

Proposal for Graduate Research Symposium

Title – *Does God Have an Imagination?* An Exploration of the Divine Ideas

Program of Study – Philosophy

Presentation Type: PowerPoint

Mentor(s) and Mentor Email – Dr. Thomas Provenzola (tprovenzola@liberty.edu)

Student name(s) and email(s) – Nathan Dowell (ndowell7@liberty.edu)

Category: Textual

Abstract: This presentation seeks to briefly survey older theories of how God relates to His creative ideas and critiques of them made by Brian Leftow as well as explicate Leftow's own theory and some issues with it. In addition to these objectives, a synthesis will be proposed that supplements a more traditional theory with some insights from Leftow. The argument will be that God reasons to the things He can create using His nature but does so imaginatively. The attempt is to do so in a way that avoids Leftow's critiques.

The question of how God gets the ideas of what He can create has been discussed since the beginning of the church. On the one hand, philosophers have intuitively thought that possibilities could not have been different than they are but on the other hand, we say that everything that is not God or part of His nature is under His control. Three major views have arisen: God has simply always had these possibilities in mind (e.g., Scotus, Leibniz); God somehow reflects on His own nature and reasons to these possibilities (e.g., Aquinas, Kant); or lastly, God simply thinks up these possibilities, though He could have willed to have others (e.g., Descartes). Brian Leftow has recently critiqued these so-called deity theories in his book, *God and Necessity*. Leftow's alternative is to say that God thinks up these possibilities imaginatively

from eternity. God has certain guidelines for thinking possible creatures up (for example, logical and mathematical truths) but not many. Once God thinks up a set of possible creatures, there is good reason to believe He could not (or at the least, *would* not) think up more, although it is in Him to think up more possible creations. This means that all possibilities always have remained – and always will remain – the same but they are still under God’s control. Leftow provides very solid criticisms of deity theories but his own model also faces serious problems. That being said, Leftow gives valuable insights in introducing God’s imagination as key to an account of God thinking up what He can create. I have tried to supplement the older theory that God reasons to the ideas for creaturely natures from His own nature but He does this imaginatively *and* in a non-arbitrary way. He could not have reasoned to different creative ideas but rather, His imagination includes everything He could ever possibly create.

Christian worldview integration: My research began and was informed by my conviction that Scripture implicitly and explicitly teaches that God is independent of all else but also is sovereign over everything outside of Himself. Furthermore, this would be true of God – who is the greatest possible being and the only being worthy of worship. An additional motivation came from the fact that God must be the most imaginative being. This follows from the fact that the Bible presents God as the creator of the world and men are sub-creators who are made in His image. The property of being imaginative would also be better to have than to not have so God must have it and have it to the greatest possible degree. As a Christian, I have sought to think carefully about the research, be honest and fair in my assessment and formulation of various arguments, and to do so in a way that is both faithful to Scripture and historical Christian

doctrines. Moreover, I have attempted to communicate this in an attractive way, firmly holding that God is not only rational but also beautiful and imaginative.

My research is relevant to dialoging with the culture as a whole in three ways. Firstly, it is a proposed way to alleviate any tension that exists between God and necessarily existing possibilities by understanding these possibilities as God's thoughts and dependent on God's reasoning processes. Secondly, it is hoped that the insights provided may open up new avenues for theology and illuminate other areas in the philosophy of religion in order to better understand, present and/or defend the truths contained in the gospel. Thirdly, my work has been an attempt to emphasize the Godhead as immensely imaginative and aesthetically oriented. In doing this, my desire is for believers and unbelievers to see a more intriguing picture of God who is infinitely creative and all the more interesting for pursuing in our studies and lives.