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# GOD AND ABSTRACT ENTITIES

Brian Leftow

Alvin Plantinga's *Does God Have a Nature?* has ignited debate over God's relations to abstract entities. Recently Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel have suggested a way to maintain that God creates all abstract entities, including those attributes which He instances essentially. After defending the Morris-Menzel position against some initial objections, I argue that it generates the unacceptable consequence that God creates Himself and fails to secure the claim that God creates His nature. In closing I suggest that Aquinas' claim that God is "purely actual" may avoid the problems of Morris and Menzel's view and secure the relation of God to abstract entities which they favor.

There appears to be a conflict between traditional theism and the Platonist ontologies which many contemporary philosophers favor. Traditional theism holds that God is the creator of everything distinct from Himself, and that whatever God creates depends on God for its existence. So traditional theism entails that whatever is distinct from God depends on God for its existence. Contemporary Platonist ontologies affirm the existence of such abstract entities as possible worlds, propositions and attributes. To Platonists, all these abstracta are distinct from God, and most exist by "broadly logical" necessity.<sup>1</sup> Necessary beings seem not to depend on God for their existence. If something exists necessarily, we want to say, it exists simply because it is this thing's nature to exist, just as God, according to Descartes' ontological argument, exists because it is His nature to exist. If necessary abstract entities do not depend on God for their existence, then by positing these, contemporary Platonism contradicts the traditional theistic claim that whatever is distinct from God depends on God for its existence.

Alvin Plantinga, at once Platonist and theist, addresses the apparent inconsistency of theism and Platonism in his *Does God Have a Nature?*<sup>2</sup> Plantinga reasons that if necessary truths are indeed necessary, the abstract entities their truth-conditions involve exist necessarily: if it must be the case that  $7+5=12$ , then it must be the case that the number 7 exists. But having said this, Plantinga asks whether we can

explain the existence of the number 7 by citing the fact that it is part of God's nature to affirm its existence...If we can...then perhaps we can point to an important dependence of abstract objects upon God...<sup>3</sup>



In his APA Presidential address, delivered some two years later, Plantinga affirms this dependence:

A proposition *exists* because God thinks of or conceives it...propositions are best thought of as the thoughts of God...God is a necessary being who has essentially the property of thinking just the thoughts he does think; these thoughts, then, are conceived or thought by God in every possible world and hence exist necessarily.<sup>4</sup>

Plantinga thus tries to harmonize Platonism and traditional theism by denying that propositions exist by their very natures. Rather, Plantinga suggests, propositions exist necessarily but nonetheless depend on God, being thoughts which He thinks in all possible worlds. In their "Absolute Creation," Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel endorse Plantinga's reconciliation of traditional theism and Platonism and extend it to the rest of the Platonic domain: numbers, attributes, etc. are for them God's "ideas," and exist only because God thinks them.<sup>5</sup> Morris and Menzel dub their extension of Plantinga's view "theistic activism." I want to suggest that theistic activism's picture of God's relation to abstract entities is false, and suggest an alternative picture.

### I. *Can necessary beings depend on God?*

For theistic activism, abstract necessary beings depend on God. In fact, according to activism, abstract entities exist necessarily only because God necessarily exists and necessarily thinks them. This claim is surprising. Thus theistic activism's first order of business must be to explain how a genuinely necessary being can owe its existence to God. I think activism can do this, and I will briefly suggest how.

If the activist claim surprises us, it is because we believe (for instance) that for any  $x$ , if  $x$  exists necessarily, then  $x$  is uncausable, or of independent existence, or that for any  $x$ , if  $x$  exists necessarily, then  $x$  exists in virtue of its nature. If we believe either conditional, we believe it because we think that the nature of necessity renders this claim true. But an activist can argue that these (and any other such) conditionals are false, and derive their specious plausibility from insufficiently precise understandings of alethic necessity. In 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, and so may well not create difficulty for the claim that necessary beings depend on God. In any event, it seems that intuitions about necessity do not conflict with activism, for they do not warrant the conditionals mentioned.

Philosophers in fact have intuitions to which activists can appeal. Many philosophers, like Kant, find ontological arguments for God's existence du-

bious because these seem to infer God's real existence from the fact that the concept of God includes His being a necessary existent. As Jerome Shaffer puts it,

even if we have...the concept of an object which necessarily exists, a further question remains whether any existent meets the specifications of the concept.<sup>6</sup>

Let us say that if an entity A is such that if it exists, it exists necessarily, then A is necessary by nature. Then what Shaffer asserts is that for any A, knowing that A is necessary by nature is not sufficient for knowing that A exists. If we leave aside the question of whether God may not be an exception, most philosophers will agree with this. Shaffer's point raises a question, though: what explains this insufficiency? The explanation may be that knowledge that A is necessary by nature is not of the right kind to warrant our asserting that A exists. Or it may be that however much we know about A, our knowledge of A's nature is never sufficient to let us know whether A is both a possible being and necessary by nature. Both explanations are compatible with its being the case that "A is necessary by nature" entails "A exists"; they merely assert that even if this is so, we do not know enough to take advantage of the entailment. But I think Shaffer's point, with which many philosophers agree, is that "A is necessary by nature" just does not entail "A exists." This is the intuition to which theistic activism can appeal. For if "A is necessary by nature" does not entail "A exists," one may ask what accounts for the failure of this entailment. Theistic activism can recommend itself by offering an answer to this question, namely that even if "A is necessary by nature" is true, something more is needed for A to exist, and the something needed is a cause able to account for the fact that A exists at all.

There is clearly a lot more to be said here on both sides.<sup>7</sup> But perhaps this at least suggests that being necessary by nature does not preclude depending on God for existence. In any event, even if this point is granted, there is another likely line of attack on theistic activism. A critic may contend that we can make no sense of the dependence a necessary being is said to have on God. The critic may have something like the following in mind. If my match's lighting depends on my striking it, I can explain this by saying that if I had not struck it and if no relevantly similar event had occurred, the match would not have lit. But it is not clear that a theistic activist can similarly flesh out his assertion that necessary beings depend on God. An activist can certainly say that

1. had God not created it, proposition P would not exist.

According to theistic activism, "God created P" is necessarily true. Thus on activist principles, (1)'s antecedent is necessarily false, and so (1) is true. But on activist principles, it also seems true that

2. had God not created it, P would still exist, and
3. had nothing created it, P would still exist, and
4. if God did not exist, P would still exist.

For if "God created P" is necessarily true, (2)-(4) have necessarily false antecedents. If (2)-(4) are true, though, one may well suspect that the claim that P depends on God has no content, even if (1) is also true.

Let me try to allay this suspicion. (4) poses no problem peculiar to theistic activism. If God exists necessarily, then if in (4) one replaces "P" with a name of any contingent entity, the resulting proposition will be true. So any problem (4) raises for the claim that God creates necessary beings arises as well for the claim that God creates contingent beings. This does not show that (4) creates no trouble for theistic activism. My point is only that any trouble it creates arises because activism incorporates the claim that God exists necessarily, not because of any peculiarity of the dependence which activism claims necessary beings to have on God. (2) and (3) are a bit trickier. But I think activism can deal with them (and also dispose of (4)) by urging that not all conditional propositions with impossible antecedents are created equal. Rather, the activist may say, where a conditional's antecedent involves God's not existing, special rules apply in virtue of God's special relation to propositions.<sup>8</sup> At first glance, this move has an air of hopeless *ad hocery*. I think we can lessen this appearance by showing that it is well-grounded in the activist theory of God's nature and creative role.

To activism, if God does not exist, nothing else necessary or contingent exists either: the only world in which God does not exist is the (absolutely) null world. This renders God's non-existence unlike any other impossible state of affairs. To explain this, I need to set out some theses about possible worlds. I propose that a non-null world is a set of propositions which for every atomic proposition P either includes P or includes not-P, and that a possible world is a non-null-world-sized set of propositions which is consistent, i.e., such that all its member propositions can be true together. I also propose that the null world is the null set of propositions. As I am advocating a set-theoretic view of possible worlds, I take it that there is neither more nor less difficulty in talk of the null world than in talk of the null set.

If God is a necessary being, any world in which God does not exist (i.e., the null world) is an impossible world. But we need not say that every impossible world is the null world. A set of propositions can be both a non-null world and inconsistent.

For instance, suppose that there is a set S of propositions such that for all atomic propositions P save for a proposition Q, S includes P or includes not-P, but not both, and

5. S includes Q, and

## 6. S includes not-Q.

If  $((5) \cdot (6))$  is true, then  $((5) \vee (6))$  is true. But our definition of worldhood requires only that  $((5) \vee (6))$  be true. Hence S is a world, and an impossible world, then, will be either the null world or an inconsistent world-sized set of propositions, such as S.

Any impossibility except for God's nonexistence, including the nonexistence of necessary beings other than God, occurs in some set of inconsistent worlds. But 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 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.<sup>9</sup> The propositions expressing these truths exist only in other, non-null worlds.

This metaphysical framework expresses the unique status God's non-existence must have among impossibilities according to activism. It also lets us distinguish semantically between counterfactuals whose impossible antecedents involve God's not existing and counterfactuals whose impossible antecedents do not. From any ordinary impossibility, anything whatsoever follows. Thus if any ordinary impossibility were actual, all other states of affairs would be actual and possible. But God's nonexistence occurs only in the null world. If God did not exist, no states of affairs would be actual or possible. Thus God's nonexistence is in fact unlike any other impossibility, on the activist view of things. Because an ordinary impossibility entails everything, we usually assign trivial truth to all conditionals with ordinarily impossible antecedents. Any conditional with an antecedent involving God's nonexistence is a claim about the null world. This permits us to say that some such conditionals are non-trivially true and others are non-trivially false. For instance, in the null world, nothing exists. So any proposition entailing that something exists in the null world will be non-trivially false.

Let us now apply all this to (2)-(4). Adopting David Lewis' connective for "would"-counterfactuals, " $\square \rightarrow$ ", we may symbolize these as

2\*  $T \square \rightarrow R$

3\*  $Q \square \rightarrow R$

4\*  $S \square \rightarrow R$

Necessarily, if God does not exist, then God does not create P. On activist principles, "God creates P" is necessarily true, and so too then is "if God does not create P, God does not exist." So given activism, we have

$7 \square(S \equiv T)$

The conjunction of (2\*) and (7) entails (4\*). (7) is necessarily true (given S4 or S5). For all propositions  $\Phi$  and  $\Psi$ , if  $\Phi$  in conjunction with a necessary truth entails  $\Psi$ ,  $\Phi$  entails  $\Psi$ . So (2\*) entails (4\*). Again, on activist principles, necessarily, God does not exist iff nothing creates P. So by the same sort of move, we see that (3\*) entails (4\*). On the principles I am ascribing to theistic activism, (4\*) is a claim about the null world, that if the null world existed, P would exist. As so taken, (4\*) is clearly false. If so, then on our assumptions, (2)-(4) are false. By contrast, (1) remains—unproblematically true. For as (1)'s antecedent does not involve God's not existing, (1) is still to be treated as all other counterfactuals with impossible antecedents are. So I think theistic activism has resources to vindicate its claim that necessary beings depend on God. For the activist can hold that (1) is true while (2)-(4) are false, and that this gives the activist claim content.

## II. *God's power over modality*

That necessary beings depend on God entails that though God somehow causes these beings to exist, God is not in *control* of their existence: it is not in His power to refrain from creating them. For were this in God's power, these would not be genuinely necessary beings. Rather, it would be possible that they not exist. Now the assertion that God creates the bearers of modal status (the propositions which are possible and necessary) leads theistic activism to a nearly Cartesian thesis, that God is in a strong sense responsible for the necessity of what is necessary and the possibility of what is possible. To activism, necessary beings (or truths) are necessary because God creates them as existing (or being true) in all possible worlds, and possible beings (or truths) are possible because God creates them as existing (or being true) in some possible world. That God could not have done otherwise does not efface the fact that He alone has done it. Because it grants that God could not have done otherwise, activism rejects such Cartesian claims as that God can make or could have made some necessary truth non-necessary, or that God can deny or could have denied existence to some necessary proposition. But though it denies such Cartesian theses about God and modality, the activist claim is almost as strong. This emerges in Morris and Menzel's remarks on the "modal problem of evil."

The modal problem of evil lies in the inconsistency of the following set of claims:

8. Necessarily, if a world W is actual, God creates W.
9. Necessarily, God is of perfect moral goodness.
10. Possibly an evil world exists.

Given (8), if possibly an evil world exists, then possibly God creates an evil

world. Thus (10) and (8) in conjunction entail that possibly God creates an evil world. But plausibly, given (9), God is not possibly the creator of an evil world.<sup>10</sup> Theistic activism's response to this inconsistency is to deny (10), holding that since God is necessarily the creator of whatever world exists and God is necessarily good, no evil world is in fact possible.<sup>11</sup> For activism, God's nature constrains the possible in such a way that

some maximal groupings of propositions which, if *per impossibile* God did not exist, would constitute possible worlds, do not count as genuinely possible worlds due to the constraints placed on possibility by the nature of the creator.<sup>12</sup>

This denial of (10) is not *ad hoc*, but is a consequence of activism's distinctively theistic metaphysics of modality. For activism, God's causal activity is the source of whatever reality possible worlds have. But God can act only in accord with His nature. If it is God's nature to be perfectly good, then He produces no possible worlds which would be evil if actual. For if God produces such a possible world, then possibly He creates it. But as God is by nature perfectly good, God's nature is such that God cannot create an evil world. Thus no evil world is possible. This does not however entail that no evil world *exists*. For Morris and Menzel, a world is a set of propositions. So for them, if a certain set of propositions exists, a certain world exists. A set exists if its members exist and there are no set-theoretic reasons (such as the generation of paradoxes) for its not existing. This makes it plausible that evil worlds do exist, given the reasonable assumption that the propositions composing them also figure in the makeup of non-evil worlds. Thus Morris and Menzel call evil worlds "maximal groupings of propositions" which do not "count as" genuine possible worlds, a phrasing which implies that these groupings (and so these worlds) exist. But again, though these worlds exist, they are not *possible* worlds, and God's nature explains why they are not possible. So for theistic activism, God's nature delimits possibility, preventing evil worlds' being possible.

Now since God does not control what His nature is, this activist position does not entail that God controls the existence of evil worlds. But it does show that God's causal responsibility for the existence of abstracta puts His distinctive stamp on the facts of modality—that even though these facts could not be otherwise, there is a sense in which God determines their character. Further, Morris and Menzel hold while God necessarily creates the abstract entities He creates, the necessity of this creation stems solely from God's own nature, and this creation is free in the sense that it is "conscious, intentional, and neither constrained nor compelled by anything existing independent of God and his causally efficacious power."<sup>13</sup> Thus activism claims for God an exalted status which Descartes sought to ascribe to Him, that of being in some sense the free determiner of what is necessary and what is possible.



Yet activism avoids Descartes' thesis that God could have made the modal facts other than they are.

### III. *Problems of Activism*

If it is tenable, then, activism offers a variety of features which should excite theists. Let us however examine this view more closely. For activism, God necessarily creates necessary truths and beings, yet

the necessity of his creating (these) 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.<sup>14</sup>

That is, God's creation of necessities is necessary in that it freely establishes a framework of necessities relative to which it counts as necessary, freely creating the possible worlds which are such that in all of them, God creates the necessities He does. The activity by which God does this flows only from Himself. Ultimately, it is necessarily true that  $2+2=4$  only because God is what He is—because He is such as to think that necessarily,  $2+2=4$ . So God's necessity-creating activity flows from God's nature. That is, it seems that we can explain this activity, but can explain it only by saying that it takes place because God is what He is. Theistic activism not only countenances but insists on this sort of explanation. The activist claims that God's morally perfect nature puts its stamp on His activity of creating possible worlds. Thus the activist claims that because God is what He is (i.e., because His nature includes moral perfection), God thinks into possibility only good worlds.

But then just as God's being what He is explains the (alleged) fact that all possible worlds are good, His being what He is explains the fact that all these worlds are such that  $2+2=4$ , and indeed explains the whole character of the realm of necessary truth. In fact, according to activism, it is a necessary truth that all possible worlds are good, and so God's character's explaining the goodness of all possible worlds is just one instance of the more general phenomenon of God's character's explaining the nature of all necessary truth.

In saying that according to activism, God's nature determines that God shall make  $2+2=4$  or shall create only good worlds, I am not claiming that some abstract entity somehow forces God's creative hand. I *am* saying that according to activism, God's creating the necessities he does is explained, and the explanation of this lies solely in God's being what He is. Now God's being what He is includes His exemplifying the essential attributes He does. But if God creates all attributes, God creates the attributes He instances essentially. Morris and Menzel grant this:

God has properties...essentially...for whose existence his eternal intellectual activity is creatively responsible.<sup>15</sup>

That God creates His essential attributes, and does so because He is what He is, leads to three difficulties.

A. God's being what He is includes His instancing His nature, i.e., having all the attributes which He necessarily has. The attributes which God instance exist only because God creates them. But God is able to create them because He is what He is, i.e., instances His nature. Thus on the activist picture, God's having His necessary attributes is a causally necessary condition of God's having His necessary attributes. Thus God is God because God makes it so, and odder still, God makes it so because He already is God. But this just seems impossible. It seems that for any states P and Q, if P's obtaining is causally necessary and sufficient for Q's obtaining, there must be *some* asymmetrical relation between P and Q such that Q's obtaining presupposes P's and not *vice-versa*. No state can have an asymmetrical relation to itself. So God's having His necessary attributes cannot do so.

B. God's essential attributes exist only if God creates them. But God can create them only if He instances them, and He instances them only if they exist. So it seems that to activism, God's attributes' coming to exist presupposes that they already exist. But if they already exist, how can they then be created? That is, for activism, these attributes' existing is a causally necessary condition for their existing. Again, this seems impossible.

C. According to activism, God's being what He is explains His creating the necessities He does. But it also seems that His creating the necessities He does explains His being what He is, for His necessary character is part of the structure of necessities He creates. How can this be?

Given these consequences, one might want to drop either the claim that God's being what He is explains the character of what He creates, or the claim that God creates His nature. But if the activist drops the first claim, he gives up his distinctive approach to the modal problem of evil. Nor can he drop the second. In addition to what has been discussed, activism has two other reasons to assert that God creates His own nature.

First, its very project requires this. Theistic activism seeks to square Platonism with the traditional theistic belief that everything other than God depends on God by holding that God is the source of all abstract entities, including attributes. God has some attributes essentially. If God creates all attributes save the ones He Himself instances essentially, the claim that whatever exists depends on God is incompatible with the claim that the attributes which God instances exist, and so Platonism and traditional theism are to this extent unreconciled. So if God creates all attributes, as activism maintains, He creates even the attributes He instances essentially.<sup>16</sup>

Again, on the activist account, for any possible state of affairs S, God's activity explains the fact that S is possible. This leads in a second way to the position that God creates His nature. For if God makes possible all possible

states of affairs, and it is possible that God exists, God must make His own existence possible. Now if something's making itself actual is absurd or unintelligible, something's making itself possible seems even more so. But activism offers an account of how God is supposed to do this. According to activism, God creates the attributes whose conjunction constitutes His nature. Given S5, that the divine nature exists entails that it has its actual modal status, as possibly exemplified. For the divine nature to be possibly exemplified is for God's existence to be possible. Thus the activist claim that God creates His own nature secures the claim that God makes Himself possible. Thus activism is irrevocably committed to the twin claims which generate A-C. In section V below, I will consider and reject an activist argument which if successful would rob A-C of their sting. First, though, I would like to discuss another problem for activism.

#### IV. Does God create Himself?

The claim that God creates His essential attributes seems to yield yet a fourth difficulty: given the common theistic belief that God is necessary by nature and one plausible modal axiom, it seems to entail that God creates Himself. Let "G" stand for the proposition "God exists." Then the claim that God is necessary by nature is that  $G \rightarrow \Box G$ . This claim leads to the following argument.

- |  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 11. $G \rightarrow \Box G$ .   | premise.                          |
| 12. $\Diamond G$ .   | assumption for conditional proof. |
| 13. $(G \rightarrow \Box G) \rightarrow (\Diamond G \rightarrow \Box G)$ . | Instance of modal theorem.        |
| 14. $\Diamond G \rightarrow \Diamond \Box G$ .                             | 11, 13, <i>modus ponens</i> .     |
| 15. $\Diamond \Box G$ .  | 12, 14, <i>modus ponens</i> .     |
| 16. $\Diamond \Box G \rightarrow G$ .                                      | instance of Brouwer axiom.        |
| 17. $G$ .  | 15, 16, <i>modus ponens</i> .     |
| 18. $\Diamond G \rightarrow G$   | 11-17, conditional proof.         |

Now if God's nature exists, then it is possibly instantiated, i.e.,  $\Diamond G$ . So per (18), if God's nature exists, then God exists: if God creates His nature, He creates a necessary and sufficient condition of His own existence. This seems to amount to God's creating Himself. Morris and Menzel claim to avoid this consequence:

...the claims we are espousing do not entail that God creates Himself. God stands in a relation of logical dependence to His nature (a trivial result of the strict necessity of both relata). His nature stands in a relation of causal dependence to Him. It simply does not follow that God stands in a relation of causal dependence to Himself. Relations of logical dependence are always transitive. Relations of continuous causal dependence are always transitive. But we have no good reason to think that transitivity always holds across these two relations. If God creates some bachelor, the existence of this bachelor is logically sufficient for the existence of some unmarried man...But the

transitivity we thus see across the causal and logical dependence relations holds only in case the unmarried man is one and the same individual as the bachelor...God is not identical with His nature. (So) we can reject the inference that from God's nature causally depending on God, and God's logically depending on His nature, it follows that God causally depends on Himself.<sup>17</sup>

The argument, then, is that if God causes His nature to exist, and His nature's existing entails God's existing, it does not follow that God causes God to exist, save on the condition that God = God's nature. This argument's crucial premise is that

19. for all  $x$ ,  $y$  and  $z$ , if  $x$  causes  $y$  to exist, and  $y$ 's existing entails but does not cause  $z$ 's existing, it follows that  $x$  causes  $z$  to exist only if  $y=z$ .

But (19) appears false. Let "T" denote my thought at 4:30 on April 9, 1988, that I want to have lamb for dinner. Let "E" denote an event in my brain which took place at or very shortly before T did. Then consider the following claims:

20. T E.  
 21. T's existing does not cause E to exist.  
 22. E causes T to exist, and it is not "broadly logically" possible that anything other than E directly cause T to exist. (That is, any other thing which causes T to exist must do so by causing E to exist.)  
 23. it is not "broadly logically" possible that a non-divine thought exist uncaused.

(22) and (23) jointly entail that

24. T's existence entails E's existence.

(20)-(23) are not obviously inconsistent or incoherent; they make up what is in fact a reasonably plausible position. But given (20), (21) and (24), if we let  $y = T$  and  $z = E$ , then if some  $x$  causes  $y$  to exist, it follows that that  $x$  causes  $z$  to exist, even though  $y \neq z$ . Thus if (20)-(23) are true, (19) is false.

Still, some may find the second conjunct of (22) controversial. So let us construct a second counter-example by changing the referent of "E." Instead of having "E" denote one particular brain-event, let it denote whatever in any possible world satisfies the description "the process or activity of thinking T." In this case (20)-(23) are very likely true. One could respond to these examples by strengthening (19) to

25. for all  $x$ ,  $y$  and  $z$ , if  $x$  causes  $y$  to exist, and  $y$ 's existing entails and is entailed by but does not cause  $z$ 's existing, it follows that  $x$  causes  $z$  to exist only if  $y=z$ .

But (25) too seems false. For

26. necessarily, E does not exist unless T exists (at some time).

With "E" read in our second way, (26) is true. For with "E" so understood,

E does not exist unless a process of thinking T exists, and nothing can be a process of thinking T unless it actually manages to think T at some time.<sup>18</sup> (20)-(23) plus (26) constitute a counter-example to (25).

Faced with this further example, one could replace (19) and (25) with

27. for all  $x$ ,  $y$  and  $z$ , if  $x$  causes  $y$  to exist, and  $y$ 's existing entails and is entailed by  $z$ 's, and  $y$  does not cause  $z$  to exist, and  $z$  does not cause  $y$  to exist, it follows that  $x$  causes  $z$  to exist only if  $y=z$ .

But (27) is of no help to Morris and Menzel. In the case of God and God's nature,  $x=z$ , and so it is not possible that  $x$  causes  $y$  to exist and  $z$  does not cause  $y$  to exist: an activist cannot apply (27) to his position.

If my reasoning is correct, then, Morris and Menzel do not manage to show it false that if God creates His nature, God creates Himself. Can we therefore conclude that on the activist theory, God creates Himself? In the absence of any reason not to draw this conclusion, one would think so. One may draw this conclusion via the claim that

28. for all  $x$ ,  $y$  and  $z$ , if  $x$  causes  $y$  to exist, and  $y$ 's existing entails and is entailed by but does not cause  $z$ 's existing, it follows that  $x$  causes  $z$  to exist.

If (28) is true, then if both God and God's nature are necessary beings, God's creating His nature entails that God creates Himself. In fact, if (28) is true, then if God exists necessarily, God's creating any necessary being entails that God creates Himself. But (28) does seem true. For suppose that  $y=z$ . In this case  $y$ 's existing entails and is entailed by  $z$ 's but does not cause  $z$ 's, and in this case clearly, if  $x$  causes  $y$  to exist,  $x$  causes  $z$  to exist. Suppose on the other hand that  $y \neq z$ , but still  $y$ 's existing entails and is entailed by  $z$ 's but does not cause  $z$ 's, and that  $x$  cannot cause  $z$  to exist because  $z$  already exists, prior to  $x$ ' action (the priority here may be temporal, causal or logical). If  $z$  exists, I suggest, it follows that  $y$  too already exists, prior to  $x$ ' action (in the same way  $z$  is prior), and so  $x$  cannot cause  $y$  to exist either. Suppose finally that  $y \neq z$ , but still  $y$ 's existing entails and is entailed by  $z$ 's but does not cause  $z$ 's, and that  $z$  does not already exist. If in this case  $x$  causes  $y$  to exist,  $x$  will do something which entails that  $z$  exists, and so  $z$  will exist. If  $x$  is not therefore the cause of  $z$ 's existing, either (a) the laws of logic themselves, apart from  $x$ , then bring  $z$  into existence, (b)  $z$  comes to exist uncaused, or (c) some wholly distinct agent causes  $z$  to exist, by an extraordinary coincidence, or (d)  $x$ 's acting logically necessitates that some wholly distinct agent acts to produce  $z$ . As (a)-(d) all appear massively implausible, (28) correspondingly seems plausible.

Still, though (28) is plausible, it is not beyond question. So let me show that activism entails divine self-creation without relying on (28). Theistic activism asserts that divine activity accounts for the necessity and truth of

all necessary truths. But among the necessary truths God's activity thus accounts for is the truth that God exists. So theistic activism seems committed to the claim that God's activity makes it true that God exists. This seems to amount to God's creating Himself. Again, if God's existing is a necessary state of affairs, and God's activity accounts for the obtaining of all necessary states of affairs, then God's activity accounts for the obtaining of the state of affairs that God exists. So it is hard to see how an activist could avoid affirming that God creates Himself.

Let us note a consequence of this. If my arguments are correct, activism entails that in all possible worlds, God creates His nature and that in all possible worlds, God creates Himself. Thus activism must also endorse the conditional that if God creates His nature, God creates Himself. If (as I will argue) God cannot create Himself, this conditional will let us infer that God cannot create His nature either, and so that activism must admit that there are abstract entities God cannot create.

#### V. Can God create Himself?

Now it seems to me that it is just impossible that God create Himself, and that if theistic activism entails that He does, it is just unacceptable. However, it has been suggested that perhaps God can create Himself.<sup>19</sup> Suppose that time is without beginning or end, that God exists at all times, and that for any time  $t$ , God's activity at  $t-1$  is responsible for His existence at  $t$ . We can do things which at least help to assure that we will exist later. So why can't God wholly assure that He will exist later? If He can, and if for every  $t$  at which God exists, God's activity at a prior time accounts for His existence at  $t$ , then at every moment, God exists because God has caused Himself to exist—and so, it seems, God exists because He has created Himself. Yet we do not have to say that the state of affairs *God's existing* is asymmetrically related to itself. For the relations of our causal relations are not things or states of affairs taken as occurring timelessly or omnitemporally but occurrences of states of affairs at different times.<sup>20</sup>

Now in this response, the activist depicts God as everlasting causing Himself to *continue* to exist. *God's continuing to exist* is not the same state of affairs as *God's existing*, even if the obtaining of each strictly implies the obtaining of the other. For these states of affairs are identical only if in them the same particular exemplifies the same attribute. But the attributes of existing and continuing to exist are distinct. Every entity has the first but not the second at the first moment of its existence, and if there are any instantaneous entities (as I doubt) or timeless entities (as I believe there are), they have the first but not the second. Again, that God continues to exist entails (and not by a paradox of implication) that there are times, through which God continues to exist. That God exists does not entail that times exist (save by

a paradox of implication, if time exists necessarily). Now if the situation described is one of God's causing Himself to continue to exist, and continuing to exist  $\neq$  existing, the activist cannot simply claim to have described God's causing Himself to exist. He must rather be offering implicitly some such argument as the following:

29. Possibly, for all  $t$ , at  $t$  God causes God to continue to exist at  $t+1$ .
30. Necessarily, for all  $t$ , God continues to exist at  $t$  iff God exists at  $t$ .
31. Necessarily, for all  $x$ ,  $y$  and  $z$ , if  $x$  causes  $y$ , and necessarily,  $y$ 's existing entails and is entailed by  $z$ 's existing,  $x$  causes  $z$ . (The particulars these variables range over include occurrences of states of affairs, such as God's existing at  $t$ .)
32. So possibly, for all  $t$ , God at  $t$  causes God to exist at  $t+1$ .
33. Necessarily, if for all  $t$ , God at  $t$  causes God to exist at  $t+1$ , then omnitemporally, God causes God to exist.
34. Necessarily, if omnitemporally, God causes God to exist, God creates Himself.
35. So possibly God creates Himself.

This argument fails, I submit, because (34) is false. It seems to me that if omnitemporally, God causes God to exist, it follows only that God everlastingly preserves Himself. This is quite a different matter from His everlastingly creating Himself, because creation and preservation are distinct concepts.<sup>21</sup> That something is created entails that it is brought from non-existence into existence. That something is preserved does not entail that it is brought from non-existence, though it does entail that that thing is kept from non-existence. That something is created does not entail that that thing previously existed, save by a paradox of implication, if it is the case that necessarily, the thing created previously existed. That something is preserved does entail (and not by a paradox of implication) that it previously existed and that its past existence is continued. Now that God at  $t+1$  is caused to exist by God at  $t$  entails that God existed prior to  $t+1$ . If God exists necessarily (as activists hold), He cannot have gone out of existence between  $t$  and  $t+1$ , and so necessarily, His existence at  $t+1$  continues His prior existence. Thus the activist response sketched seems more aptly called a case of preservation than a case of creation.<sup>22</sup>

If this is so, (33) is likely false as well. For I suspect that the difference between creation and preservation is not merely conceptual: the characteristic effect of creation is existence, the characteristic effect of preservation is continuing to exist, and *existing* and *continuing to exist* are two distinct attributes.<sup>23</sup> But if the effect of preservation is continuing to exist, and the activist picture just sketched is only a case of preservation, then the picture does not warrant us in asserting that omnitemporally, God causes God to exist, as (33) says that it does. Rather, it can only warrant the claim that God causes Himself to continue to exist.

Let me offer a second argument against (34). Even if "God always continues to exist" entails "God always exists," it does not fully explain the latter.

Even if God always assures His continued existence, one can still intelligibly ask “but *why* does God exist *at all* to assure His existence, rather than always not exist”? That He *has* always existed and always assured His continued existence is not a satisfying answer to this question.<sup>24</sup> Now if P does not fully explain Q,  $\Box P$  doesn't fully explain  $\Box Q$ ; if that all men are mortal does not fully explain that all triangles are trilateral, neither does the fact that necessarily, all men are mortal fully explain the fact that necessarily, all triangles are trilateral.<sup>25</sup> So that the question “but why does God exist” seems in place supports the claim that God's necessarily everlasting continuance (EC) does not fully explain God's necessarily everlasting existence (EE). This claim, that

36. EC does not fully explain EE,

generates an argument, for which I will also need the premises that

37. causal sufficiency is a transitive relation

and that

38.  $(x)(y)(\text{if } x \text{ causally suffices for } y, x \text{ fully explains } y)$ .

My argument, then, is this. Given (36) and (38), EC does not causally suffice for EE. Then per (37), whatever causally suffices for EC does not by so doing causally suffice for EE. In the activist response above, God's activity causally suffices for EC. (29)-(35) purport to show that by so doing, He causally suffices for EE. If (36)-(38) are true, He does not. Thus (27)-(38) constitute an inconsistent set of propositions; at least one of them is false. The most rational move is to reject the one with the least intuitive warrant. It seems clear that this is (34). Hence it is most rational to reject (34). But again, if (34) is false, the activist response sketched above does not really involve God's creating Himself.

The activist cannot weaken his claim from “God everlastingly creates Himself” to “God everlastingly preserves Himself.” If all God does is cause Himself to continue, there is a necessary state of affairs for whose obtaining God is not creatively responsible, namely EE (as vs. EC). To allow this would amount to giving up the activist project of rooting all necessary facts in the creative activity of God. So activism remains committed to self-creation, and does not seem able to provide a model of self-creation which could convince us that it is possible.

It is of course very plausible that self-creation is in fact not possible. But as activists dispute this, let me argue it explicitly. To create God is to account for God's existing at all (as vs. continuing to exist). To account for God's existing at all is to account for the fact that the set S of times at which God exists has any members. It seems to me that if God exists beginninglessly, and



His actions account for His existence at moments later than the moments of His action, no action of God at any time can account for S' having members.

For suppose that God's action at  $t$  does so. Then this action accounts for S' having members subsequent to  $t$ . If God acts at  $t$ ,  $t$  is itself a member of S. Thus at  $t$ , S already has a member, and so whatever prior act of God accounts for  $t$ 's membership in S has already sufficed *ipso facto* to account for the fact that S has members. Thus God's act at  $t$  cannot do so. Suppose then that God's action at  $t-1$  accounts for God's existing at  $t$ . Then if God acts at  $t-1$ ,  $t-1$  is itself a member of S, and so whatever prior act of God accounts for  $t-1$ 's membership in S has already accounted for the fact that S has members, and so on. As God exists beginninglessly, then, no act of His at any moment can account for the fact that He exists at all. As creating any entity = accounting for the fact that it exists at all, thus God cannot create Himself, if His actions account for His existence at later moments. Nor can we intelligibly suppose that God's actions at  $t$  account for His existence before  $t$ . Nor can God at  $t$  create God at  $t$ , for if God already exists at  $t$ , He cannot then cause Himself to exist at  $t$ . Now if God at  $t$  cannot cause Himself to exist (as *vs* to continue to exist) at, before or after  $t$ , God at  $t$  cannot create Himself at all.

If God cannot cause Himself to exist, the activist project of rooting all necessities in the activity of God fails. Further, we argued above that if God creates His nature, He creates Himself. If this argument works, then as God cannot create Himself, it follows that God cannot create His nature. Moreover, even if this argument be rejected, we have still shown that God cannot create His nature. Arguments A-C in section III above raised difficulties which seem if not dispelled to entail that God just cannot do so. When we raised these arguments, we noted that we would consider an attempt to blunt their force. This attempt would consist in re-applying the strategy sketched at the start of this section: it would interpret God's creating His nature as God's acting at  $t-1$  to assure that His nature exists at  $t$ , acting at  $t$  to assure that His nature exists at  $t+1$ , and so ad infinitum. But we have now shown that on this model, God would not create His nature, but at most would everlastingly preserve it. He could not account for its existing at all, rather than not existing. No other model of God's creation of His nature is available. So we are entitled to conclude that God just cannot create His nature. If so, the activist reconciliation of Platonism and traditional theism fails in another way, as it falls short of allowing God to create all abstracta. The failure of activism leaves us the task of explaining just what God's relation to abstract entities (if there are such things) may be. Let me close with just a hint of an alternate approach.

#### VI. On God and possibility

First, let me motivate this alternate approach. Plausibly, possibilities come

in interlocking systems rather than as discrete, disjoint entities. For instance, for it to be possible that God exists, it must be possible that a creator *ex nihilo* exist. If it is to be possible that a creator *ex nihilo* exist, worlds which He can create must be possible. If God is essentially omnipotent, and omnipotence involves (very roughly) being able to actualize all states of affairs which are in fact possible, all these states of affairs must be possible, as part of what it is for God to be possible. Suppose now that God is possible and cannot make Himself possible: that is, cannot create His nature. Plausibly, if God cannot make Himself possible, He cannot make possible any state of affairs whose possibility is bound up with His—that is, any other fact of possibility. Rather, all states of affairs must then be possible “logically before” God exists. The realm of possibility must on this assumption exist independent of God. If this realm consists of Platonic entities, then, Platonism must remain unreconciled with traditional theism.

Further, we saw above that

$$18. \diamond G \rightarrow G.$$

If this is so, then arguably whatever accounts for God’s being possible suffices to account for His being actual. Now if possibilities come in interlocked systems, and God’s existing is possible, it seems that God possibly exists because there exists an appropriate network of possibilities, one which includes His being possible. If God possibly exists and cannot make Himself possible, then the realm of possibility exists independent of Him. Its nature accounts for the truth of  $\square G$ . So its nature arguably accounts for the truth of  $G$ . Thus if God possibly exists and cannot make Himself possible, it can seem that God is a creature of an independent, antecedently given realm of possibilities. Not God but the realm of possibility is the ultimate source of all that exists, if this is so, because the realm of possibility gives rise to God, from whom all else stems. Theists will surely object to this.

So if God possibly exists and cannot make Himself possible, arguably God cannot account for the facts of modality or the existence of any necessary abstracta these facts involve, and God is a creature and servant of Ideal masters. Both consequences conflict with traditional theism; hence if these consequences do follow, the traditional theist must modify his stance or reject one of the premises. We have seen that God in fact cannot make Himself possible.<sup>26</sup> This suggests that if the above argument is correct, traditional theists should consider denying that possibly God exists.

A second motivation for this denial arises from the problems we have raised for theistic activism. Theistic activism ran into trouble because it held God to be an instance of attributes He creates: because God’s nature was among the exemplifiable entities the activist’s God creates. Now God’s nature is an exemplifiable entity iff possibly God exists. So activism can also be said to

stumble because it claims that the God who is the ground of possibility is Himself possible. Again, activism went awry because "God exists" was among the necessary truths for whose truth it held God to be responsible. Yet an activist cannot hold that God exists contingently, for no contingent being could create a necessary entity. Now every actual existent which also possibly exists exists contingently or necessarily. One sympathetic to activism's program might, therefore, want to consider holding that while God actually exists, He does not possibly exist—that is, that while God actually exists, He is not the sort of entity which one can say possibly exists. If this claim could be maintained, it would secure the activist's extension of God's creative activity to necessary abstracta and the facts of modality while avoiding the difficulties to which activism fell prey.

### VII. *Pure actuality and abstract entities*

Can a traditional theist deny that God possibly exists? I think so. Though it sounds outrageous, this denial is not new. That God actually exists but does not possibly exist is precisely the import of Aquinas' claim that God is pure actuality. Part of what Aquinas means by this is that in God there are no unactualized possibilities. But he also means that in God there are no actualized possibilities either. Thomas writes in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* that

In every composite there must be act and potency. For several things cannot become absolutely one unless among them something is act and something potency. Now, beings in act are not united except by being, so to speak, bound or joined together... Their parts, likewise, are brought together as being in potency with respect to the union, since they are united in act after being potentially unitable. But in God there is no potency. Therefore there is no composition in Him.<sup>27</sup>

Aquinas' point is that God cannot contain components because if He did, an aspect of His being would be a fulfilled potentiality that these components come together to compose Him. That Aquinas sees this as incompatible with God's being purely actual indicates that for him, God's pure actuality excludes both unfulfilled and fulfilled potentialities. Now Aquinas often distinguishes potentialities from mere logical possibilities, and in some contexts the distinction is important for him.<sup>28</sup> Here, though, it is not. According to Thomas, God's power ranges over the full extent of the logically possible.<sup>29</sup> Hence if God is possibly F, God has the power to effect it that God is F and so God is potentially F: corresponding to a possibility for God, realized or unrealized, there would be a potentiality in God, realized or unrealized.<sup>30</sup> Thus God can be without realized potentiality only if He is not in any respect the actualization of a possibility.

This entails that in a language perspicuously representing the divine being, on Aquinas' terms, locutions such as "possibly God..." or "God possibly..."

would be banned, even as consequences of locutions such as “actually God...” or “God actually....” We place an entity within the framework of possible worlds to represent formally the truth-conditions of statements of possibility about that entity (and statements of actuality and necessity, insofar as these are connected with possibility). Hence if strictly speaking, there cannot be statements of possibility about God, He is not the sort of thing that can properly be “located” within a possible world.

If God, though actual, is not possible, then God’s actuality or activity can account for all possibility without having to account for His own possibility. Further, if God cannot exist within a possible world, He cannot exemplify any of the attributes facts about which constitute the framework of necessary truths which all possible worlds instantiate (for if He did exemplify these, He would ipso facto exist within a possible world). Thus God can create all abstract entities without instantiating any of them. The claim that God is purely actual, then, reconciles theism and Platonism while avoiding Cartesianism (as activism does) and also avoiding the distinctive difficulties of activism.

#### VIII. *Some explanations*

The Thomist thesis I have briefly set forth raises a great many questions. I hope to deal with some of these on a future occasion, but several may seem too pressing to ignore. First, the Thomist claim that God is purely actual is certainly not supposed to entail that the proposition “God actually exists” is false. But “God actually exists” entails that possibly God exists, and if God is purely actual, it is false that possibly God exists. So if God is purely actual, must we deny that God actually exists, or deny the venerable *dictum* that *ab esse ad posse valet consequentia*? Again, what happens to modal discourse generally and to modal talk about God in particular given the Thomist thesis? Finally, what can one mean by saying that God exists, but not in a possible world?

Thomas suggests a response to the first question in *Contra Gentiles*:

we do not know of what sort this being is...by which God subsists in Himself ... (in) reference...to the being that signifies the composition of intellect...the existence of God does fall under demonstration; this happens when our mind is led from demonstrative arguments to form...a proposition of God whereby it expresses that He exists.<sup>31</sup>

Strictly speaking, then, for Thomas, what we demonstrate is not so much that God exists as that some proposition affirming the existence of God is true.<sup>32</sup> The actuality we can demonstrate is not the actual being of God, but the actual truth of a proposition.<sup>33</sup> Now Thomas’ arguments for God’s existence provide him with identifying descriptions for God, whence he infers all the attributes that he subsequently ascribes to God: having argued that (for instance) an unmoved mover exists and is identical with God, Thomas derives divine

attributes by exploring the attributes which an unmoved mover must have.<sup>34</sup> Thus this restriction of the “actually” in “God actually exists” to the actual truth of a proposition extends to “an unmoved mover actually exists,” and thence to all the theses of both rational and dogmatic theology.

Actuality can be construed as a modality interrelated with necessity and possibility. Thus I suggest that on Thomas’ account, ordinary modalities which occur in talk about God are not to be construed as modifying the divine being, but rather as modifying propositions about God. Specifically, such modalities tie these propositions to worlds in which it is correct to assert them. An analogy will set out what I have in mind. Were I in a delivery-room, watching the birth of a child, I might very well say “God has here become the Creator of a new person.” But I would not mean by this that God occupied any volume of space in the delivery room, or had been just to the left of the operating table. Rather, I would use “here” to refer only to the place at which a new predicate became ascribable to God. Again, if I hold that God is timeless, then if I say “God is now the Creator of a new person,” I will explain my statement by saying that “now” refers not to a time at which God is located, but merely to the time of the proposition’s utterance, a time at which it is true to say that God is (timelessly) the Creator of a new person. I suggest, then, that by analogy, for Thomas, when we say “actually God exists and therefore possibly God exists,” the modal terms’ semantics are to be given in terms of possible worlds in which it is correct to affirm that God exists, not possible worlds in which God exists. With this given, all standard modal entailments apply to propositions about God (and so the claim that God is purely actual in no way conflicts with any truths of modal logic). For instance, though God does not exist in any possible world, in every possible world it is true to say that God exists and that therefore, in some possible world it is true to say that God exists. Thus it remains the case that “God actually exists” entails that possibly God exists. In the same way, all tense-logical entailments apply to tensed propositions about a timeless God. One need not infer that God exists during the times one’s semantics involve, nor in the worlds one’s semantics involve.

With this understood, we can see why God’s being beyond the modal framework of reality does not affect the fact that there are necessary and contingent truths about God. These truths acquire their modal status according as the statements they make about God are true *at* (not in) the various possible worlds, just as truths about a timeless God acquire their temporal status according as the statements they make are true *at*, not in, the various times. Their modal differences are functions not of differences in God but of differences in possible worlds. “God created Adam” is contingent not because God has a contingent attribute but because it is true at some but not all worlds that Adam exists and is created by God.<sup>35</sup> Obviously, a full treatment of this

idea would require a lot more work than it can receive here. But its prospects strike me as promising.

Now it is customary to introduce the *de re/de dicto* distinction in a rough and ready way by saying that modalities *de re* are modalities in which things have attributes and modalities *de dicto* are those in which propositions have truth-values. So my account thusfar raises a question: if all divine modalities are modalities of propositions, does it follow that they are all only *de dicto*? I think not. A more precise explication of the *de re/de dicto* distinction would note that both sorts of modalities are after all modalities of propositions. Following a suggestion of Kit Fine's, we may say that propositions whose modalities are *de dicto* are such that their truth-value does not vary if we vary the reference of their singular terms (or equivalent devices for picking out bearers of attributes), and propositions whose modalities are *de re* are such that their truth values do vary if we vary the reference of their singular terms or equivalent devices.

In explicating what I take to have been Aquinas' implicit position, I have appealed to the idea that God does not exist within possible worlds. One may well wonder what this can mean. I think that at least two other historic metaphysical systems incorporate the claim that God does not exist within possible worlds. Arguably Leibniz, the grandfather of possible worlds semantics, held that possible worlds are creatures of God which are sets or groupings of other creatures of God, and that God, as their creator, is not included in any such set.<sup>36</sup> Again, for Plotinus, God creates all necessary abstracta and yet exemplifies none, being above and beyond "the realm of Being," i.e., the Platonic domain. Thus the writings of Leibniz and Plotinus (as well as Aquinas) may give us some way to picture God's transcendence of possibility.

A formal explication of God's transcendence of possibility might be that no predication of or identity-statement involving God is included in any world-constituting set of propositions, rather as no predication of or identity-statement involving God is included in any group of propositions true in some particular moment. If one indexes propositions to times in which they are true, for instance, one must index all predications of or identity-statements involving a timeless God not to any time, but instead to one more timelike *locus*, that of eternity. Similarly, if one indexes propositions to worlds in which they are true, one must index all predications of and identity-statements involving a purely actual God not to any possible world, but instead to one more worldlike *locus*, that of pure actuality.

#### IX. *Vale et salve*

The claim that God is purely actual eliminates the problems we have seen theistic activism to face. Yet this claim does the job activism tried to do, in that it makes God the source of abstracta and the ground of modal facts. So

perhaps theistic activists might have something to gain by moving a bit closer to classic Thomism and its claim that God is purely actual. This is not to say that the claim that God is purely actual is without its own problems. The claim that God has no attributes which creatures instantiate, for instance, threatens to force us to a radically negative theology, as it did Plotinus. I believe that it does not force us to this, and that the concept of pure actuality has exciting ramifications in philosophical theology. But these will have to await another occasion.<sup>37</sup>

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## NOTES

1. In all future occurrences, unqualified modal terms such as "necessary," "impossible," "contingent," or "possible" will express "broadly logical" modality.

Non-necessary abstract entities include sets with contingent members; these exist only in worlds in which all their members exist. Propositions whose truth-conditions include contingent entities are also non-necessary abstracta if what Alvin Plantinga calls "existentialism" is true. On this view, such propositions exist only if the contingent entities their truth-conditions involve exist. For instance, if "existentialism" is true, in a world in which there is no Charles Schulz, the proposition that Charles Schulz is the creator of *Peanuts* does not exist. (For an exposition of an existentialist position, cf. Robert M. Adams, "Actualism and Thisness," *Synthese* 49 (1981), pp. 3-41.) Also, if attributes (which are abstracta) exist only if instanced, then it follows that any attribute which is not necessarily exemplified exists only contingently.

2. Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980).

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 145, 146.

4. Alvin Plantinga, "How to Be an Anti-Realist," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 56 (1982), p. 70. Plantinga here assumes the anti-"existentialist" claim that all propositions exist in all worlds. Presumably, though, he means to claim only that God thinks in every world the same *proposition-creating* thoughts. The broader claim that God has all the same thoughts in every world is implausible. To see this, let "W" rigidly designate some world. In every world, God thinks the thought that constitutes the proposition P, "W is the actual world." But if God is omniscient, then only in W does He believe or know 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. Let us now suppose that God's occurrent believing or knowing that P = His thinking some thought which He thinks in all worlds. As God thinks this thought in all worlds, God believes that P in all worlds. This yields two alternatives. Perhaps in all worlds, God believes that W is actual although this is not true in any world but W, i.e., perhaps God is in error about P in all worlds but W. Again, perhaps God believes P in every world and therefore (God being essentially omniscient) it follows that P is true in every world. In this case, W is the only possible world, since

only in  $W$  is  $P$  true. Neither of these alternatives is acceptable. Therefore it is false that God's occurrent believing or knowing that  $P$  = His thinking that  $P$ . God's knowing that  $P$ , then, must constitute a mental act distinct from His thinking the proposition that  $P$ . If this is so, there seems no reason to deny that this mental act occurs only in  $W$ .

5. Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel, "Absolute Creation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1986), pp. 353-62. (The essay also appears in Morris' *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame, IN: (University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).) The locution "God thinks attributes" seems more appropriate to activism than "God thinks of attributes." For the latter may suggest that attributes somehow exist independent of God's thought and are grasped by it.

Menzel has recently provided a detailed treatment of the implications of this move for the nature of numbers and for set theory. Cf. his "Theism, Platonism and the Metaphysics of Mathematics," *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1987), pp. 365-82.

6. Jerome Shaffer, "Existence, Predication and the Ontological Argument," *Mind* 71 (1962), p. 318.

7. For more on the activist side, see my "A Leibnizian Cosmological Argument." *Philosophical Studies* 57 (1989), pp. 135-55.

8. What I say will also apply to conditionals whose antecedents involve God's not having some attribute He has essentially, for (to speak loosely) if God lacks an essential attribute, God does not exist.

9. For an exploration of the distinction between truth in a world and truth about a world, cf. Adams, *op. cit.*

10. This is the main argument of Theodore Guleserian's "God and Possible Worlds: the Modal Problem of Evil," *Nous* 17 (1983), pp. 221-238.

11. Morris elaborates this response in "The Necessity of God's Goodness," *The New Scholasticism* 59 (1985), pp. 418-48.

12. Morris and Menzel, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 357.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, p. 359.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, p. 360.

18. Aristotle and Ryle argue that for a range of mental-life expressions, the present progressive entails a perfect: that seeing entails having seen, for instance. If seeing entails having seen, though, nothing is a process of seeing which does not actually manage to see at some time. One way to defend the text's claim would be to argue that Aristotle and Ryle are right and that thinking  $T$  is like seeing in the relevant respects.

19. By an anonymous referee for *Faith and Philosophy*. The strategy of this reply can apply as well against the arguments of sec. III.

20. Richard Swinburne considers and rejects a similar theory of divine self-causation in *The Coherence of Theism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 261-62. (On the theory Swinburne discusses, the existence of God is a contingent rather than a necessary fact. But that would not prevent his argument from applying to the present theory if it works.) Swinburne rejects this theory because

when  $b$  is the cause of  $a$ , and  $c$  is the cause of  $b$ , we say that the cause of  $a$



+  $b$  is  $c$ , not  $b + c$ . If  $c$  is the lighting of a fuse,  $b$  is an explosion caused by  $c$ , and  $a$  an explosion caused by  $b$ , then the cause of  $a + b$  is just  $c$ ... (Thus)  $S$  is the cause of the occurrence of a collection of states if and only if it is a collection of the causes of each, which are not members of the former collection... It follows... that if God's existence at each moment of time is brought about by God acting at a prior moment of time (and God's existence has no other cause than his actions), that the whole series of God's states at each moment of infinite time... has no cause. For nothing from outside the series is in any way responsible for the existence of the members of the series. Certainly given that at some time God is, his subsequent existence will indeed be due to his actions. But what has no cause... is the non-existence of a time before which God was not (*loc. cit.*).

I am leery of this argument because I am unsure that the principle it is based on can really support its weight. Swinburne is correct about what "we say" of the cause of  $a + b$ , but just why do "we say" it? It strikes me as at least plausible that we do so solely because ascribing  $a + b$  to  $b + c$  sounds redundant or sounds like a case of self-causation (though it is not one), rather than because in sober fact the cause is not  $b + c$ . (Further, denying that the cause is  $b + c$  arguably is an instance of what Swinburne stigmatizes as the "completist fallacy" in *The Existence of God* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 73-74, 87-89.) A fuller investigation of causality would be needed to assure us that Swinburne's principle is based on the real nature of causation rather than a peculiarity of colloquial English usage.

21. Cf. Duns Scotus, *Quodlibet* 12.

22. Note that Morris and Menzel's ingenious "materialization machine" example (cf. Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-76) is expressly only a case of self-preservation.

23. Thus I suggest that authors such as Aquinas are overlooking something when they equate God's preservation of creatures with creatures' constant creation (though it may be that as they say, the same divine activity effects both). Cf. Aquinas, *ST Ia* 104, 1 (cf. 44, 1).

24. Nor, given activism, is it an acceptable answer to say that God exists because it is necessary that He do so. For on the activist stance, the fact that God exists necessarily is a causal consequence of the fact we are trying to explain, the fact that God exists at all.

25. Perhaps this principle is true because if within a single world  $W$  there is no connection between  $P$  and  $Q$  sufficient for  $P$  to fully explain  $Q$ , that connection cannot be created by having  $P$  and  $Q$  occur, disconnected, in all possible worlds. The text's principle follows from the thesis that if  $\square P$  fully explains  $\square Q$ ,  $P$  fully explains  $Q$ . This latter seems very plausible: if that necessarily Socrates is a man fully explains that necessarily Socrates is mortal, it does seem to follow that Socrates' being a man fully explains Socrates' being mortal.

26. At least, He cannot do so in the way activism depicts. But activism is the only position available which suggests that He can do so at all.

27. *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, tr. A. C. Pegis (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1955) (henceforth *SCG I*), c. 18, p. 103.

28. Cf. e.g., *SCG* 82 (7), 83 (4), pp. 261-62, 264.

29. *Summa Contra Gentiles* II, tr. J. Anderson (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), c. 22, pp. 65-67.

30. If this is correct, there is a flaw in the interpretation of Aquinas Norman Kretzmann

and Eleonore Stump offer in their "Absolute Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), pp. 353-82. For them, God is purely actual because He has no potentialities, where these are understood as liabilities to undergo some change during the history of some world. But on their view, pure actuality excludes only potentialities, not possibilities. Thus for them, God's pure actuality is compatible with His realizing alternate possibilities in different worlds, something which they seem to think required if God is to have contingent attributes. Because they construe God's pure actuality as His lack of potentiality but not of possibility, they feel comfortable in construing His correlative simplicity as His lacking all attributes whose distinction is evident within a possible world (i.e., lacking all attributes with respect to which He can change within a world-history) but not all attributes whose distinction is evident between possible worlds (i.e., attributes with respect to which God can differ intrinsically from one possible world to the next). I suggest that the Stump-Kretzmann view, while faithful to Aquinas' text, misreads his underlying intent. It seems to me that in the unique case of God, potentiality and possibility are necessarily correlative. (Obviously, if God is potentially F, He is possibly F. Hence given the text's argument, in God's case, potentially  $F \nrightarrow$  possibly F.) This entails the view of pure actuality the text endorses. It also entails that God cannot have attributes with respect to which He can differ intrinsically from one possible world to the next. It does not however follow that potentiality and possibility are necessarily correlative within discourse *about* God, and I suggest that this provides the reason Aquinas distinguishes the two in talking about the modalities of the divine will (*loc. cit.*, n. 28). Some of what I think is going on in such passages is spelled out in the text.

31. *SCG* I, 12 (7), p. 85.

32. For an exploration of the roots and implications of this part of Thomas' religious epistemology, cf. Victor Preller's *Divine Science and the Science of God* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967).

33. Of course, if this proposition is actually true, God (purely-actually) exists. Thomas' point is that our epistemic relation to God does not enable us to understand or express His actual being, while our epistemic relation to propositions does let us understand them and affirm their truth.

34. *SCG* I, 14 (4), p. 97.

35. What I say here parallels Thomas' move in regard to temporal predications of God e.g., at *Summa Theologiae* Ia 13, 7.

36. Cf. Leibniz, *Monadology*, # 43-46, 53, in *Leibniz: Philosophical Writings*, tr. Mary Morris (NY: Dutton, 1934), pp. 10-11, 12.

37. This paper has benefitted from the comments of William Alston, Robert McKim and an anonymous referee for *Faith and Philosophy*.