

***An Examination of
Theistic Conceptual Realism
as an Alternative to Theistic Activism***

***Thesis for the
M.Phil. in Philosophical Theology***

Greg Welty

Oriel College

20 May 2000

An Examination of Theistic Conceptual Realism as an Alternative to Theistic Activism

Introduction

Chapter 1: Theistic Activism: The Model, Its Motivations, and Some Unsuccessful Objections

The Motivation

The Model

Some Unsuccessful Objections

Chapter 2: Theistic Activism: Some Successful Objections

Understanding M&M's model of divine creation

Some Successful Objections

Chapter 3: Theistic Conceptual Realism: An Alternative to Theistic Activism

The Model

Some Consequences

Direct contrasts between TCR and TA

The Advantages (TCR escapes the successful objections to TA)

Chapter 4: Theistic Conceptual Realism: Some Objections Answered

Introduction

This thesis critically evaluates two ways of interpreting abstract objects as divine ideas. But why should one be interested in the question as to whether abstract objects can be divine thoughts? One reason is that some Christian philosophers claim that an argument for God's existence can be constructed for those non-theists who are persuaded that there are such things as abstract objects.

At the end of ch. 6 of *Warrant and Proper Function*, Alvin Plantinga writes:

Suppose you find yourself convinced that (1) there are propositions, properties, and sets, (2) that the causal requirement is indeed true [that is, that there must be a causal connection between object of knowledge and knower], and (3) that (due to excessive number or excessive complexity or excessive size) propositions, properties, and sets can't be *human* thoughts, concepts, and collections. Then you have the materials for a theistic argument (Plantinga 1993a: 121 fn. 25).

This argumentative strategy is reminiscent of a paper Plantinga delivered seven years earlier, 'Two Dozen (or So) Theistic Arguments' (Plantinga 1986), wherein he gives various 'metaphysical' arguments for God: from collections (i.e. sets), from the natural numbers, from properties, from possible worlds which are the truth-makers of counterfactuals, and so on.¹

Essential to this argumentative strategy is Plantinga's claim that it is highly plausible to hold 'that abstract objects are really divine thoughts. More exactly, propositions are divine thoughts, properties divine concepts, and sets divine collections' (Plantinga 1993a: 121). Plantinga repeats this claim in his most recent book, *Warranted Christian Belief*, saying that 'what is most important about

¹ In that paper, Plantinga also gives an 'epistemological' argument for God's existence, based upon the claim that construing abstract objects as divine thoughts enables us to satisfy the causal requirement for knowledge, and thus to *explain our knowledge of* abstract objects.

numbers, propositions, properties, states of affairs, and possible worlds... [is that] they really are divine thoughts or concepts' (Plantinga 2000: 281).²

Now on the surface of it, this strategy of theistic argument seems very interesting, and could be quite promising. Appeal to abstract-objects-as-divine-thoughts could help to develop a new sub-category of the so-called 'metaphysical' arguments for God's existence, alongside the various epistemological and ethical arguments for God surveyed in Plantinga's paper. However, there is at least one significant roadblock to the development of such a family of arguments: what if the whole *idea* of abstract objects as divine thoughts is well nigh incoherent? This is a crucial question. It will do no good to attempt to account for the existence of a particular range or category of abstract objects, in terms of the divine thoughts, if such an equivalence is ultimately confused. Just as (to follow the thinking of some earlier logical positivists), if there is an obvious incoherence in the very idea of God creating a world (or in the idea of God itself), it will do no good to go ahead and develop a cosmological or teleological argument for God's existence, and hope no one asks any questions.³

Thus, we have one way of motivating the question that occupies me presently: what could it possibly *mean* to say that abstract objects are the divine thoughts, or are created by God's thoughts, or are grounded in God, or otherwise find their source in God, or so on? What does this claim come to? *Is* there a coherent model we can adopt? For if the whole idea is just nonsense – or admits of severe and

² He acknowledges that such a view 'is controversial,' but claims that it is 'certainly the majority opinion in the tradition of those theists who have thought about it' (Plantinga 2000: 281 fn. 71).

³ All that to say, it seems quite proper for one to write *The Coherence of Theism* before *The Existence of God*. From the Introduction to the former: 'It is true that God exists *only if* it is coherent to suppose that he exists' (Swinburne 1977 [1993]: 6, my italics). From the Introduction to the latter: 'The present book assumes that the claim that there is a God is not demonstrably incoherent (i.e. self-contradictory), and *hence* that it is proper to look around us for evidence of its truth or falsity' (Swinburne 1979 [1991]: 1, my italics).

unanswerable difficulties – then a cogent theistic argument based upon that nonsense cannot be forthcoming.

It is interesting to note that every time Plantinga makes his distinctively theistic claims about abstract objects, he points his readers to a single article in the literature: ‘Absolute Creation,’ by Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1986 (Morris and Menzel 1986).⁴ Plantinga’s analysis of the issues rarely goes further than this bare reference. Now, no doubt Plantinga has made a good choice. Morris and Menzel’s seminal article has exerted considerable influence – for better or for ill – in ‘framing’ the debate over the relation between God and abstracta. Fourteen years later, it is still the primary article at which critics of such a relation aim their guns (cf. Ross 1989: 259; Leftow 1990b; Davison 1991; Smith 1994; Fales 1996; Wierenga 1998; Davidson 1999; Davis 2000). Nevertheless, those of us who are interested in the coherence question cannot be satisfied with Plantinga’s hand-waving. What exactly *is* Morris and Menzel’s model? Is it the best one that can be given? What are the significant criticisms that can be posed to it? Which of these criticisms can be rebutted? Which can only be met if Morris and Menzel’s model is significantly revised? And does a new model, distinct from that of Morris and Menzel’s, need to be developed?

⁴ Plantinga makes this reference in *Warrant and Proper Function* (Plantinga 1993a: 121 fn. 25), in his article on ‘Divine Knowledge’ (Plantinga 1993b: 50 fn. 11), and in *Warranted Christian Belief* (Plantinga 2000: 281 fn. 71).

Chapter 1

Theistic Activism: The Model, Its Motivations, and Some Unsuccessful Objections

The Motivation

Before examining their *model* of the relationship between God and abstract objects, it will be helpful to consider Morris and Menzel's primary *motivation* for articulating a philosophically satisfying account of that relationship in the first place. Fundamentally, they are persuaded that there is 'a point of apparent conflict... between two major metaphysical visions': 'the idea of a God as absolute creator of everything which exists distinct from him,' and the Platonistic claim that there exists 'a realm of necessarily existent abstract objects... such things as properties and propositions' (Morris and Menzel 1986: 161). In sum, there seems to be 'a fundamental and central incompatibility between a strongly modalized Platonism and any version of theism holding God to be the absolute creator of all' (162-163).

Morris and Menzel aim to dissolve this apparent conflict by regarding necessarily existing abstract objects as nevertheless *created* by God. If a coherent account of how this creation goes can be given, then the apparent conflict between theism and Platonism will be dissolved. This then is the primary motivation for Morris and Menzel's project: to reconcile divine creation with a Platonistic

ontology, by showing how the scope of God's creative activity is so 'absolute' that it can even include abstract objects.¹

The Model

So how does their model go? In 'Absolute Creation,' Morris and Menzel (hereafter, 'M&M') articulate and defend what they call *theistic activism*, or 'the view that a divine intellectual activity is responsible for the framework of reality' (Morris and Menzel 1986: 168). By 'framework of reality,' M&M mean the 'Platonic realm of necessity as comprising necessary truth as well as necessarily existent objects,' a framework which 'provides a structure which exists in and delimits every possible world... a structure which would have to be instantiated by any contingent created universe' (162).

More specifically, on theistic activism God is *creatively responsible* for the existence of all properties, relations, and cardinal numbers, as well as for the existence, truth-value, and modal-status of all propositions. M&M give a thumbnail sketch of how this creation is to go: 'all properties and relations are God's concepts'; 'all necessarily existent propositions [are] "built up" out of properties,' or are God's thoughts; and all cardinal numbers are 'certain properties of properties.' Taking these things together, 'we thus have all necessarily existing abstract reality... deriving existence from God' (166).²

¹ James Ross recognises that this is their motivation: 'Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel explicitly try to reconcile the notions of creation to the Platonistic ontology for QML [quantified modal logic] in "Absolute Creation"' ('The Crash of Modal Metaphysics,' Ross 1989: 259 fn. 20).

² In 'Theism, Platonism and the Metaphysics of Mathematics,' Christopher Menzel suggests a way of extending this account to cover all mathematical objects as well (Menzel 1987: 365). For the sake of clarifying M&M's talk of 'all necessarily existent propositions,' etc., we should distinguish between a proposition's *mode of existence* (either necessarily existent or contingently existent), a proposition's *truth-value* (either true or false), and the *modal-status of that truth-value* (either necessarily true [or false], or contingently true [or false]). For M&M, propositions exist of

It is important to note that M&M are expounding (what they take to be) an implication of the Judeo-Christian doctrine of divine *creation*, ‘the idea of a God as absolute creator of everything which exists distinct from him’ (161). For M&M, abstract objects are not divine and uncreated; rather, they are *creatures* of God that are distinct from him and depend upon the exercise of his creative power.³ That this causal/creative point is intended is not only clear from the very title of the article, ‘Absolute Creation,’ but also from the specific claims forwarded within that article. Thus, ‘the thorough-going theist must... claim that the realm of necessity as well as that of contingency is within the province of divine creation’ (162). Abstract objects ‘depend on God as their cause’ (164). ‘[I]t is God who is creatively responsible for the realm of possibility’ (167). And so on throughout the article: it is God’s *creative, causal* power that is stressed as the source of abstract objects.

Some Unsuccessful Objections

Over the past fourteen years there have been quite a few objections raised to ‘theistic activism,’ M&M’s basic claim that abstract objects can be created by God. Some of the more successful objections, which (in my estimation) motivate a departure from M&M’s model, will be surveyed in the next chapter. But there are a couple of quite popular objections to their views that I believe are ultimately unsuccessful. The first is that theistic activism violates strongly held intuitions about causation and necessity. The second is that theistic activism must rest

necessity (via God’s creative act in all possible worlds), but these necessarily existing objects may differ in their truth-value, and in the modal-status of that truth-value.

³ For critical discussion as to whether the doctrine of creation has traditionally had such objects in view, see especially the final objection discussed in Chapter 2 of the present thesis, as well as the

content with being ‘dialectically inert,’ since we cannot give its distinctive dependence claim any content on the standard semantics for counterfactuals. I shall briefly rebut the first objection, but spend most of my time rebutting the second objection, since it has generated so much discussion in the literature.⁴

Objection 1: theistic activism violates our intuitions about causation and necessity.

One clear consequence of theistic activism is the idea that necessary beings can be caused to exist. But some would dispute that this even makes sense or, at the very least, would argue that it violates our fundamental intuitions about necessity. Necessary beings, it seems, just aren’t the kind of things that can be *caused* to exist.

For instance, this type of intuition seems to be behind Swinburne’s claim that, in identifying God as the creator of the universe,

the theist is presumably not claiming that God is the creator of prime numbers, concepts, or logical relations. There are certain things which exist as a matter of logical necessity; that is, the statement that they exist is a logically necessary truth... [With respect to these things,] that they exist cannot be due to the act of any creator; for they exist just because they are, because the propositions which assert their existence say what they do.

This leads Swinburne to say that the claim that God is the creator of all things does not include those things the existence of which is a logically necessary truth (Swinburne 1993: 130).

But it is not clear how this intuition, that necessary beings ‘exist just because they are,’ would fare against the claim that a necessary being could nevertheless be caused, *especially if that claim was spelled out in some detail*. If the right

relevant material in Davidson 1999: 278-279, Davison 1991: 488-489, Wolterstorff 1970: 279-297 (esp. 296), and Swinburne 1993: 130.

distinctions were drawn, perhaps this intuition that necessary beings cannot be caused would lose much of its force. Swinburne himself draws a distinction between *two kinds* of necessary beings: ontologically necessary (having no cause), and metaphysically necessary (possibly admitting of an eternal cause) (Swinburne 1994: 118-122).⁵

To illustrate the insufficiency of this intuition to rule out theistic activism, consider the following thought experiment by Peter van Inwagen, who notes that

it is not... easily demonstrable that just any necessary being would be an independent being. Anyone who wanted to demonstrate this conclusion would have somehow to prove the impossibility of cases like the following one. Suppose that A is a necessary being and that A causes the existence of B and that it is necessary that A cause the existence of B. Then B will be a necessary being – B will exist in all possible worlds, since A exists in all possible worlds, and, in every possible world in which it exists, causes B to exist in that possible world – but B will nonetheless depend upon A for its existence (van Inwagen 1993: 108).

It seems then that the issues of necessary existence and causal dependence can be distinguished, so that the former does not automatically preclude (at least, not without further argument) the latter.⁶

Brian Leftow makes a similar point in his article ‘A Leibnizian Cosmological Argument’ (Leftow 1989), in a section entitled, ‘Can Necessary Beings Be Caused?’ Leftow considers various conditionals, such as ‘for any *x*, if *x* exists necessarily, then *x* is uncausable,’ or ‘for any *x*, if *x* exists necessarily, then *x* exists in virtue of its nature.’ Leftow holds that these conditionals are false, and that they

⁴ I rebut these two objections, not merely for its own sake, but also because such objections could be raised against my own revised model as set forth in Chapter 3.

⁵ He articulates the latter in order to describe the necessity of the persons of the Trinity (Swinburne 1994: 144-149, 170-173). Thus, the eternal begetting of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit take place necessarily, due to the perfection of the divine love, and this necessity is a *metaphysical* necessity (possibly admitting of an eternal cause). But the necessity of the Trinity *taken as a whole* is *ontologically* necessary (having no cause).

⁶ M&M draw something like this distinction when they differentiate the issue of *control* (God cannot *annihilate* or *alter* a necessarily existing being) and *causal dependence* (God can nevertheless *create* a necessarily existing being) (Morris and Menzel 1986: 171).

derive their specious plausibility from insufficiently precise understandings of alethic necessity. According to currently popular semantics, “*x* exists necessarily” asserts only that *x* is to be found in every possible world. It entails nothing at all about why this is so; it leaves open the question of whether there may be some cause or causes which account for this. If this is so, the conditionals just mentioned may well be false (Leftow 1989: 137).⁷

Objection 2: theistic activism, by claiming an asymmetric dependence relation of abstract objects upon God, violates the standard semantics for counterfactuals. It must in the nature of the case be ‘dialectically inert.’

The objection stated

On M&M’s view, God is ‘creatively responsible’ for abstract objects. This claim can be analysed in various ways. But suffice it to say that M&M’s claim comes to *at least* the following: if God did not exist, then abstract objects would not exist.

But if this is so, then (the present objector would press) the claim that abstracta depend (in some way) upon God must end up being *dialectically inert*; it cannot be defended in a polemical context except via metaphor. For it cannot be shown to be an *asymmetric* dependence, on the standard semantics for counterfactuals – a semantics that is supposed to be relevant in illuminating the content of *any* dependence claim. So regardless of the precise *model* of dependence that is asserted, how can a nontrivial dependence relation be avoided?

⁷ Leftow makes precisely the same point in ‘God and Abstract Entities’ (Leftow 1990b), p. 194. Matthew Davidson, a critic of theistic activism, says that he is sympathetic to ‘intuitive worries’ about ‘the notion of something’s causing a necessarily existing object to exist,’ but admits that it is ‘difficult to mine out this sort of intuition into any sort of cogent argument’ (in ‘A demonstration against theistic activism,’ Davidson 1999: 287).

The objection detailed: the standard semantics

Let's detail this objection a bit more, especially since it is perhaps the most prominent objection in the literature critiquing theistic activism. M&M themselves anticipate it in Morris and Menzel 1986: 164-165. It is subsequently discussed in Leftow 1989: 143-150; Leftow 1990b: 195-198; Davison 1991: 489-493; Fales 1996; Wierenga 1998: 87-103; Davidson 1999: 281-286; and Davis 2000: 1-56.

It seems clear that, if any claim that abstracta depend upon God is to even get off the ground, the God upon whom the abstracta depend would himself have to exist of logical necessity. That is, God must exist in every possible world. This must be the case because the abstracta that are claimed to *depend* upon God also exist of logical necessity. Propositions, relations, properties, and all other abstracta are supposed to exist in all possible worlds. After all, the 'framework of reality' for which the 'divine intellectual activity is responsible' is a framework which 'provides a structure which exists in and delimits every possible world' (Morris and Menzel 1986: 162). Thus, the relata *on either side* of the dependence relation exist of logical necessity.

And yet this is the precise fact that seems to pose a serious problem when we are asked to capture the dependence relation *counterfactually*. Let's take the abstracta in question to be propositions. Of the following pair of counterfactuals (CFs):

- (1) If God were not to exist, then propositions would not exist.
- (2) If God were not to exist, then propositions would still exist.

... the theistic activist wants the first CF to come out true (since the existence of abstracta depend upon the existence of God), but the second CF to come out *false* (since abstracta, being dependent upon God, should not exist if God does not exist).

Unfortunately, on the standard Lewis-Stalnaker semantics for counterfactuals, (1) and (2) above both come out to be *trivially true*. This is because they are *counterpossibles*, or counterfactuals with *impossible* (i.e. necessarily false) antecedents. And on the standard semantics, a necessary falsehood counterfactually implies the truth of *just any* proposition.

Because the right counterfactuals do not come out to be false, the proponent of the claim that ‘abstracta depend upon God’ seems unable to express his dependence claim counterfactually. At best, he gets a relation of *trivial symmetric dependence*, not a relation of *nontrivial asymmetric dependence*. So when, for instance, M&M claim that abstracta causally depend upon God, critics such as Scott Davison specifically charge that M&M have no way of *explaining* their claim, that it is very hard to *understand* M&M’s claim, and that it is very hard to *argue* for the preferability of M&M’s claim. Indeed, it seems that M&M ‘cannot provide anything more than metaphorical accounts of their crucial notions.’ In sum, they must ‘settle for a rather dialectically inert position’ (Davison 1991: 493).

Given the above objection, at least two replies seem open to M&M, and both of them cogent in my estimation. First, they can rightly challenge the *relevance* of any counterfactual analysis of the dependence relation. And second, they can concede that although a counterfactual analysis *might* be relevant to their claims after all, the objector’s insistence on the relevance of the *standard* semantics for

counterfactuals as the basis of that analysis just begs the question against the theistic activist. We will examine the cogency of these replies, in turn.

First reply: challenge the relevance of a counterfactual analysis of the dependence relation.

At this point, the theistic activist might say, ‘Perhaps the impotence of the standard semantics only shows that CFs may not be able to *capture* the relevant asymmetry. But this does not in any way preclude the *existence* of such an asymmetric causal relation. Nor does it preclude other means of arguing for it.’

As was mentioned earlier, Morris and Menzel anticipate the objection from the standard semantics for counterfactuals, and this is precisely how they dispose of it. Their main claim is that the theist can admit the (trivial) truth of all relevant counterfactuals,

acknowledge a *logical* dependence running both ways between God and abstract objects (a trivial result of there being necessary existence on both sides) and nevertheless maintain that there is a *causal* or ontological dependence running in only one direction, rendering [one counterfactual] somehow ultimately more revealing than [the other] (Morris and Menzel 1986: 165).⁸

It is significant that M&M, after challenging the relevance of the standard semantics, immediately proceed to *explain what they mean* by their causal claim. First, by drawing the distinctions mentioned earlier, they undermine the strength of the intuition ‘that the necessary is the uncaused.’ Then they make a *prima facie* case that any causal relation between God and abstracta must go from God to abstracta, and not vice-versa, since ‘God is thought of as causally active, indeed as the paradigmatic causal agent, whereas such abstract objects are standardly

⁸ Similarly, Menzel, in his later article: ‘Note that we can’t analyze the causal relation counterfactually as simply the claim that if God hadn’t thought abstract objects, they wouldn’t have existed, since (on the existing semantics for counterfactuals) it is equally true that if abstract objects hadn’t existed, God wouldn’t have. Despite this *logical* symmetry between God and abstract objects, we claim that there is a causal asymmetry’ (Menzel 1987: 380 fn. 5).

regarded as causally inert' (Morris and Menzel 1986: 165). And, finally, they describe in some detail their model of the 'divine intellectual activity, a causally efficacious or productive sort of divine conceiving,' ending with the claim that 'it is in *this* sense that God is creator of the framework' (Morris and Menzel 1986: 166-167, my italics).

Thus, while they have indeed abandoned the standard semantics as a means of assigning the right truth-values to those counterfactuals which are relevant to their claimed causal relation, it is just not true that (as Davison charges), M&M have 'no way' of explaining their claim, of arguing for their claim, or of helping us in understanding their claim. In this regard, it seems that 'dialectical inertness' may be in the eye of the beholder or, at the very most, a matter of degree.⁹ It just isn't the case that someone can't meaningfully *assert*, *explain* or *argue* a claim of causal dependence *unless* he can derive the right truth-values for that claim from the standard semantics for counterfactuals.

There's a parallel here to the standard semantics for *material* conditionals. Let's say that I claim, 'If the moon is made of green cheese, then I am Prime Minister.' I say, 'Obviously, this claim is false, since the connection does not hold.' And I would not be impressed if someone responded, 'But on the standard semantics for material conditionals, a false proposition strictly implies the truth of just any proposition, so actually your conditional is true. So you can't say it's false *until* you square it with the standard semantics.' For all this tells us is that

⁹ In a later article, 'Dependence and Divine Simplicity,' Morris argues that certain counterpossibles, especially those involving God's nonexistence, 'can be evaluated independently of the consideration of the metaphysical impossibility of their antecedents and consequents – they can be assessed with respect to the metaphysical propriety of the connection in each case between antecedent and consequent, on the basis of the intrinsic conceptual or metaphysical content of the conditional.' Put more succinctly, we do not assign truth-values to these counterpossibles 'from considerations about the standard semantics of counterfactuals with impossible antecedents,' but rather 'from considerations about the intrinsic metaphysical content of the conditional.' (Morris 1988: 170).

the standard semantics for material conditionals doesn't *capture* the fullness of natural language, not that we can't use natural language in a common-sense way to make or evaluate various claims. The same goes (I say) for the standard semantics for counterfactual conditionals. The theistic activist should not let certain paradoxes of implication rob him of his ability to use the English language to make various claims. The meaningful use of the English language predates the emergence of the 'standard semantics' for both counterfactual and material conditionals.¹⁰

In connection with theistic activism, Richard Brian Davis argues that 'perhaps counterfactuals cannot serve to capture the desired asymmetry. How does it follow from *that*, however, that there neither is nor can be a relation of asymmetrical dependence here' (Davis 2000: 107)? At this point Davis offers a helpful illustration of the limitations of the standard semantics with respect to conditionals. Following Sanford (1989: 217), Davis refers to how we calculate the length L of a flagpole's shadow from the height H of the flagpole and the angle A of the sun. The laws of plane geometry and trigonometry, says Sanford, 'licence inferences in all directions, from angle and height to length, from angle and length to height, and from height and length to angle.' In particular, they licence the biconditional: $(A \ \& \ H)$ if and only if L . But while the conditional is two-way, we all know that there is a *one*-way dependence of L on $A \ \& \ H$.¹¹

¹⁰ This is essentially the point which Edward Wierenga makes in 'Theism and Counterpossibles' (Wierenga 1998). The legitimacy of the standard semantics does not preclude a *nontrivial sense* in which some counterpossibles are true. For if there exists a more general theory which gives a reason for employing the counterpossible, then it has a nontrivial sense. Cf. his discussion of the meaningfulness of Aquinas's *per impossibile* argument – 'if there were no intellects, there would be no truths' (*De Veritate* q. 2, a.1), in Wierenga 1998: 94-97. In the present context, theistic activism would provide that 'more general theory.'

¹¹ Similarly, William Mann argues: 'Given the length of a pendulum one can deduce its period from a simple law of motion. Given the period one can equally well deduce the length. But it is the length which explains why the pendulum has the period it has, and not *vice versa*. Mathematical truths are all equally necessary, hence all equally entail all others, yet mathematicians rightly

Davis says that this

shows that a one-way relation of dependence can obtain even though it is not reflected in the relevant biconditional. And something similar goes, I submit, in the case of God and NTs [necessary truths]. A one-way dependence relation *can* obtain here despite the fact that we cannot display the requisite asymmetry by way of the relevant strict or counterfactual conditionals (Davis 2000: 108).

Is this a fatal concession? Well, obviously, it ‘rules out the possibility of giving a counterfactual analysis of divine causation’ (at least one based on the standard semantics), but that is not necessarily incoherent:

Many philosophers are unhappy with such analyses of nondivine causation; perhaps it is not surprising that this is also the case for causation of the divine variety. The theistic activist analysis of divine causation will simply have to take some other form (Davis 2000: 121).

To be sure, any particular case of causation implies that some counterfactuals are true and others false. But that is not what is in dispute. What is in dispute is whether [a] the *standard semantics* can assign the right truth-values to all of the relevant counterfactuals, so that the dependence relation is clearly captured, and whether [b] it is *relevant* that the standard semantics cannot do so for the causal claim of the theistic activist. I take it that Morris and Menzel, Edward Wierenga, and Richard Brian Davis have all provided cogent reasons for maintaining that the theistic activist can consistently deny not only [a] but [b] as well.

Second reply: perhaps the insistence on the standard semantics begs the question against the theistic activist.

Upon reflection, it might be thought that the first reply above – that the theistic activist should just repudiate the relevance of *any* semantics of

assume that some mathematical propositions explain why others are true’ (‘Modality, morality, and God,’ Mann 1989: 85-86). Thus we can quite reasonably have – with respect to the same set of relata – asymmetric *explanatory* relations and symmetric *logical* relations, even though the latter means that the standard semantics is no longer available as a means of giving content to the former.

counterpossibles in explicating his claim – is a bit extreme. Is this not the philosophical equivalent of curing a headache by decapitation? A more nuanced and perhaps more polemically effective reply may be on hand for the theistic activist. Perhaps he can spell out the implications of his theory in a bit more detail, and show how the basic claims of theistic activism entail, not a complete repudiation, but merely a significant *revision* of the standard semantics. If this can be done, then the insistence of the critic that the *standard* semantics must be used to capture the dependence relationship can be interpreted as a begging of the question against the theistic activist: an insistence that one *assume the falsity of* the theistic activist's thesis at the outset *in order to show the triviality of* the theistic activist's thesis.

More specifically, the strategy available to the theistic activist is the following. The critic wants to say that, according to the standard semantics for counterfactuals, the theistic activist's asserted dependence relation is only one of *symmetric, logical dependence*, and that this is a consequence of the *trivial truth* of all counterpossibles. But, the theistic activist will point out, the critic can only *make* this claim about trivial, symmetric, logical dependence, *if* the standard semantics as a matter of fact obtains. But the standard semantics would only obtain if the theistic activist's claim is false, for *that* claim implies (so he argues) a *different* or significantly revised semantics. Thus, the critic has begged the question against the theistic activist.

Of course, the theistic activist can only make good on this line of reply, if he can actually *show* how his distinctive claim implies a significantly revised semantics. To this end, let us briefly examine Brian Leftow's so-called 'null world semantics' (set forth in Leftow 1989: 148-150 and Leftow 1990b: 195-198).

Leftow starts off with the general claim that not all counterpossibles ‘are created equal,’ for ‘where a conditional’s antecedent involves God’s not existing, special rules apply in virtue of God’s special relation to propositions.’ This is not a piece of ‘hopeless *ad hocery*,’ says Leftow, because ‘it is well-grounded in the activist theory of God’s nature and creative role’ (Leftow 1990b: 196).

Leftow starts to articulate such a theory, by offering four theses about possible worlds. First, start with ‘a set-theoretic view of possible worlds.’ In this case, possible worlds are sets of propositions. Second, define a non-null world as ‘a set of propositions which for every atomic proposition P either includes P or includes not-P.’ Thus, non-null worlds are *maximal* sets of propositions. Third, define a possible world as ‘a non-null-world-sized set of propositions which is consistent, i.e., such that all its member propositions can be true together.’ That is, a possible world is a non-null set of propositions, a world-sized set of propositions, and a consistent set of propositions.¹² And fourth, partition *impossible* worlds into two categories. Most impossible worlds are ‘an inconsistent world-sized set of propositions.’ But one impossible world has *no* propositions as members: the null world. ‘The null world is the null set of propositions.’ (Since Leftow is advocating a set-theoretic view of possible worlds, he takes it ‘that there is neither more nor less difficulty in talk of a null world than in talk of the null set.’)

Leftow then explains the significance of the null world, more specifically. Since God exists in every possible world, God’s nonexistence occurs in an impossible world. But not just in *any* impossible world. Rather,

God’s non-existence occurs only in the null world. Any world containing God’s non-existence is *ipso facto* identical with the null world. That God’s non-existence occurs in the null world does not entail that the proposition “God does not exist” exists in the null world. It does not exist there. In the

¹² Cf. Robert Adams’ ‘Theories of Actuality’ (Adams 1974: 204), on a possible world being ‘a maximal consistent set of propositions.’

null world, no propositions exist, and so none are true (or false). God's nonexistence is a logical "black hole," sucking all the propositions of a world into itself. But while nothing is true *in* the null world, there are truths (and falsehoods) *about* the null world, e.g., that it is null and that God does not exist in it. The propositions expressing these truths exist only in other, non-null worlds (Leftow 1990b: 197).

Here Leftow is appealing to the distinction which Robert Adams argued at length in 'Actualism and Thisness' (Adams 1981), namely, a distinction between truth *in* a world and truth *at* or *about* a world. Adams contends that a possible world represents my nonexistence, 'not by including the proposition that I do not exist but simply by omitting me' (Adams 1981: 22). Thus, the proposition that I do not exist is not true *in* that possible world (i.e., the proposition which asserts my nonexistence does not exist *as a member of the set* of propositions which define that possible world); rather, the proposition that I do not exist is true *at* that possible world (precisely because any and all propositions making reference to me are *omitted* from the set of propositions defining that possible world). Adams originally made this distinction with respect to possible worlds; Leftow is now applying it to *impossible* worlds. The proposition 'God does not exist' is true *at*, but not *in*, the null world. For the null world is the *null set* of propositions.

Again, Leftow is setting forth this metaphysical framework as something, not *ad hoc*, but straightforwardly entailed by the basic claim of the theistic activist. If the main metaphysical claim of the theistic activist is that God thinks propositions and other abstracta into existence, then – consistent with this claim – if God did not exist, *there would be no propositions* (i.e. the null world). And what this gets the theistic activist is a straightforward revision of the standard semantics for counterfactuals. For there is a 'unique status God's non-existence must have among impossibilities.' We can now divide counterpossibles into three categories: those with self-contradictory antecedents ('ordinary' counterpossibles, which are

trivially true), those involving God's non-existence but not implying something exists (non-trivially true), and those involving God's non-existence and yet implying that something nevertheless exists (non-trivially false). Counterfactuals that involve God's non-existence (the null world), but imply that something nevertheless *exists* in the null world, are non-trivially false.

So now, applying this revised 'null world semantics' to the counterpossibles (1) and (2) examined earlier, we get:

(1) 'If God were not to exist, then propositions would not exist' is nontrivially true. (It is about the null world, and does not imply that anything exists there.)

(2) 'If God were not to exist, then propositions would still exist' is nontrivially *false*. (It is about the null world, but it implies that something exists there.)

Note that on the *standard* or unrevised semantics for counterfactuals, both of these counterpossibles would be trivially *true*, and thus the standard semantics would fail to capture the dependence claim of the theistic activist. But on the revised, null-world semantics for counterfactuals, the asymmetry of the dependence claim is captured: abstracta depend upon God, but God doesn't depend upon abstracta.

Leftow says that his revised semantics merely 'gives the activist claim content' (Leftow 1990b: 198). But I think we can go further than this. If this revised semantics is straightforwardly implied by the theistic activist claim, then the insistence of the critic – that the *standard* semantics must be used to capture the claimed dependence relationship – can be interpreted as a begging of the

question against the theistic activist: an insistence that one *assume the falsity of* the theistic activist's thesis at the outset *in order to show the triviality of* the theistic activist's thesis.

Of course, not everyone thinks that Leftow's null world semantics can actually do the job that it was (albeit, ingeniously) invented to do. Richard Brian Davis, in particular, has subjected it to a series of searching criticisms (Davis 2000: 41-47).¹³ However, I think that all of Davis' criticisms either misinterpret Leftow, or beg the question against him.

Davis' first criticism of Leftow's null-world semantics

First, Davis charges that Leftow's nonstandard semantics entails a proposition which Leftow would have to reject as false (Davis 2000: 41). Davis offers the following argument, from Leftowian premises to an entailment Leftow must reject:¹⁴

(19) If *God does not exist* had been true, then the null world would have been true. [Leftow's claim]

(20) Necessarily, the null world is true if and only if nothing exists. [by the definition of the null world]

(21) Necessarily, nothing exists if and only if it is true that nothing exists. [obvious truism]

(22) Necessarily, if *God does not exist* had been true, then it would have been true that nothing exists. [by (19)-(21)]

(23) Necessarily, if *God does not exist* had been true, then the proposition *Nothing exists* would have been true. [broadly logical equivalence to [22)]

¹³ Davis' discussion is the only critical examination of Leftow's nonstandard semantics that I can find in the literature.

¹⁴ The numbering here is from Davis.

Unfortunately, Leftow cannot accept the truth of (23), for (23) is false on Leftow's nonstandard semantics (because it implies the existence of something, a proposition, in the null world). Thus, Leftow's initial claim entails a falsehood, and so his initial claim must be false.¹⁵ The only way out is for Leftow to deny the obvious truism of (21).

I don't think Leftow would be too impressed with this argument, because the 'obvious truism' of (21) is ambiguous. Since it is about the null world, it can be read either as:

(21') Necessarily, nothing exists if and only if it is true *in the null world* that nothing exists.

or:

(21'') Necessarily, nothing exists if and only if it is true *at the null world* that nothing exists.

Leftow would regard (21') as simply a misreading of his definition of the null world (nothing is true 'in' the null world), whereas (21'') – while an accurate understanding of the null world – does not allow Davis' argument to go through to the next premise.

Davis' second criticism of Leftow's null-world semantics

Second, and perhaps more fundamentally, Davis charges that Adams' distinction between truth *in* a world, and truth *at* or *of* a world, just can't do the job Leftow wants it to do with respect to the null world. Davis concedes that it *sounds plausible* to argue that if, 'as Adams says, a world in which I do not exist represents my possible nonexistence, then surely a world in which nothing exists represents the possibility of there being nothing' (Davis 2000: 43). But the

¹⁵ Or, more exactly, Leftow's initial claim implies both the truth and the falsity of (23); its truth given Davis' argument, and its falsity given Leftow's semantics.

problem (Davis argues) is that Leftow endorses a possible worlds semantics where ‘worlds are set-theoretical constructs on propositions.’ And, says Davis, ‘sets lack the intentional properties of propositions; sets do not represent things (in particular their members) as being a certain way (or any way for that matter)’ (Davis 2000: 43). And, argues Davis, this just rules out the notion of the ‘null world’ as a representational entity:

The concept of a proposition’s being true *at* a world may be perfectly respectable. But if a proposition **p** is true *at* a world **W** in virtue of **W**’s representing things as being the way **p** says they are, then **W** must include **p** – at least if (fundamentally) it is propositions and not sets which possess the relevant intentional properties to do the representing (Davis 2000: 43).

The main difficulty with this objection is that it seems to prove too much. Not only would it rule out the *null world* as a representational entity. It would rule out as incoherent *any set-theoretical conception* of possible worlds.¹⁶ For if the null set cannot represent the null world in virtue of the alleged fact that no sets whatsoever can be representational entities, then it follows (from that same alleged fact) that *no set* (whether of propositions, sentences, or concrete physical objects) can represent a possible world. And that seems a bit strong. Just because a set of *concrete objects* cannot be representational, doesn’t mean that a set of *propositions* cannot be representational.

When we examine the situation more closely, we see that Davis has misapplied a criticism from Plantinga. Davis expressly relies on Plantinga’s remarks in ‘Two Concepts of Modality: Modal Realism and Modal Reductionism’ (Plantinga 1987: 208, 212), to the effect that sets obviously lack the relevant intentional properties that propositions have. ‘A set is neither a claim nor anything like a claim; it doesn’t represent its members or anything else as being thus and

¹⁶ Including modal actualist theories like that of Robert Adams, where a possible world is a *world-story*, ‘a maximal consistent set of propositions’ (Adams 1974: 204).

so; it neither is nor makes a claim as to what things are like' (Plantinga 1987: 208). But in context, Plantinga is developing a criticism against *David Lewis'* construction of propositions out of *sets of concrete objects*. Plantinga's point is that the unit set of a particular donkey (say) doesn't *represent* a donkey or anything else. This seems plausible enough. But Davis then adapts Plantinga's observation about the non-representational character of sets of concrete objects, to sets of *propositions*, arguing that the latter also cannot be representational. But is this so? It seems to me that a story is just a set of propositions (well, perhaps an *ordered* set, just so we get the sequence of events right), and it also seems clear that a story *represents* the world as being a certain way (in a way that the unit set of {donkey}, with one concrete member, does not). So the applicability to Leftow of Plantinga's criticisms of Lewis, is surely in doubt. Surely *some* sets are representational, even if Lewis' propositions-as-sets-of-concrete-objects are not.¹⁷

¹⁷ In *The Nature of Necessity*, Plantinga discusses the function of names in fiction. He characterises a story as a 'certain proposition or state of affairs,' when then gets 'expressed by an existentially quantified sentence,' that in turn is broken up 'into a lot of shorter sentences.' By these means the author 'helps us explore states of affairs we should never have thought of,' all the while, of course, 'he does not *assert* the propositions that form his stock in trade' (Plantinga 1974: 159-161). Surely, then, Plantinga would take a set of *propositions* as a representational entity, and so Davis' adaptation of Plantinga's criticism of Lewis is misguided.

Chapter 2

Theistic Activism: Some Successful Objections

The two objections that were rebutted in the last chapter are certainly not the only ones that could be offered against M&M's view of the relation between God and abstract objects. In this chapter I shall examine five additional objections to M&M's view, which in my estimation render it unacceptable as it stands. The cogency of these objections does not preclude, of course, the possibility that M&M's model could be significantly revised in order to meet their force. In fact, I shall recommend such a revision in Chapter 3.

Understanding M&M's model of divine creation

M&M assert a causal, creative relation between divine intellectual activity and abstract objects. This much is obvious from their initial and perhaps most sweeping claim that

all properties and relations are God's concepts, the products, or perhaps better, the *contents* of a divine intellectual activity, a causally efficacious or productive sort of divine conceiving. Unlike human concepts, then, which are graspings of properties that exist ontologically distinct from and independent of those graspings, divine concepts are those very properties themselves; and unlike what is assumed in standard Platonism, those properties are not ontologically independent, but rather depend on certain divine activities (Morris and Menzel 1986: 166).

Here we see that the 'divine intellectual activity [is] a causally efficacious or productive sort of divine conceiving.' Thus there is a causal relation between the divine intellectual activity and the existence of abstract objects. Additionally, we learn that 'properties are not ontologically independent, but rather depend on

certain divine activities.’ Thus there is a *dependence relation* between abstract objects and divine activities, and (in context) it is clear that this dependence relation is *causal*.

M&M’s language suggests that the causal, creative relation in theistic activism can best be understood in terms of a very plausible account of the *thinker/thought relation* in human beings. According to this account, we must distinguish between the active process of thinking, and the passive, occurrent thoughts that are produced by that activity of thinking. Passive, occurrent thoughts are mental events, propositional attitudes to a state of affairs described in a certain way. Active thought produces occurrent thoughts in at least three different ways: (1) ‘an agent produces in himself a thought as a by-product of attempting to communicate it to others in speech or writing,’ (2) ‘an agent intentionally bringing about the occurrence of the occurrent passive thoughts (i.e. purposing to bring them about and succeeding in so doing),’ and (3) an agent intentionally thinks about a subject in the hope that a thought will be brought about by some process over which he has no control (Swinburne 1997: 62-65). For obvious reasons, theistic activism can only apply to God the second account of the relation between active and passive thought. God thinks the thoughts he does because he *purposefully intends* to think those thoughts; that is, he wills to think them.¹

In terms of this model, M&M would be taking abstract objects to be (a subset of) God’s occurrent thoughts. God’s occurrent thoughts are mental events; they

¹ ‘Active thought (of these three kinds) is analysable in terms of other more basic constituents of the mental life – purpose or intention... and occurrent thought’ (Swinburne 1997: 65). In addition, the very notion of purposing is itself intrinsically propositional in content; one has a purpose to do such-and-such. Thus, a purposing to think an occurrent thought, and the occurrent thought causally produced by that purposing, are both propositional in character (Swinburne 1997: 96-97; cf. 19).

are in time, but everlastingly thought by God.² Abstract objects (being occurrent thoughts) are produced by the ‘divine intellective activity,’ which is ‘a causally efficacious or productive sort of divine conceiving’ (Morris and Menzel 1986: 166). Similarly, they say that abstract objects arise ‘out of a divine, creatively efficacious intellective activity’ (Morris and Menzel 1986: 167). One mental event in the life of God (his actively purposing to think these thoughts) causes a subsequent mental event in the life of God (his occurrent thoughts), and this causal process has been going on everlastingly.

Whether or not this *particular* construal of the thinker/thought model would be the one that M&M would adopt, the *fundamental* idea is clear: there is a causal, creative relation between God’s active process of thinking, and the abstract objects which are produced. As a thinker, I engage in the *activity* of thinking, and the result of this activity is the *creation* of my thoughts. Likewise, God engages in the *activity* of thinking, and the result of this activity is God’s *creation* of his thoughts. Even as thoughts are created by the activity of thinking, so abstract objects are created by God’s activity of thinking. With this basic model in mind, let us turn to a number of objections.

Objection 1: Theistic activism cannot construe properties and relations as *God’s concepts*

² I am assuming here that M&M take God’s existence to be everlasting (in time), and not eternal (timeless). This seems clear from many passages, including their ‘materialisation machine’ analogy: ‘the machine, like God, is creating that on which it depends for its ability to create and for its occurrent activity of creation. If the end-state of the replacement story is conceivable, if it is conceivable that the materialization machine be in this state at any time, it seems also conceivable that such an activity take place *at every time, or eternally*. And that is like what we have in the case of God’ (Morris and Menzel 1986: 175, my italics). More about the materialisation machine in Objection 4 of this Chapter.

A characteristic claim of theistic activism is that ‘all properties and relations are God’s concepts,’ or ‘divine concepts are those very properties themselves,’ or ‘we characterize properties as God’s concepts’ (Morris and Menzel 1986: 166). These are straightforward identity-claims, which seem to make two kinds of abstract objects (properties and relations) *identical with* divine concepts.

And if this is the case, then it seems to clearly conflict with M&M’s thesis of ‘absolute creation.’ If abstract objects are divine concepts, it seems difficult to imagine that God *creates* the concepts of his own mind; that is, creates the formal capacity for his own omniscience. Indeed, it seems quite plausible to say that *any* intelligent act of divine creation – including the one which M&M have in mind – must be *in accordance with* divine concepts; it already *presupposes* a concept of what is to be created.

This seems to follow straightforwardly from the thinker/thought model earlier considered. If particular occurrent thoughts are caused by particular *purposings* on the part of the agent, then these purposings *already* have a propositional character. They are a purposing to do such-and-such. But then surely such purposings presuppose the very concepts that give them their propositional character in the first place! More broadly, how can God create by an act of thinking the very concepts that are presupposed in any activity of divine thinking?

The only way out, as I see it, is for M&M to concede that while God’s intellectual activity is *creative*, it is not *purposeful* in any significant sense of the word. It is not a case of creation in the traditional sense (a case of God bringing about what he intends), but more an unintended by-product of his intellect, an epiphenomenon as it were. And then perhaps Davison’s criticism would not be that uncharitable: ‘it seems that M&M’s account of the creation of abstract objects

involves something like the neo-platonic notion of emanation, rather than the traditional theistic notion of creation' (Davison 1991: 495).

Objection 2: Theistic activism violates the *sovereignty intuition*

As we saw in the previous chapter, theistic activism does not necessarily violate our intuitions about necessity and causation, for we can plausibly distinguish the issues of necessary existence and causal dependence. However, the critic of theistic activism can press the issue as follows: 'I concede that, technically speaking, the issues of necessary existence and causal dependence can be distinguished, so that one does not preclude the other. But specifically applying this distinction to the realm of *divine creation* generates new problems for the theistic activist. For now we seem to have a case of divine creation which violates our intuitions, not about necessity or causality, but about *divine sovereignty*.'

One way of understanding this objection is by considering what Morris (in 'Necessary Beings') has to say to theists like Clement Dore who state that 'logically necessary beings are not causally dependent.' Morris states that some necessary beings can be caused to exist by 'a self-existent being... which causally depends on no individual distinct from itself for its existence.' And, says Morris, '[w]hat has blinded most philosophers to this possibility is a confusion or conflation of the distinct issues of dependence and control.' God would lack *control* over these necessary beings,

in the sense that he could not annihilate them, or bring new ones into existence, but it does not follow that any which do exist do not *depend* on God for their existence. And a lack of such control is not such as to impugn

divine omnipotence, ranging as it does only over the logically possible (Morris 1985: 187, my italics).³

But if this is the response of the theistic activist, then I think the critic is on to something. *If* we are to take seriously the ‘absolute creation’ model of theistic activism, then the following situation confronts us: there is a realm of objects *distinct from God* – after all, it is a realm which God has created – but which nevertheless God *cannot annihilate*. And this does appear to violate what we normally mean by divine sovereignty, whereby God can annihilate any realm that he has created. Morris would disagree, of course, since divine omnipotence ranges ‘only over the logically possible,’ and it is thus not logically possible for God to destroy a logically necessary being. But since it is the exercise of divine omnipotence that has *determined* (on M&M’s model) just what is logically possible, I’m not sure this reply is open to Morris.

Objection 3: Theistic activism seems to violate the *aseity intuition*

Theistic activism seeks to explain why abstract objects exist. They exist because God creates them, as the causal products of his intellective activity. But even if theistic activism were to satisfy the sovereignty intuition, there is significant doubt as to whether it satisfies the *aseity* intuition, which should be equally important for those who wish to reconcile theism with a Platonist ontology.⁴ Consider that, in any act of creation (whether by humans or by God),

³ Morris and Menzel make this same distinction between control and dependence, in Morris and Menzel 1986: 171. ‘[T]heists can acknowledge the standard Platonist view that God is not in control of abstract objects or necessary truths, in the sense that he cannot annihilate or alter them intrinsically, while at the same time maintaining that these things depend on God for their existence and intrinsic characteristics.’

⁴ While it is clear that M&M regard the intuition of ‘absolute creation’ as the *primary* motivation for regarding God as the source of the ‘framework of reality,’ M&M also believe that their

what is created is normally the realisation of a purpose – the exemplification of an idea – within the mind of the creator. If this is so, then M&M’s appeal to God’s *creation* of abstract objects leaves unanswered the question of the *standard* or *model* for this particular act of creation. Does God look to something *external* to himself as the exemplar for this particular act of creation? Or does something *internal* to God play this role? M&M believe that the divine aseity is accommodated on their model, because ‘the necessity of his creating the framework is not imposed on him from without’ (Morris and Menzel 1986: 170). But the question I am posing in the present context is of a different sort: not, ‘does something external to God *force God to create* the framework he does?’ but rather, ‘does something external to God *provide the model for or content of* the framework which God does in fact create?’

There seem to be at least three possible answers to this question, none of them favourable to the theistic activist project:

God creates abstract objects, and the exemplar for this act of creation is something external to God

Here the divine aseity clearly seems to be compromised, for on this answer (at least some of) God’s acts of creation depend for their content upon a realm external to God. At this point it would do no good, obviously, to reconcile aseity with divine creation by appeal to yet *another* act of creation.

Understanding ‘abstracta’ as existing independently of and apart from God, Matthew Davidson says that ‘By my lights, there’s nothing wrong with abstracta

proposal resolves – among other things – ‘problems which may be posed by what we are calling the framework of reality for traditional theistic beliefs concerning the sovereignty and *aseity* of God’ (Morris and Menzel 1986: 163, my italics). This is a reference, in particular, to Plantinga’s discussion of the aseity intuition in *Does God Have a Nature?* (Plantinga 1980).

serving as the “blueprint” for creation’ (1999: 279). Thus Davidson believes that the divine aseity is not compromised if God looks to something distinct from himself to aid him in any act of creation. It is unfortunate that Davidson does nothing more here than simply note the absence of the relevant intuition in his case. To me it seems perfectly obvious that the divine aseity excludes, in principle, the Platonic model of the Demiurge looking to the externally-existing Forms as a satisfactory model of divine creation.⁵

God creates abstract objects, and the exemplar for this act of creation is something internal to God

This second answer would seem to involve M&M in the incoherence noted under Objection 1 above. If properties are God’s concepts, then does God create his concepts according to his concept of what he is to create?

God creates abstract objects, but this act of creation has no exemplar

But this third answer is wholly at variance with the traditional notion of creation. It is no longer a purposeful act, where ‘purposings’ are propositional in character, but instead just an instance of neo-Platonic emanation. In a sense, this answer is equivalent to: ‘God doesn’t *create* abstract objects at all.’ For it will do no good for M&M to reconcile Platonistic ontology with the expressly *Judeo-*

⁵ As Alfred Freddoso puts it in his review of Plantinga’s *Does God Have a Nature?*, ‘Again, someone might point out that Platonic entities have traditionally been construed as exemplars (or paradigms or models) according to which created things are fashioned. But if such exemplars were wholly distinct from and independent of God, then his creative activity would be constrained by standards which originate outside the divine intellect. In that case God in creating would be more like the imitator who copies an original painting than like the creative genius who produces the masterpiece “on his own.” Some such line of reasoning apparently led Augustine and Aquinas to “Christianize” the Platonic Forms by conceiving of them as ideas in the mind of God’ (Freddoso 1983: 80). The notion that ‘Platonic entities’ (abstract objects) are *not* created but are exemplars for creation is at the heart of my alternative to M&M, to be presented in Chapter 3.

Christian doctrine of divine creation – ‘the idea of a God as absolute creator of everything which exists distinct from him’ – by abandoning *that* doctrine as traditionally conceived.

M&M could complain that I am being unfair here. Why can’t they just say that God thinks the thoughts he does simply because it is in his *nature* to think these thoughts?⁶ But the difficulty here, I suspect, is that this appeal is not grounded in anything we have traditionally wanted to affirm about the nature of God; it seems wholly speculative and *ad hoc*. We simply can’t make a cogent parallel, for instance, between the eternal generation of the Son, and the M&M account of God’s eternal, efficacious, intellectual activity. Whereas we can see a plausible *reason* or *motivation* for the necessary and eternal generation of the Son (perfect divine love shares itself with another; cf. Swinburne 1994: 170-191), it is difficult to find a reason why God would necessarily *cause* or *create* the proposition ‘ $2+2=4$ ’.

Objection 4: theistic activism entails *divine self-creation* (or *divine simplicity*)

Perhaps the most popular objection to theistic activism (besides the charge that it violates the standard semantics for counterfactuals) is the observation that it leads to the absurdity that God creates himself, or at the very least that he creates his own nature. M&M themselves anticipate ‘the initial, obvious entailment of activism that God has properties, and has some both essentially and distinctively, for whose existence his eternal intellectual activity is creatively responsible’

⁶ This is close, if not equivalent, to what M&M actually say: ‘The necessity of his creating the framework is not imposed on him from without, but rather is a feature and result of the nature of his own activity itself, which is a function of what he is’ (Morris and Menzel 1986: 170-171).

(Morris and Menzel 1986: 173-174). But how can God create ‘the very properties which are logically necessary for, and distinctively exemplified within, his creative activity – properties such as his omniscience and omnipotence’ (172)? That is, how can God create his own nature?

In response to this dilemma, M&M offer their ‘heuristic, or pedagogical’ analogy of the materialisation machine, a machine that replenishes its own parts just as they are about to wear out. ‘The machine, like God, is creating that on which it depends for its ability to create and for its occurrent activity of creation.’ If the machine can conceivably be in a state where it is creating all of its own parts, then ‘it seems also conceivable that such an activity take place at every time, or eternally. And that is like what we have in the case of God’ (Morris and Menzel 1986: 175).

But Leftow (1990b) and Davidson (1999) both argue at length that theistic activism entails the absurdity of divine self-creation. Brian Leftow rightly responds that ‘Morris and Menzel’s ingenious “materialization machine” example... is expressly only a case of self-preservation’ (Leftow 1990b: 216 fn. 22). Thus the charge of self-creation has not been rebutted. In addition, given the hypothesis of theistic activism, Leftow gives four arguments that God creates his own nature, another argument that God must create himself, and another argument that if God creates his nature then he must create himself. Leftow then argues at length that it is impossible for God to create himself (Leftow 1990b: 201-208).

Matthew Davidson has three separate strategies against M&M: from properties, propositions, and possible worlds. Davidson restricts his focus to those properties which are essential to God, such as ‘being omnipotent,’ ‘being omniscient,’ ‘having divine cognitive activity,’ ‘being God,’ and so on. Each of

these properties has as part of its essence the property 'being exemplified by God.' Since to cause something to exist is to cause its essence to be exemplified, when God creates any of *these* properties, he also causes it to be exemplified by himself. But shouldn't God's omnipotence, or omniscience, or cognitive activity be causally *prior* to his causing these properties to exist? Davidson then extends this strategy to God's creation of *propositions*. If God causes the proposition 'God exists' to exist, he causes its essence (which includes the property 'being true') to be exemplified. Thus, in causing this proposition to exist, he makes it true, and thus God causes his own existence. Finally, if God creates *possible worlds*, he causes 'God exists' to be true in all possible worlds. Since this includes the actual world, God causes his own existence in the actual world (cf. Davidson 1999: 288-290 for all of these arguments).

Most philosophers of religion have strong intuitions about the scope of divine creation (does it include properties, or only concrete substances?), about the plausibility of divine simplicity, and about the plausibility of divine self-creation. It is interesting to see how the various authors of the literature on theistic activism sort out the competing intuitions on these matters.

For instance, M&M start off with an extremely strong version of creation (God creates everything distinct from him, including all properties), and rightly infer that a divine creation with this unrestricted scope entails either divine simplicity or (what looks like) divine self-creation. They then argue against the coherence of divine simplicity, and so in the end are left adopting what looks like a version of divine self-creation (Morris and Menzel 1986: 172-176).

Brian Leftow starts off with a version of divine creation that is just as strong as that of M&M. But since Leftow regards any form of divine self-creation as

incoherent, he actually uses the strong creation doctrine to *argue for* divine simplicity (Leftow 1990a: 582-583; cf. Leftow 1998: 785)!

Others could point out that, since the alternatives of divine simplicity and divine self-creation appear to be equally implausible, it would be best to pare down the relevant doctrine of creation to the creation of *concrete substances* only (especially if a stronger view of creation isn't a fundamental claim of Christian theism).⁷ My suspicion is that each party is engaged in a 'Moorean-shift' of some sort against their opponents, each taking some particular intuition as more fundamental than (and therefore corrective of) the others.

If Leftow's and Davidson's arguments are sound (and I believe they are), and if theistic activism entails divine self-creation, then one thing is for certain. *If* divine self-creation is an incoherent concept, and *if* M&M do not want to embrace divine simplicity, then it seems that they must scale back their initial, motivating doctrine of divine creation, so that it pertains to concrete substances only. But of course if they do that, then the 'absolute' scope of divine creation can no longer be the motivation for their distinctive claims about the source of abstract objects.⁸

Objection 5: theistic activism only receives very tenuous support from the *Christian tradition* to which it appeals

In his 'A demonstration against theistic activism,' Matthew Davidson identifies three possible motivations for holding to the M&M doctrine that God creates abstract objects: (a) the scope of divine creation (God has created

⁷ Notice Swinburne's restriction of the doctrine of creation to that of concrete substances: 'God is the creator and sustainer of any universe there may be in the sense that any *substance* that exists apart from himself exists because God causes it to exist as long as it exists...' (1994: 128, my italics).

everything distinct from himself), (b) the divine aseity (God can't depend upon anything distinct from himself for his existence and character), and (c) the divine sovereignty and/or 'perfect being theology' (everything distinct from God must be dependent on God) (Davidson 1999: 278-279). And, as was shown in the preceding chapter, it is clear from M&M's article that it is the *first* motivation – the scope of divine creation – that guides their project from beginning to end. Abstract objects exist because God has created everything distinct from himself.

To what extent then does this motivation and model fit in with the Christian theological and philosophical tradition? M&M would certainly welcome such an investigation, given their explicit concern to reconcile Platonism with 'Judeo-Christian theism,' which holds that God is 'absolute creator of everything which exists distinct from him' (Morris and Menzel 1986: 161).

Theistic activism in the Christian theological tradition

Some have objected that what M&M take to be the *scope* of divine creation has never been part of traditional Christian theism (cf. Wolterstorff 1970: 296). After all, do the relevant biblical texts and passages from the church fathers really have abstract objects in mind?

I have some sympathy with this query, although, as Davidson puts it, the biblical writers probably didn't have top quarks in mind when they addressed the subject of divine creation, and yet no one denies that top quarks, as well as everything else distinct from God, are created by God (Davidson 1999: 278; cf. Morris and Menzel 1986: 164).

⁸ It will be remembered that in Chapter 1, we saw that M&M's motivation was to reconcile divine creation with a Platonistic ontology, by showing how the scope of God's creative activity is so 'absolute' that it can even include abstract objects.

Theistic activism in the Christian philosophical tradition

In evaluating ‘The Doctrine of Creation Argument’ for theistic activism, Scott Davison notes that

there *is* a tradition of Christian philosophers (including, most notably, Augustine) who have claimed that abstract entities are really Divine thoughts. But even here it is not clear that the principal advocates of this position viewed the relation between God and abstract objects as a relation of *creation*. It is doubtful that either Augustine or Aquinas (for example) actually considered abstract objects as part of the created order, and it is less than clear whether or not they could do so consistently. Hence the existence of the Christian tradition involving Ideas in God’s mind lends little support (if any) to M&M’s claim that theists *ought* to view abstract objects as created by God (Davison 1991: 489).

Davison does well to remind us of the plurality of the Christian philosophical tradition on the relation between God and abstracta. The clearest dividing line in this respect seems to be Descartes vs. Leibniz. As is well known, Descartes made necessary truths dependent upon the divine *will*, as an act of creation: ‘The mathematical truths which you call eternal have been laid down by God and depend on Him entirely no less than the rest of His creatures’ (Letter to Mersenne, 15 April 1630, in Kenny 1970: 11). ‘[I]t is because he willed that the three angles of a triangle should necessarily equal two right angles that this is true and cannot be otherwise’ (Sixth Replies [1642], translated in Cottingham 1986: 93). ‘[T]hough God has willed that certain truths were necessary, that is not to say that he has willed them necessarily’ (Letter to Mesland, 2 May 1644, cited in Curley 1984: 582).⁹

However, in the *Monadology* (1714), Leibniz explicitly chastises Descartes for supposing that the eternal truths depend upon God’s will. Rather, they solely depend upon God’s *understanding*:

⁹ For rival theories of why Descartes took the position he did, see Frankfurt 1977 and Curley 1984. For an argument that, for Descartes, the truths in question were immutable but not necessary, see van den Brink 1993. For an argument that Descartes *intentionally* refrained from saying that *all* eternal truths depend on God’s will, see Glauser 1998.

However, we should not imagine, as some do, that since the eternal truths depend on God, they are arbitrary and depend on his will, as Descartes appears to have held, and after him Mr. Poiret. This is true only of contingent truths, whose principle is *fitness* [*convenance*] or the choice of the *best*. But necessary truths depend solely on his understanding, and are its internal object' (sec. 46 of the *Monadology*, translated in Ariew and Garber 1989: 218-219).¹⁰

Leibniz's conviction that the necessary truths depend upon the divine understanding, rather than the divine will, was not new to Christian philosophical theology. Augustine held that

the ideas are certain archetypal forms or stable and immutable essences of things, *which have not themselves been formed* but, existing eternally and without change, are contained in the divine intelligence. *They neither arise nor pass away*, but whatever arises and passes away is formed according to them (*De Ideis*, 2, my italics).

Similarly for Aquinas, mathematical truths are not created truths. Rather, 'the nature of a circle, and the fact that two and three make five, have eternity in the mind of God' (*Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 16, a. 7, obj. 1 and reply).¹¹

Given the divided Christian tradition on the source of the eternal truths – with some advocating the divine understanding/intellect/mind, and others the divine will – it seems intelligible to ask M&M: are abstract objects *uncreated* divine thoughts within the divine understanding, or are they rather the *creative, causal product* of the divine conceiving activity?¹²

¹⁰ In 'Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas' (1684), Leibniz equates 'primitive possibilities' with the 'absolute attributes of God' (Ariew and Garber 1989: 26), rather than with a realm of modality which God has *created*. Cf. chapter 7 of Robert Adams' *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* for further argument that, 'throughout his career, Leibniz was vehemently opposed to the Cartesian thesis that necessary truths depend on God's *will*' (Adams 1994: 190).

¹¹ It is significant that Aquinas also quotes with approval the aforementioned passage from Augustine, in ST Ia, q. 15, a. 2 sed contra, and again in a. 3 sed contra. With respect to the dependence of the eternal truths upon God, Frankfurt puts the views of Aquinas and Suarez (as well as of Scholasticism more generally) in explicit *contrast* to that of Descartes, in Frankfurt 1977: 39-41.

¹² I take the Christian tradition about *necessary or eternal truths* to be relevant to M&M's claim about *abstract objects* because (1) most who accept the real existence of abstract objects take them to be the required truth-makers of necessary truths, and (2) M&M claim similarities between their view and those of Augustine and Descartes (Morris and Menzel 1986: 168-170).

While M&M explicitly *advertise* their theory as an account of divine creation, the *details* of that theory at times betray a commitment to the divine understanding thesis, the claim that these objects *simply are* the divine ideas, quite apart from any subsequent act of creation. This was seen most clearly in the desire to maintain, on the one hand, the claim that properties and relations are just God's concepts, and on the other hand, that God has created all abstract objects. But how can this be, if God must already have his concepts in place if any intelligible act of creation is going to proceed?

While Augustine clearly eschews creative and causal categories, M&M feel free to advertise their 'absolute creation' view as simply 'a modally updated descendent of the "divine ideas" tradition represented by, for example, St. Augustine' (Morris and Menzel 1986: 168).¹³ In the end, M&M appear to be doing something which is quite confusing: drawing upon the Augustinian language of uncreated divine ideas in order to expound an account of 'absolute creation' (wherein abstract objects are nondivine creatures). In the next chapter, I aim to avoid this confusion by clearly siding with Augustine, Aquinas, other medieval thinkers, and Leibniz – and against Descartes – in regarding abstract objects as uncreated divine ideas. In doing so I also hope to avoid the other objections raised against M&M in this chapter.

¹³ Similarly, in 'Theism, Platonism and the Metaphysics of Mathematics,' Menzel claims that 'Morris and I essentially just reclothe the venerable doctrine of divine ideas in contemporary garb' (Menzel 1987: 366).

Chapter 3

Theistic Conceptual Realism: An Alternative to Theistic Activism

The Model

The model that I wish to advocate of the relationship between God and abstract objects is not, as we shall see, a complete repudiation of everything M&M have said on the subject. It is however a model that purges theistic activism of all misleading language about ‘divine creation.’ On my model, God in no way *creates* abstract objects. Rather, a certain subset of the uncreated divine thoughts *function as* abstract objects because of the peculiar role they play with respect to any created realm (actual or possible). These thoughts function as abstract objects *for* the creation but not for God, because it is *nominalism* at the divine level which entails realism at the created level. The further articulation of these claims is the burden of the rest of this chapter, while their critical evaluation will be taken up in the next.

Theistic conceptual realism

I prefer to call my model ‘theistic conceptual realism’ (hereafter, ‘TCR’), rather than theistic activism, in order to purge all reference to a divine *activity of creating* abstract objects. TCR claims that (at least some of) the divine thoughts can be regarded as functionally equivalent to abstract objects, due to the unique and determinative relation they sustain to any created realm.

As a version of *realism*, TCR asserts that abstract objects (such as propositions, properties, possible worlds, logical relations) are *real* objects. They are not (as in creative antirealism) mere products of human intellectual activity, but have extramental existence relative to finite minds. However, as a version of *conceptual* realism, TCR asserts that such objects *are* ultimately mental in character. This is because what is being considered is a *theistic* version of conceptual realism, where the abstract objects in question are uncreated ideas in the divine mind; i.e. God's thoughts. Let us build up this model, step by step.

Divine aseity

The fundamental starting point is God's aseity, or self-existence. Aseity refers to 'his uncreatedness, self-sufficiency and independence of everything else'; 'If he [God] has aseity, he depends upon nothing for his existence and character' (Plantinga 1980: 1, 68). We can construe this in terms of God's 'ontologically necessary existence.' There is not at any time any cause, either active or permissive, of God's existence.¹

God's necessary omniscience

Next, it seems quite plausible to suppose that God is necessarily omniscient. For some of the things which the theist wishes to say about God is that he is

¹ Here I am adopting Swinburne's technical distinction between ontologically necessary existence and metaphysically necessary existence (cf. Swinburne 1994: 118-119). The former excludes any cause for what exists, while the latter admits the possibility of an everlasting cause of what exists. While Swinburne holds that the Trinity exists of ontological necessity, he holds that the different Persons of the Trinity have merely metaphysically necessary existence (in order to accommodate certain claims about the eternal relations among the Persons). In affirming divine aseity I am affirming, with Swinburne, the ontologically necessary existence of the Trinity.

necessarily the kind of person he is, that he *necessarily* has (at least some of) the properties he has.

For instance, the theist will want to claim, among other things,

that God is an animate being of a certain kind which can only have thoughts of certain kinds and perform actions of certain kinds. He could not have thoughts other than true thoughts or perform actions other than ones which effect their desired result... [It is] logically impossible that he commit suicide, or abandon his omnipotence (Swinburne 1993: 285-286; cf. Swinburne 1994: 155-157).

God's self-knowledge

Crucial to TCR is the claim that God's omniscience can plausibly be construed as his self-knowledge. That is, God perfectly knows himself, and in knowing himself, he knows all creatures, both possible and actual. God's knowledge of *possible* things is his knowledge of his own *power*, while his knowledge of *actual* things is his knowledge of his own *will*. This follows the Thomistic distinction between the *scientia intelligentiae* and the *scientia visionis*, the knowledge of understanding and the knowledge of vision, the knowledge of possibility and the knowledge of actuality, which Aquinas expounds in *Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 14, a. 8-9:

Whatever therefore can be made, or thought, or said by the creature, as also whatever He Himself can do, all are known to God, although they are not actual. And in so far it can be said that He has knowledge even of things that are not. Now a certain difference is to be noted in the consideration of those things that are not actual. For though some of them may not be in act now, still they were, or they will be; and God is said to know all these with the knowledge of vision [*scientia visionis*]... But there are other things in God's power, or the creature's, which nevertheless are not, nor will be, nor were; and as regards these He is said to have knowledge, not of vision, but of simple intelligence [*scientia intelligentiae*]' (*Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 14, a. 9, responsio).²

² As Anthony Kenny summarises, 'Aquinas makes a distinction between "knowledge of understanding" (*scientia intelligentiae*), which is grasp of possibility, and "knowledge of vision" (*scientia visionis*), which is awareness of reality' (Kenny 1979: 33).

Taking as his starting point Augustine's remark that God's knowledge of creatures is prior to the existence of the creatures themselves, Aquinas develops a model of God's knowledge in terms of the blueprint which an 'artificer' or architect has for whatever he intends to build. As the divinely omniscient architect, God has in his possession all possible blueprints (his knowledge of his own power, his knowledge of possible things), and has knowledge of which blueprint he has decided to enact (his knowledge of his own will, his knowledge of actual things). These two aspects of self-knowledge are jointly sufficient to define divine omniscience.

Thus, says Aquinas,

The knowledge of God is the cause of things. For the knowledge of God is to all creatures what the knowledge of the artificer is to things made by his art. Now the knowledge of the artificer is the cause of the things made by his art from the fact that *the artificer works by his intellect...* Nevertheless, we must observe that a natural form, being a form that remains in that to which it gives existence, denotes a principle of action according only as it has *an inclination to an effect...* hence His knowledge must be the cause of things, *in so far as His will is joined to it.* (*Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 14, a. 8, responsio, my italics).

Because of the divine aseity, God's knowledge of himself – of his power and of his will – is not knowledge obtained from creatures. It is completely independent of and prior to creatures. Aquinas concedes that natural objects are the measure of *our* (human) knowledge, since we know them by empirical observation. Thus, our knowledge is *dependent* on what exists. But God's knowledge is the *measure of* those natural objects, even as an architect's plan is the measure of what gets built (and not vice-versa):

'Natural things are midway between the knowledge of God and our knowledge: for we receive knowledge from natural things, of which God is the cause by His knowledge. Hence, as the natural objects of knowledge are prior to our knowledge, and are its measure, so, the knowledge of God is prior to natural things, and is the measure of them; as, for instance, a house is midway between the knowledge of the builder who made it, and the knowledge of the one who gathers his knowledge of the house from the house already built' (*Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 14, a. 8, reply 3).

Of course, if God's knowledge is the measure of natural objects, and if natural objects are the measure of our knowledge of them, it follows from this that God's knowledge is the measure of our knowledge as well.

Notice that when Aquinas states that 'the knowledge of God is to all creatures what the knowledge of the artificer is to things made by his art,' I am interpreting him to be saying at least the following. First, God's knowledge of actual things is A-foreknowledge, not O-foreknowledge. That is, God knows that p as a result of ordaining or effectively willing or otherwise *ensuring* that p is true.³ Second, God's A-foreknowledge is *unrestricted* foreknowledge. That is, God's knowledge is the cause of *all* things. This appears to exclude the possession of libertarian free will on the part of God's creatures, for if God gave some creatures libertarian free will, then it seems likely that to some extent the divine knowledge would be dependent on what exists (i.e. on the human choices that get made).⁴

God's thoughts as abstract objects

So what follows from this joint affirmation of divine aseity and necessary omniscience (where the latter is construed as divine self-knowledge)? The preceding considerations can be brought together to produce a model of abstract objects as divine ideas. If due to the divine aseity God's knowledge of all possibilities (of everything that he can bring about) is completely independent of

³ See Helm 1988: 129-132 for an exposition of this distinction, and for argument that Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas and Calvin held that divine foreknowledge is A-foreknowledge.

⁴ I hold, with Paul Helm, that Aquinas's appeal to divine timelessness does not remove the *prima facie* contradiction between divine omniscience and human libertarian freedom (cf. Helm 1988: 95-108). Thus, if one believes that human possession of libertarian free will is required for ascriptions of human moral responsibility, then my model of God's knowledge would need to be qualified accordingly. There is no space here to pursue that particular debate.

the creature, then a whole range of God's thoughts can be seen to *function as* abstract objects in relation to the created realm. In addition, abstract objects will differ in kind according to *how* the divine thoughts function in relation to the world. And, finally, the three fundamental characteristics of all abstract objects (on a realist conception) will have been satisfied: (a) *real* existence outside space and time, (b) ability to be *exemplified*, (c) real existence *independent of* exemplification. Let us see how this model accounts for properties, and for possible worlds.

Properties

With respect to properties, we could say that if God creates any world which exists, and if any created world exemplifies (a particular subset of) the ideas of the divine mind, then at least some of God's thoughts function as *properties* in the realist sense, insofar as they are nonspatial, nontemporal, exemplifiable entities which actually exist (in the divine mind), entities that explain all cases of attribute-agreement in any created universe, and which exist independently of any created universe.

The *existence* of a property is due to the divine power, since God has the power to bring such-and-such about. The *form* of a property is due to the divine omniscience, because it is God's *knowledge* of his power that serves as the blueprint for all possible worlds. Thus, the property of 'being red' *exists*, precisely because God *has* the power to bring about the existence of things that are red. But the property of 'being red' exists in the *form* of a concept in God's mind; specifically, God's idea of his power to bring about the existence of red things. This concept or idea which is in God's possession exists outside space and time, is

exemplifiable, but exists independently of any of its exemplifications. Indeed, it could exist wholly unexemplified.⁵

Notice here that TCR can still adapt M&M's distinction between human concepts and divine concepts: 'Human concepts [are]... graspings of properties that exist ontologically distinct from and independent of those graspings,' whereas 'divine concepts are those very properties themselves' (Morris and Menzel 1986: 166). TCR just rejects M&M's account of God *creating* his concepts and all other abstract objects via an intellectual activity, since (as argued in Chapter 2) it regards such creation as incoherent.

Possible worlds

God is an omniscient being. One consequence of this is that God perfectly knows the capacities of his own power, and therefore all possibilities. From knowledge of possibility is derived knowledge of impossibility, necessity, and contingency. For instance, the impossible is what is not possible. The necessary is what is not possibly not. And the contingent is what is possible but not necessary.⁶

Thus, possible worlds are simply God's knowledge of his own power, of what he is able to instantiate. God's knowledge is not just a useful fiction, and so neither are possible worlds. God truly has this knowledge – it is as real as his own thoughts – and he creates in accordance with it. This naturally leads to a theistic version of an 'actualist' conception of possible worlds, akin to the actualism

⁵ I tie properties to the divine concepts, because properties and concepts are closely aligned. For something to have a property means that it falls under a particular concept. And to have a concept of X is to grasp or apprehend the property of being X. (cf. Plantinga 1980: 20-22; Plantinga 2000: 15)

⁶ Since all these notions are interdefinable, one can just as well start with something other than possibility, such as necessity. 'I shall take the central notion as the notion of necessity. The other notions can be explained by means of it. The impossible is that which is necessarily not; the possible is that which is not impossible, and the contingent is that which is neither necessary nor impossible' Swinburne (1994: 96).

embraced by Alvin Plantinga, Robert Adams, and Robert Stalnaker, and rejected by David Lewis. On this conception, existence claims about nonactual possible worlds are reducible to existence claims about things in the actual world, for God's knowledge of his own power is after all a mental item in the actual world.⁷

As with any actualist conception of possible worlds, TCR does not claim to give a 'reductive' analysis of modality. Rather, modal facts about God ground modal facts about the world. In this connection it is crucial to remember that, because of the divine aseity, it is simply a 'brute fact' that God is the kind of God he is, with the powers that he has. There is no cause of God's nature and existence, and thus no cause or ultimate explanation of why God's knowledge of his nature has the content that it does. This is significant, because it follows that *what* God is able to do (the possible), and his *knowledge* of what he is able to do, is not dependent in any way upon the existence of anything distinct from God (such as, for instance, human sentences). To be sure, in order for humans to *describe* these and other facts about God, they must use human sentences. But the order of our knowing does not determine, and is completely independent of, the order of God's being and knowing. Thus, God's knowledge of a whole host of necessary truths about himself – for instance, the range of possible universes he could create – is a function of who God is in and of himself, not a function of our contingent ability to describe such knowledge.⁸

Thus, the essential argument is that if God exists and has thoughts, then everything significant which realists have wanted to say about abstract objects can

⁷ In Chapter 4, this theistic version of an 'actualist' conception of possible worlds will be articulated in detail, and then critically evaluated from a number of angles.

⁸ We can of course *define* God's omnipotence as his power to do 'any action the description of which makes ultimate sense' (Swinburne 1994: 152). But this is not to say that God's power to do such-and-such is somehow dependent upon the logical and semantic intuitions possessed by human beings. Precisely the reverse is the case.

be said about (at least some of) the divine thoughts. The argument doesn't presuppose the existence of abstract objects at the outset, but only the existence of the divine thoughts. It then proceeds to characterise those thoughts as abstract objects. And the M&M thesis of 'absolute creation' forms no part of this characterisation.

Some Consequences

Several implications of this model should be explained in greater detail.

Uncreated divine thoughts function as abstract objects with respect to the created realm only

Why do I embrace this 'functionalist' account of abstract objects, defining them as abstract objects in terms of *the role they play* with respect to something else? Precisely because I want to endorse the following contrast, which seems to me to just follow from divine aseity and divine self-knowledge. God's thoughts about his own omnipotence do not explain the fact that he *is* omnipotent; rather, it is the fact that God is omnipotent that explains why he has the thought that he is omnipotent. But with creatures, precisely the reverse relation obtains. The fact that a creature has a certain attribute (and that another creature has the same attribute) does not explain why God has the corresponding thought about such creatures (and why he has his thought about their relation to each other). Rather, it is God's thought about such creatures (the artificer's blueprint, to use Aquinas' image) that explains why certain creatures have certain attributes.⁹

⁹ Again, as was noted earlier, this account would most likely have to be modified if one held that the creatures in question possessed libertarian free will.

Thus, I want to deny that God's thoughts are abstract objects *simpliciter*. Instead, I want to endorse the claim that while God's thoughts are numerically the same thoughts in relation to the creation and to God, God's thoughts *function as* abstract objects only with respect to the creation, and not with respect to God. For example, God's thoughts determine attribute agreement with respect to the creation, not with respect to God.

To illustrate. God and I can have the *same* thought, '2+2=4', in terms of content. But my thought doesn't *function* in the same way that God's thought does. My thought doesn't *determine* or *delimit* anything about the actual world, or about any possible world. But God's thought does. Thus, it plays a completely different *role* in the scheme of things, even though God and I have the same thought in terms of content. Thus, God's thought uniquely *functions* as an abstract object, because of his role as creator of any possible world. I am not the creator of the actual world (much less, any possible world), and thus my thoughts, though they are in many cases the same thoughts as God's, don't function as abstract objects in any relevant sense.

Thus, realism – rather than nominalism – obtains with respect to the created realm

Due to the peculiar role the divine thoughts play with respect to any created realm (actual or possible), any *nominalist* account of possible worlds, properties, propositions, and logical relations is bound to be defective. Usually, arguments for realism about abstract objects appeal to a need to explain facts about human language. But the present argument for realism proceeds, not from facts about human language, but from facts about God's self-knowledge.

Thus, creatures exemplify properties in virtue of God's own plan for them, and this plan (and therefore the properties) exist independently of the creatures in question. The propositions expressed by synonymous human sentences exist independently of those sentences. Possible worlds exist (unexemplified, of course) in the actual world. And due to the divine omniscience, what we call 'creation' on the human level is just the first-tokening of an abstractly-existing type.¹⁰ We can of course *say* that Beethoven created or invented the Ninth Symphony, but his creativity is to be understood by saying that he was the first human person in history to token that abstract object. He was not the first *person* to think of that symphony, for it existed eternally in the mind of God.

The nominalist might resist these conclusions, and seek (for instance) to reduce all logical relations to human linguistic behaviour. But if logical laws *just are* how human linguistic behaviour goes, then we must conclude that God is an irrational or arational being, for *his* thoughts exist prior to and independently of any human linguistic behaviour. And that is much too high a price for the Christian theist to pay. Firmly embedded within the Christian tradition is the conviction that God is an optimally rational being; he is the paradigmatically rational agent. His thoughts are not randomly organised and unrelated to each other. They exhibit a rational structure. And if God had never created human beings, or a universe at all, he would still be an optimally rational being, with a perfect knowledge of a whole range of necessary truths.

Logical relations, then, exist realistically for the created realm. These relations are constituted by the nature and organisation of the divine thoughts, and if any world that is created is created by God according to his creative intentions (i.e. his

¹⁰ The terminology of 'first-tokening' is from Katz 1998: 168.

plan, his design), then surely the *nature* of any such world is constrained by the nature of God's plan. As Augustine puts it in *De Ideis 2*,

The ideas are certain archetypal forms or stable and immutable essences of things, which have not themselves been formed but, existing eternally and without change, are contained in the divine intelligence. They neither arise nor pass away, but *whatever arises and passes away is formed according to them* (my italics).

It is precisely because nominalism obtains at the divine level that realism obtains at the created level

Two things are being claimed here. First, 'nominalism obtains at the divine level.' That is, logical necessity does not exist *for God* in some abstract, realist sense, independently of God's thoughts and constraining God's thoughts. Logical necessity *just is* how God thinks (even as, for most nominalists, logical necessity *just is* how humans use language). In favouring 'the Augustinian strategy' over 'the Cartesian principle,' William Mann insists that God neither discovers nor invents necessary truths. Rather,

God thoroughly understands that $1 + 2 = 3$ with a sweep of intellectual comprehension that sees all of the implications of that truth for all the rest of the truths. In understanding " $1 + 2 = 3$ " in this way, God understands something about himself as the supremely rational being. The necessary truths occupy an important place in the structure of rational thought. According to the Augustinian strategy, the structure of rational thought is either the structure of the divine mind or the divine mind itself, actively and essentially engaged in thinking (Mann 1997: 269).

Second, 'realism obtains at the created level' *because* 'nominalism obtains at the divine level.' That is, because of God's unique relationship to any existing world (he is the creator of any world that exists), the possible features of any world are constrained (quite literally) by God's creative power. Modal facts about the world – what can possibly be the case in any world you please – are grounded in something which obtains independently of the world: the divine self-knowledge and, ultimately, the divine nature which is known by God.

Thus, whereas logical nominalism at the divine level is a consequence of the divine *aseity*, logical realism at the created level is a consequence of the divine *creating*; not that God *creates* abstract objects¹¹, but that the uncreated divine thoughts *function as* abstract objects because of the unique and determinative relation they sustain to any created realm. Logical realism applies at the created level *because* logical nominalism applies at the divine level.

The laws of logic are discovered via, but are not reducible to, how humans use language

As has been argued, while the nominalist will hold that logic ‘does not govern the relations of timeless entities to each other, but concerns only... human behaviour – a matter of psychology’ (Swinburne 1994: 114), the theistic conceptual realist will hold that the relations which exist among certain timeless entities *just are* (i.e. constitute) the laws of logic.¹² While for the classic Platonist these timeless entities are the forms, for the theistic conceptual realist these timeless entities are the divine thoughts, which exhibit the optimally rational structure of the divine mind.

However, all that being said, there is a sense – and a very significant sense at that – in which we can understand logic for all *practical* purposes as simply the codification of human linguistic behaviour, of how humans use language. But an advocate of TCR will say that such a reflection upon language gives us successive

¹¹ A key error, as I see it, of the theistic activist doctrine of ‘absolute creation.’

¹² I say among *certain* (that is, particular) timeless entities for the simple reason that it is not relations among just *any* divine ideas that constitute a law of logic. Logical laws codify *very general* relations between divine ideas. Thus, a distinction must be made between ‘If all As are Bs, and if...’ (which is a law of logic, being fully general), and ‘All bachelors are unmarried,’ which is not a law of logic even though it is a necessary truth entailed by a law of logic, given other things. So the timeless relations between God’s concepts of ‘bachelor’ and ‘unmarried’ do not constitute ‘laws of logic.’

approximations to the truth of the matter about objectively existing logical relations. The discipline of logic, like other disciplines of empirical science, is an imperfect though progressive journey in understanding what is objectively the case; our *understanding* is always subject to correction via the contingencies of reflective equilibrium.

Another way of putting this is to say that for the theistic conceptual realist, the fact that human beings codify laws of logic *by studying* human linguistic behaviour does not mean that logical relations *simply are* how human beings use language. Discovering logic through reflection upon language may give us *epistemic access* to logical relations, but this is not to be confused with the *metaphysical reality* to which epistemic access is given. One cannot simply collapse an objectively existing metaphysical realm into the criteria of its discovery.

Of course, the epistemic question will now inevitably arise with respect to TCR: just what *guarantee* do we have that reflection upon human language (and our subsequent codification of laws of logic) ‘matches up with’ the logical relations among the divine thoughts? But surely if God is the creator of our cognitive capacities, we have good reason to think that he both can and has ensured that such a match can ordinarily result through the exercise of our faculties. As Robert Adams puts it in his article on ‘Divine Necessity’:

I do seriously entertain the hypothesis that there is a mind to whose nature it simply pertains to be able to recognize necessary truths. Indeed I am inclined to believe that such a mind belongs to God. And that opens the way for another explanation of our knowledge of necessary truths: an explanation in terms of divine illumination. Suppose that necessary truths do determine and explain facts about the real world. If God of his very nature knows the necessary truths, and if he has created us, he could have constructed us in such a way that we would at least commonly recognize necessary truths as necessary. In this way there would be a causal connection between what is necessarily true about real objects and our believing it to be necessarily true about them. It would not be an incredible accident or an inexplicable

mystery that our beliefs agreed with the objects in this. This theory is not new. It is Augustinian, and something like it was widely accepted in the medieval and early modern periods. I think it provides the best explanation available to us for our knowledge of necessary truths... (Adams 1983: 217-218).¹³

The danger of conflating the epistemological and the metaphysical can be illustrated with reference to the philosophy of Augustine. Augustine's philosophy of the eternal truths had both an epistemological and a metaphysical side. *Epistemologically*, there was the theory of divine illumination: we subjectively apprehend the truth as God enables us to do so (whether his assistance comes to us dynamically and directly, via ongoing divine illumination, or more statically and indirectly, via our divinely created cognitive faculties¹⁴). But *metaphysically*, logical validity was *something human beings discovered*, rather than invented; it had its source and pre-existence in the divine mind.¹⁵ And the theistic conceptual realist will contend that we must not confuse these two aspects. By the grace of God we are given subjective epistemological access to an objectively existing metaphysical realm of eternally existing relations. The fact that we can describe the functioning of our cognitive capacities without explicit reference to that metaphysical realm, is no argument that there *is* no metaphysical realm. Similarly, the fact that logic gets codified via reflection upon human language is no

¹³ Cf. also pp. 188-191 of Thomas Morris's 'Necessary Beings' (Morris 1985), for a similar argument. Compare as well, Leibniz: 'It is the knowledge of necessary and eternal truths which distinguishes us from mere animals and gives us *reason* and the sciences, raising us to knowledge of ourselves and God' (*Monadology* 29, quoted in Swinburne 1997: 210 [fn. 6], in describing the distinct *advantages* which linguistic ability gives to humans).

¹⁴ Cf. Adams 1983: 219 [fn. 6] for this distinction. Adams' theory 'agrees with Augustine in explaining our knowledge of necessary truths in terms of God's action on us. Augustine's theory of divine illumination has God intervening, so to speak, in each event of logical or mathematical knowledge; whereas what I have presented is an account of God giving us an innate capacity to judge rightly about such matters. Such innatism is perhaps more Cartesian than Augustinian. I do not mean to express a decided preference for one of these theories over the other.' Neither do I.

¹⁵ Cf. Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* Bk. II, Ch. 32 ('Valid Logical Sequence Is Not Devised But Only Observed By Man'). Here Augustine says: 'And yet the validity of logical sequences is not a thing devised by men, but is observed and noted by them that they may be able to learn and teach it; for it exists eternally in the reason of things, and has its origin with God.'

argument that the relations thus codified do not exist eternally and independently of human beings. If God exists, eternally and as a perfectly rational and omniscient being, then such relations *do* exist eternally and independently of human beings.¹⁶

Direct contrasts between TCR and TA

Properly speaking, God does not create his thoughts

With its affirmation of divine aseity and necessary divine omniscience, TCR rejects the theistic activist notion that the divine thoughts properly come under the province of divine *creation*. Plausibly,

the claim that there is an individual who is the creator of all things, is to be understood with the qualification “apart from himself” or, more precisely, “apart from anything the existence of which is entailed by his own existence” (Swinburne 1993: 129-130).

Now if God is necessarily omniscient, and therefore necessarily knows (among other things) his own power, then he necessarily has some of the thoughts he has. But then these are thoughts that are entailed by his own existence, and they should not fall under the category of something that God has *created*.¹⁷

Abstract objects are not a part of the creation, but are a blueprint for creation. That is, God does not create exemplars; he creates according to an uncreated exemplar

¹⁶ This distinction is also found in Leibniz. Robert Adams documents the fact that, ‘like Augustine, he [Leibniz] links a theological ontology of logic with an epistemology of divine illumination’ (Adams 1994: 187).

¹⁷ This argument assumes, of course, that in God’s case <knowing *p*> entails <thinking or having thoughts that *p*>. ‘Now if God is a perfect knower, He does not forget what He knows or become unaware of what He knows: all His knowledge is occurrent, not dispositional’ (Leftow 1990b: 214 fn. 4).

M&M are right to say that ‘a thoroughly theistic ontology... will be one which places God at the center and views everything else as exemplifying a relation of creaturely dependence on him’ (Morris and Menzel 1986: 161-162). But it is precisely *because* everything in the creation ‘exemplifies a relation of creaturely dependence’ on God, that abstract objects *cannot* be understood as created by God. For the thoughts of God (in terms of his set of blueprints for any possible creation) are precisely that which *are* the exemplar for anything which gets created.

Again, the advocate of TCR will agree with M&M that there is a ‘framework of reality’ that is akin to the ‘Platonic realm of necessity as comprising necessary truth,’ a framework which ‘provides a structure which exists in and delimits every possible world... a structure which would have to be instantiated by any contingent created universe’ (162). But the advocate of TCR will explicitly deny what M&M affirm: that God has *created* this framework. Rather, God’s uncreated knowledge of his own power constitutes this framework.

The Advantages (TCR escapes the successful objections to TA)

Unlike TA, TCR can construe properties and relations as God’s concepts

The difficulty with TA was that God was creating, by an act of thinking, the very concepts that are presupposed in any activity of divine thinking. The only way out was to deny that this is a case of intelligent, purposeful creation, but instead a form of neo-platonic emanation. But on TCR, properties and relations

are identical to elements of God's uncreated self-knowledge, so this problem does not arise.

Unlike TA, TCR does not violate the sovereignty intuition

The difficulty with TA was that we have a realm which is clearly created by God, but which God cannot annihilate. But on TCR, we simply have the unchanging and unchangeable content of God's own self-knowledge. Surely the fact that God has this knowledge is not controversial in the slightest; God cannot but know himself perfectly. Since it is not clear that these thoughts are distinct from God in the sense of being *creatures*, it is not clear that God's 'inability' to think something other than these thoughts violates his sovereignty (since sovereignty ranges over what God has *created*). Rather, God's necessary omniscience is a *virtue*, not a defect, of his divine person. It would be strange to say that God would be more sovereign if only he could choose to disbelieve a necessary truth! Thus there can be and are thoughts that God necessarily thinks, and this is not at the expense of his sovereignty, but in virtue of his perfection.¹⁸

Unlike TA, TCR does not violate the aseity intuition

The difficulty with TA was that it did not give us a standard or model that God uses for his creation of abstract objects. If this model is external to God, the aseity

¹⁸ If the critic insists that his intuitions about divine sovereignty *can* be extended to the causal relation that exists between a thinker and his thought, then he ultimately has to give up any notion of God's necessary omniscience (or else embrace divine simplicity, in which God's thoughts are in *no* sense distinct from God, and thus do not fall under the range of divine sovereignty). But I think it is far more plausible to hold that our intuitions about divine sovereignty really only apply to the realm of creation as traditionally conceived (where God can annihilate any creature he has created), and do not apply to the thinker/thought model. Otherwise, there is a possible world where God is ignorant of a necessary truth, and God is no longer necessarily omniscient.

intuition is violated. If this model is internal to God, incoherence results. At best, on TA God necessarily thinks (at least some of) the thoughts he thinks, but absolutely no reason is given as to why God thinks *these* thoughts and not others in their place. The answer that it is in God's 'nature' to think these thoughts and not others is surely correct, but that answer is not tied to anything that we have traditionally wanted to *affirm* about God. The bare claim about God's nature is completely unmotivated by traditional descriptions of God (especially when that claim is put in terms of divine creation).

But on TCR, abstract objects are not created (and thus *a fortiori* not created according to a paradigm). The aseity question does not arise. God has (at least some of) the thoughts he has, because of his necessary omniscience about himself (in particular, about his power). Thus, the possession of these thoughts by God is rooted in something that has traditionally been ascribed to God.

Unlike TA, TCR entails neither divine self-creation nor divine simplicity

The difficulty with TA was that God creates the very properties that are logically necessary for, and distinctively exemplified within, that very creative activity. He creates his own nature. It can also be argued that on TA, God creates himself. TA's problems stem from the claim that God creates properties for *both* God and man.

But on TCR, properties are uncreated thoughts that function as abstract objects for the creation *but not for God*. Thus, God's thoughts do not *explain* God having the determinate attributes he does have. And since on TCR possible worlds are indexed to the *uncreated* divine knowledge of his own power, God doesn't bring

possible worlds into existence. Thus, God's thoughts do not *explain* the fact that God exists in the actual world. The 'self-creation' criticisms of Leftow and Davidson are avoided.

Unlike TA, TCR finds broad support from the Christian tradition

It may not be a coincidence that, insofar as there is a Christian tradition on these matters, it is M&M's reliance on the peculiarly *Cartesian* impulse that occasions most of their difficulties. Notice that TCR escapes all of the preceding objections to TA (first presented in Chapter 2) primarily because TCR grounds the existence of abstract objects in the divine aseity, rather than in divine *creation*. Anthony Kenny notes this fundamental divide in Christian philosophical theology, which places Descartes on one side all by himself. The Cartesian view, where 'the geometers' triangle is an eternal creature of God,' is opposed to

the rival medieval theory... The truths of logic and mathematics, on this [latter] view, are essentially truths about the limits of divine power [rather than its exercise]; but the limits in question are not limits which are, as it were, imposed from outside (Kenny 1979: 20, 24-25).

That is, because of the divine aseity, God depends upon nothing for his existence and character. Kenny makes a parallel to the modern intuitionist in the philosophy of mathematics, who appeals to a kind of 'aseity' or 'autonomy' in the human case:

A modern intuitionist does not believe that there is anything outside the human mind to which it must conform itself if it is to be correct in its mathematical judgements. Similarly, the medieval scholastics thought that logical and mathematical truths were known by God simply by knowing his own essence, and it was not in virtue of anything outside his mind that what was in his mind was true (Kenny 1979: 25).

It seems, then, that TCR succeeds at precisely those points where TA fails. Nevertheless, even if this is the case, there may be a number of objections

peculiar to TCR that need to be identified and evaluated. These matters will be taken up in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Theistic Conceptual Realism: Some Objections Answered

Objection 1: There are other, equally plausible accounts of God's self-knowledge, besides a propositional account that entails the existence of abstract objects

At least three distinct accounts come to mind:

Perhaps God's self-knowledge is ultimately knowledge of human languages

That is, perhaps God's knowledge of necessary truths *just is* his knowledge of truths about which languages (human or other), yet to be invented, would involve speakers saying and denying the same thing. But this view is implausible for two reasons. First, on this view God's knowledge of his own nature is not really *self-knowledge*, or God's knowledge about *himself*, but knowledge about the rules of all possible future languages. To me at least, this is not a very plausible account of divine self-knowledge, for it seems counterintuitive to assert that God's knowledge of himself, from all eternity, is *via* his knowledge of possible languages.

And second, in any event this account doesn't really address the issue at hand. Let's say that God has knowledge of all possible future languages. This is not knowledge of what a *particular* person *will* say, but of what all and any persons *can* say. And it is a knowledge of what they can say, without their saying something which would lead to their affirming and denying the same thing. And if so, we can still ask, what grounds *this* knowledge? For it is still knowledge of

irreducibly modal facts, facts about what humans (or any other creatures) *can* do with respect to language. On what basis does God have *this* knowledge? He doesn't look to the future to get it. So he must know it on the basis of his own power, since creatures can't *do* anything via language except by means of abilities that have been granted them by God.

Perhaps God's self-knowledge is via a divine language

Perhaps God's self-knowledge is in terms of a divine language, concrete sentences and all, and the necessary truths he knows are just truths about *that* language.

But first, this appeal to a divine language doesn't seem to the point, since even *these* sentences would still be abstract objects on the TCRist account. That is, they would be multiply-exemplifiable entities that exist independently of their instantiations. This becomes evident once we consider that the divine language view is that God's self-knowledge just is his knowledge of which concrete sentences he would endorse as correct descriptions of his nature. Thus, within the divine language, there are correct descriptions of his nature, and incorrect descriptions. Note that these descriptions are correct descriptions *independently* of any sentences humans may use in the future. Note also that God has knowledge of all of his possible creative intentions;¹ he knows what he can create, and this knowledge is expressed (to himself) in terms of divine sentences. Are these sentences abstract objects, or at least function as such?

¹ I did not say *actual* intentions, in order to avoid begging any questions against those who hold that God's knowledge of his future intentions would deprive him of his perfect freedom. Cf. Swinburne 1993: 179-181.

I say yes, because those sentences that are correct descriptions of God's nature (including his power) are (multiply) *exemplifiable* entities that exist *independently* of their exemplifications. On the one hand, if we deny that the divine sentences are *exemplifiable*, we are denying that God has a blueprint for the world, and knows this blueprint via his own language. And on the other hand, if we deny that the divine sentences exist *independently* of their exemplifications, we are implying that God's knowledge of his own power (his possible creative intentions) depends upon the creature.

There is a second (and perhaps more important) reason why this particular objection misfires, in addition to the preceding. Namely, the 'divine language' view leads precisely to the view that TCR is meant to endorse. It is *nominalism* at the divine level that entails realism at the created level. Construing God's self-knowledge in terms of the concrete sentences of a divine language does nothing to undermine this basic contention.

Perhaps God's self-knowledge is dispositional, not propositional

Consider the following sentences:²

- (a) 'John knows London.' This is an example of 'acquaintance knowledge,' which 'consists in first-hand acquaintance with a person, a place, an event, and so on.'
- (b) 'John knows how to get to London from Manchester.' This is an example of 'ability knowledge' or *dispositional* knowledge. 'Intuitively, this consists in knowing how to perform various actions. For example, we gain ability knowledge by learning how to speak a language, by learning how to ride a bicycle, and by learning how to prepare a meal.'

² The following distinctions and descriptions are from Sturgeon 1995: 10.

(c) ‘John knows that London is south of Manchester.’ This is an example of ‘propositional knowledge.’

Now perhaps (the objection goes) God’s self-knowledge should be understood along the lines of dispositional (ability) knowledge, or (b) above, and not in terms of propositional knowledge. Thus his self-knowledge, and his corresponding knowledge of necessary truths, wouldn’t involve a relation to an *object* at all. Knowing how to speak French doesn’t require an object of knowledge; it’s just an ability to use language in the right way, a competency in performance. Similarly, God’s omniscience isn’t propositional (knowing *that* p), but dispositional (knowing *how* to bring about p).

But first, this account appears to be an *ad hoc* departure from the standard way we define God’s omniscience, which is propositionally: for all *p*, God knows that *p*. Any subsequent qualifications to this definition, which point out what it is logically possible for God to know, are qualifications of degree, not kind, of this fundamentally propositional definition.³

Second, can we really reduce all ‘knowing *that*’, on the part of God, to ‘knowing *how*’? God knows that he cannot lie, or deny himself. Can a dispositional account of divine knowledge make sense of that knowledge? Can God’s knowledge of his *lack* of a capacity, be construed as a capacity? It seems that God’s disposition to be capable, and his knowledge of his capabilities, are not coextensive.

³ Thus Swinburne’s preliminary definition of divine omniscience is explicitly *propositional*: ‘*P* is omniscient at *t* if he knows all true propositions.’ This definition subsequently gets refined to the following account, which is still essentially propositional: ‘A person *P* is omniscient at a time *t* if and only if he knows every true proposition about *t* or an earlier time and every true proposition about a time later than *t* which is true of logical necessity or which he has overriding reason to make true, which it is logically possible that he entertains then’ (Swinburne 1993: 167, 180-181).

Third, God knows that he is self-existent, or not dependent upon the creature. Is this knowledge of his own aseity a disposition to *do* anything? This argument can be generalised to several other divine attributes.

Objection 2: TCR undermines the explanatory force of realism

You have already conceded (the objection goes) that we don't need realistically existing properties in order to explain facts about God. So then why do we need realistically existing properties in order to explain facts about the creation? If we can give a perfectly coherent though nominalistic account of God, why not for his creatures? Urging nominalism at the divine level only undermines the need to urge realism at the creation level.

This objection is defective because it is attacking a motivation for my view that I don't hold in the first place. In the context of the present argument, I don't assert that God's thoughts are abstract objects in order to *explain* facts about the creation that I couldn't otherwise explain. I concede that this *is* the dominant argument for realism about abstract objects; that is, these objects need to be available in order to explain all cases of attribute agreement, or all cases of sentence-synonymy, or the truth of mathematical statements within a uniform semantics for natural language, and so on. But while this may be the dominant and classical motivation for realism about abstract objects, it is not the motivation in the *present* context. As was stated in Chapter 3, 'the present argument for realism proceeds, not from facts about human language, but from facts about God's self-knowledge.'

Thus, that God's thoughts function as abstract objects is not being urged as an explanatory hypothesis for facts about the world, but simply as a straightforward

consequence of God's relation to the world. And unlike theistic activism, I'm not adding to our traditional conception of God by arguing that (for some unspecified reason) it is in God's nature to create these objects. I'm simply pointing out a consequence of our traditional conception of God: if he is self-existent and necessarily omniscient, then some of his thoughts function as abstract objects. Simply put, there is a Person who stands at the centre of the universe. All other concrete substances (including their various relations) causally depend upon him. The contents of God's cognitive plan for the creation of these substances thus function as abstract objects with respect to these substances. They are multiply exemplifiable entities that exist independently of their exemplifications.

Notice that, because of their commitment to 'absolute creation,' M&M cannot follow TCR in restricting their account to creaturely properties only. They cannot urge nominalism at the divine level, but realism at the creaturely level. Faced with the divine self-creation objection, M&M briefly consider the possibility of scaling back the scope of their original claims. Perhaps God does not create *all* properties. Perhaps,

to avoid painting himself into such a corner [of God's creating his own properties] the activist might be tempted to consider placing the essential and distinctive attributes of deity outside the creaturely framework. Then God's creative activity would not appear to be the ultimate act of bootstrapping.

This would be similar to how TCR posits that the divine thoughts function as abstract objects for the creation *but not for God*. 'The essential and distinctive attributes of deity' are placed 'outside the creaturely framework' of properties.

However, M&M expressly reject this way out:

But aside from the fact that no such selective exclusion would work in the first place, this move would amount to scrapping the whole project of theistic activism and abandoning the view of absolute creation (Morris and Menzel 1986: 172, including the preceding quote).

To be consistent, they *must* acknowledge that this route is closed to them. As was pointed out under Objection 4 to their view (in Chapter 2), it is precisely the *absolute* scope of divine creation – a creation that pertains to all properties, including divine ones – that is the motivation for their distinctive claims about the source of abstract objects in the first place.

Objection 3: TCR's 'actualist' conception of possible worlds is ultimately unsatisfactory for a number of reasons

Possible worlds actualism

In order to appreciate this set of criticisms, it is important to note the modern interest in ‘the metaphysics of modality’ and the rise of modern modal logic. In particular, many philosophers have become attracted to an *actualist* analysis of possible worlds. The idea is that existence claims about nonactual possible worlds are reducible to existence claims about things in the actual world. As Robert Adams puts it in his ‘Theories of Actuality,’ one proposes to begin

with the actual world, to treat talk about the system of possible worlds as a way of talking about a proper part of the actual world, and thus to gain, so to speak, a standpoint outside the system of possible worlds from which judgments of actuality which are not world-relative may be made (Adams 1974: 202).

Possible worlds actualism is to be contrasted with the possible worlds ‘extreme realism’ of David Lewis (1973, 1986), which denies that existence claims about nonactual possible worlds are *reducible* to existence claims about things in the actual world. For Lewis, all possible worlds exist just as ‘really’ as the actual world, though *apart from* the actual world. That is, Lewis takes possible worlds to exist just as concretely as the actual world; they just exist ‘elsewhere’ in logical space.

The disagreement between Lewis's extreme realism, and possible worlds actualism, comes down in large part to how one interprets the force of ordinary language. Lewis argues in *Counterfactuals* (1973) (and in his later *On the Plurality of Worlds* (1986)) that there is a presumption in taking 'seeming existential quantifications in ordinary language at their face value.' Since we ordinarily talk about 'ways things could have been,' these 'ways' exist as fully respectable entities in their own right, as fully concrete and realised possible worlds. Possible worlds are not ontologically different from the actual world; they are just more things of the same kind. The suspicion on Lewis's part is that something can't 'really' be a possible world, unless it exists just as concretely as the actual world.

The modal actualists disagree. Stalnaker, for example (in 'Possible Worlds'), says that we can countenance that there *are* 'ways things could have been,' but that Lewis's extreme realism about possible worlds (that they are concretely existing particulars) doesn't follow from this. Possible worlds exist, but they are not things *of the same sort* as the actual world. Lewis's argument from ordinary language doesn't go through, says Stalnaker:

If possible worlds are ways things might have been, then the actual world ought to be *the way things are* rather than *I and all my surroundings*. *The way things are* is a property or a state of the world, not the world itself. The statement that the world is the way it is is true in a sense, but not when read as an identity statement (Compare: "the way the world is is the world"). This is important, since if properties can exist uninstantiated, then *the way the world is* could exist even if a world that is that way did not. One could accept thesis one – that there really are many ways that things could have been – while denying that there exists anything else that is like the actual world (Stalnaker 1976: 228).

Adams further distinguishes between a 'soft actualist' and a 'hard actualist' analysis of possible worlds. The hard actualist sees nonactual possible worlds as merely a fiction or heuristic device; this is the opposite extreme from Lewis. But

for the soft actualist, who occupies the middle ground between extreme realism and fictionalism, ‘there *are* nonactual possible worlds, but they are logically constructed out of the furniture of the actual world’ (Adams 1974: 203, my italics).

It is important to note that possible worlds actualists disagree among themselves about *what* entities in the actual world serve as the ‘furniture’ out of which possible worlds may be logically constructed. For Plantinga, they’re states of affairs; for Stalnaker, properties; for Adams, sets of propositions.⁴ But common to all actualists is the distinction between a possible world *existing*, and a possible world *obtaining*. All possible worlds exist in the actual world as abstract objects, but only one obtains: the actual world. There’s a similar distinction with respect to propositions. They all exist in the actual world, but only some are true.⁵ In addition, although possible worlds are on the actualist analysis being construed as items existing in the actual world, possible worlds do not therefore *contingently* exist. If the actual world had not obtained, then some *other* possible world would have obtained, and the same set of possible worlds would be items existing in *that* actual world.

A conceptualist account of possible worlds actualism

However, not all modal actualists find the analyses of Plantinga, Stalnaker, and Adams acceptable, since the latter regard the relevant abstract objects – out of which possible worlds are logically constructed – to be completely *mind-independent*.

⁴ A helpful overview of these varieties of possible worlds actualism is found in Lycan 1979, ‘The Trouble With Possible Worlds.’ Lycan is ultimately sympathetic to some form of modal actualism.

⁵ A relevant discussion is ‘3. Existence and Properties in a World,’ in Plantinga 1974: 46-48. Cf. also his ‘Actualism and Possible Worlds’ (Plantinga 1976).

Nicholas Rescher, in his article ‘The Ontology of the Possible’ (Rescher 1973), argues for the thesis that

unrealized possibilities are *generated* by minds, and so they can be said to “exist” only in a secondary and dependent sense, as actual or potential objects of thought. Such possibilities are the products of an *intellectual construction*. The ontological status of the possible is thus fundamentally mind-dependent, the domain of the possible being a mental construct (Rescher 1973: 179).

A conceptualism such as Rescher’s seems to accord with some of the concerns of creative anti-realists, for whom logical relations are mere products of human intellectual activity. But some have pointed out that this conceptualism cannot do the job that a reasonably articulated modal logic requires it to do. As William Lycan puts it in ‘The Trouble With Possible Worlds’:

A mentalistic approach, for example, is daunted by the paucity of *actual* mental events: the entire history of the universe will quite probably contain only finitely many mental entities, and it is hard to see how these might be parlayed into a system of proxies for all the multiply uncountable sets of worlds that must be posited for purposes of modal logic (Lycan 1979: 304).

In ‘Modality and Metaphysics,’ Michael Loux similarly notes this difficulty for the possible-worlds conceptualist:

But even if he succeeds here, the possible-worlds conceptualist will find himself confronted with a difficulty analogous to that pointed to in our discussion of the austere version of possible-worlds nominalism. Just as there are not enough sentence-tokens to yield the complete framework of possible worlds, there are not enough actual conceivings to generate the full range of possibilities, for not only is the notion of a possible state of affairs that no human being has ever conceived of coherent, reflection once again on the case of the real numbers is sufficient to convince us that there are uncountably many such states of affairs (Loux 1979b: 58).

A theistic conceptualist account of possible worlds actualism

One who is attracted to possible worlds actualism, and to its conceptualist version, can seek to remedy the just noted defects of the latter by articulating a *theistic* version of possible worlds actualism. If a key defect of Rescher’s proposal is that there simply are not enough *human* conceivings to go around, then surely

the positing of an *omniscient* mind as the ground of possibility remedies this fundamental defect in Rescher's proposal. Loux outlines this move:

One could, however, preserve the central insight underlying possible-worlds conceptualism while accommodating the difficulty presented by unconceived possibilia by insisting that possible worlds are grounded in divine conceptual activity, for presumably God's conceptual activity is not subject to the restriction imposed on the thinking of finite intellects. The idea that the existence of possibilia is rooted in God's thought seems to have enjoyed some popularity in medieval philosophy; it may represent Leibniz's considered views on the reality of possible worlds other than the actual; and it is suggested by some remarks of Robert Adams (Loux 1979b: 59).

Loux is referring to Adams's 'Theories of Actuality' (Adams 1974) but the brief remarks Adams makes there are more fully spelled out in his 'Divine Necessity' (Adams 1983). Adams holds that 'Augustinian theism' could provide 'an attractive explanation... [of] the ontological status of the objects of logic and mathematics,' by appealing to the plausibility of the following two views:

- (1) 'Possibilities and necessary truths are discovered, not made, by our thought. They would still be there if none of us humans ever thought of them.'
- (2) 'Possibilities and necessary truths cannot be there except insofar as they, or the ideas involved in them, are thought by some mind.'

These views appear contrary to each other,⁶ but Adams claims that

they can both be held together if we suppose that there is a nonhuman mind that eternally and necessarily exists and thinks all the possibilities and necessary truths. Such is the mind of God, according to Augustinian theism (Adams 1983: 218).

Note that this is still an *actualist* conception of possible worlds, for possible worlds are logically constructed out of something that *actually* exists; namely, the

⁶ Plantinga would say that (1) is *realism* and (2) is *creative anti-realism*. Cf. 'How to be an anti-realist' (Plantinga 1982: 70).

divine thoughts. Note as well that the actualist distinction between a possible world *existing*, and a possible world *obtaining*, is preserved as well. God thinks all possibilities (and this constitutes the *existence* of possible worlds), but only a subset of God's thoughts *obtains* or is instantiated (the world he decided to create). This reflects the aforementioned Thomistic distinction between the *scientia intelligentiae* and the *scientia visionis*, the knowledge of understanding and the knowledge of vision, the knowledge of possibility and the knowledge of actuality, God's knowledge of his power, and his knowledge of his will.

This then is the *theistic*, conceptualist account of possible worlds actualism, briefly mentioned in Chapter 3 as the way TCR would give an account of possible worlds as abstract objects. Having now articulated its motivation in greater detail, a number of objections need to be addressed.

Objection 3.1: TCR is philosophical 'theft,' not honest toil

Rescher himself would not agree with the just noted solution to the problems of conceptualism. Indeed, he even anticipated it in his article earlier quoted, when he considers the view that 'attributes the reality of nonexistent individuals to... the mind of God.' This is a position that Rescher finds in some scholastics, and Leibniz. However, according to Rescher, it would not

nowadays be viewed as a viable position, for contemporary philosophers are unwilling to follow in the path of their predecessors (both before and after Descartes, Leibniz, and Berkeley) and obtain by theft – that is, by falling back upon theological considerations – what they believe ought to be the fruits of honest philosophical toil (Rescher 1973: 180).

However, this objection appears to be almost entirely prejudicial. If theological concepts have substantive philosophical consequences, then why not explore their explanatory power? If we are trying to find a coherent and satisfying

explanatory model for the ontology of unrealised possibilities, then we should find one free of defects.

One can acknowledge the strength of Rescher's arguments for 'the ontological status of the possible' being 'fundamentally mind-dependent, the domain of the possible being a mental construct,' while noting that a key defect of his programme – that there are not nearly enough *human* conceivings to go around – can be remedied by appeal to the omniscience of the *divine* mind. This preserves Rescher's conceptualist insights while avoiding an obvious difficulty with them. If this is not 'honest philosophical toil,' then I don't know what is.

Objection 3.2: TCR cannot distinguish possibilia from impossibilia

If possibilia are reducible to God's thoughts, then how do we distinguish possibilia from impossibilia, since God can think of both? As Loux puts it:

But while this approach does provide the nonmodal actualist with sufficient resources for constructing the various possible worlds in their entirety, it has its own problems. The suggestion here is that possibilia exist as objects of God's intellectual activity; but impossible states of affairs are also open to God's ken, so that the defender of this version of possible-worlds conceptualism owes us a further characterization of the nature of possibilia (Loux 1979b: 59).

But it seems to me that the relevant principle of differentiation here is that possibilia are possible objects of God's will, while impossibilia are not, and that God (in his perfect self-knowledge) knows this about himself. The principle of differentiation arises, not from something outside of or apart from God, but simply from God's own knowledge of what he can will. Possibilia are not *merely* what God thinks about, or 'objects of God's intellectual activity' *in general*, but what God thinks about *in relation to* other aspects of himself (such as his power and will).

Objection 3.3: TCR can't eliminate modal notions from its analysis

Loux seems to anticipate something like the immediately preceding response, and proceeds to point out what he sees as a difficulty with it. Namely, reference to God's creative power as the principle of differentiation doesn't give us *nonmodal* actualism. Loux explains:

One suggestion here is that what distinguishes *possibilia* from *impossibilia* is that the former but not the latter are objects or states of affairs that (at least once) it was within God's power to realize or actualize. But of course this cannot be the end of the matter, since reference to divine *power* leaves us with a modal notion; nor is it obvious that we can eliminate the reference to divine power here by saying that a situation, *S*, is one that was within God's power to actualize just in case if God had willed to actualize *S*, *S* would have been realized; for this analysis of the notion of divine power makes use of a counterfactual, and the avowed aim of the nonmodal actualist is one of reconstructing the framework of possible worlds without reference to modal machinery of any sort (Loux 1979b: 59).

This is an interesting objection, but if raised in the present context I think it misconstrues the nature of the task that the proponent of TCR must set for himself. His task is not ultimately that of the *nonmodal* actualist, who wants to *eliminate* modal notions from his analysis, but rather a more modest one: to *further understanding* of what modality *is* for human beings. And he does this by indexing modality to a personal agent. Loux is correct in showing that we cannot *describe* divine power except in modal terms. But the theistic conceptual realist will nevertheless assert that there is a great difference between treating modal idioms (possibility, impossibility, necessity, contingency) as *primitive properties*, and grounding them in a *property-bearer*. Treating them as *primitive properties* is the generally acknowledged implausibility of platonist ontology: the 'forms' are bizarre, alien, free floating entities that are neither mental nor material. But grounding them in a *property-bearer* appeals to something with which we are familiar (mental properties), satisfies conceptualist concerns about the mind-dependence of the possible, and avoids the obvious limitations that result if the

mind-dependence is merely *human*. The TCRist will cite these consequences as a theoretical advantage for his view, while conceding that he has not achieved the reductionism of *nonmodal* actualism.

As most possible worlds actualists will concede, a circularity in the bedrock description of any nonreductive modal actualism is unavoidable (e.g. possible worlds as maximally *consistent* sets of propositions already introduces the modal element into the analysis of possible worlds, for ‘consistency’ must be explicated in terms of the possibility or impossibility of propositions being true when taken together⁷). But, says the modal actualist, the task is to *locate* the circularity, or the ‘brute fact,’ in a place in one’s account that gives rise to the fewest difficulties, and has the most explanatory power. The TCRist will argue that God’s self-knowledge is that place.

Objection 3.4: TCR gets the modal analysis backwards

Here the objection is that reference to God’s creative power improperly reverses the relation between possibility and power:

But even if the defender of this view were to succeed in reducing the notion of God’s creative power to nonmodal notions, it is difficult to believe that his account provides a really satisfactory theory of modality. The root idea is that an object, situation, or state of affairs is possible *because* its actualization was (at least once) within God’s power; but this idea seems to have things backward. One wants to say that things are not possible or impossible because their actualization is or is not within God’s power. Quite the contrary; it is because they are possible or impossible that their actualization is or is not within God’s power; and that suggests that we need an account of possibility that is independent of what God could or could not have done (Loux 1979b: 59-60).⁸

⁷ Cf. Mann 1997: 264, who argues, following Adams 1983, that ‘prospects are bleak for producing a definition of necessary truth that does not presuppose the concept under definition.’

⁸ Perhaps the background to this particular objection is found in the order of analysis appearing in Aquinas’s *responsio* in *Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 25, a. 3: ‘this phrase, “God can do all things,” is rightly understood to mean that God can do all things that are possible; and *for this reason* He is said to be omnipotent’ (my italics).

Part of the answer to Loux here will depend on what we mean by ‘a really satisfactory theory of modality.’ Must it be a *reductive* theory of modality, which reduces modality to purely nonmodal notions? Or can it be a theory of modality that accounts for modal facts about the creation (what can possibly be the case in any world that exists), *in terms of* modal facts about the creator? Indeed, in virtue of its appeal to that very relation between creator and creation, can it be a *causal* explanation of modal facts about the creation? If so, then perhaps the following comments are relevant:

[I]t is no objection to explaining X by Y that we cannot explain Y. . . . Scientists have always thought it reasonable to postulate entities merely to explain effects, so long as the postulated entities accounted simply and coherently for the characteristics of the effects. The existence of molecules with their characteristic behavior was “no more to be accounted for” than observable phenomena, but the postulation of their existence gave a neat and simple explanation of a whole host of chemical and physical phenomena, and that was the justification for postulating their existence.⁹

Objection 4: There is no non-circular defence of TCR

A final objection goes like this. Someone might ask, ‘What if there was a being that had all of the properties which we attribute to God, *except* that he thought that “ $2+2=5$ ”? Would that being fail to be God?’

At first glance, it appears that the advocate of TCR doesn’t have a non-question-begging answer to this. If he says (as I believe he *should* say), ‘No, of course he’s not God. Any being who believed that wouldn’t be omniscient,’ then the objector can follow up: ‘But why wouldn’t he be omniscient? Doesn’t his immutable belief about such things *constitute* the truth that serves as the definition of omniscience?’ But if the advocate of TCR says, ‘Yes, he would still be God, even if he believed that “ $2+2=5$ ”,’ then he seems to have lapsed into a version of Cartesian universal possibilism.

In other words, the objector's claim is that the TCRist can't just define logical necessity as some aspect of 'what God thinks,' because what if God thought some other way than he in fact does? On the latter hypothesis, he would still be God, which isn't a conclusion the TCRist wants.

However, there appears to be some conceptual confusion here in the objector's strategy. If the TCRist has *defined* logical necessity with respect to how God actually thinks (about his power), and asserted that it is God's nature that he thinks what he does, it's conceptually malformed to ask, 'And *why* can't God think differently?' For this implies that the TCRist should be able to give a *reason* why God's nature is one way rather than another, and (since God is ontologically necessary, with no cause of his existence or nature) that is the very thing the TCRist expressly denies at the outset. The objection ultimately seems to amount to nothing more than: 'What if your view was false? Then, would it be false?' Which doesn't seem like a very cogent objection.

To put it another way, because God is ontologically necessary, there is no cause of God's nature and existence, and thus no cause or ultimate explanation of why God's knowledge of his nature has the content that it does. To ask *why* God's knowledge has the content that it does – for instance, why God's knowledge includes knowledge of a whole host of necessary truths about himself – is just a conceptually malformed question. However, to ask what explains *what can possibly be the case in any world you please*, is not thus conceptually malformed, for an answer can be given in terms of God's unique relationship to any existing world (he is the creator of any world that exists). The possible features of any world are constrained (quite literally) by God's creative power which, because

⁹Richard Swinburne, "The Argument from Design," Swinburne 1968: 208-209.

God is an optimally rational agent, is always mediated via his knowledge of his own plan for any world he creates.

Conclusion and Future Prospects

In the Introduction to this thesis, I alleged that a theistic argument from abstract objects couldn't get off the ground if there were obvious incoherencies in making abstract objects depend in some way upon God. In the subsequent Chapters, I introduced two contrasting visions for relating abstract objects to God – theistic activism and theistic conceptual realism – and provided some reason for thinking the latter option is to be preferred over the former.

In a sense, TCR is reviving the medieval tradition of *exemplary causality*. As the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* explains with respect to the 'Exemplarity of God':

An exemplary cause is the model according to which something is made or done. The extramental model, if there be one, responds to an idea in the mind of the maker or doer. The exemplary cause is necessarily and intimately united with the final and efficient causes in producing an effect. However, it is properly called an extrinsic formal cause because of its affinity to the intrinsic formal cause, which intrinsically actualizes and specifies the effect. Thus, in educing the form (intrinsic formal cause) out of the clay, the potter (efficient cause) is guided by his idea (exemplary cause) of a vessel which must hold 2 quarts of water (final cause) (Chereso 1967: 715).

On this model, (necessary and contingent) properties of and relations between creatures – properties and relations traditionally answerable to the abstract objects of orthodox platonism – are instead construed as the divine ideas, as exemplary cause of what exists.¹⁰

¹⁰ The quotations from Aquinas in Chapter 3, about the 'artificer' working by his intellect, place Aquinas within this tradition of exemplary causality.

W. V. O. Quine, in his influential essay ‘On What There Is,’ notes that ‘the three main mediaeval points of view regarding universals’ – *realism, conceptualism, and nominalism* – ‘reappear in twentieth-century surveys of the philosophy of mathematics under the new names *logicism, intuitionism, and formalism*’ (Quine 1948: 28). TCR follows medieval and early modern figures such as Augustine and Leibniz in arguing that it is a *combination* of realist and conceptualist themes that is the best alternative to nominalism.¹¹

In his book on Leibniz, Robert Adams argues that ‘Leibniz’s rejection of anthropological and Platonist ontologies of logic’ was ‘intuitively appealing’ because ‘Leibniz has an alternative in store’:

a theistic modification of Platonism, sponsored in antiquity by Philo and Augustine, and generally accepted in the Middle Ages. On this view, the reality in which necessary truths, and more generally the being of the objects of logic and mathematics, are grounded is the ensemble of ideas in the mind of God. These ideas take up in many ways the role of the self-subsistent Ideas of Plato’s middle dialogues. They exist necessarily, since God’s having and understanding them follows from the divine essence, but they can be regarded by Leibniz as modes of the divine being. In this way the implausibilities of both anthropological and Platonist ontologies of logic can be avoided. It seems to be a theoretical advantage of theism that it makes this possible, and Leibniz’s proof from the reality of eternal truths is an attempt to exploit this advantage (Adams 1994: 180).

To be sure, much more work needs to be done in articulating and defending TCR, and difficult work at that. Abstract objects have traditionally been taken as existing of logical necessity. Therefore, construing them as divine ideas requires the logically necessary existence of God. But isn’t the very idea of God’s logically necessary existence now viciously circular (or at least void of content), since it is God’s thoughts which are determinative of logical necessity in the first place? Other questions need addressing as well. If all (or at least some) divine thoughts are uncreated, must the modality of divine existence be timeless rather than

¹¹ Anthony Kenny’s parallel between the medieval scholastic theory, and modern intuitionism, was noted at the end of Chapter 3.

everlastingly in time? Is it plausible to suppose that divine omniscience *must* be in the form of 'ideas' at all? What is the relevance of the Thomistic doctrine of God's 'pure actuality' to the placing of God within a scheme of 'possible worlds'? What is the relationship between our modal and semantic intuitions and the definition of divine power? And is it *really* the case that our modal idioms ultimately range over the content of the divine ideas? If these issues can be successfully engaged, and if a reasonable case can be made that both the anthropological (i.e., nominalist or fictionalist) and Platonist alternatives for an ontology of logic face insuperable difficulties, and if (finally) TCR is a viable third alternative, then perhaps there are materials for a theistic argument after all.

Bibliography

- Robert M. Adams (1974), 'Theories of Actuality,' *Nous*, 8 (1974), pp. 211-231. Reprinted in Loux 1979a: 190-209. All page numbers are to this reprint.
- Robert M. Adams (1981), 'Actualism and Thisness,' *Synthese* 49 (1981), pp. 3-41.
- Robert M. Adams (1983), 'Divine Necessity,' *The Journal of Philosophy*, 80 (1983). Reprinted in Adams 1987: 209-220. All page numbers are to this reprint.
- Robert M. Adams (1987), *The Virtue of Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
- Robert M. Adams (1994), *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*.
- Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (1989), *G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*. Translated by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989).
- St. Augustine, *De Ideis*.
- St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*.
- C. J. Chereso (1967), 'Exemplarity of God,' entry in the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967-), Catholic University of America.
- John Cottingham (1986), *Meditations on First Philosophy: with selections from the Objections and Replies* [by Rene Descartes, 1642]. Translated by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
- E. M. Curley (1984), 'Descartes on the creation of the eternal truths,' *Philosophical Review*, 93 (1984), pp. 569-97.
- Matthew Davidson (1999), 'A demonstration against theistic activism,' *Religious Studies* 35 (Sept. 1999), pp. 277-290.
- Richard Brian Davis (2000), *The Metaphysics of Theism and Modality* (New York and London: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000).
- Scott A. Davison (1991), 'Could Abstract Objects Depend Upon God?', *Religious Studies* 27 (1991), pp. 485-497.
- Evan Fales (1996), 'Can God Create Necessities?', paper read at the Midwest Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers, April 1996.

- Harry Frankfurt (1977), 'Descartes on the creation of the eternal truths,' *Philosophical Review*, 86 (1977), pp. 36-57.
- Alfred Freddoso (1983), 'Review of *Does God Have a Nature?*, by Alvin Plantinga,' *Christian Scholars Review* 12 (1983).
- Richard Glauser (1998), 'Descartes on God and the Eternal Truths.' Paper presented to the Joseph Butler Society, Oxford University, 16 November 1998.
- Paul Helm (1988), *Eternal God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
- Jerrold Katz (1998), *Realistic Rationalism* (London: MIT Press, 1998).
- Anthony Kenny (1970), *Descartes: Philosophical Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).
- Anthony Kenny (1979), *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford, 1979).
- Brian Leftow (1989), 'A Leibnizian Cosmological Argument,' *Philosophical Studies* 57 (1989), pp. 135-155.
- Brian Leftow (1990a), 'Is God an Abstract Object?', *Nous* 24 (1990), pp. 591-598.
- Brian Leftow (1990b), 'God and Abstract Entities,' *Faith and Philosophy*, 7/2 (1990), pp. 193-217.
- Brian Leftow (1998), 'Simplicity, Divine,' in Edward Craig (ed.), *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998).
- David Lewis (1973), *Counterfactuals* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973).
- David Lewis (1986), *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford, 1986).
- Michael J. Loux (1979a) (ed.), *The Possible and the Actual: Readings in the Metaphysics of Modality* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979).
- Michael J. Loux (1979b), 'Introduction: Modality and Metaphysics,' in Loux 1979a: 15-64.
- William Lycan (1979), 'The Trouble with Possible Worlds,' in Loux 1979a: 274-316. All page numbers are to this reprint.
- William E. Mann (1989), 'Modality, morality, and God,' *Nous*, 23 (1989), pp. 83-99.
- William E. Mann (1997), 'Necessity,' in Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (eds.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997).
- Christopher Menzel (1987), 'Theism, Platonism and the Metaphysics of Mathematics,' *Faith and Philosophy* vol. 4, no. 4 (October 1987), pp. 365-382.

- Thomas V. Morris (1985), 'Necessary Beings,' *Mind* 94 (1985), pp. 263-292. Reprinted in Morris 1987: 179-193. All page numbers are to this reprint.
- Thomas V. Morris and Christopher Menzel (1986), 'Absolute Creation,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1986), pp.353-362. Reprinted in Morris 1987: 161-178. All page references are to this reprint.
- Thomas V. Morris (1987), *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987).
- Thomas V. Morris (1988), 'Dependence and Divine Simplicity,' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 23 (1988), pp. 161-174.
- Alvin Plantinga (1974), *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).
- Alvin Plantinga (1976), 'Actualism and Possible Worlds,' *Theoria* 42 (1976), pp. 139-160. Reprinted in Loux 1979a: 253-273. All page numbers are to this reprint.
- Alvin Plantinga (1980), *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980).
- Alvin Plantinga (1986), 'Two Dozen (or So) Theistic Arguments.' Paper presented at the 33rd Annual Philosophy Conference, Wheaton College, October 23-25, 1986.
- Alvin Plantinga (1987), 'Two Concepts of Modality: Modal Realism and Modal Reductionism,' in James Tomberlin (ed.), *Philosophical Perspectives, I, Metaphysics, 1987* (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1987), pp. 189-231.
- Alvin Plantinga (1993a), 'A Priori Knowledge,' ch. 6 of *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 102-121.
- Alvin Plantinga (1993b), 'Divine Knowledge,' in C. Stephen Evans and Merold Westphal (eds.), *Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), pp. 40-65.
- Alvin Plantinga (2000), *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- W. V. O. Quine (1948), 'On What There Is,' *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. II (1948). Reprinted in Michael Loux (ed.), *Universals and Particulars: Readings in Ontology* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1970), pp. 24-34. All page numbers are to this reprint.
- Nicholas Rescher (1973), 'The Ontology of the Possible,' in Milton Munitz (ed.), *Logic and Ontology* (New York: New York University Press, 1973). Reprinted in Loux 1979a: 166-181. All page numbers are to this reprint.
- James F. Ross (1989), 'The Crash of Modal Metaphysics,' *Review of Metaphysics* 43 (December 1989), pp. 251-79.

- David H. Sanford (1989), *If P, Then Q: Conditionals and the Foundations of Reasoning* (London: Routledge, 1989).
- Quentin Smith (1994), 'The Conceptualist Argument for God's Existence,' *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 11 No. 1 (January 1994): 38-49.
- Robert Stalnaker (1976), 'Possible Worlds,' *Nous*, 10 (1976), 65-75. Reprinted in Loux 1979a: 225-234. All page numbers are to this reprint.
- Scott Sturgeon (1995), 'Knowledge,' entry in A. C. Grayling (ed.), *Philosophy: a guide through the subject* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 10-26.
- Richard Swinburne (1968), 'The Argument from Design,' *Philosophy* 43 (1968). Reprinted as ch. 14 of R. Douglas Geivett and Brendan Sweetman (eds.), *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology* (Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 201-211. All page numbers are to this reprint.
- Richard Swinburne (1991), *The Existence of God* (revised edition) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- Richard Swinburne (1993), *The Coherence of Theism* (revised edition) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- Richard Swinburne (1994), *The Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- Richard Swinburne (1997), *The Evolution of the Soul* (revised edition) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- Gijsbert van den Brink (1993), 'Descartes, Modalities, and God,' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 33 (1993), pp. 1-15.
- Peter van Inwagen (1993), *Metaphysics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).
- Edward Wierenga (1998), 'Theism and Counterpossibles,' *Philosophical Studies* 89 (1998), pp. 87-103. [Note: this article was written in 1996, but published in 1998.]
- Nicholas Wolterstorff (1970), *On Universals* (Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970).