

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

*DIE PHANTASIE GOTTES:*  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE DIVINE IDEAS IN DEITY THEORIES & BRIAN LEFTOW,  
WITH A PROPOSED SYNTHESIS

MASTER'S THESIS

PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS IN PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES

BY

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*The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.*

- Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1.12-17.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Brian Leftow first of all. The chances of him ever becoming aware of anything here are very small but I have to acknowledge him, nonetheless. From everything I have read and seen in lectures, he appears to be a brilliant, original and thorough thinker. His intellectual rigor, humility and passion for God and His supremacy in all things make him a preeminent Christian philosopher for a philosophy student like myself to strive to imitate in my work. It is unfortunate that tone can be lost in writing so I ask the reader to subliminally preface all my critical remarks of his work with a sincere “with all due respect.”

I owe a great debt here to Leibniz, Kant, and Spinoza, three prolific German thinkers in whose honor I made the title for this thesis. They both set me on this path (Leibniz) and caused me to change directions while on it (Kant and Spinoza).

Some personal friends and family: my dad for his passion for Christ and doing his best to impart that to me; my brothers Joseph and David for their support and insight in conversations on these issues; Scott Panida, one of the most encouraging and inquisitive men I know; Brendan Hegarty for thoughtful conversations; Jonathan Wells, Joseph Gibson, Matt Nevius, Will Green, Shaun Smith and Canaan Suitt, who not only all spoke with me about and/or read over sections of this paper but who also made my time in the M.A.P.S. at Liberty University rich in many ways; Dr. Robert Hughes, who was initially responsible for my interest in philosophy, continuation in academia and desire to integrate imagination and theology; the professors at Liberty University, especially Dr. Martin, Dr. Provenzola and Dr. Hinkson, who challenged, inspired and encouraged me from the day I met them and were exemplars, *par excellence*, of not only Christian philosophy at its finest, but also godly men who I had the joy and privilege of studying under and following. Ironically, there is no footnote where one will see, “Thanks to Dr. Provenzola for this point,” and this is drastically misleading. It is ironic because (1) he, along with Dr. Martin, had such an incalculably tremendous influence in forming this thesis and (2) because of his emphasis on the implicit (himself now an instance of that). His passion for the role of imagination in philosophy and theology is as contagious as it is compelling.

Above the rest, I thank my wife Ashley, who edified me in the hard times of the program and rejoiced with me in the good times. I thank God every day that she is in my life and it is a constant grace that she faithfully loves me in spite of my many faults.

Lastly, I thank the triune God, without whom, in the spirit of Leibniz, this thesis would *not exist* or even *be possible*. All other praise to the others above is indirect praise to the Other above all. I am in awe of just how creative and imaginative He is, the greatest manifestation of His creativity being in the story of the gospel of Jesus Christ, our beautiful hope, love and Lord. I will not do justice to Him here or in a thousand pages or lifetimes but for a glimpse of His glory, I would willingly spill every drop of ink. No minute spent in pursuit of the Great Pursuer is a moment wasted and I pray that the journey taken in these pages is one with Him at the end.

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## 1. Introduction

### I. Opening: A Tale of Three *Creative Siblings*<sup>1</sup>

Once there were three siblings: Ham, Shem, and Jane (ages in that order). When she was pregnant with Jane, the mother was tragically kidnapped – *naturally*, along with her unborn daughter – early in the pregnancy. The abductor was of the mad scientist sort<sup>2</sup> and though he returned the mother after Jane was born, he kept Jane.<sup>3</sup> Not only did the scientist modify Jane genetically *in utero* so that she did not have an artistic bone in her body, but he subsequently kept her secluded from the world and raised her in thorough ignorance of any artwork, banal or otherwise. All objects in the home were connected with a utilitarian purpose, ornamented in the blandest of colors and the most mundane furniture possible. When it did not detract from their use, objects were disproportionate and unsightly. It is not as though she would have seen much anyway. Jane was almost completely blind.

Meanwhile, Ham and Shem grew up under the care and tutelage of their parents, who introduced them to the great artists of history. Ham was indifferent to his studies, forgot quickly what he had learned and focused his interests on other things. Unexpectedly, he showed remarkable skill as a young painter but insisted that he was simply painting pictures he had had in mind ever since he could remember. He did not know what to make of it, nor did anyone else. Based on all appearances and his own testimony, Ham never painted from experience, just from the prenatal (or barely postnatal) gallery consisting of canvasses lining the walls of his thought.

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<sup>1</sup> As this thesis deals in imagination, I thought it appropriate to begin with a story.

<sup>2</sup> This part of the fable was partly inspired by Leftow's illustration for God developing preferences. Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 466-468, 474. To be sure, it would not be a *philosophical* anecdote without a mad scientist as a character.

<sup>3</sup> ...for the "greater good of scientific knowledge and the betterment of mankind," as he assured himself in his notes.

Shem had the most *normal* childhood of the three. He absorbed the art lessons, studied Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Degas and Vermeer relentlessly, and practiced their methods. After some time, he was able, through careful thought and reflection, to manipulate and transform the things he encountered into beautiful images of landscapes and portraits, among others – even on par with his brother’s art.

At last, when her captor had finished with her, Jane was sent back to her family at adulthood. She was not very interesting, to say the least, and a strange dinner guest. In their love and pity, her parents encouraged her to spend time with her brothers and join them in running their newly opened business, a studio in the city where they were to display their work. The brothers unsurprisingly disliked their long lost sister intensely. That, taken together with a boyish humor that took precedence over good business sense, caused them to capitalize on her poor education, eyesight and upbringing to call their workspace, “The Ham-Shem-Witch Studio,” to her oblivious chagrin and their constant amusement. But to their bewilderment, when Jane was left alone one day at work (which amounted to her answering phones), the idea for a full, large-scale painting suddenly occurred to her. Out of sheer impulse, she grabbed a brush and within the hour had finished a breathtaking picture – bringing her face close to the canvass to color the masterful details she had never seen before that time or since. Inexplicably to her and everyone else, it simply popped into her head.<sup>4</sup> Whatever the cause, Jane never had the compulsion again and that was her sole contribution to the family business.

Now, here is a question: which of the siblings could rightly be called *creative* and be admired the most for the pieces in the studio?

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<sup>4</sup> We do not want to say it was uncaused so we can speculate, as her brothers did, that it was some supernatural being’s idea of a joke, at best, or she had, after all, lived up to the namesake they had bestowed on her in the christening of their workplace, at worst. Ham, an unwavering Leibnizian, even flirted with abandoning the principle of sufficient reason and embracing the reality of honest-to-goodness magic in the world.

## II. Statement of the Problem

Traditionally, God has been defined as a maximally perfect being. Among other things, this definition entails two attributes: aseity and sovereignty. The first refers to the fact that He does not depend on anything or anyone for His own existence or nature. He is uncreated, completely self-sufficient, and as such, requires nothing outside of Himself. The second quality, sovereignty, implies not only that God is omnipotent but also expresses the relation of God to everything that is not God. All things depend on Him in some way for their existence *and*, controversially, their nature. This Christian tradition is captured well in Colossians 1:15-16: “For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible... all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” (NASB)

Indeed, if God is a being worthy of worship, these characteristics are crucial to our conception of Him. Challenging these notions in any way appears tantamount to denying the supremacy of God in reality. That being said, the intuition does seem to be threatened by the existence of abstract objects. These are the members of the Platonic realm, which include things such as numbers, states of affairs, propositions, properties, possible worlds, etc. If these objects exist, they are believed to be just as necessary as God. They have always existed, could not have failed to exist and hence, they will always exist – all despite divine creative decrees. Abstracta additionally seem to exist *a se* as well, independently of all else and so, their existence yields an inconsistent set for theists.<sup>5</sup>

The question of the ontology of abstract objects in relation to God has been given much attention and a host of plausible and satisfactory answers to it have been provided. God’s aseity

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<sup>5</sup> Paul M. Gould, “Introduction to the Problem of God and Abstract Objects,” in *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul M. Gould (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 2.

is secure if these are ideas in His mind or even if that is simply a way of speaking and there are no such things but something stands behind talk of them to make statements concerning them true or false.<sup>6</sup> What appears to remain is the sovereignty question. What makes the truth-values of the propositions on possibilities what they are? Alvin Plantinga's seminal work, *Does God Have a Nature?*, brought aseity/sovereignty issues to the forefront and most have focused on dissolving the threat of the *existence* of abstract objects. Embedded within the lecture is a second question, largely unanswered and even ignored in the contemporary literature (perhaps, as it is estimated as unanswerable). It surfaces when Plantinga discusses the irrelevance of nominalism in alleviating any tension between abstract objects and the aseity/sovereignty intuition.

The nominalist, presumably, will agree that there are truths-or-falsehoods – things that are either true or false. He won't suppose, of course, that truths-or-falsehoods are necessarily existing abstract objects... Now suppose we say that a truth-or-falsehood is within God's control if it is up to God whether or not it is true... [then] the trouble with abstract objects, realistically construed, is that if there are such things, then there will be many truths not within God's control... What was originally objectionable about realism was the fact that if it is true, then there are many abstract objects independent of God on some of which he depends. What is objectionable about *that*, as we have seen, is that if there are such objects, there will be the many truths not in God's control. But the latter will be the case even if nominalism is true and realism false... The real issue is *modal* rather than ontological; it is a question not so much of what there is as of what God can do, what is within his control.<sup>7</sup>

As Plantinga explicitly states, the challenge posed by the existence of abstract objects is not just one of ontological status, but their propositional content (i.e., their truth-value).

Let us grant that certain truths, like those about God and His nature, as well as certain mathematical and logical truths, have their content by virtue of the fact that they are either about God or quantify over Him. What settles the content of necessary things that do not seem to be

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<sup>6</sup> Often the disagreements among the factions on these issues appear to be minor and sometimes, merely semantic. E.g., see Paul Gould's comments on Greg Welty's *theistic conceptual realism* as opposed to his own version of *theistic activism*. Paul Gould, "A Defense of Platonic Theism," Ph.D. diss. (Purdue University, 2010), 101 n. 113.

<sup>7</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature? The Aquinas Lecture, 1980* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 85, 89, 91-92.

about God at all? Brian Leftow has called such truths, “*secular truths*,” and demands that we give a resolution, involving God, that adequately accounts for their modal status.<sup>8</sup> Many philosophers accept that if something is possible, then it is necessarily possible. Why, then, must *what* a zebra is and *that* it is possible necessarily be the way it is?

Many theists throughout history have sought to maintain that the possible is necessarily so but this is somehow reliant on God. It is just the case that who and what God is entails these possibilities or, at any rate, means He has to recognize the ones He does. Leftow refers to these as “deity theories.”<sup>9</sup> The trouble starts anew if these theories cannot tenably relate just how God’s existence, nature or activity make these truths what they are. Therefore, the question of God’s control over secular truths raises important issues that have been around since the medieval theologians and require deeper probing today.

### **III. Statement of the Purpose**

The thesis will primarily be a survey and analysis of prominent positions on the relation between God and His ideas for created things. It will briefly cover a few significant thinkers who have thought about the problem in the past. The bulk of the thesis will interact with the recent work of Brian Leftow on the subject: (1) his critiques of traditional positions (what he calls “deity theories”), (2) the development of his position, and (3) critiques of his position. Though the sufficiency of Leftow’s theory will be challenged, it will be acknowledged that he has made strong, negative points in his appraisal of former attitudes on the matter and he has at the same

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<sup>8</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 23-25, 83, 248-252. I do not exactly agree to Leftow’s distinctions between ‘secular’ and ‘non-secular’ truths but this will be explained in greater detail when I outline my own position in chapter four. See pg. 86, n. 206.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-174.

time opened up new ways of thinking about it. Thus, a new proposal will be offered that attempts to synthesize some of the major aspects of the former views with some of Leftow's. The result will focus on God's imagination as the mechanism that necessarily produces secular modality.

Regardless of the view adopted as to how God relates to these abstracta, either causally or ontologically, there has been little consideration given to *how* God receives His ideas for creation. Moreover, the concept that any abstracta are linked to God logically has been widely abandoned due to what are considered insurmountable problems.<sup>10</sup> Giving a coherent way to see abstract objects as dependent upon God's causal activity or ontological primacy may be sufficient for dismissing the initial tension of our original set, but more questions can always be pressed against the theistic activist (i.e., abstracta are causally dependent on God) or theistic conceptual realist (i.e., abstracta are ontologically dependent on God). Why those thoughts and not a different set? Does God then have no control over what He thinks so that He is drastically limited in His freedom? In presenting the argument that will follow in this thesis, the ambition is to excavate avenues for advancement, particularly and explicitly in the metaphysical foundations of secular modality but generally and implicitly for other abstracta as well.

#### **IV. Statement of Importance of the Problem**

The relation of God to other necessary objects is not a new question nor is it one limited to academic theology and philosophy. Their reality seems to make the traditional notion of God as existing independently of all else and in control of all that is not God incoherent. This is the case since (1) what He can do in creation is a brute fact, outside of His control, and (2) there are an infinite amount of objects not subject to Him either for their existence or content. There are

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Gould, "A Defense of Platonic Theism," 77-83.

many philosophers who hold to Platonism and a reconciliation of Platonic entities to God would make for a more solid and attractive appeal to them in contemplating theism. Therefore, more inquiry into the relation between God and abstract objects – such as the objects of secular modal truths – is vital to understanding the foundations of metaphysics (and hence, reality) and the incorporation of theology into our metaphysical accounts.

### **V. Statement of Position on the Problem**

This is, in many ways, a work of ironies. It was the little work by Plantinga (*Does God Have a Nature?*) that began to disabuse me of the Thomism that I would not soon after largely abandon, and here I am proposing a partially Thomistic response to the problem. It was also this work that made me realize that there was a second issue in the debate that needed a resolution. Brian Leftow puts the conversation on the right track but he does so by abandoning key tenets that the tradition and contemporary philosophers are eager to preserve. The final position will be one that incorporates the imagination of God into drawing creature concepts out of His nature but not in a deductive way. Instead, He does so because He is able to think of things other than Himself and that means He will think of everything He could that differs from Him with qualifications.

### **VI. Limitations**

Though this thesis will involve many issues surrounding the doctrines of divine aseity and sovereignty as well as abstract objects, it will not cover everything in these areas. Firstly, there will be no room to answer the preliminary epistemological question: can we even talk

about this and assess various solutions? I will be taking it for granted that we can. Secondly, the thesis will only focus on secular modality for the most part – namely, the concepts of creatures that are thought not to be about God. Others, such as mathematical and logical truths, may be mentioned but a full analysis of each would lie outside the scope of this thesis. Thirdly, even for the abstract objects that will be studied, very little attention will be given to arguing for their existence. The thesis will rather take their existence as an assumption.

Fourthly, it will be claimed that these abstract objects exist as divine ideas but no space will be dedicated to arguing that they are caused or uncaused by God in some way (i.e., theistic activism or *modified* theistic activism vs. theistic conceptual realism vs. fictionalism, etc.). It should not be presumed that my account favors one or another. Fifthly, the modal logic adopted in the thesis will be **S5**. **S5** contains, at least, the following axioms:  $\Box(p \supset q) \supset (\Box p \supset \Box q)$ ;  $\Box p \supset p$ ;  $\Diamond p \supset \Box \Diamond p$ .<sup>11</sup> These roughly amount to the intuition that all possible worlds are accessible to one another. If something is possible in a relation governed by **S5**, it would have been possible no matter what world had been actual. If it is necessary, it obtains in all possible worlds and if impossible, in no possible worlds. Sixthly, the most startling omission in the discussion of deity theories listed in chapter one is Descartes's. His view, though influential in history and reminiscent of Leftow's, was not added due to space and the fact that I am only interested here in views that are not so voluntaristic (at least where it counts).

Seventhly, Brian Leftow's own book, *God and Necessity*, cannot be completely covered in detail in this thesis. His work is impressively massive in its scope, depth and page length. Some of the issues in the book are irrelevant to the thesis but there are many things that Leftow addresses that are interesting and may have implications for the subject but that cannot be

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<sup>11</sup> Alexander Pruss, *Actuality, Possibility and Worlds* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 13-17.

assessed here (e.g., Leftow continually shows how a certain position or point would work on other theological/philosophical assumptions he does not share). Some of these are alluded to in the footnotes but my main purpose here caused me to do my best in mining the pages of *God and Necessity* for what was central to Leftow's theory. Lastly, even though the divine attributes of aseity and sovereignty, among others, are covered and given some biblical support in the opening, a complete treatment in biblical and systematic theology is not possible given the purpose of this paper and so, philosophical theology will take precedence.

## **VII. Method**

### **A. Research Methods**

The method utilized in this thesis will be library research in which insights from philosophical and theological thinkers in this area will be evaluated and organized for the purpose of elucidating the subject matter and answering the dilemma in question. The insights gained from this research will be structured into an argument and thus, the research is descriptive in part. Nevertheless, some novel concepts will be introduced throughout the analysis of the data and construction of the argument.

### **B. Tests or Questionnaires**

There will be no tests or questionnaires used in this thesis.

### **C. Data Analysis**

The data for this thesis will be gathered by researching various books, peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, dissertations, online articles, and commentaries. This data will be organized into three basic divisions: (1) the problem, (2) a proposed solution to the problem, and

(3) an attempted synthesis of the data which displays a coherent and intelligible understanding of the issues surrounding the problem and proposed solution.

## VIII. Chapter Divisions and Summaries

### A. Chapter Divisions

Chapter one will serve as an introductory chapter. Here, the problem will be addressed and the purpose of the thesis will be clarified. Chapter two gives (1) a brief survey of the major positions, historically, as to how the content of secular modality relates to God and His activity and (2) presents Brian Leftow's critiques of the prevailing theories. Chapter three, almost in full, will detail the major areas of Brian Leftow's non-deity theory. God imaginatively gets a set of natures to create and His moral and aesthetic preferences sort these into worlds from which He can select one for creation. The chapter ends with an analysis of Leftow's claim that *what it is in God to do* is non-modal. Chapter four concludes the thesis with steps towards a deity theory that take Leftow's criticisms seriously. In a basic account there, God's imagination is posited as the instrument but it is argued that His imaginative reasoning includes **all** possible creatures and so, could not have gone another way. A couple of objections will be anticipated in the end.

### B. Summary of Each Chapter

#### Summary of Chapter 2

The first chapter looks at the development of deity theories from the Middle Platonists past the Middle Ages. The most space is dedicated to Aquinas, Leibniz, Spinoza and Kant. Leibniz and the Middle Platonists are more modest deity theories that merely ground secular

truths in the mind of God while the content of the ideas are brute facts. Spinoza and Kant represent very robust deity theories that either are, or border on, pantheism. Aquinas used the notion of similitude to escape those conclusions but still said that divine ideas were like God in some way. The second part of the chapter provides Brian Leftow's critiques of deity theories. These critiques can be sorted into a negative and positive agenda where the negative project seeks to demonstrate that there are no good arguments for deity theories and the positive project argues that there are good reasons to avoid a deity theory if at all possible.

### Summary of Chapter 3

Chapter three primarily sets out Leftow's non-deity theory and the arguments in its favor. God has it in Him to dream up creature candidates for creation and in a *Bang*, God receives the concepts that will eventually become the possible worlds we know. Some of the ideas He receives will be impossible because God's nature prohibits Him from permitting them. God has it in Him to do more but Leftow maintains that it is impossible for God to do more. His thinking of secular modality happens from eternity and God will not give Himself more powers (that is, more things to create). What He has is enough and there is no reason to continue. This ensures an **S5** modal logic because all of God's powers are possible relative to one another and are necessarily that way (that is, could not have been otherwise). Regardless, a few authors have challenged the assumption that God's having it in Him to do more is not a modal notion. The chapter ends with this discussion and it is decided that if God has it in Him to do more, then He *could*, and Leftow's position falters as a consequence.

## Summary of Chapter 4

Chapter four opens with a defense of a general deity theory to the effect that Leftow's theory is just as brute in the end, offers no real advantages over the older models and has more than a few sacrifices most philosophers are not willing to make. Despite that, Leftow's criticisms of deity theory are too effective to ignore. Here, an alternative deity theory will be drafted that uses God's imagination and His nature to arrive at creature concepts. This is given in a series of imaginative leaps that simply serve to highlight imaginative thought processes in God's mind. A possible objection might be that God could not come to definitive natures in this way so the issue of vagueness is discussed. The second and last objection deals with the problem of God thinking horrific thoughts and the privation theory of evil is employed to circumvent this potential hindrance.

## **IX. Research Sources**

The research required for this thesis will primarily take place through reading. The research may also require some translation and Biblical exegesis. Furthermore, research for the thesis will focus on theological, philosophical, historical, and biblical studies consisting of time spent at Liberty University, Clear Creek Baptist Bible College, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, conversations with scholars in the field, and internet research tools such as WorldCat.

## **X. Results**

This thesis will work towards three outcomes. Firstly, it will attempt to alleviate any tension that arises between God's sovereignty/aseity and the existence of necessarily existing objects that are seemingly not about Him. My procedure for relieving this will be by showing that such objects are the result of God's reasoning activity, do not exist apart from Him and are

not simply arbitrarily contained within His mind. The second aim of thesis is to not only safeguard intuitions about God's sovereignty and aseity but also intuitions about modality and its necessary shape. Accomplishing this assignment will be contingent on (1) solid critiques of Leftow's system, (2) an argument to the effect that though the older theories may have their weaknesses, they are better off than Leftow's, and (3) an alternative can be put in place that has the best of both theories. Finally, it is hoped that this thesis will, minimally, open up new areas for looking at divine personhood by its treatment of imagination in God. To satisfy this objective, the attempt has been to construct a lucid and consistent account of secular modality. Even if the attempt does not succeed, it will, all being well and considered, hint at other ways divine imagination can be studied.

## 2. Deity Theories & Their Problems

### I. A Brief History of Deity Theories

#### A. Middle Platonism and Early Christian Thought

The nature of possibles cannot be examined in the Christian tradition apart from the divine ideas in general. This follows as (1) natures, essences or forms took precedence in ontological discussions from Plato and Aristotle through the Middle Ages and (2) a mature modality had not yet been introduced, making possibilities subsumed under these headings. Some time – and not long – after the initial *discovery* and development of the doctrine of the forms by **the** philosophers (namely, Plato and Aristotle), it became apropos to place the ideas (or forms) within the divine mind.<sup>12</sup> Such a move heralded a new era in philosophy and made the doctrine ripe for later Christian philosophers to adopt and adapt for their purposes. In fact, this subsequent doctrine of the forms, known as “Middle Platonism,” so dominated the philosophical/theological landscape that by the time of Philo and Seneca, it would be uncontroversial to assume (and by Augustine, it was widely held) that *ideas qua rational principles in God just was* Plato’s own understanding of the forms. The period set the stage for an exchange that was marked by a drive to reconcile Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy and preserve God as the *simple* grounds of everything else in reality.<sup>13</sup>

No causal or logical link existed between God’s nature and *abstracta* during the reign of Middle Platonism, which would in some ways characterize thinkers from Philo to the church

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<sup>12</sup> Vivian Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas: Sources and Synthesis*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, ed. Oberman A. Heiko (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), 22. Some have suggested that it was actually Xenocrates, one of the students of Plato, who was the first to do so.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22, 39, 46, 61. Currently, the consensus is that though the forms being divine ideas may have been a natural extension of Platonic thought, it was not the view of Plato himself.

fathers. Any connection was merely, and purely, ontological. A modest position along these lines may best be described as a *bricks-without-straw-ontology* though we shall be satisfied here with the shorthand “brute fact ontology” (hereafter, **BFO**). A BFO may be ignorant of, indifferent to, or even skeptical of any truth makers for these abstract entities or at least whatever plays the role of these abstract objects.<sup>14</sup> A BFO not only prevailed in the early church, but a survey of recent conversations on the problem of God and abstract objects reveals a striking presumption of it at present.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of this, early philosophers and theologians were not content to leave the doctrine there. This was mostly motivated by the work of those such as Plotinus and Augustine who believed that *whatever* God possesses, He *is*. This strict divine simplicity was, in turn, urged by a desire to address the ancient problem of the one and the many.<sup>16</sup>

Unable to adhere to a full Plotinian account due to its pantheistic and anti-Trinitarian implications, Christian philosophers, beginning with the Latin Christian neo-Platonists like Marius Victorinus, would still come to embrace aspects of it in a Trinitarian model in which the Son was generated by the Father knowing Himself and the divine ideas were identical to, or

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<sup>14</sup> By this part, I am speaking of various anti-realists when it comes to the existence of abstracta who may consider talk of these objects as a way of speaking about concrete things that do their real ontological work.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., see Paul M. Gould, “Introduction to the Problem of God and Abstract Objects,” in *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul M. Gould (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 2. Gould sets up the problem itself as a matter of the existence of these objects. Their truth-makers are not even discussed in the book by any of the contributors. The reason for this presupposition can securely be said to be apologetic. It is much easier to defend the weaker claim that there is no serious cause for alarm when explicating the relationship between God and *the existence* of abstract objects than the stronger one that the content of modality can somehow be derived from something about God. Hence, Craig states (*pace* Leftow) that “[once] one has adopted divine psychologism, one need not offer any modal theory at all, for the ultimacy concerns have been satisfied. Ironically, then, the central project of the book is thus seen to be something of a red herring or addendum to the really important matter, which is defeating Platonism... To characterize anti-realist solutions as ‘no ontology’ solutions in so thin a sense is therefore highly misleading. They might perhaps better be classed as ‘safe ontology’ solutions...” William Lane Craig, “Book Review of *God and Necessity*,” *Faith and Philosophy* 30, No. 4 (October 2013): 469-470.

<sup>16</sup> Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 52, 55, 71. The problem of the one and the many is whether or not reality consists of one thing or multiple and if multiple, how multiplicity is a consequent of unity.

located within, this *Word*.<sup>17</sup> Again, God contemplating only Himself was undoubtedly a result of Aristotelian influence and the requirement of incorporating him into the dialogue on divine ideas was central to the unfolding of the dialogue itself.<sup>18</sup>

### B. *Similitude and Simplicity in Aquinas*

An implicit tension existed within the Christian tradition until Aquinas: how could there be a multiplicity of ideas *with* the simplicity of God?<sup>19</sup> In any case, the tradition was roughly united on some rational principles existing within God's mind that (1) were the range of what He could do, (2) are identical to, or at least contained within, God's Son when all are taken together so that perfect knowledge of God entails perfect knowledge of created things and (3) served Him in creating, as an artisan at work.<sup>20</sup> The craftsman analogy of (3), where God is compared to artists (or architects) who construct a project based on the image they have in mind, is the

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<sup>17</sup> The Spirit was the relational Love (though still a person) that passed between Father and Son. *Ibid.*, 68-69, 72-80, 92. Augustine and Anselm concur though Augustine is still viewed as a Middle Platonist (see below). See, e.g., Augustine, "On the Trinity," in *Augustine in His Own Words*, ed. William Harmless, S.J. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 312; Anselm, "Monologion," in *Anselm of Canterbury, Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, eds. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1998), 59-60.

<sup>18</sup> For Aristotle, it was only proper that God should think of Himself alone, seeing as He is beauty and nothing else is worthier of attention and meditation. Aristotle, "Metaphysics : Bk A, 9," in *The Works of Aristotle Translated into English*, ed. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), 2479-2480. Christians understood this in Trinitarian terms and sought to establish God's knowledge of all else by identifying the divine ideas with the Word of God.

<sup>19</sup> Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 90. As Boland suggests, Augustine is not entirely silent on the point nor does he fit neatly into the Middle Platonist camp, but Augustine's remarks are sparse. His input on the nature of the ideas would be left for others (most notably, Aquinas) to work through and solidify into a system for the doctrine. For Augustine, like Aquinas, the ideas are eternal, immutable, necessary, *divine* ideas and they are "nothing more than [God's] essence known according to a certain mode of deficiency..." Lawrence F. Jansen, "The Divine Ideas, in the Writings of St. Augustine," *The Modern Schoolman* 22, No. 3 (March 1945): 129-130. Central passages in Aquinas for his position are Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Hanover House, 1955-57), I.49-55 (especially 54); Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), I. 14-15; Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan, S.J. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), 2. 1-15; 3.1-8.

<sup>20</sup> Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 93. Identifying the Word with the divine ideas has serious problems not least of which is how finite ideas are to be equated with an infinite Person. Later theologians would question and amend this concept as far as possible to escape such dilemmas. Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Rand House, 1955), 118.

illustration of choice for the Middle Platonists and later medieval theologians. These mental models were known as “exemplars” that pre-exist in God and through which, somehow, God communicates a likeness of Himself to finite effects.<sup>21</sup>

Aquinas consciously forms his thought on the ideas with the problem of divine simplicity in the foreground. Characteristically, he also follows the tradition with a critical eye.

Exemplarism is integrated into his system but not on the basis of tradition alone. Aquinas sees it as necessary for God to have ideas in order to evade the consequence that God is ignorant of worldly states of affairs (Aristotle) and these ideas are also naturally posited when considering God’s intentionality in creation.<sup>22</sup> The divine ideas are the way by which God knows all creatures (epistemological), are the ontological/causal principles in whose likeness God can/does create, and serve an epistemological use for human beings who know God through them.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, things *participate* in the **likeness** of the divine essence (not the divine essence itself) in that God knows Himself as imitable and how each creature can imitate Him according to the relationships all creatures can bear to His essence. Depending on what relation a thing has to the divine essence, this essence is *the idea*<sup>24</sup> in that way for the thing that is available for creation. Finitude implies deficiency so no single creature can perfectly imitate God and

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<sup>21</sup> Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 93, 102-105.

<sup>22</sup> Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 50. Technically speaking, the term “exemplar” is reserved in the later Aquinas to designate those forms for actual creation while God’s “notions” apply to all His ideas, even those that are not instantiated. Exemplars belong solely to God’s *actual* practical knowledge as opposed to what is *virtually* practical in the rest of His ideas – the difference between the two being in the fact that actually practical knowledge involves God’s intention to give a preconceived form to matter. *Ibid.*, 8-13. The importance of distinguishing the two will be apparent in Thomas’s doctrine of participation and creation. God necessarily knows all that is possible in knowing His essence but creation is a free act. This avoids the danger/heresy of Plotinus where all of reality emanates from the One. Creation is wholly contingent. *Ibid.*, 158, 189.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Note the singular. It is not a composite but perfect representation of God in the Word.

therefore, a multitude of ideas is necessary for a more perfect imitation.<sup>25</sup> The entailment of likeness among causes and effects is founded upon the axiom that agents produce effects like themselves.<sup>26</sup> A formal hierarchy exists for ideas as they come closer to, or move further away from, God's essence, which Thomas terms the "participation" of the idea. Central to this, and exemplarism in general, is *similitudo* or *likeness*. Concrete particulars can be said to be *exactly like* (i.e., are perfect representations of) their corresponding ideas in God's mind since God creates perfectly, but on that basis Thomas cannot say that this is participation. The ideas themselves are not *exactly like* the divine essence but rather approximate to it and thus, participate to varying degrees based on their relationship to God.<sup>27</sup> God *discovers* these imitations within His nature for creatures can be perfect (e.g., exist, be good, have life, be beautiful, etc.) only insofar as they imitate what God is perfectly and simply.<sup>28</sup>

What can be made of Thomas's belief that the ideas are reducible to the divine essence and derivable from it? It is difficult to say with great confidence. As will be seen in Kant and Spinoza, (1) this could amount to the claim that God's essence can be negated, limited, arranged, etc. – logically, not *really*, of course, to use Aquinas's terminology – so as to arrive at various

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 83-93. The diversity of notions, or ideas, is *logical*, not *real*, given that there are no real distinctions in God's essence.

<sup>26</sup> John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on Our Knowledge of God and the Axiom that Every Agent Produces Something Like Itself," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 74 (2000): 82, 84. It is debatable what Aquinas took as justification for the principle. Suggestions range from the principle being self-evident to it being grounded inductively to deductive arguments offered in its favor. Ibid., 88-95.

<sup>27</sup> Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 223, 228-229. Aquinas's fourth way (from grades of perfection and a teleological principle to God's existence) may ultimately rest on exemplarism because of this but Doolan argues it fails to establish God as an existing maximal being but instead He exists "as exemplar cause." Ibid., 64-75.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 68, 220-223. This *discovery* on God's part is best not construed as God inventing, excogitating or "coming up with" with these ideas *ex nihilo*. Ibid., 58, 58 n. 29, 91, 91 n. 21; John Wippel, "The Reality of Non-existing Possibles According to Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Godfrey of Fontaines," *Review of Metaphysics* 34, No. 4 (1981): 738-739, 739 n.19. The present interpretation of Aquinas runs completely contrary to Leftow's claim that Aquinas' exemplarism is compatible with Leftow's own theistic modal theory, at least as Aquinas would have seen it. Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 173-174.

possibilities of finite creatures. In this way, the Son is a mirror image of the Father, and possible creatures are akin to smashing that mirror into pieces and shards in order to arrive at a fractured image of God. Indeed, Doolan may hint at this impression by comparing the logical sequence of God-idea-creation to an artist painting a self-portrait. Two other facts support this conclusion. Thomas believed that ideas are not really distinct from one another or from the divine essence for that matter, *and* finite things are gradations of being and perfection.<sup>29</sup>

It would be most advantageous in upholding divine simplicity and the Aristotelian intuition that God only comprehends Himself to understand Thomas in this manner. Ontologically, God is infinite and can encapsulate all particular things, but with non-being as an epistemological principle, He can know things other than Himself through His own essence. To the extent something has being (perfection), it is like God and all these things are reducible to the divine attributes, but there is also an “infinite abyss of nothingness” and the more remote a thing is from God’s being, the more non-being it has, less of “the act of *to be*.” The principle of nothingness is the reason why there can be a plurality of ideas stemming from the simplicity of God. Non-being is obviously *not anything* and as such does not exist as a separate thing from God and has no meaning, content or truth.<sup>30</sup> God can know beings as they fall short of Himself and the rich array of diversity can be mapped back to this “fundamental division and opposition

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<sup>29</sup> Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 148, 223.

<sup>30</sup> Vincent P. Branick, “The Unity of the Divine Ideas,” *The New Scholasticism* 42, Issue 2 (1968): 184-185, 195-201. Saying that there is in actuality no real distinction between God’s being, essence and His ideas does unsurprisingly, threaten to undermine the multiplicity of ideas or the unity of God if the question is pressed. Some have questioned whether a doctrine of divine ideas is not antithetical to Thomism and an inconsistent byproduct of Aquinas’s (almost) unwavering allegiance to Augustine. Nonetheless, Aquinas reiterates that the language is unavoidably anthropomorphic and although there is really, merely a single idea (specifically, the divine nature), logically, multiple ideas can come from it. John L. Farthing, “The Problem of Divine Exemplarity in St. Thomas,” *Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 49, No. 2 (April 1985): 217-222. Leftow thinks that Thomas’s language suggests a “conceptual diminishment on deity.” Brian Leftow, “Aquinas on God and Modal Truth,” *The Modern Schoolman* 82, No. 3 (2005): 190.

between being and non-being” with finite creatures being differentiated from one another by their composition.<sup>31</sup>

(2) The above is fully compatible with saying that perfections in creatures, taken as a whole, in the end do not exhaust who God is but do satisfactorily represent a portion of Him. All ideas are reducible to God’s idea of Himself but they themselves are His idea of Himself *as imitable*. (3) Aquinas often speaks of reducing ideas to God’s causal power too and this option cannot be passed over too lightly. Such an explanation would be substantially weaker than what is provided above and closer to a BFO in which God knows the range of His power but God’s moral and other properties are not vital to knowing the content of possibilities as truth-makers. He perfectly knows His essence and thereby knows His power perfectly and whatever states of affairs are in His power to bring about through it. Understood like this, divine simplicity entails God’s power is His goodness and creatures are *possibly exemplified* if they are like God (that is, are good in some way). But God’s ideas, in some way, go beyond what is possible to exemplify

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<sup>31</sup> John F. Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas on the Distinction and Derivation of the Many from the One: A Dialectic between Being and Nonbeing,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 38, No. 3 (March 1985): 567, 570-571. It is in fact the reality of this reasoning principle in God and the ontological reality that provides the basis for our *analogical* and some *nonmetaphorical* knowledge of God for Aquinas. By the first is meant our ability to speak metaphorically of God and the second includes the *via negativa* by which we can remove the limitations and imperfections of creatures in order to say what God is not. Despite our failure to grasp what God is in this life (i.e., have *quidditative* knowledge of God) we can know that He is and what He is not. Even positive names that somewhat signify God’s essence in this manner should be tacitly taken to be significations *as they are known to us: imperfectly*. John F. Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy, Vol.10 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 215-216, 227-230, 232-236, 239-241. Also, the above summary of Thomas’s principle of non-being should not suggest that creaturely essences are not good unless they exist just because God’s goodness=His essence=His existence. Maintaining that possibles are not good would amount to denying their existence for Aquinas, which would amount to denying the doctrine of divine ideas. They are real for Aquinas, but *relatively* real and good since actual existence is required for a thing to be completely, substantially good. They are good in a qualified sense. Now, possibles have to be related to an actual existence to be good, for sure, but it does not follow that only existing things are good. So, for example, a man’s future (and therefore, *possible*) health is a good even without men existing because it is grounded in the nature of God. James I. Conway, “The Reality of the Possibles,” *The New Scholasticism* 33, Issue 3 (July 1959): 336, 352-353. Additionally, possibles in themselves are good in that they participate in the divine essence by imitating it and it must be remembered that God’s ideas are identical to Him. It thus has no reality apart from God. John F. Wippel, “The Reality of Non-existing Possibles,” 733-734.

and include anything not involving a contradiction.<sup>32</sup> Even so, this second option does not seem to do justice to Aquinas's language or system and has difficulties with a strict divine simplicity.<sup>33</sup>

Aquinas circumvents pantheism by a crucial appeal to the concept of similitude and his contention that both the essence and existence of creatures are created. Neither preexists in God. As these existing things are composites of essence and existence, they cannot *participate* in God's essence like His ideas of them do since He does not enter into composition but He remains necessarily simple. God does not enter into the constitution of a thing to know it but knows it through His own essence as an idea.<sup>34</sup> The same may not be the case for those following him.

### C. Leibniz's Monadology

The most modest position from a major thinker on the relation between God and possibilities comes from Gottfried Leibniz. Samuel Newlands highlights two central questions

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<sup>32</sup> Leftow, "Aquinas on God and Modal Truth," 171-175, 187; Wippel, "The Reality of Non-existing Possibles," 730. This would separate possibility into what is often called "narrowly" and "broadly" logical possibility. The former has to do with logical consistency and the latter, metaphysical possibility. Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 1-2. The latter may be reducible to God's nature for Aquinas on this view but not the former for it is dependent on the compatibility or repugnance of conjoining terms. Most likely, it would be fitting to assign God's knowledge of these tautologies to God's speculative knowledge, if anything, as many of them are not *really* possible. Any knowledge God has of evil also belongs to this speculative knowledge for He does not know evil (as such) or otherwise there would be evil in God given that His ideas are Him. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 134-138. It could be the case that a Thomistic account along these lines could be much in accordance with what I will propose at the end of this thesis. (Thanks to Dr. David Beck for bringing this possibility to my attention). If that is the case, the account provided later will be an expansion of the Thomistic theory. I simply think that Aquinas either says too little to say for certain or leans towards more of a view akin to Kant's, given his statements and the requirements of the doctrine of divine simplicity.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 207, 228-235; Wippel, "The Reality of Non-existing Possibles," 737-738. Wippel concludes, "If Thomas's God necessarily knows himself from eternity, then he necessarily knows all the ways in which he can be imitated by creatures. The ultimate foundation for this is not the divine power or divine omnipotence, but the divine being itself."

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 734; Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 223, 228-229. On another note, some have questioned whether there is anything like 'possible being' for Aquinas at all, where, prior to instantiation, there is the possibility of *being Gene Wilder*, with all the same properties the actual Gene Wilder enjoys in this world, albeit without existence (however, that is parsed out). Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Being* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 191-192. All the same, Aquinas definitely held to God's possession of ideas for creation before creating. Not labeling it "possible being" simply highlights Aquinas's anti-realism in saying that to talk of possibilities, for Aquinas, is to talk about God's power and His ideas.

that drive the seventeenth-century rationalists though they were inherited from Augustine and others in the history of the divine ideas:

**Q1:** On what in God do modal truths and modal truth-makers depend?

**Q2:** What is the manner(s) of dependence by which modal truths and modal truth-makers depend on God?<sup>35</sup>

Robert Adams sees Leibniz as holding a stance akin to a BFO in answering these questions, embracing a general principle that facts and truths necessitate an existing ground(s) and that is all. This foundation furnishes an “*ontological standing*, a foothold in reality,” for possibility without explaining *why* a truth is true.<sup>36</sup>

It is certainly true that truths are dependent on essences and their arrangement in God’s mind for Leibniz and that the content of these essences is not determined by God.<sup>37</sup> It is also accurate to say that Leibniz’s deity theory does not emerge *as full-bodied* as Aquinas’s (or Kant’s or Spinoza’s). Yet, this does not capture Leibniz entirely. The essence of God and all else are inextricably tied together as there is nothing that can exist, from creatures to God’s own decisions, which does not somehow reflect His nature.<sup>38</sup> There is, after all, no other substances for him to first consider and then create. He explicitly endorses the medieval axiom that causes produce like effects.<sup>39</sup> More significantly, his ‘principle of sufficient reason’ is so strong that he

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<sup>35</sup> Samuel Newlands, “Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility,” *The Philosophical Review* 122, No. 2 (2013): 157-158.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Merrihew Adams, “God, Possibility, and Kant,” *Faith and Philosophy* 17, No. 4 (October 2000): 434.

<sup>37</sup> Newlands, “Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility,” 169-170.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Adams does believe that Leibniz held to the fact that creatures imitate God in the relation but Adams sees this as separate in Leibniz from the grounding question. Possibilities are grounded in God’s understanding ontologically. Imitation is a side note. Robert Merrihew Adams, “Necessary by Nature? Possibility and the Mind of God,” Book Review; available from <http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/necessary-by-nature-possibility-and-the-mind-of-god/>; (Book review originally posted 20 December 2013); accessed 13 August 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Gottfried W. Leibniz, “Discourse on Metaphysics,” in *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays: On the Ultimate Origination of Things, Preface to the New Essays and the Monadology*, ed. and trans. Daniel Garber and Roger Ariew (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), 30.

would not likely overlook it in the determination of an essence's content.<sup>40</sup> Leibniz clearly connects the *perfection principle* (i.e., that God always acts in a way that is best: simplest, most beautiful, etc.) to a perfect being theology. What else does God have to base His decision on but His own perfect nature? God as a perfectly rational being always has a *sufficient reason* for why He creates; God as a rational, perfect being, always acts in the *best* possible way for the *best* possible outcome.<sup>41</sup> What is more, the simplicity aspect of the perfection principle narrows God's choice to a single purpose and He consequently chooses *the best* to bring into existence.<sup>42</sup>

Lastly, the doctrine of the monads in its entirety is predicated on God's effects being like him. Implicit within Leibniz's account is a stouter, though subtler, deity theory.<sup>43</sup> All substances likewise reflect God both in themselves and their relations. Monads are simple substances and are possible for God because they echo the divine nature on which all things depend. They are simple and immaterial while simultaneously containing a rich, infinite diversity of predicates,

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<sup>40</sup> Leibniz, "The Monadology," in *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*, 72. Put succinctly, the principle is that "by virtue of which we consider that we can find no true or existent fact, no true assertion, without there being a sufficient reason why it is thus and not otherwise, although most of the time these reasons cannot be known to us."

<sup>41</sup> After proposing that God has all perfections together to the highest degree, Leibniz argues to "[whence] it follows that God, possessing supreme and infinite wisdom, acts in the most perfect manner, not only metaphysically, but also morally speaking, and that, with respect to ourselves, we can say that the more enlightened and informed we are about God's works, the more we will be disposed to find them excellent and in complete conformity with what we might have desired." Leibniz, "Discourse on Metaphysics," 1.

<sup>42</sup> Because God is a simple substance (monad) and a diversity of predicates reside in His mind, nature and intellect, then the perfect choice for a world will be "at the same time the simplest in [means] and the richest in phenomena." A monad reflects infinitely (1) *the* Monad behind all things, (2) the universe (some things are reflected more clearly than other substances since God does the requisite adjustments as all predicates dictate), and (3) the whole universe of innumerable monads that act as a single monad in a sense; the monads of a universe together reflect God in being united in a) the efficient causality of God, connected with one another in correspondence to b) the purpose of the God's kingdom. Leibniz, "The Monadology," 77. The intentions here co-jointly are the final cause of God for His creation. Without this final causality, no reason would obtain for the actual world's existence contrasted with others that are merely possible. *Ibid.*, 72; Leibniz, "Discourse on Metaphysics," 6, 24.

<sup>43</sup> The popular interpretation of Leibniz described in Adams and Newlands sees him in stark contrast to Descartes who made modal truths (and all other truths for that matter) dependent on the will of God. Newlands, "Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility," 158-161. For a selection of passages from Descartes on God's relation to abstracta, see, Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* 95-140. That notwithstanding, Leibniz's statements can be safely taken as implying a stronger deity theory while still rejecting a Cartesian account.

and all have the potential to be rational.<sup>44</sup> A single monad is distinguished from another by its inner constitution being completely different from the other(s). As an individual notion (or *haecceity*), it holds all that is possibly predicated of it. If this were not the case, other substances would be required to clarify the monad in question, in so doing negating its identity as a substance (that is, its distinctiveness is compromised).<sup>45</sup> The monad is essentially *windowless* on this rationale but, again, as with God's monad, each monad imitates the entire possible world it is in with the end that if the monad could possibly be unfolded, then the full universe would be embodied in it.<sup>46</sup> Thus, God's thoughts/decisions do significantly reflect Him for Leibniz. Much of God's, and each individual monad's, nature is accepted in a BFO for Leibniz but all things have to replicate the divine nature at least in their substance, simplicity, diversity, and so on.

#### D. Spinoza's Pantheism

A contemporary of Leibniz, Benedict (or Baruch) Spinoza, was inclined to present the strongest deity theory that could be offered. Leibniz, himself, flirted with Spinozism early in his career and the figure of Spinoza will loom large in deity theories from Leibniz to Kant and

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<sup>44</sup> Leibniz, "The Monadology," 74, 78; Nicholas Rescher, "Leibniz on Possible Worlds," *Studia Leibnitiana* 28, No. 2 (1996): 134-135. If an unspecified number of substances are compossible – there is logical consistency among the relational properties of the monads – then they comprise a possible set, or a world capable of being actualized by God. Only one possible world is actualizable for if two could be instantiated together, they would have to be compossible and so, one possible world, not two. Rescher, "Leibniz on Possible Worlds," 134-137.

<sup>45</sup> Leibniz, "Discourse on Metaphysics," in *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*, 8-9.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 35; Leibniz, "The Monadology," in *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*, 77. God adjusts every monad analogously to setting up multiple mirrors in a microscope (or reflecting telescope) in which light is *bounced* off each mirror and finally into the eye of the observer. A pre-established harmony, ordered by God, has been arranged for the mirroring to occur in accordance with the internal properties of all monads involved in a world. *Ibid.*, 75. God solely performs this operation on me but for "the connection and communication among substances," God, as mediator, pre-establishes their relationship for the purpose of giving reality to our perceptions even though one could in theory exist alone with God and have the same experiences. Nevertheless, this would violate the perfection principle of having the *greatest amount* of phenomena through simple means. Leibniz, "Discourse on Metaphysics," in *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*, 35, 35 n. 47. The significance is that an entire possible world reflects God as well in that it acts as a single monad: a diverse set of predicates with a single, simple purpose.

beyond.<sup>47</sup> Substance in Spinoza is “that which is in itself and is conceived through itself.” In other words, one can conceive of the thing *a se* (i.e., without reference to something else to explain it, causally or otherwise).<sup>48</sup>

What inevitably follows is that one substance cannot produce another substance or knowledge of the latter would depend on the former, contradicting the concept of substance as defined. A dilemma naturally arises from the heretofore mentioned arguments: either two or more distinct substances exist and have nothing in common whatsoever to distinguish them (and thus, have no causal relation) or only one substance can and does exist. Spinoza concedes the second half of the disjunction for if more than one substance existed, there must necessarily be a cause (reason) why that certain number existed and no more or less. But the substances cannot be causally connected – require one another for explanation – or else they cease to be distinct. And so, every effect follows necessarily from its cause since knowledge of the cause is required for knowledge of the effect.<sup>49</sup> God is traditionally understood as a being whose essence involves existence and is absolutely infinite. Spinoza concurs and employs this definition as undeniable. God is the one substance who has infinite attributes and is mediated through a series of eternal and finite modes.<sup>50</sup> Spinoza takes seriously the claim that everything follows necessarily from the divine nature and that whatever God has, He is. In actuality, all things are part of the divine essence and God Himself. Creatures cannot have their own substance for precisely this logic.

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<sup>47</sup> Newlands, “Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility,” 156-157. Leibniz once wrote that Spinoza would actually be right, “if not for the monads.”

<sup>48</sup> Benedict Spinoza, “Ethics: Part I, Axioms,” in *Spinoza: Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 217; Martin Lin, “Substance, Attribute, and Mode in Spinoza,” *Philosophy Compass* 1-2 (2006): 145.

<sup>49</sup> To say they differ according to affection, or mode, is not to introduce distinction since modes are merely the conception of a substance through something else. Spinoza, “Ethics: Part I, Axioms,” in *Spinoza*, 218-221.

<sup>50</sup> Daniel Whiting, “Spinoza, the No Shared Attribute Thesis, and the Principle of Sufficient Reason,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 19, No. 3 (2011): 543-546.

God cannot be finite without being limited by another substance with the same nature, as the second definition states, but it would be absurd to suppose that two substances can have the same nature, as has been proven.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, because God's essence involves His existence, then whatever comes within the purview of the infinite intellect follows necessarily from the divine nature. All that is possible is actual, and nothing is contingent.<sup>52</sup> To state that God creates less than He is able is a futile attempt to limit the infinite and would deny God's omnipotence.<sup>53</sup> For Spinoza, this would amount to atheism because God's power is His essence and His essence is to exist.<sup>54</sup> God has an infinite number of eternal, necessary attributes that are expressed in an infinite number of modes in an endless causal chain each part of which is necessary and eternal. The essence of the modes does not involve existence but rather they can only be understood in terms of the one substance.<sup>55</sup>

#### *E. Kant's Natural Theology*

Immanuel Kant, like Leibniz before him, also found Spinozism a tempting venture. A longing to reconcile the natural sciences with metaphysics marked Kant's early period (1740s-1770). This was no less true in his theology, an enterprise that culminated in the publishing of his

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<sup>51</sup> Spinoza, "Ethics: Part I, Axioms," in *Spinoza*, 219. This all is predicated on the assumption that God exists, which Spinoza goes on to prove using the ontological argument and the fact that no substance can be conceived without God. *Ibid.*, 222, 224.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 227, 234.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 228-229.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 238. This is why it will be seen that whatever can be conceived of as within God's power must necessarily exist since it follows from His nature.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 230-232. There are other interpretations of Spinoza but I will spare the reader any of these as the purpose of this is to show a selection of deity theories and this traditional interpretation works for that purpose. Lin, "Substance, Attribute, and Mode in Spinoza," 149-150; Samuel Newlands, "More Recent Idealist Readings of Spinoza," *Philosophy Compass* 6, No. 2 (2011): 109-119; Henk Keizer, "Spinoza's Definition of Attribute: An Interpretation," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20, No. 3 (2012): 479-498; Moltke Gram, "Spinoza, Substance and Predication," *Theoria* 34 (1968): 222-244.

*Der Enzig Mögliche Beweisgrund*, its full title often translated as “The One Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God.” The work consisted of the rejection of earlier proofs for God’s existence along with the erection of two new arguments in their place: an *a priori* ontological argument (from the notion of possibility) and an *a posteriori* physico-theological argument (from design).<sup>56</sup> His ontological argument would be the first, and maybe last, formal attempt to show that the natures of creatures follow from God’s nature.

It begins by distinguishing between formal and real possibility. *Formal* possibility involves the logical relations between subject and predicate (i.e., something does not involve a contradiction) while *real* possibility makes reference to the thing in itself (i.e., something can be thought **and** actually exists).<sup>57</sup> Now a possibility can be negated in accordance with these two notions: either it involves a contradiction or all existence is abolished. For the latter, no “matter or dictum” exists for something to be posited.<sup>58</sup> This is because possibility presupposes an existing object where it is contained as a determination (or property) of the thing or a consequence of a determination.<sup>59</sup> If a thing’s non-being would cancel all existence – and so, with it, “the material element for all thought data for it” – then that thing enjoys *absolute real* necessity.<sup>60</sup> In this, Kant appears to endorse a modal principle widely heralded by contemporary philosophers in **S5** modal logic: namely, whatever is possible is necessarily possible. It cannot be

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<sup>56</sup> Martin Schönfeld, *The Philosophy of the Young Kant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 17, 183-184, 191-192. The existence of two proofs bears witness to the twofold nature of Kant’s pre-critical project: harmonizing nature and metaphysics. The proofs are not independent of one another, however. This makes sense of Kant’s title even in light of two arguments in the book. The physico-theological argument presupposes the ontological argument for Kant, as he sought to establish was the relationship for earlier theistic arguments. The purposive organization of all things is actual because of their possibility as unified in God. Their possibility, as will be shown, conforms to God and the features He has. *Ibid.*, 194-197.

<sup>57</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The One Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, trans. and intro. Gordon Treash (Reprint; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 43-45.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-77.

that the ground(s) of modality is contingent. A contingent being as the ground of its possibility makes the possibility contingent.<sup>61</sup>

From here, Kant seeks to establish God's existence with these foundations in place. Even with the advent of Kant's critical period, he would not shrink from this concept of God though the hope for a *demonstration* of His existence is lost.<sup>62</sup> The early argument becomes the transcendental Idea of philosophical theology in which it has a regulative function. As the *ens perfectissimum*, He unites all perfections and grounds the possibility of both subject and object. God remains the Unconditioned being who grounds all possibility through His exemplification of the maximum of all positive predicates in His determinations and consequences.<sup>63</sup> It is not as though Kant stands apart from the tradition in this regard but can easily be viewed as a part of it. The central thesis of his theology is that God is somehow the sum of all possible predicates, the complete set of all properties that could be attributed to any possible thing. By selecting from (or

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<sup>61</sup> Nicholas F. Stang, "Kant's Possibility Proof," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 27, No. 3 (July, 2010): 289; Robert Merrihew Adams, "God, Possibility, and Kant," *Faith and Philosophy* 17, No. 4 (Oct., 2000): 433.

<sup>62</sup> He would later say that "we have no concept of real possibility except through existence, and in the case of every possibility which we think *realiter* we always presuppose some existence; if not the actuality of the thing itself, then at least an actuality in general which contains the data for everything possible... even this proof is not apodictically certain; for it cannot establish the objective necessity of an original being, but establishes only the subjective necessity of assuming such a being." Immanuel Kant, "Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion," in *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Ak 28:1034, 1036.

<sup>63</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Marcus Weigelt based on the translation by Max Müller (New York: Penguin Group, 2007), 310-313, 532-548. Moving beyond the *ens perfectissimum* to the *ens realissimum* (as Kant's pre-critical argument sought to do) would be a category mistake of the highest degree as it is assigning a category beyond possible experience (i.e., the phenomena) to the noumena. Kant calls this a "paralogism" which is a specious syllogism. Ian Logan argues that this transition from Kant's pre-critical to critical period with the view of God creates a dilemma for the critical Kant. Since the argument continues to work in order to posit God as a regulative, transcendental Idea, then it breaks down the epistemic barrier between the phenomena and the noumena. The way for the pre-critical metaphysics is left open. However, if it does not work, then there can be no subjective necessity for the Idea. Ian Logan, "Whatever Happened to Kant's Ontological Argument?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74, No. 2 (March 2007): 346-347. Mark Fisher and Eric Watkins also see no justification for Kant to dismiss the argument in his later period other than it simply not fitting in the epistemology of the Critique. Mark Fisher and Eric Watkins, "Kant on the Material Ground of Possibility: From the 'The Only Possible Argument' to the 'Critique of Pure Reason,'" *The Review of Metaphysics* 52, No. 2 (December 1998): 369-371.

limiting) God's properties in a certain way, any property could, in principle, be derived.<sup>64</sup>

#### F. *Some Initial Concerns for Kant and the Tradition He Represents*

To begin, a number of objections have been raised against the Kantian project, which can be seen as an extension of, and formal argument for, the medieval project to derive all of reality from the nature of God. Some of these issues, to name a few, include challenges as to: (1) why one ground must exist and not several, each grounding a separate section of ontological space;<sup>65</sup> (2) why it should be admitted that absolute necessity is essential for being a ground of all possibility;<sup>66</sup> (3) why one should suppose that possibility presupposes existing things; (4) why possibilities necessitate exemplification in God when interrelations and modifications do not require this.<sup>67</sup>

Many of these objections neglect Kant's reliance on a strong version of the *principle of sufficient reason* (PSR).<sup>68</sup> In this way, Kant is no different than the other moderns from Spinoza to himself who implicitly or explicitly adhered to an exacting form of the principle.<sup>69</sup> With this

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<sup>64</sup> Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 18-19, 63.

<sup>65</sup> Stang, "Kant's Possibility Proof," 289; Adams, "God, Possibility, and Kant," 434. The idea of Kant dealing with what is called "ontological space" is from Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, 33-34.

<sup>66</sup> Stang, "Kant's Possibility Proof," 291-293. Stang means by this objection something like the following: if a demiurge exists such that it necessarily emanates from God's nature then if it were not to exist, then God would not exist and all possibility would be canceled. The demiurge is thus absolutely necessary since its non-existence would annul all possibility but it is not a ground of possibility. The ground of all possibility must be necessary and absolutely necessary but there is no reason to believe this entailment runs the other way. As Stang reports, "Quite generally, counterfactual relations do not bear causal ones." Again, Kant cannot move from a plurality of grounds for possibility to the ground of all possibility without the stronger premise.

<sup>67</sup> Adams, "God, Possibility, and Kant," 432, 435. Adams thinks it would be arbitrary to say one requires exemplification but not the other things.

<sup>68</sup> Omri Boehm, "Kant's Regulative Spinozism," *Kant-Studien* 103, No. 3 (2012): 293.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Della Rocca, "A Rationalist Manifesto: Spinoza and the Principle of Sufficient Reason," *Philosophical Topics* 31, Nos. 1 & 2 (Spring & Fall 2003): 75-76. It may seem that Kant feels his argument does not take advantage of the PSR as he explicitly marks using the principle as a disadvantage to the Leibnizian cosmological argument because the principle "is always under attack." But he does say he is willing to endorse the

version of the principle in place, however, Spinozism will follow, for all existing things (matter and space included) become consequences of the nature of God.<sup>70</sup> At the least, there will be a stringent determinism and possibly, process theology.<sup>71</sup> This illuminates the curious ties, flirtations and leanings of the tradition with Plotinus and Spinoza. For one, Kant’s ontological argument establishes its edifice on the claim that whatever is possible is actual. Put in this way, Spinozism seems to be a natural consequence logically. This is even more evident when one places the axiom in its symbolic form and applies basic axiomatic rules of modal logic to it.

$$1. \diamond p \supset p^{72}$$

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principle. Kant, *The One Possible Basis*, 227-229. Also, it is evident all throughout the argument and in other places (e.g., an argument for this being the best of all possible worlds – similar to Leibniz). *Ibid.*, 95-97.

<sup>70</sup> Kant confessed that he thought that Spinozism was “the true consequence of dogmatic metaphysics.” Quoted in Boehm, “Kant’s Regulative Spinozism,” 292. Even Leibniz’s deity theory is somewhat affected in that spatial relations are reduced to intellectual relations and there is an idealist metaphysics. Kant is not happy with this move at his pre-critical stage. Spatial extension, for him, is a “consequence through a ground.” Others have noticed the connection between Kant and Spinoza. Newlands, “Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility,” 174-178; Kimberly Brewer and Eric Watkins, “A Difficulty Still Awaits: Kant, Spinoza, and the Threat of Theological Determinism,” *Kant-Studien* 103, No. 2 (2012): 163-187; Andrew Chignell, “Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 19, No. 2 (2009): 157-192; Andrew Chignell, “Kant, Real Possibility, and the Threat of Spinoza,” *Mind* 121, No. 483 (2012): 635-675. Peter Yong and Uygur Abaci have responded to Chignell but the dialogue between all three participants very much ignored the presence of the PSR and Kant’s Spinozism was less stable for that reason. This is the case despite that Chignell was one of the first to see a direct link from the early Kant to Spinoza. Peter Yong, “God, Totality and Possibility in Kant’s *Only Possible Argument*,” *Kantian Review* 19, No. 1 (2014): 27-51; Uygur Abaci, “Kant’s Only Possible Argument and Chignell’s Real Harmony,” *Kantian Review* 19, No. 1 (2014): 1-25; Andrew Chignell, “Kant and the ‘Monstrous’ Ground of Possibility: A Reply to Abaci and Yong,” *Kantian Review* 19, No. 1 (2014): 53-69.

<sup>71</sup> Process theology, a form of *panentheism*, holds that there are two aspects of God: an unchanging essence and a concrete part that involves change. The world is an extension of God, though the two are distinct in some way. John Culp, “Panentheism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2015 Edition, Edward N. Zalta (ed.); available from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/vagueness/>; accessed 16 January 2016.

<sup>72</sup> This can be translated as “*p* is possible only if *p* is actual.” It may be tempting to say that something is amiss in assuming that Kant’s argument requires this axiom for would not David Lewis’s modal ontology be in the same position? And it is certainly not the case that his extreme modal realism collapses the semantics into PC. This would be a mistaken objection. Lewis does not hold that all possible worlds are *actual* in the sense that ‘actual’ is a world-indexed term, connected to everything that is spatiotemporally connected to us and not every world is. From the standpoint of our world, this world is actual and others are possible. The same goes for other worlds. The semantics works from the standpoint of each individual world – that is, it does not stand outside these worlds. David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 97-101. Unfortunately, this move cannot be made for Kant given that God and possibilities exist in the same world and possibilities must have material ground(s) in the actual world in order to be possible.

Now, (1) is extremely controversial, so controversial that I would not feel comfortable placing any significant amount of money, much more my bottom dollar, on an argument utilizing it as a key premise. But assuming it for the sake of argument, we can continue. Consider

$$2. p \supset \diamond p$$

which is a standard theorem of the reflexive modal system, **T**, and any modal system that contains **T** (in particular, **S5**).<sup>73</sup> (1) and (2) together demand the bi-conditional

$$3. p \equiv \diamond p^{74}$$

Substituting  $\sim p$  for  $p$  in (1) and *via* transposition, we get

$$4. p \supset \Box p$$

(4) and the *axiom of necessity* from **T**,  $\Box p \supset p$ ,<sup>75</sup> yield

$$5. p \equiv \Box p$$

Really, adding the Kantian axiom to **D** will contribute the same outcome.<sup>76</sup> What this means is that adding  $\diamond p \supset p$  to any system stronger than **K** (i.e., any system valid on a frame where the relation between worlds is at least serial) will inevitably collapse that system into the *propositional calculus* (**PC**). Modal symbols are solely “idle” in such formulas as the resulting system will be able to make “no significant distinction between necessity, possibility and truth, and for all practical purposes it could be regarded simply as the Propositional Calculus itself,

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<sup>73</sup> G.E. Hughes & M.J. Cresswell, *A New Introduction to Modal Logic* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 42, 58.

<sup>74</sup> Allen Wood has arrived at this bi-conditional in Kant’s argument by adding  $\diamond p \supset p$ , along with deriving  $\Box p$  from it. Wood, *Kant’s Rational Theology*, 70 n. 65.

<sup>75</sup> Hughes & Cresswell, *A New Introduction to Modal Logic*, 42. This can be translated as “ $p$  is necessary only if  $p$  is actual.”

<sup>76</sup> This is because **T** can be derived from **D** + the axiom itself. For, once again, substituting  $\sim p$  for  $p$  in  $\diamond p \supset p$  and applying transposition, we now have  $p \supset \Box p$ . By a hypothetical syllogism with  $\Box p \supset \diamond p$  (the **D** axiom), we have  $p \supset \diamond p$  ((2) above) and by the same step of substitution taken before ( $\sim p$  for  $p$ ), we have  $\Box p \supset p$ . The rest follows as it did with **T** + the Kantian axiom. For the axioms and some theorems of **D**, see *Ibid.*, 43-44.

encrusted with [necessity-operators] and [possibility-operators] as mere typographical embellishments.”<sup>77</sup> In short, the Kantian thesis reduces modal logic to first order logic.

Everything becomes logically necessary.

Perhaps, though, I am being too hasty. Kant surely did not mean that everything possible is actual in the same sense as Spinoza. Absolute possibility is grounded in being *actually exemplified* in God’s nature, not the contingent existence of finite beings.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, a possibility’s content can be a consequence of God’s nature in order to be a possibility; it need not be exemplified in God Himself. Taken weakly, (1) assumes some type of powers-theory-of-modality to gain enough traction to get off the ground in conjunction with a strong *principle of similitude*, in which causes must produce effects like themselves. In a generic powers-theory, the possibility of something happening depends on an existing agent having the causal power to actualize the state of affairs.<sup>79</sup> Finite beings with causal powers would *overdetermine* the truths of modal statements in Kant’s scheme given that God’s nature is the real grounds of all possibility. But, on that qualification, Kant’s argument becomes even more untenable. Firstly, why should (1) be accepted over dropping the stronger similitude principle in something like the much homelier supposition that if something is contingent, then something has the causal power with the capability of bringing it about? This construal is attractive in that possibility (at least for contingent objects) is grounded in existing things.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Hughes & Cresswell, *A New Introduction to Modal Logic*, 42-45, 64-68. A frame “is a non-empty set” of possible worlds along with a dyadic relation that exists between the worlds in that set. A frame is serial if and only if every world of a frame can at least access another possible world in that frame. *Ibid.*, 38-39, 44-45.

<sup>78</sup> E.g., see Kant, *The One Possible Basis*, 83, 125. These two passages appear to be flat out rejections of Spinoza’s system.

<sup>79</sup> See, Jonathan D. Jacobs, “A Powers Theory of Modality: or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Reject Possible Worlds,” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 151, No. 2 (November 2010): 227-248.

<sup>80</sup> Satisfying the whole range of our modal intuitions might indicate that an omnipotent being should be introduced in order to account for the possibility of the whole world *being different than it in fact is*. Alexander

Secondly, to sidestep issues of collapsing into **PC**, the success of Kant's argument would require the construction of a possible-world semantics for God and His ideas on the one hand, and contingent, finite things on the other.<sup>81</sup> That project seems hopeless from the outset and I see no way forward in its favor. In point of fact, it would *beg the question* to presuppose a dual semantics but it would be *ad hoc* to introduce a God-specific semantics after proving His existence on the regular semantics. Either way, the endeavor is entangled in erroneous thinking. Thirdly, at best, Kant's premise makes all modal statements involving "**D +**" just as tautologous as the axioms of **K** (or better yet, the **PC**) and the conclusion of his argument is not special in the least. And finally, it cannot be that certain possible properties are mere consequences of God's fundamental nature because a possibility requires a *material* element (actual existence) in order to be possible for Kant. *Formal* possibility is not enough.<sup>82</sup>

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Pruss, *Actuality, Possibility and Worlds* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 205-278. In all honesty, this probably involves a weakened version of the PSR and can be plugged into a Leibnizian cosmological argument for God's existence. To speak even more honestly, this side effect is not unwelcomed on my part. Alexander Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 10-13.

<sup>81</sup> This should be distinguished from what Leftow does in his work on counterpossibles where he proposes a semantics for counterfactuals involving God's non-existence over against the trivial truth-value of counterfactuals that have a contradiction as their antecedent. The former is an example of what Linda Zagzebski has labeled "'interesting' impossible propositions," as opposed to impossible propositions that involve blatant contradictions and entail anything whatsoever. Linda Zagzebski, "What if the Impossible Had Been Actual?" in *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, ed. M. Beatty (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 165-169. Leftow is not arguing for God's existence in that instance but attempting to find a possible state of affairs where abstract objects *asymmetrically* depend on God's existence. He tweaks the semantics just enough given the nature of who God is in relation to the rest of reality. By this, I mean that the early Leftow makes one exception for the semantics. All counterfactuals with necessarily false antecedents have a trivial truth-value except in God's case, whose hypothetical non-existence acts as a sort of black-hole that sucks all of reality into it. See, Brian Leftow, "A Leibnizian cosmological argument," *Philosophical Studies* 57 (1989): 135-155; Brian Leftow, "God and abstract entities," *Faith and Philosophy* 7 (1990): 193-217; Brian Leftow, "Impossible Worlds," *Religious Studies* 42, No. 4 (December 2006): 393-402. A revised semantics for Kant's argument would mean a complete overhaul of the current semantics. All secular modal objects would require one semantics while all these objects as they relate to the divine nature would require another. (I do not necessarily agree with Leftow's revised semantics but I only provide it as a contrast to demonstrate the radical requirements that would be involved in a Kantian revised semantics.)

<sup>82</sup> Newlands, "Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility," 184-185. Newlands retorts (with an indictment against the tradition implicit in his denouncement), "The history of theistic metaphysics is littered with metaphors masquerading as explanations, all aimed at providing some alternative, such as 'virtual' containment, 'eminent' perfection, and 'intelligible extension.' We can now add Kant's 'consequence as through a ground' to this list of unfulfilled promissory notes." *Ibid.*, 177. This is the case even if one wants to say that Kant's God only exemplifies

## II. Leftow's Critiques of Deity Theory

### A. Necessary Truths and Their Ontologizers

Leftow begins his interaction with the tradition surprisingly in agreement. Necessary truths do not get their truth for free, so to speak. They require something to make them true. A helpful distinction must be noted at this point. Leftow is not speaking of a modal truth having a *truth-maker* as the term is usually understood. Normally, truth-maker theory endorses the claim that an entity exists in virtue of which a proposition about the entity is true. In this way, truths depend on existence.<sup>83</sup> Leftow's dispute is much more restrained: truths have an ontology where a proposition's "ontology is giving an account of what real items go into its being the case [that the proposition is true]." A truth may very well lack a truth-maker but there is no way to evade its having an ontology.<sup>84</sup> Even so, Leftow continues to employ "truth-maker" to designate this and so, in order to avoid confusion, instead of stating that something(s) "truth-make" a

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the most fundamental possible properties, for if the rest goes logically, Spinozism is still the result. Newlands goes on to write, "Even worse, consider a gradable divine property like *power*. Is the existence of something with submaximal power really possible? The fact that there is no logical inconsistency between the existence of an omnipotent being and a less powerful being is not enough by Kant's principles. After all, bad things can happen – real repugnance! – when logically compossible properties that are not actually co-exemplified are combined. This concern should also apply to submaximal *degrees* of the gradable properties God exemplifies to the maximal degree, in which case God will also need to exemplify every metaphysically possible degree of every metaphysically possible gradable property in order to ground the real possibility of a plentiful range of limited creatures." Interestingly, Adams has partly agreed with the early Kant. God may not have to exemplify all positive predicates in His person but the post-critical Kant can be used to supplement the pre-critical Kant in that fundamental qualitative possibilities are exemplified in God by being represented there. So, blue things and (perhaps) other shades of the color and other colors even, are possible insofar as they are constructed out of God's phenomenal awareness of a fundamental color. God has a mental image of the color that is nonrepresentational from which representational possibilities come about. Adams, "God, Possibility, and Kant," 435-439. Newlands, I think, correctly points out that even Adams's meeker reprise for Kant leads to Spinozism. Once an idea of, say, *pain* is introduced, it must be admitted on Adams's account that God has "a conscious state of pain for just the same reason that it needed to include phenomenal consciousness of blue. The problem cases are easy to generate. Consider the quality of forgetting an important piece of information or feeling depravity at the awareness of one's moral failings. The qualitative life of our experiences is incredibly rich and not obviously reducible to a few orthodox-friendly bases in God's nature." Leibniz's explanation, on the other hand, could separate out "what God is conscious of from what God has ideas of – the *qualia* of the representation from the representation of the *qualia*..." Newlands, "Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility," 178-180.

<sup>83</sup> Trenton Merricks, *Truth and Ontology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1-5, 15.

<sup>84</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 23, 48. So explicated, a truth may have an intrinsic character such that this character explains the fact that it is true. No existing entity corresponding to the proposition is necessary.

proposition, I will say that they “ontologize” it inasmuch as they give the ontological anchor that accounts for the propositional truth-value.<sup>85</sup>

Such thoughts concerning the necessary directly conflict with many philosophers’ notions about it. Consider Richard Swinburne’s strong assertion:

An argument that claims that the best explanation of the existence of morality is the action of God who created it must claim that many moral truths are (logically) contingent. For the existence of the phenomena described by (logically) necessary truths needs no explanation. It does not need explaining that all bachelors are unmarried, or that, if you add two to two, you get four. These things hold inevitably and necessarily, whether or not there is a God.<sup>86</sup>

Leftow does not feel that this is so obvious. Such an account relies on something like the following: a proposition’s content (say, that it is analytic) explains *that* it is necessarily true and as necessity entails truth, the content explains *why* the proposition is true. However, the argument is invalid as it stands.<sup>87</sup> Still, if it is the case that a proposition is true by virtue of

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<sup>85</sup> Simply keep in mind that “ontologizing” does not carry with it the meaning of “bringing something into being.” Some accounts will, of course, speak of a proposition receiving its ontology in this manner (as will Leftow’s) but this is not always the case (as is seen in the majority of deity theories). Leftow says that these ontologizers truth-make in a thin sense. That is, “to say that a truth has a truthmaker in [his] sense is just to say that its truth-conditions are met, by its ontology being such as to do so... As [he uses] the term, that Fido is brown has a truthmaker says little more than that Fido is brown is true.” Ibid., 83-83. “Ontologizers,” the thin sense of a truthmaker, can also be differentiated from what Leftow calls “truth-explainers” – the latter refers to absences and whatever items account for these absences. There is, for instance, no such thing as a noncircular circle. Those entities that go into accounting for the lack of such an entity in our ontology (e.g., the properties of *being a circle* or *not being a circle*, etc.) truth-explain the absence. God ontologizes and truth-explains in that He positively gives truths ontologies and truth-explains a lack through Himself or His action, a lack that in turn explains a truth. “Truth-explainers” could also be confusing for the same reason as truth-makers so I will heretofore refer to truth-explainers as “gap-fillers.”

<sup>86</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 277-285. Swinburne is not questioning the necessity of moral principles but their prospect for a theistic argument. As he goes on to clearly say, “For this reason I cannot see any force in an argument to the existence of God from the existence of morality.” Ibid., 179. Swinburne’s issue with non-causal arguments may be restated as asserting that one could always revert to Platonism to prevent the conclusion that God is required to explain necessary truths. He summarizes, “[All theistic arguments] all purport to be arguments to an explanation of the phenomena described in the premisses [*sic*] in terms of the action of an agent who intentionally brought about those phenomena.” Ibid., 19-20, 176. Adams, among others, also disagrees with Swinburne in that there can be theistic arguments from God *constituting* certain necessary facts that better explain why those facts are the way they are. Adams, “God, Possibility, and Kant,” 426; Greg Welty, “Theistic Conceptual Realism: The Case for Interpreting Abstract Objects as Divine Ideas,” Ph.D. diss. (Oriental College, University of Oxford, 2006), 249-250.

<sup>87</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 48-49. Leftow writes, “...that I want to go to the store and believe driving my car will get me there explains me driving my car, and that I am driving my car entails that a car exists, but my beliefs and desires do not explain the car’s existing.”

simply being the proposition it is, its truth is essentially a part of it. A common rejoinder is that essences are just what they are. They are brute facts, as it were. Again, though, brute facts retain an ontology and pose a problem for the sovereignty/aseity intuition.<sup>88</sup>

Furthermore, merely holding that the complement of a proposition or thing is contradictory (or impossible) does not thereby dismiss the explanatory need for truth. Indeed, the lingering question as to why something has an ontology seems to arise no matter what necessary truth is under examination. An identity statement such as “Mark Twain = Mark Twain” is true iff the identity relation holds, but  $(\forall x) (x = x)$  does not entail any essential identity properties of Samuel Langhorne Clemens. The existence and/or the possibility of Twain’s existence are indispensable for that. What ontologizes truths concerning identity? It is certainly undeniable that *necessarily, if Mark Twain exists then Mark Twain is identical to himself* but with importation, we are left with *either Mark Twain does not exist or Mark Twain exists and is identical to Mark Twain*. The upshot is that necessity is “never a full explanation.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 49-50. Perhaps necessary truths are sort of like negative existentials and have no ontology. An ‘absence’ is not a thing and has no ontology for that reason. A proposition about something *not being there* is true just in case the thing is not there. If no possible world contains  $\sim p$  or  $\sim \diamond p$  then “the plain unmodalized claim that P” is true in the same way: namely, it is true because  $\sim p$  or  $\sim \diamond p$  is not true in any possible world. Nevertheless, notice that they must have an ontology for this to work. Possible worlds (or at the least whatever the semantics quantifies over in talk of possible worlds) are involved and if possible worlds have no ontology then  $p$  and  $\sim p$  would be necessary as neither are true or false in any possible world. The negative existential objection thus fails to rid our ontology of ontologies. Ibid., 58-59. Leftow goes on to add that the enterprise of seeking no-ontology accounts is bankrupt since we could speak of necessary facts being true “even if there were not facts.” He, candidly and commonsensically, admits that his mind cannot fathom such claims. There may plausibly be negative existentials that do not have an ontology but this does not go for all strongly necessary truths and these would pose a problem for God’s ultimacy. Ibid., 23. This conclusion amounts to Plantinga’s remarks on nominalism given in the introductory chapter of this thesis. Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, 85, 89, 91-92.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 50-54, 57. There may be a concern that Leftow asks too much, as this would seem to lead to an infinite regress if no necessary truth gets its truth for free, not even God’s. Leftow admits that God’s necessity cannot explain His existence for His ultimacy precludes an explanation outside of Himself. His necessity would explain Him obtaining only if sense can be made of His person and nature being mutually dependent somehow. Leftow does not have high hopes for this but neither does he ever give a truly informative and satisfying alternative for the ontologizing of God. His answer is entangled in his own story that will be covered in chapter three of the thesis. The point of it is, for any curious or impatient readers, that there are no facts that are literally self-explanatory as was argued above. This goes even for God as the ultimate reality. Yet, additionally, that fact is not brute for Leftow. On his theory, there is no coherent alternative in the pre-modal moment (again, see chapter three). It is just “not in God to make it possible that a history go on independent of Him... Thus, given by nature that God is the

## B. *The Negative Project I: Against General Arguments from Deity*

As a reminder, Leftow believes that there are necessary truths that have an ontology, are not about God and hence, are *outside* of Him – truths that he has given that tedious title of being “secular.” If something is neither an event nor God, nor an aspect, part or attribute of God, then it must be under God’s control.<sup>90</sup> This entails that some so-called “abstract” things are created and conserved by God. Power over objects is, *prima facie*, a perfection and perfect being theology calls for a perfect being to have power over more rather than less for that reason.<sup>91</sup> All of these imply the following for modal ontology:

**All Modal Ontology (AMO):**  $(P)((\Diamond P \text{ is true} \supset \text{God is, contains, has or produces all of } \Diamond P\text{'s ontology}) \text{ and } (P \text{ is true} \supset \text{God is, contains, has or produces all of } P\text{'s ontology or all ontology in its [gap-filler]}) \text{ and } (\Box P \text{ is true} \supset \text{God is, contains, has or produces all of } \Box P\text{'s ontology or all ontology in its [gap-filler]}))$ .<sup>92</sup>

What this means is that God ontologizes (or is the gap-filler for) every modal truth that is *de re* and ontologizes all modal truth that is *de dicto*.<sup>93</sup> How Leftow parses out AMO will be taken up in chapter three but what concerns us here are his critiques of deity theories. Deity theories, in general, do not want to put AMO under God’s causal power. Rather, things are possible if God is able to bring them about and He knows all that He can bring about so that there are truths about them. A simple necessary truth along these lines would be the following:

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source of secular possibility and is by nature eternal, His necessary existence follows.” Ibid., 437-442. This would be a variation of a primitivist interpretation of modality: something or some truth exists and could not be otherwise and as a result, exists or is true in all possible worlds. See, e.g., Amy Karofsky, “The Primitiveness of Leibnizian Alethic Modalities,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 16, No. 3 (Jul., 1999): 297-320. Leftow’s primitivism would unquestionably be more extreme than most. For him, God’s necessary existence is logically posterior to His existence and nature.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 20-25.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 102-103. *De dicto* truths predicate modal properties of a proposition (such as *being necessarily true*) whereas *de re* truths predicate modal properties of an object (such as Socrates’s *being essentially human*). Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 9-11.

**DOGS.** The natural kind ‘dog’ has four legs.<sup>94</sup>

So, the presence of the cocker spaniel, Lady, may seem unassuming, innocent and even adorable, but her place in ontological space threatens an omnipotent God. Ontologizing DOGS on a deity theory may fall roughly into four camps:

- (i) As DOGS is necessarily and eternally true, God has to acknowledge this fact and this truth is in God in some way;
- (ii) the content of deity makes DOGS true and God, as morally perfect and supremely rational, affirms DOGS;
- (iii) God’s moral goodness makes the affirmation of DOGS appropriate, analogous to (ii);
- (iv) God knows DOGS and all modal truths because of a brute obligation to think them which is foisted on Him by His nature.<sup>95</sup>

One general argument in consideration of deity theory determining or including the truth about DOGS is that (1) necessary truths need a necessary ontologizer and (2) if these ontologizers are in God, then His nature must determine or include them given that His nature does so for what is necessary in Him. An argument along these lines fails as (1) is only true understood *de dicto*; a necessary truth necessarily must have an ontologizer but the ontologizer may vary from world to world. (2) begs the question against Leftow’s own position where the contents of modality are necessary but due to a divine act that God’s nature does not determine.<sup>96</sup>

Somehow the deity theorist has to argue that modal truths are *written into* the divine nature. The contents of deity (e.g., His attributes, etc.) entail the contents of possible worlds or at least mean that God has to identify the things He does as possible, including but not limited to the furry inmates at the local pound who are detained for terrorizing postal workers. The attack

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<sup>94</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 139-143. Leftow uses *cats* but I, being more of a canine-person, thought I would make the substitution.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-144.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-145. Leftow calls this the “missing option” and thinks that it was drastically overlooked in the tradition due to divine simplicity (in and before Aquinas) or the other alternative being Descartes’ universal possibilism, which subsequent thinkers, like Leibniz, would find unsustainable. He also finds very little by way of argument for a deity theory as it was just assumed. The reasons he puts forth are what he believes are most likely the motivations behind deity theory.

on deity theories is thus twofold: *negative* (they are not defensible) and *positive* (they are not desirable). The negative aspect dismantles the rationale behind deity theories as not delivering the inferential moves on which the theories are predicated. Positively, Leftow contends that deity theories have very unwelcomed consequences for God's aseity/sovereignty and are extremely counterintuitive. A story for God's relation to such objects that did not have these outcomes would be *ceteris paribus* preferable. It does not follow that since deity encompasses or subvenes all things that are needed to make it true that He has deity and deity is His nature, He does so for all things semantically considered essential to do so. It may be that there is something else in God that does the ontological heavy lifting in this regard.<sup>97</sup>

Firstly, omnipotence itself would be a natural place to begin when grounding the modal desideratum in God. He is, after all, able to create by nature and is free to choose between alternatives. Likewise, the ability to bring about an object, state of affairs, etc. *p* assures the possibility of *p*. All of this surely would embrace possible worlds and their constituents. Despite its initial intuition, this argument begs the question, as it only settles *that* God necessarily has options for creation and is able to do things, but *what* He is able to do is not explicitly a part of His nature. Why is it that the range of God's effects be definite creaturely essences, such as *being canine*?<sup>98</sup>

Omniscience is the next divine property that could make sense of the claim that God knows all non-divine necessary truths (especially the natures of creatures) and that His knowledge in this area could not be otherwise. The impetus behind omniscience supplying the necessary connection is multifaceted. For one, God is a rational being and ideally so. His knowledge can neither be analyzed in terms of mere belief, nor in external grounds of which He

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 145-146.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 146-149.

is ignorant, nor can He fail to know the truth.<sup>99</sup> If DOGS is not derived from God's nature or His knowing that DOGS is not dictated by His nature so that no reason is needed (either of which a deity theory could endorse), then no reason exists for why God thinks DOGS and the thought is capricious, at best, or capricious and irrational, at worst. The short answer, that awaits and alludes to Leftow's full position later, is that if no good reason exists to think one thing or another – as in the case of a novelist working on a fictional story – one is not irrational for choosing one thing over the other.<sup>100</sup>

But the very nature of omniscience would entail that God know all modal truths, would it not? Once again, this begs the question for the deity theorist. Say that we coin a term to designate a *real* empty name. Empty names of the Frege-Russelian sort, like dragons and hippogriffs, can always be said to have content for they have properties and, conceivably, are part of some possible worlds.<sup>101</sup> Our creature will have no such luxury. It is the property of *being a zog*. Now, zogs do not so much as graze or sneeze in any possible zoo or work tirelessly on a thesis to complete philosophy programs in any possible world (depending on what a zog would be). They are neither possible nor impossible. In this scheme, God is not a Meinogian who is aware of

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 149. This has led some to reasonably ask whether God has 'beliefs' at all. Nelson Pike, "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action," in *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., eds. Michael Peterson et al (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 147.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 149-150. Many opt for just such a solution when it comes to God's choice of actualizing one possible world as opposed to another. As there is no best possible world, God decides on a good world for His purposes but His decision is neither arbitrary nor irrational. Robert Adams, "Must God Create the Best?" *Philosophical Review* 81, No. 3 (1972): 317-332. Leibniz's penchant for a strong principle of sufficient reason made God's selective process determined and, intuitively, undermines the very argument based on contingency he uses to establish God's existence. Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Reprint; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 202-204.

<sup>101</sup> See, Bertrand Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1919), 167; Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Reference," in *The Philosophy of Language*, eds. A.P. Martinich and David Sosa, 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 38; Chris Daly, *Philosophy of Language: An Introduction* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 262-267.

actual but non-existent modal facts. God is no less omniscient in not knowing ZOGS than He is in not knowing the proposition “ $2+2=5$ .”<sup>102</sup>

The next move is to say that had God not thought of DOGS than DOGS would not be possible or impossible and God not knowing it would not detract from His omniscience. The deity theorist has to say that God not thinking up DOGS implies Him knowing less than it is in Him to know, but this is precisely what is to be proved. Had God not thought up DOGS, they would join the gobs or mobs of ZOGS in ontological oblivion. Once He knows DOGS, He cannot eradicate these properties without diminishing His omniscience, but logically prior to the thought, no danger exists for this attribute. God knows **all and only** truths by His nature, but if the number of truths were less, He would still be all-knowing; it is simply that there is *less to know*. God is perfect *ab initio* in His cognitive powers and His implementation of those powers *sans* thinking up creatures. It may always be in Him “to think up more” but this in no wise forces the conclusion that God’s perfection rides on thinking up more.<sup>103</sup>

### *C. The Negative Project II: Against Decomposing Deity*

The last argument from deity theory to be conquered to make way for a non-deity theory, argues for the largest claim that can be made: one that holds that creaturely concepts are derivative somehow of God’s nature itself.<sup>104</sup> God has the power to bring states of affairs about and His omniscience assures that He knows what He can so bring about. Still more, God can diminish His attributes in such a way to get finite possibilities. Some do not allow diminishment (e.g., being alive, conscious, a person, etc.). He, for instance, can think of less powerful beings

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<sup>102</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 150-153.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> This version of deity theory is very much in the spirit of Aquinas and/or Kant.

by conceptually thinning His own omnipotence. Some creaturely concepts can follow from this mental operation. From logic and mathematics, He may reason to the possibility of matter through spatial extension in geometry. Depending on God's relation to time, if He is temporal, then His life takes place in a temporal location as well as exhibits duration. From these things and spatial extension, He can receive the ideas for such things as motion and causal interaction between physical objects. He might proceed logically from His phenomenal consciousness to these spatial entities having the ability to cause a phenomenal experience in something else. Therefore, there is sense perception.<sup>105</sup>

Unfortunately, this story is rather too rashly sketched. A fairly strong case can be made for God's atemporality, which dissolves the inferences He would make towards temporal concepts. Even granting temporal location and extension in a temporal divine property will not deliver a spatial counterpart. Neither will mathematics and geometry produce the possibility of matter. The *space* of geometry is abstract and cannot be equated with spatial extension.<sup>106</sup>

Perhaps we should limit our focus to a range of things that could be predicated of God and creatures univocally: things like substance, consciousness, being alive, being powerful, being free, goodness, personhood, having knowledge and mental states and being a spirit. Here, trouble nonetheless looms over the undertaking. God's nature is too sparse to construct the vast diversity of creature-concepts.<sup>107</sup> Three predicates of the above (personhood, spirit, substance) are the most likely candidates to lay the groundwork for His other attributes to be diminished and added to with the hope of getting finite modal properties. His own substance fails to give definite concepts for the substances of creatures. 'Spirit' fares no better unless Leibniz's *Monadology* or

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 153-155.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 155-156.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 156-158.

Berkleyean idealism is accepted.<sup>108</sup> Equally unpromising is the thought that spirit is a negative property by virtue of its nature. It is an *immaterial* substance. This is confused, however. Such properties are wholly unnecessary. It is pure philosophical tomfoolery to define a plant as a non-animal and vice versa. God has to then *come by* ‘matter’ through innate knowledge, brute compulsion or means “of whose nature we have no idea.” Lastly, though personhood may be set by God’s nature and cannot be altered, this is not enough to delegate specific kinds of possible creatures.<sup>109</sup>

A necessary condition for God to have creature-concepts in a manner with which we are familiar – and what is assumed in the above arguments – is that deity has to be a conjunctive property. A simple sample of a conjunctive property would be *being a human being*, which includes the conjuncts of *being rational* and *being an animal*. *Deity* as a conjunctive property would involve *being omnipotent*, *a substance*, etc. and permits God the capability of thinking of creatures that have one power but lack another in that scheme.<sup>110</sup>

Leftow not only does not think that deity is a conjunctive property but does not believe it is a predicate or concept at all. He reflects on three arguments for the existence of conjunctive universals (or tropes). The first is a two-sided defense of the concept from D.H. Armstrong. Conjunctive universals are logically and epistemically possible so that if there are no conjunctive properties, the properties themselves may possibly not exist. Intuition would call us to deny the consequent; *modus tollens* would bid us do the same with the antecedent.<sup>111</sup> Leftow’s rejoinder is a basic one: why posit conjunctive properties when the conjuncts can easily do the ontological

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<sup>108</sup> Leibniz would say that in a sense all the monads are *personal* as well because they all have the potential to be rational. Leibniz, “The Monadology,” in *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*, 78.

<sup>109</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 158-162.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>111</sup> D.M. Armstrong, *A Theory of Universals*, *Universals and Scientific Realism*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 30-36.

work without the conjunction? Ockham's razor is sharp and quick to cut them away from reality. The epistemic element has little, if no, support. Is there a reason that no conjunctive properties exist only if we know this fact?<sup>112</sup>

Two other things may be said on behalf of the Armstrongian conclusion. There are so-called "*structural* universals," such as molecules that are comprised by many atoms of different kinds. Realists about these universals may draw a line directly to conjunctive universals. But structural universals are admitted given the ontological work they accomplish and again, conjunctive properties do nothing the conjuncts cannot pull off themselves. Finally, an *abundant* theory of universals will let in a universal for about any predicate you can imagine. Conjunctive predicates obtain, so conjunctive universals enjoy existence by that fact.<sup>113</sup> We may grant that this theory of reference is correct but it is far from agreeing that the properties of *being rational* and *being an animal* together constitute a singular term and must exist as a conjunctive universal. Leftow summarizes, "that we must quantify over some properties, if true, hardly entails that every appearance of an apparent property name constitutes a place over which we should quantify." Therefore, no positive reason can be provided for accepting them and it also creates

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<sup>112</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 162-164.

<sup>113</sup> Arguments along these lines are variations on indispensability arguments for Platonic objects. Indispensability arguments take the following form according to Craig: (1) If a simple sentence (i.e. a sentence of the form '*a* is *F*', or '*a* is *R*-related to *b*', or...) is literally true, then the objects that its singular terms denote exist. (Likewise, if an existential sentence is literally true, then there exist objects of the relevant kinds; e.g., if '*There is an F*' is true, then there exist some *F*s.) (2) There are literally true simple sentences containing singular terms that refer to things that could only be abstract objects. (Likewise, there are literally true existential statements whose existential quantifiers range over things that could only be abstract objects.) (3) Therefore, abstract objects exist. Craig, "Anti-Platonism," in *Beyond the Control of God?* 116. Peter van Inwagen declares that something like (1) should be uncontroversial and labels all attempts to dispense with it as suspect seeing that it is indispensable for settling ontological disputes without which such conversations would be marked by "imprecision and wishful thinking." Peter van Inwagen, "Meta-Ontology," *Erkenntnis* (1975-) 48, no. 2/3, *Analytical Ontology* (1998): 237, 249.

problems for distinguishing them from their conjuncts apart from the conjunction. For what makes *being A & B* distinct from merely *being A* and likewise *being B*?<sup>114</sup>

God cannot decompose the divine nature to figure out what He can create on these grounds. He can only diminish deity, but this would do no more than yield lower degrees of deity. Counter-intuitively, a politician and a grain of sand would be a little divine. Can kind-properties even have degrees like this? But let us allow this for the sake of argument. Degrees of deity would have to fall along a scale of some sort. Leftow gives four options for what this would come to:

- (6) Deity is pre-equipped with numbers that correspond to lower-degree types of it.
- (7) Deity has guidelines to assign diminished percentages of itself that essentially manufactures the scale.
- (8) Deity is pre-equipped with an ordered set of continually lower-degree varieties of itself that make up the scale.
- (9) Deity has gradations written into it (God having the maximum amount). God's deity is a full tank, analogously speaking, and ideas of things are built from having various entities along the scale when He mentally empties the tank.

(6) presupposes that something is already there with which to have a number paired. The natures of creatures pre-exist as lower degrees of deity without God diminishing anything. Accordingly, this begins with a deity theory and does not argue for it. (7) suffers from extreme vagueness for little to no sense can be made of diminishing a nature by certain percentages and the argument advances no further without clarity on this front. If God decides on the directions, then He would decide on the creatures that result, which is not what a sensible deity theorist would want. Contrariwise, strict directions for diminishment would collapse (7) into (9) with hardly a difference between the two. As to (8), with creature-concepts pre-packaged in God's nature, saying that they are based on God diminishing Himself cannot help. This is more of what Leftow calls a "primitive-contents-of-deity theory." The problem is how it can be expounded

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<sup>114</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 164-168.

non-arbitrarily that *being a dog* is 0.9 divine or 0.0000001 divinity is equivalent to *being an actor with the acting skills of Bill Paxton*. (9) does not differ much from (6) or (7) so it also will make no better use of diminishment as a means to creature-concepts and like (8), must answer how some creature relates to a degree of deity.<sup>115</sup>

#### D. *The Positive Project: Why Deity Theories Should Be Avoided*

With the negative task in place, Leftow moves to positive reasons not to endorse any deity theory.<sup>116</sup> The argument against deity theories has two steps. The first is that these theories cannot avoid the conclusion that the existence of God is dependent on the existence of ontologizers for certain necessary truths concerning creatures and secondly, it would be preferable on a perfect being theology, *ceteris paribus*, to not assent to theories that have this result. The first premise is supported by the following thoughts. Here is a simple, necessary identity statement.

WATER  $(x)(x \text{ is a body of water} \supset (\exists y)(y \text{ is a body of H}_2\text{O and } x = y)) \cdot (x)(x \text{ is a body of H}_2\text{O} \supset (\exists y)(y \text{ is a body of water and } x = y))$ .<sup>117</sup>

He calls WATER a strong necessity in that either every body of water is identical to H<sub>2</sub>O or no bodies exist of the stuff that is water/H<sub>2</sub>O. We could imagine WATER not being true if H<sub>2</sub>O was not possible or impossible but simply not an entity of ontological space whatsoever. Doing away

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 168-171.

<sup>116</sup> That being said, Leftow does go on to argue that side-stepping any issues with God coming to creature-concepts in this way would not guarantee that something is possible. God would also, given the reasoning of deity theories, grasp things that are unlike Him to a degree as creatures knowing less would be more unlike Him than those that know more. And so the argument goes, He could think of a near-omnipotent being that was also nearly omniscient. The being would know all things but moral truths. Nothing is intrinsically impossible in this “maxi-devil.” But a maxi-devil will not appear in a possible world because God would never create such a thing. Hence, “even if representations of candidate creatures were somehow built into God naturally, creaturely *modal truths* could well still depend on God’s will and dispositions.” On his account, necessary divine volitions/dispositions obtain to settle this dilemma. Ibid., 171-173.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 209.

with the property of H<sub>2</sub>O is not nonsensical or *a priori* false, according to Leftow, for we would have known nothing about WATER apart from empirical discovery. So, without a property or proposition, WATER lacks a truth-value, as there is nothing there to bear the truth-value. Enter a simple deity theory, one that makes WATER ontologically dependent on God's being able to instantiate it and He knows this fact. The hypothetical syllogism emerges:

10. WATER is not true  $\supset$  either it is the case that nothing has deity or deity does not have an attribute from a set of attributes of which it necessarily contains some member.
11. Deity contains no attribute from a set of which it necessarily contains some member  $\supset$  deity does not exist.
12. WATER is not true  $\supset$  either nothing has deity or deity does not exist.
13. Nothing has deity  $\supset$  God does not exist.
14. Deity does not exist  $\supset$  God does not exist.
15. WATER is not true  $\supset$  God does not exist.<sup>118</sup>

Naturally, a counterfactual with a necessarily false antecedent implies anything and everything, so why should God's nonexistence being logically entailed by WATER being untrue strike us as odd? We may be able to delimit what it entails to solely other impossible truths to be generous and God's not existing would still follow. These responses ignore that these counterpossibles are paradoxes for precisely the reason that the argument above encapsulates. We hence have another paradoxical example of strict implication.<sup>119</sup> One could resort to the claim that omnipotence must imagine WATER or it is not omnipotence but this, once again, begs the question that implanted within omnipotence is the power to imagine water.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 209-211.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 211-213. A conditional, strictly speaking, is true unless it is possible for the antecedent to be true and the consequent, false. Because an impossible antecedent is not true in any possible world, no matter what the consequent is, the whole conditional will be true. This means that on current possible world semantics, 'WATER is not true' also strictly entails that something **does** exemplify deity in addition to "deity contains some attribute from a set of attributes of which it necessarily contains some member." Leftow feels he can safely ignore this alternative "because some strict conditionals are true *only* because their antecedent is impossible. But again, truths can be true *not just for general semantic reasons* but because of how certain other facts are. These are the impossible-antecedent conditionals to use in philosophical argument." (emphasis mine) Ibid., 221-222.

A more promising response may be from epistemic considerations. Surely, a counterexample to (10)-(15) above could be offered.

16. If '5 + 4 = 10' is true, then God necessarily believes it (or *knows it*).

17. If He believes it, then He is not omniscient.

18. If '5 + 4 = 10' is true, then God is not omniscient.<sup>120</sup>

This argument contains an epistemic misstep. Some truths are overdetermined in spite of the antecedent not being true in any possible world. Here we *hold fixed* the omniscience of God and assume that the mathematical equation is true for the purpose of intuitively assenting to the first premise. In the second premise, we drop our suspended belief in the equation and return to the fact that it is false. Maybe (10)-(15) has a similar mistake. Regrettably, the content of WATER is maintained in (10)-(15) even in denying its existence in (12). A similar *faux pas* is not committed there. The argument is valid provided that God ontologizes WATER by deity, whether in general or through one property or set of properties, and deity is immutable, which is exactly what a deity theory upholds.<sup>121</sup>

In summary, (15) is not just a conclusion based on possible world semantics. WATER is “a substantive necessary condition” for it being the case that God exists.<sup>122</sup> What is the primary problem for wanting to look elsewhere for an account of how God relates to creaturely concepts? Leftow specifies three reasons. Firstly, there is the complete irrelevance, intuitively, between God’s existence and WATER being true. Normally, conditionals that have an antecedent that is irrelevant to the consequent are rejected. Semantic reasons cause us to overlook this in some

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 213-214. Leftow evaluates counterpart theories in which God has counterparts in other worlds to make WATER true as well as the properties of deity differing from world to world or if He could have understudies in each world to determine that WATER. Neither he nor I accept this and explaining these would lie outside the scope of this thesis. Ibid., 211-212, 218-221, 222-234.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 236-237. He confesses that divine simplicity would have no problem with (15) since it just amounts to deity depending upon deity for existence. That conclusion is trivial. Many theologians and philosophers find significant problems with a strict divine simplicity, though, and will not welcome the person-property identity relation here.

cases but only rarely and never, perhaps, comfortably. Deity theorists may respond that their theory makes WATER relevant to God's existence but they certainly do not appear so.<sup>123</sup> The counterintuitiveness of (15) counts against its being correct.

Secondly, another hypothetical syllogism can readily be formulated such that:

19. WATER is not true  $\supset$  God does not exist.

20. God does not exist  $\supset$  hydrogen contains two protons.

21. Hydrogen contains two protons  $\supset$  7 is not a prime number or 7 has an ontologizer outside of deity.<sup>124</sup>

(21) is highly counterintuitive but it follows necessarily, for God is the ontologizer of all necessary truths. If He does not exist, nothing ontologizes them. The antecedent and consequent of (21) are just as irrelevant to one another and this further bolsters the oddity of (15).

Lastly, the charge of irrelevance seems to deal with another intuition about perfect being theology. Intuitively, the contents that go into making up the facts about WATER are not ostensibly germane to what it means to be divine. God would be omnipotent before WATER on any definition of omnipotence since this property has to do with actualizing states of affairs and is silent as to the content of these. *Being deity* looks to be separate from knowing facts about water. God would not be more or less perfect if He knew one world existed over another, nor is He in any better state for knowing DOGS are possible as opposed to ZOGS.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> This reply is, in essence, what Chris Tweedt says in response to Leftow. Chris Tweedt, "Splitting the Horns of Euthyphro's Modal Relative," *Faith and Philosophy* 30 (April 2013): 8. See pg. 85, n. 201, for this discussion.

<sup>124</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 238-239.

<sup>125</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 184, 237-241. Leftow later uses a distinction introduced by Kit Fine to make sense of this. Fine postulates that something can be *necessary* for an object without it being *essential* to that object. The traditional modal account sees a property as essential to an object iff the object has the property necessarily (i.e., in every possible world of which that object is a part; whatever one says for Plantingan haecceities, the propositions on the identity of an object are true in, or at, all possible worlds). Here is the problem. Consider the case of the hilariously talented, Gene Wilder. After having a short, but good, laugh at a remembered scene from a classic Wilder flick, you stop and assume a straight, philosophical face in suddenly realizing that Gene Wilder necessarily belongs to the set {Gene Wilder}. In every possible world, this is the case. But is this really essential to Gene Wilder? It may be tempting to boldly proclaim, "Yes!" but let us turn our attention to another proposition: 'Gene Wilder is distinct from the overgrown yard that my landlords' mowers have neglected for close to a month now.' This, too, is *necessary* for Gene Wilder, but is it *essential* to him? You do not need to understand or even know the

It could be said that no theory adequately deals with these problems but to answer this, Leftow's theory will have to be considered. It is to this that we will turn in the next chapter.

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truth of either of these statements in order to grasp the essence of Gene Wilder. And according to Plantinga, there are an infinite number of such propositions, stating such things as Wilder's distinction from the Taj Mahal to a rubber ball to DeMoss Hall, and according to Fine, each is just as useless and irrelevant as the last in determining just what kind of a thing Gene Wilder is. You can understand that without even knowing anything about any of these other objects or any sets at all. To be exact, in Leftow's words, "it is not tied to his identity in the right way." From here, Leftow takes it that there can be things that are necessary for God but do not belong to what it means to be divine – again, they are not essential to Him. There is, in effect, more to God than His deity. He concludes, "...on a Finer-grained approach to deity, there is room for the thought that some things in God are necessary but not part of deity, and for contentful stories about how they get to be necessary. We are free to look outside deity for a necessary ground in God for at least some necessary truth." This will be what allows Leftow to separate His version of divine simplicity from the complexity of the divine ideas (see pg. 95, n. 233). Kit Fine, "Essence and Modality: The Second Philosophical Perspectives Lecture," *Philosophical Perspectives* 8, Logic and Language (1994): 1-16; Brian Leftow, "On God and Necessity," *Faith and Philosophy* 31, No. 4 (October 2014): 435-436; Alvin Plantinga, "Two Dozen (or So) Theistic Arguments," Paper presented at the 33rd Annual Philosophy Conference, Wheaton College, October 23-25, 1986; available from [https://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual\\_library/articles/plantinga\\_alvin/two\\_dozen\\_or\\_so\\_theistic\\_arguments.pdf](https://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual_library/articles/plantinga_alvin/two_dozen_or_so_theistic_arguments.pdf); accessed 19 November 2014.

### 3. A Half Step with a Long Stride: Brian Leftow's Non-Deity Theory

#### I. Exegesis of Leftow's Theory

##### A. *What it is in God to Do*

Motivated by what he considers the failure of deity theories, Leftow erects his own system from the detritus. One cannot help but see the seeds of this plan years before *God and Necessity* (hereafter, *G & N*) in Leftow's work on Aquinas. It is plausible that they were sown much earlier when Leftow was developing a separate modal semantics for God in dealing with counterpossibles<sup>126</sup> or when he thought that the tradition could salvage the theistic activism of Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel by removing God as an object in any possible world.<sup>127</sup> Elements of his view have been hinted at in the first chapter in the discussion of *zogs* and *WATER*. Leftow describes it as beginning at Aquinas and taking a half step toward Descartes.<sup>128</sup> Descartes had believed that God decided the truth of everything from logic and mathematics to zebras being possible. Almost all of reality was a matter of God willing it so.<sup>129</sup> Leftow will not be joining him in going so far but instead opts for a halfway house that allows for God's ontologizing of some facts while others do not fall under His control.

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<sup>126</sup> Brian Leftow, "Aquinas on God and Modal Truth," *The Modern Schoolman* 82, No. 3 (2005): 187-196; Brian Leftow, "God and abstract entities," *Faith and Philosophy* 7 (1990): 193-217; Brian Leftow, "Impossible Worlds," *Religious Studies* 42, No. 4 (December 2006): 393-402.

<sup>127</sup> Brian Leftow, "God and Abstract Entities," *Faith and Philosophy* 7, No. 2 (April 1990), 213. Morris and Menzel set out to update the doctrine of divine ideas by seeking to defend the notion that God created all abstracta necessarily. It led to the very counterintuitive result that God created His own properties and Himself, as a consequence. Few have taken up their banner, though some, like the early Leftow, have tried to work within their framework but avoid the problems. Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel, "Absolute Creation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23, No. 4 (October 1986): 354-355; Paul Gould (ed.), *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on The Problem of God and Abstract Objects* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

<sup>128</sup> Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), vii.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 112. Alvin Plantinga called this view "universal possibilism." Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature? The Aquinas Lecture, 1980* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 95-114. I did not cover Descartes' view of abstract objects in this paper for reasons I gave in the introduction.

To recap, sentences that are **secular** do not make *prima facie* reference to God for their truth. What are excluded are truths that concern God or His nature. Among other non-secular sentences would be the truths of logic and mathematics, given that they involve variables that can be replaced by anything and quantify over God as well. Granted, the secular can be conjoined with God's existence for a non-secular proposition: "Platypuses are only possible insofar as God exists and instantiates them" and "God can possibly exist alongside platypuses." The conjunct, *platypuses are possible*, is secular in itself, though, as it essentially does not make mention of God or His nature.<sup>130</sup>

In order to explicate God's relation to secular modality, Leftow introduces the prepositional phrase 'in Him'. Something is *in God* to do if He has the ability, the power, to bring it about. The expression is neither committed to there being things already in place at the outset that God can bring about, nor does it constitute a new and distinct modality. It is not as if there are worlds that exist at this level only. God has the ability to think up novel creaturely natures – it being *in Him* to do so – but He may not choose to exercise this ability further for some reason. Nevertheless, there is more *in Him* to do. Powers are intrinsically modal in that *being able to do A*, all things considered, means that it is possible for *A* to be done. God has such ability. He can imagine possible states of affairs, has the freedom to choose amongst them, bring them into existence through creation and can subsequently sustain them, *inter alia*.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 248-252, 477-478. Propositions are either: *secular* – that *p* is possible iff God has the eternal power to bring about or promote that *p*, or He prevents this from eternity, the former disjunct covering contingent propositions and the latter, necessities; or *purely non-secular* – about God, His nature, etc. and these are necessary or impossible; or *mixed* – these refer to God or quantify over Him, His attributes, etc. along with secular content (e.g., 'God knows that I am writing this thesis' is a contingent mixed proposition and the proposition, 'possibly, God conceives that I am writing this thesis' is necessary on Leftow's account because it could not have been otherwise for He eternally lacks a power to make it false). *Ibid.*, 446-450.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 252-258.

With the dismissal of any deity theory, nothing about God determines the possible creatures He can imagine. God's person and nature set some things, like personality and goodness, because they are essential to divinity.<sup>132</sup> The powers God possesses at this point, along with the constraints that obtain prior to God *dreaming up* what to create, are extremely general, although possibilities coming to mind for God (so to speak) amounts to Him endowing Himself with more specific powers. The basic powers just mentioned safeguard against an account that sees God as giving Himself further powers without any prior mechanism for doing so. God has powers by virtue of His nature, which provide the occasion, and perhaps, trigger at times, for the production of an effect. His powers furthermore do not *fink*; nothing within or outside God can prevent them being used.<sup>133</sup>

'In Him' comes to just one possibility or power, if we wish to speak in those terms: the possibility or ability to use His power to think up secular states of affairs. *Afterwards*, He does not give Himself the power to think up more and the best way to think about 'in Him' is as the basis for ascribing powers in that God uses what He has for the purpose of procuring more. To reiterate, it is devoid of certain modal connotations. God can will to have a power to cause effect *P*. As will be shortly observed, there is no time before God thinks up creatures and He must do so. Thus, there is no possible world with simply God and no thoughts concerning secular modality. God imagines various possible states of affairs by nature, but there is no antecedent, logically speaking, state of affairs God *has to* include by nature.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 254-258. Causal relations would likewise be grounded in God as He is a causal agent. The causal relation exists after a cause has produced its effect and in this way, the causal relation relies on God bringing about an effect.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 259-261. Leftow will later posit that the fact that a mental event of a creaturely concept, such as *platypuses*, gives God the power to create platypuses is a brute fact. His concept of something has the requisite content to make it possible for Him to create it. Ibid., 314.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 259-264. Leftow gives the analogy, "Compare: I owe you a dollar, but there is no dollar such that I owe you that one."

The power to create a platypus does not exist prior to God willing to have it. In this manner, God establishes the reality behind talk of possible worlds and quantifying over such entities is appropriate solely when this reality is there over which to quantify.<sup>135</sup> For precisely this reason, ‘in Him’ lacks a true modal position. A platypus is not possibly possible only while ‘in Him’ and all secular modality is contingently necessary as a consequence. Apart from the divine willing to acquire other powers, platypuses are neither possible nor impossible.<sup>136</sup> They are sadly not there at all for their pet lovers to brood over. Causality is taken as a primitive relationship in this scheme and is like ‘in Him’ in the respect of being non-modal. *P* is brought about by an entity *x* because *x* acts and *P* is produced.<sup>137</sup>

### B. *The Biggest Bang of All*

In what Leftow deems “the Biggest Bang of all,” God thinks up candidate creatures that can be brought into existence. By knowing Himself perfectly, God knows what it is to create and that He can so create. It is moreover His nature to think up such possibilities for two plausible reasons: (1) a perfectly good God is magnanimous to the highest degree and this would lead God to consider exact creatures to which He could freely give of Himself, and (2) a perfectly creative God will think up creatures.<sup>138</sup> A fallacious move would be to conclude that this reasoning entails God’s actually creating one of these possibilities and arguing along these lines should be

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 262-263.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 263-265.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 337.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 272-274. One might object that Trinitarian reflections do away with the need for the first but Leftow believes that the most plausible account of the Trinity ends up saying that God gives to Himself in giving to the Son. Brian Leftow, “A Latin Trinity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (2004): 304-333. As to the second, he notes that there are two types of creativity, one in which an external source provides the opportunity to be creative whereas others are irrepressibly imaginative and new ideas arise with no outside activator. He views the latter as better and as such, this would belong to God.

resisted. God is not more creative if He *in fact* creates because His creation would be exactly like He had conceived it beforehand and He could easily actualize it. Creating does not add to this.<sup>139</sup>

On an atemporal understanding of God, His thought occurs all at once with the rest of His life. If He is temporal, it is still reasonable to assume He would not wait but think of creatures from eternity. He would have no good reason to delay and would probably want to have them sooner to contemplate for the purposes of pleasure and deliberation over what to create. His goodness and creativity would likewise seem to demand it be realized instantaneously.<sup>140</sup> In this Bang, the natures of creatures are actually comprehended *ex nihilo*. Natures, such as platypusness or redness, did not exist before the Bang to be grasped. Their entrance in the ontological sphere came through a burst of God's imaginative act. He does not concentrate and intend to bring certain properties onto the scene – that is the case only if these concepts exist earlier than the Bang. What follows is that 'red is a color' has no further explanation. It is this way because that is how God thought it. Any dissatisfaction with this will find no solace in Platonism or deity theories as chapter two argued. Necessities are not explicable **because of** their necessity. *Redness* is just as brute on them as on Leftow's but at least the latter provides a causal explanation for this phenomenon.<sup>141</sup>

The material available to God in His own nature was argued to be too sparse to derive creature concepts. Supposing He finds anything there, nothing about it seems to be self-

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 274-276. Leftow also analyzes the objection that God would have "a better record as a maker" in a world if He creates there but this would make a perfect being impossible for He could always create more. There is no reason to accept this stipulation on perfection either.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 276-277. Leftow does not think that goodness and creativity arguments entail this conclusion but they do support it.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 276-280. If some form of Meinongianism is true, where there are possible but nonexistent objects, God could have a pre-creative intentionality of sorts but this makes no sense. Once God has the concept of something, He has it and does not need to gain it through the Bang. No more content would be there after the Bang than was previously there. Ibid., 40, 309-310. Leftow continually insists that nothing secular is *either contingent or necessary* prior to the Bang. The activity of God "has an explanatory priority to any full fact of modal status." Ibid., 350.

interpreting so He may read it any way He chooses in employing the material to get to natures. God may creatively apply concepts both to Himself and creatures and even if they are imagined in imitation of Him, they do not have to do this in any special mode, although they must resemble Him in existing if He were to actually make them. His nature could place constraints on His thoughts and set Him in a vague direction towards creaturely concepts without presenting the natures of secular things themselves.<sup>142</sup>

It was in God *not* to dream up redness or platypuses or quarks or any other secular property, which has the counterintuitive outcome that God could have no concept for things we know are possible but still be omniscient. His omnipotence would appear to demand more than this also. But omniscience, as with all other facts about God and His nature, takes precedence here over modality. If God lacks a concept of secular modality, He did not give Himself the power to bring that concept into existence and this is why He lacks it. It is **not** around *to lack*. It is necessary if God thought it up and permitted it (i.e., it could not be otherwise), but His thinking and permitting/preventing are primary in the explanatory chain.<sup>143</sup>

As for omnipotence, God determines the range of this attribute by making things possible. Impossibilities are impossible because God has prevented them from being possible. He denies Himself the power to make a state of affairs actual though this is not to say that He might or could now furnish the power. He does not thereby lack a power that it is possible to have but He always retains the ability to give Himself more powers than He has.<sup>144</sup> Labeling these thoughts “powers” is misleading then. God’s power is not contingent on His creative concepts.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 280-282, 289.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 263-265, 282-285. See below for permission and prevention.

<sup>144</sup> This does not mean that this is possible. Leftow adds that if God is atemporal, He has not really *passed up* His chance to think up more creatures. Rather, He is currently passing it up. He will not change His mind on thinking up more, however, because an atemporal being cannot change intrinsically. Ibid., 293-295.

Supplying natures merely allots God more options for utilizing the *natural* power He already enjoys. Consequently, God's person or nature is not diminished or enhanced by the outcome of the Bang.<sup>145</sup>

Why did God not think up all that was in Him to think up? He would certainly seem more creative if He did. His nature may provide some reasons for it prohibits the conception of things that would be far more horrific than in His current set. There is a chance that He would get more of this in the next Bang.<sup>146</sup> Additionally, it may be the case that God's thinking up some creatures is better than not thinking up any, but it does not inevitably follow that more is better than less. More action does not settle whether something is perfect or not in an area but instead, we intuitively consign the acknowledgement of perfection to a being's ability, regardless of their exercising of that ability.<sup>147</sup>

God's power is inexhaustible and He is perfectly wise, creative, etc. With no cap available for God's imagination, multiplying entities would delay Him indefinitely in creating because He would be perpetually accumulating possibilities, and to discontinue imagining after later Bangs would represent an arbitrary ending place in this imaginative process. Even conceding that He *would create* after additional Bangs, it would only serve to make His selection of a world to actualize more arbitrary. Nonetheless, His creative conceiving ceased with one Bang, not because of a cognitive scarcity, but He chose to conclude it there. It is His prerogative to not think up more than He did. What is more, there may be no best in relation to a quantitative number of creatures and God could be satisfied with what He gets initially. Affirming He was

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 296-298.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 266-267.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 274-276.

not implies His imagination is deficient in some respect.<sup>148</sup> Nothing appears to weigh against God's wants and desires being fulfilled in the first Bang. Suppose that something was lacking in it. God would have known this and *kept the Bang going* until it met His criteria for a good selection.<sup>149</sup>

What plays the role of abstract objects like possible worlds and natures are then divine powers (or mental events). In how they are being used here, they are neither material nor have causal power. The rule of parsimony rules in favor of a single concrete object with some of its mental events over the Platonic horde if it can do the job of the forms without all the fuss. There are divine representations (DR) of creatures that God can create that determine how the world could go. All this talk of the formation of concepts can be captured in understanding that an event is produced in God's mind that plays a definite causal role. Objects that serve as precise models for creation are presented to God for Him to evaluate, take an attitude towards (take preferences), and have intentions in creating. A DR is possible insofar as God permits such a thing. His conception of a thing is what makes it what it is, or better yet, could be.<sup>150</sup>

It is not merely the semantics of possible worlds that God straightens out for DRs but its syntax as well. In fact, *being semiaquatic* is an adjective-type (a property) because God has so formed it and "platypuses" are noun-types (substances) by the same logic. Had He not formed

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 290-298.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 370-373. A Molinist could argue that God's middle knowledge would drive Him to continue until He had *all facts in* to contemplate what He wants to create. Leftow's response is to reject Molinism outright because he seems to find it problematic on other grounds. Middle knowledge is a contentious issue so such a rejection is not unwarranted. Barring that position, God does not know prior to creation what creatures will do aside from probabilistic reasoning. But He knows what they will do on account of His timelessness. Nevertheless, I believe that a Molinist who is attracted to Leftow's position on God and modality could agree with him that God's imagination may not admit of a stopping point but He could always keep thinking up new creatures, never draining what is in Him to do. They could proceed to hold on those suppositions, with Leftow, that one Bang is enough for God's purposes and desires.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 299, 312-315. This is not to reject content for impossible states of affairs. A *square circle* has content among God's powers in that either *if it were tokened* it would be a thing of an exact type (though God would not do this) or it has content due to squares and circles having content in God's other powers.

these syntactical features, they would not be a part of secular reality. Despite God being a substance and exhibiting attributes, a non-deity theory makes no contention that God must do something similar with creatures. God develops syntactical rules to follow – in the sense of patterns in how God combines various concepts He has, with attributes and so on – not innately, but post-Bang and how He thinks them is how they are. Among these concepts, one can then differentiate between simple, singular concepts, which are those of a certain, individual object (a haecceity), and complex general concepts of properties.<sup>151</sup>

### C. *Permitting and Preventing States of Affairs*

Permission and prevention, briefly mentioned previously, follow the Bang. Once God does think up the kind ‘platypuses,’ His prevention or permission decides the matter definitively – permission being equivalent to making a state of affairs possible and prevention, impossible. Both are the result of divine mental activity and occur from eternity.

Causal prevention consists in a state of affairs *S* or proposition *that S* not being something that obtains independently of a source (or cause);  
and an event *E* is caused by an object *x* such that *E* is sufficient in the context to ensure that *S* (or *that S*) does not come about or *x* omits an action where this omission effectively keeps *S* (or *that S*) from being the case.<sup>152</sup>

By nature, God must prevent certain states of affairs/propositions including disproportionately immoral states of affairs (i.e., extremely gratuitous amounts of evil) and

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 321-325, 325-330. Some, who Leftow calls “generalists” and the general position they represent “generalism,” hold that there cannot be singular concepts of individuals *before* they exist. God could have a general concept of a person that could be instanced and become a singular concept upon instantiation. For them, the corresponding singular concept for a general one is neither possible nor impossible prior to its existing. Possibility of the singular concept means God would know it. Paradoxically, all singular objects that can exist either do exist or have existed but not all singular concepts that are not impossible.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 333-337. So *x* could prevent through the mediation of a state of affairs, is only sufficient to prevent together with another preventer, or overdetermines the prevention by either **redundantly** preventing *S* or *that S* (i.e., something else *y* would prevent it if *x* had not) or is a **failsafe** (i.e., *x* would have prevented *S* or that *S* had *y* not first). *X*’s omission is the second way to prevent. *X*, in not performing some action, makes it so that “some causal consequence of the act is omitted.” Another note by Leftow here: a prevention of *S* does not lead to  $\sim S$ . For one, if *S* is a vague property, neither may have a determinate truth-value.

contradictions/metaphysical absurdities (e.g., Gene Wilder  $\neq$  Gene Wilder).<sup>153</sup> God is omniscient so that He knows those states of affairs incapable of prevention (based on their natures or it is too late to prevent it), is perfectly rational so He does not attempt to prevent these, and is omnipotent and in perfect control of His power so as to prevent whatever can be prevented without hiccups.<sup>154</sup>

Now, platypuses, and their secular kin, are included in those states of affairs that fall outside of the purview of things that God *has to* or *cannot* prevent from existing on account of His nature. Of course, it follows that certain preferences are part of God's nature. Presumably, He has moral and aesthetic preferences and whatever else may admit of a better/worse distinction. For these, God has a distinct amount of approval or disapproval for all states of affairs with His attitude being directly proportional to the good-making or bad-making qualities of each. Leftow adds that He can take non-natural preferences as well.<sup>155</sup>

Rightly interpreting Leftow on this component of his story is crucial and equally difficult so we must proceed cautiously. Some have seen him as saying that many preferences are left open since they involve creaturely essences that are not contained in God's nature and this means that what God prevented in absolute modality is erratically voluntaristic.<sup>156</sup> He can select a

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 333-334, 412. God still conceives of morally reprehensible worlds (MRW) though they are impossible. In fact, His conceiving them makes them conceivable. A modal argument could be constructed against God's existence if Leftow's position is true. God's existence would render MRWs impossible but MRWs are possible, therefore God does not exist. By **S5**:  $\diamond M \equiv \sim \diamond G / \diamond M \supset \sim \diamond G / \diamond M // \sim \diamond G$ . Leftow's reply in *G & N* gives one possible answer in distinguishing between conceivability and possibility. The other might have been developed posterior to the release of the book and he suggested it in a lecture delivered at Baylor University. There, he utilized the skeptical theist's argument where there may be goods in such worlds that are unknown to us and outweigh the evils therein. The theist may not have to abandon as much as is normally assumed in the discussion. Brian Leftow, "The Argument from Contingency," Lecture; available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnPEi9NIOmY>; Lecture originally given at Baylor University at *Plantinga Workshop: Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments Conference* on 8 November 2014; accessed 26 December 2015.

<sup>154</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 338-342.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 267-268.

<sup>156</sup> E.g., William Lane Craig, "Book Review of *God and Necessity*," *Faith and Philosophy* 30. No. 4 (October 2013): 467-468. I also made this mistake, a very easy one to make considering the labyrinth language of *G*

preference, and maybe do this with inclining, but non-necessitating, reasons from His nature. Platypuses, even post-Bang, could have been impossible because God took a disliking to the poor animal for some fickle reason. Leftow is not so Cartesianly cavalier with possibilities. When Leftow speaks of God's choosing non-natural preferences in modality, He is not talking about impossibilities but rather God narrowing the actual world down to what it *will* be.

The picture depicted has a branching of secular modality stretching out from the Bang and possible outcomes splinter the branches out into various paths. This splintering is the result of possible preferences God could take out of preferences not dictated by His nature – powers He acquires after the Bang. A red line on this modal tree shows the history of the actual world in its entirety. Many of the branches intersect with the red line as they have the same pieces. Some lines, based upon God's natural or non-natural preferences, *will never* intersect the line but do branch off of segments that do. If God takes a non-natural preference for no platypus world-powers, they would not have shown up in the actual world, though other branches would contain them as possible because God *could have* preferred them.<sup>157</sup> God's selection of a preference for preventing something *from becoming actual* is not irrational. It may have few or no reasons behind the decision, but where an agent is indeterministically free and reasons do not incline either way, he can simply choose.<sup>158</sup>

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& N, and had to re-write this section accordingly after reading Leftow's follow-up to Craig. Brian Leftow, "On God and Necessity," *Faith and Philosophy* 31, No. 4 (October 2014): 450-457.

<sup>157</sup> For a diagram of Leftow's modal tree, see Appendix 1: Fig. 1, where I have provided one from Chad McIntosh. McIntosh half-seriously quips, "Here is a picture worth (almost) 550 pages." Chad McIntosh, "Review of God and Necessity," *Philosophy in Review* 34, No. 3-4 (2014): 144.

<sup>158</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 338-342, 347-352, 373-378, 404. God also has dispositions to prevent. He might be disposed to prevent a state of affairs. If He had never thought something up, like platypuses, there would be no truths about them but He could be disposed to prevent something like them. On the basis of His natural preferences and non-natural preferences, He may *now* have a propensity for using a given power in a certain way in other cases. *Ibid.*, 342-343.

In addition to causal prevention, there is causal *permission*. That *P* is causally possible means that:

- (1) it is always the case (timelessly or temporally) that *P*;
- (2) something *x* has the power as well as the opportunity to cause *P* (or cause a thing or things that do);
- (3) *x* has the power but another entity *y* provides the occasion while *x* has that power or vice versa (or either *x* or *y* can cause something that plays the role of *x* and/or *y* in this scenario, etc.);
- (4) *x* has the opportunity and some entity with power and opportunity can give *x* the power while *x* has the opportunity (or can cause things that do);
- (5) that *P* can come true without a cause and there is/will be nothing in place to prevent its obtaining;
- (6) that *P* can come true without a cause, things do exist that could prevent it but do not.<sup>159</sup>

The causal possibilities outlined here that involve a cause bringing about a cause that brings about the possibility for an effect collapse into one another. If it is possible that it is possible that *P*, then *P* is possible.<sup>160</sup> Causal possibilities are transitive and symmetrical in this way and will include the system **S4**.<sup>161</sup> To repeat, powers are intrinsically modal since they are able to bring about their effects if the appropriate conditions are present but they are non-reductive in grounding truth claims for modality.<sup>162</sup>

#### D. *Cleaning Up: Modal Logic and Other Concepts in Leftow's System*

In summary of what we have up until this juncture, God necessarily exists and He is the common starting point of all histories that emerge from the Bang. These histories diverge causally after the Bang with things such as physical necessity being farther along the branches of our modal tree. He sees the initial crop of states of affairs and immediately sees the quality of their features, whether they are good or bad, and takes attitudes towards them accordingly. In

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 352-353.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 353-354.

<sup>161</sup> G.E. Hughes & M.J. Cresswell, *A New Introduction to Modal Logic* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 53.

<sup>162</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 354-356. Paralleling the dispositions to prevent, there are dispositions to permit.

taking such attitudes, He opts for the prevention or permission of the states of affairs and further supplements them with non-natural preferences that branch them out; dispositions towards them may also be adopted. No time is needed for a perfectly rational and efficient mind to do this.<sup>163</sup>

That every secular state of affairs is either permitted or prevented is a necessary disjunction and God from eternity does one or the other.<sup>164</sup> Logical falsehoods are prevented because God thinks logically in His shaping and describing of reality and how He so thinks affects His decisions, which consequently aides in explaining why logic dictates to reality for us in our creation of things and descriptions of reality. Mathematical falsehoods are also prevented by God's nature by His having divine inventions with essential definitions corresponding to how He has thought them that, in turn, become parts of sets that some things belong to and others do not, and sets account for mathematics. The same goes for modal essences (e.g., that the prime minister cannot be a prime number). For these *absolute* necessities, God permits them in not preventing them given that necessarily a thing is either prevented or permitted.<sup>165</sup>

In a sense, there are alternate Bangs *in* God that have never *banged* nor will they ever be realized in this way. No actual possible world contains them and although God could have thought different things, there are no things in Him that would constitute another Bang.<sup>166</sup> We

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 360-36

<sup>164</sup> That is,  $\Box(P \vee \sim P)$ . But, as we have learned from Aristotle, we cannot from this get  $\Box P \vee \Box \sim P$ . Aristotle, "De Interpretatione: IX, 25-35," in S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, and C.D.C. Reeve (eds.), *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristototele*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2011), 707. This is not valid in any modal system and Leftow's account may take advantage of the fact for some preferences being *up to* God. Hughes & Cresswell, *A New Introduction to Modal Logic*, 31.

<sup>165</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 364-368, 410.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 368-373. A possible retort could be that many of the attributes in the actual Bang no doubt could have been filled in by particulars of other Bangs had those occurred and that is why they are somewhat incomplete contents of alternative Bangs. They partially represent what other particulars could be but God does not fill these out in detail or otherwise He would come up with other possibilities. How could He fail to know these, however, if He is perfectly rational? The answer, according to Leftow, is that the histories God has are lacking if and only if they are not sufficient for God's purposes or for the satisfaction of one of His "all-things-considered" desires. The actual Bang does meet these requirements and there is no need for others.

have then what is in God to do, the Bang, God's analysis of the contents of the Bang, and lastly, His permission or prevention of the contents. If they are permitted, they are within the range of His power to bring about and are not if He prevents them. Possible histories, once more, have segments in common with the actual world and God is the common starting point of all of them in the Bang. Worlds begin at this point, and branch away from one another at a time  $t$  when they include something new, not included in the main branch. If this is the case, and  $W$  branches off the actual world  $\alpha$ , then it has all  $\alpha$  has up until a time  $t_1$  and if  $W'$  does the same for  $W$ , then  $W'$  is not only possibly possible for  $\alpha$  but possible too, as it has the same history as  $\alpha$  up until  $t_1$ . The transitivity here will be the case for all worlds, given their shared origin, and so Leftow's system includes **S4** assuming reflexivity, which seems to be the case as we are really talking about divine powers and God knows each power is possible relative to itself. Also, it boasts of **B**, for mutual segments convey symmetricity in that each branch is possible relative to each other. **S5** is **S4** + the **B** axiom,  $p \supset \Box \Diamond p$ , and so, the absolute modality contains **S5**. In the end, all of these possibilities are set in stone, as it were, and this is what, in effect, **S5** guarantees.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Leftow will later give a modal semantics for His account but I have omitted it for reasons of space and also for the fact that it mirrors the regular semantics in almost all respects but replaces talk of worlds with divine powers. One comment worthy of mention from this section of *G & N* is Leftow's look at domains. On the standard modal semantics,  $D$  is the set of all possible objects. We have good reason to think that not all possible objects are actual. So, Meinongianism seems to be the next logical step: namely, there are possible but non-existent objects. Leftow incorporates aspects of Ruth Marcus and Alvin Plantinga in his thoughts on the range of a domain.  $D$  ranges purely over actual objects for both but Plantinga qualifies the use of  $Q$ , where  $Q$  stands for a function assigning a subset of  $D$  to worlds (the assignment being those objects existing at the world in question). Marcus had restricted substitution in quantifiers so that worlds that are not actual have no domain but in Plantinga,  $Q$  contingently assigns what counts as a domain for a world. Only those objects that are actual can be so assigned but if another world had been actual,  $Q$ 's output would vary with whatever world happened to be actual. Nor is  $Q$  the sole function for Plantinga. Another function assigns haecceities rather than objects, haecceities being those properties that would be exemplified if a given world had become actual. Leftow contends that Plantinga should be interpreted as proposing that  $Q$  does not denote a *name* but a *sense* if the object is not actual. An object would have existed for the name to denote had the world it is in been actual. The valuation function  $V$ , which assigns an extension at a world for every predicate, is re-introduced as giving this sense. A predicate 'F' can be predicated of 'a' in the world  $W$  if a haecceity  $h$  can be assigned to 'a' by  $V$  in that world so that it is true to say that had  $W$  been actual,  $h$  would be co-exemplified with F. Leftow follows Plantinga but adds a function,  $2Q$ , that assigns a divine mental event to each world-power so that God understands what an individual that the power causes or promotes would be. In regards to constants,  $2Q$  assigns individual divine mental events to constants (to understand what denotations would be) and it assigns

God “would not have allowed different possibilities.” Doing all of this from eternity safeguards against more possible worlds being added to the mix at a later time, ultimately undermining an **S5** modality. He has in *every* world the powers He possesses in *any* world and this generates **S5**.<sup>168</sup> A stronger intuition for **S5** is defended in that God’s nature constrains enough that some remnants of deity theory remain. The possibility of various preferences explains God’s choice among possibilities. They do not make possibilities possible. The same things would have been possible no matter what God’s preferences were. His permission is entailed by the objective value and logical coherence that states of affairs have intrinsically. Passing the permission test comes by meeting a set standard *n* that is the way it is because of who God is.<sup>169</sup>

Even God’s preferences are not as randomly chosen as they look at first blush and although they do not alter **S5** either way, keeping them from possibly shifting does more justice

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pluralities of these constants to predicates’ extensions (to understand what extensions would be). *Ibid.*, 444-453; Alvin, Plantinga, “Actualism and possible worlds,” *Theoria* 42, No.1-3 (1976): 152-160.

<sup>168</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 391-392, 403-407, 450. Hughes & Cresswell, *A New Introduction to Modal Logic*, 62. A few objections could be posed to this and Leftow briefly addresses them. (1) *Q*: God’s omnipotence should allow for more possibilities later on after the Bang. *A*: Omnipotence, as is well observed in philosophy of religion, does not entail that God can do whatever task. The best contemporary account of omnipotence defines it in terms of being able to actualize possible states of affairs. Brian Leftow, “Omnipotence,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, eds. Thomas Flint and Michael Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 167-98. It is therefore question begging to assert that it is possible for God to think of more possible worlds. (2) *Q*: If God does not have any pre-creative singular concepts but only general ones, there can be individuals that come into being that were not possible before their existence (albeit not impossible either). *A*: Fair enough, the absolute modality cannot be **S5** if pre-creative singular concepts were not there but few are willing to admit either the loss of **S5** or singular concepts. (3) *Q*: If God prevented everything from the Bang and not afterwards, we could end up with the following scenario. God actualizes, at the Bang, the first part (instant-thick slice) of a universe’s history. If He did this, no other history without that beginning would be causally possible according to the posited theory. *A*: Prevention applies to God’s *setting the modal facts* and nothing more. It takes place apart from God’s will to bring something into existence. An atemporal God, based on earlier arguments, still has the chance and the power to actualize differently (though He is passing it up) and thus, other branches remain open. A temporal God does have the opportunity to choose otherwise as long as He does not actualize from eternity. Choosing to create from eternity, temporally, comes with problems of its own in that God is not exactly free in creating and it would be better for the temporalist to say that God simply chooses a time to decide to create. Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 408-410.

<sup>169</sup> Leftow, “On God and Necessity,” 453-454. Arguably, *n* could differ and in that case, the theist could maintain that God permits a low level of value by seeing the little value that is there, though He would never actualize such a world. I think this is the direction Leftow is moving in since the release of *G & N*. Leftow, “The Argument from Contingency,” Lecture.

to Leftow's attempt. God has the same personality no matter what and as preferences strike us involuntarily most often, God would always prefer what He did given the same nature and options. The actual world is what God liked best and the small deviations from this on the tree begin with what He liked infinitesimally less and so on.<sup>170</sup>

God's permission of something *P* means that He permits a whole history with *P* in it, or at least *P* in it. *P* is possible if God permits that *P* (i.e., a history with *P* in it). If God permits *P* and its complement  $\sim P$  – needless to say in separate histories – they are contingent.

Impossibilities work differently. A set of basic attributes come at the Bang, God combines them in accordance with their content.<sup>171</sup> The transworld identity of individuals and attributes is preserved because the same power and mental event in God grasps what a substance would be. If God is timeless, He does this occurrently. The same could be true for a temporal God but it could be coherently believed that God's grasping of a thing is dispositional as well. In either case, God understands a property to be the same, so it is the same in any history. What can be held for properties in general holds for essences, *a fortiori*. Upon grasping the concepts of creatures in the Bang, God cannot alter them thereafter. Haecceities work much the same way. The individual is

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 454-455. This seems very close to a deity theory and Craig has seen this as a dilemma for Leftow. If God's decisions are too arbitrary, it is voluntaristic, but too constrained by His nature, it is a plain deity theory and Leftow has given nothing new. Craig, "Book Review of *God and Necessity*," 468. Leftow replies that he has no qualms with this part of deity theories but he rejects them overall because "the objection [he lodges] against deity theories, in a nutshell, is that it isn't plausible that God's nature comes chock-full of creaturely natures. [He doesn't] think that if we could just peer far enough into God's nature, we'd see zebras, orangutangs etc. God's nature is not a zoo. All God's lions were born free: in God's undetermined, unconstrained imagining. Perhaps His nature takes over in determining the possible once they're there. But even if that's so, the role [he gives] God's non-natural conceiving keeps [him] out of the deity-theoretic camp." He is adamant that to get his own theory, you start with Aquinas and, next, take a half-step towards Descartes – "and [he] meant a half-step." Leftow, "On God and Necessity," 456. For a diagram comparing and contrasting Leftow with other deity theories, again see Appendix 1: Fig. 2, for one constructed by Chad McIntosh. McIntosh, "Review of *God and Necessity*," 143.

<sup>171</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 410-412.

identical from *world to world* (more literally, power to power) given that God has singular concepts of creatures prior to His actualization of them.<sup>172</sup>

#### E. *On God and Necessity... and Possibility*

God's own possibility is intrinsic, reductive and primitive. Conversely, secular possibilities come before their existence and only after the Bang. The two can be combined for a further explanation of God's possibility. Divine powers account for secular possibilities and He must be there for these powers to be used. The world-powers do not account for His existence but are plausible, non-reductive truth-makers for His possibility. His necessity can be argued from perfect being theology but furthermore, on Leftow's modal account, God exists in every possible world as the source of all secular modality. His powers ground what is secularly possible. He claims that this is not a brute fact for a coherent alternative to His existence and role in modality is just not there. He is "the most basic fact of all" and "is alone at the explanatorily basic level of things." His necessary existence is derived from His nature as the source of all secular possibilities in His powers and His eternity. There is nothing but God to make it true that He exists necessarily, as the truth-conditions of such involve a negative existential statement. Instead, the account just provided *explains* the truth of His necessity.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 416-424. Leftow provides an analog for the transworld identity of individuals in authors of fictional works. They may stipulate, as the author, that a character be the same from one story to another. For example, Chesterton's Father Brown is still Father Brown whether one is in *The Innocence* or *The Wisdom* of its main character and this, with almost anything the author decided to do with him. The last qualification reminds us that there are unavoidable restraints for the creative freedom of the author. They cannot contradict what they have already written about the character. The character cannot change into a rock in one story. The stories written by God in His permission of possible histories of worlds are similar in that His intent makes things true of individuals. After His thinking them up (the Bang), He is free to permit and prevent what He wants. The Bang is like Chesterton's first conception and writing of Father Brown. God will not contradict what He initially conceives but is free aside from that fact. Obviously, this all supposes that God has pre-creative singular concepts of individuals and if generalism is true, multiple individuals could satisfy a world-type.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 435-443.

## F. *Anticipated Objections*

Before moving to criticisms of Leftow, we can briefly see a few objections he anticipates. Firstly, is God free in (1) thinking up secular modality and (2) giving them the modal status He does? Nothing constrained God to think as He did. It was not exactly necessary either as necessity is a modal notion that He and His activity explicate, not something to which they are subject. His nature did constrain Him to think up some creatures but not any one creature. Given that His nature does not have *platypuses* or *dogs* written into it, we may say that it was in God not think them up or to have thought up something else in their place, but He cannot not think of platypuses or dogs now, for He has lost, or *is losing* on the atemporal model, the chance to imagine differently. It would seem that God lacks the control we have because we can intend to imagine certain things but God cannot or else this implies that He has concepts of creatures before the Bang. Nevertheless, He set the parameters of the Bang by His nature, nebulously, disallowing certain possibilities and then He activated the Bang through thought. Imagination is inherently spontaneous in this way anyhow.<sup>174</sup> Also, God's nature did not make Him prefer what He did. He is free and intentional in doing so. He could have done otherwise but we now say He could not because He chose as He *did*, *would not* have chosen otherwise and *will not* change His mind.<sup>175</sup>

Secondly, perhaps God is not very rational in this scenario. As we see no reason for them, His decisions appear arbitrary, made on a divine whim. Why did He limit the possible as He did?

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 457-460. One could object that as our imagination does not afford us an exact knowledge of what is possible, who is to say that God's imagination would give Him real possibilities and not conceptions? The comparison fails since there are modal truths independent of us that we fail to apprehend in our imaginings. Our imagination simply takes what we are given in experience and reconfigures it. There is no secular possibility before the Bang that God could fail to grasp in the Bang. The Bang generates these modalities *ex nihilo*. This is not to say that Leftow denies the role of imagination in considering modality, as it is one of our best guides to the modal realm. All he is saying is that it would be a hasty generalization to reason from defeasibility in imaginative reasoning in modal matters to an extreme modal skepticism. Ibid., 460 n. 4.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 460-461.

It is no more irrational for God to do this than it is for Charles Dickens to make Scrooge a stingy sourpuss who spurns sympathy and spurs sneers. God has chosen as He has, no contradictions or metaphysical problems accompany it, and that is that. He may have no deep, abiding reason for choosing a preference but a choice had to be made and He liked one the best so He picked it. There may be no reason why it was liked the best but the take away is that there is no reason not to choose it either. At most, it is non-rational (or a-rational) but not irrational. Not every natural reason makes one rational in choosing something; hence, reason-giving cannot be a sufficient condition for choosing rationally. A scientist could toy with my DNA prenatally to incline me to prefer chocolate over vanilla ice cream. Neither is it necessary for he could also make sure that I have no preference genetically and feed me horrible food for years before giving me some of each ice cream to try. I would be rational in developing a preference for one over the other even without a disposition.<sup>176</sup>

A second rationality concern comes in the form of William Mann posing a Euthyphro-style dilemma for divine rationality and freedom: either God affirms that water is identical to H<sub>2</sub>O because this is so or it is so because He affirms it. Leftow rejects Mann's solution where knowing and willing are one in God. More satisfactory, says Leftow, is His own position that says with Scotus and Aquinas that God affirms this truth because it is true, but he can add that God's affirming it makes it true because God *is responsible* for the nature of water, having thought it up.<sup>177</sup>

We can now assess the weaknesses of Leftow's account. I limit my focus here to one, though the next chapter will include more as we develop a deity theory of our own. I will also

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 466-471. For more on the irrationality of God's preferences, see above.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 461-466.

leave the strengths of Leftow for that weighty task.<sup>178</sup>

## II. The ‘In Him’ Locution and Complications

### A. Bohn, Forrest, Oppy and Craig vs. Leftow

The most discussed, and debated, of the claims of *G & N* is indisputably the ‘in Him’ locution.<sup>179</sup> The motivations behind Leftow forbidding it modal status are clear and understandable. Einar Bohn believes that Leftow separates God’s causal modality (what Bohn calls “divine modality”) from what we normally know as ‘metaphysical modality’ with possible worlds and all that goes along with them. What is ‘in God to do’ is divinely possible and secular possibilities arise from this in the Bang to become *metaphysical* modality. Surely this would flout our modal intuitions in that the metaphysically necessary is divinely contingent! Metaphysical modality is regularly understood to be the broadest category of necessity and possibility. Nothing is left out of it. Rather than explaining this, Leftow abandons it. For him, not

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<sup>178</sup> Leftow does consider one more objection that I will provide as an addendum now. It is fine to say that God is rational in choosing between preferences when there is no inclining reason on either side but the options are qualitatively distinct (e.g., chocolate vs. vanilla). What if they were qualitatively identical? God could dream up two individuals that are the same in all respects except their identity: Moses and Schmoses. Both fulfill the role of each other completely. They both could, in the description afforded by *Singing in the Rain*, suppose their toeses are roses, but suppose this erroneously. What reason could God have for preferring one and not the other? Should both be possible? How is He to decide? First of all, there must be some difference to make them distinct if God has pre-creative singular concepts. They are numerically distinct if only in their haecceities. Whatever *thisness* entails, they differ in it. In any case, it is hard to see what this is and the other could play any role played by one. Two things follow: (1) God has a general Moses-type concept and the only question is how many instances of the concept He wants. He could have a preference there. (2) The two concepts do not differ qualitatively but a token would lead to either Moses or Schmoses either way. This leads back to Leftow’s theory since these are God’s concepts and He has preferences about the exercising of powers. *Ibid.*, 471-474.

<sup>179</sup> Craig, “Book Review of *God and Necessity*,” 467-468; Peter Forrest, “Not Enough Powers,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 6, No. 3 (Autumn 2014): 31-32. Graham Oppy, “Leftow on God and Necessity,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 6, No. 3 (Autumn 2014): 7-11; Einar Duenger Bohn, “Divine Contingency,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 6, No. 3 (Autumn 2014): 19-23.

only do possible worlds not contain all possibilities, each and every true secular proposition on those worlds could have been false.<sup>180</sup>

Peter Forrest similarly writes that as God could have had different powers, the other world-powers in God would be possibly possible. If the absolute modality is at least **S4**, then these are possible and God would know them. And given that they are wider than the scope of divine powers, absolute modality must be broader than the world-powers of Leftow. Leftow might respond that there are truth-value gaps for propositions about powers God has not acquired, but bivalence would definitely hold for absolute modality.<sup>181</sup>

After surveying possible meanings for ‘in Him,’ Graham Oppy does not find the concept helpful, coherent or, needless to say, acceptable. His objections are best characterized in a series of questions. How is God to decide what to make possible? Would an omnipotent being not give Himself all the powers He can? How could He deny Himself powers consistently? It would seem that if God lacks a power, He does not will to have it for Leftow and an omnipotent being would

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<sup>180</sup> I somewhat disagree with Bohn on this point. It seems to me that they would technically not be false but rather, they would be *neither true nor false*. Leftow is insistent on this. Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 150-153. This follows in the spirit of P.F. Strawson’s response to Russell in cases of truth-value when there is nothing to denote. P.F. Strawson, “On Referring,” in A.P. Martinich and David Sosa (eds.), *The Philosophy of Language*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 127. One could attempt to avoid Strawson’s contention, as has been done, since there is intuitively still something to denote in the cases he presents, but I believe this is not open to one objecting to a Leftowian account. For one such response to Strawson, see, Chris Daly, *Philosophy of Language: An Introduction* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 140-145. Propositions, if anything, are God’s thoughts for Leftow and God would not believe or disbelieve anything about entities that are not there to take attitudes towards (or know or not know if beliefs states do not apply to God). Bohn, like some counterexamples that were presented in chapter two, *holds fixed* that these propositions exist and says that they would be false if things had gone differently. Leftow would undoubtedly respond that this cannot be *held fixed* if God did not think up these things. Of course, there is Peter Forrest’s challenge to consider (see below).

<sup>181</sup> Forrest, “Not Enough Powers,” 31-32. If Leftow were not to endorse absolute possibility being maximally broad (i.e., having *all* possibilities there could be), Forrest puts forward three anticipatory replies: (1) Leftow’s own account suggests it since the absolute modality he lays out circumscribes all other modalities (physical, epistemic, etc.); (2) Forrest’s arguments that absolute modality contains all analytic truths implies that it is maximally broad; and (3) the fact that Leftow needs possible worlds at all seems to imply that they are there in the broadest sense. It is difficult to interpret Forrest on the last point, on which he is all too brief, but I take him as arguing that absolute modality encompasses all of Leftow’s modality and more, even on Leftow’s account. Leftow makes use of so-called impossible worlds and has no ontological substitute for them.

have the power to do whatever is in Him to do. How are we to understand ‘it is in God to A’ without the proper answers to these questions?<sup>182</sup>

William Lane Craig chides Leftow for his “strange retrospective modality.” If something is *in God to do* in a moment in advance of the Bang, He is able, has the power and it is possible for Him to do it. Moreover, Leftow treats ‘in Him’ modally but denies it the privilege of being a modal notion. Can sense be made of saying that ‘it is in God to do A’ is explanatorily prior to God willing and having the power to do A and hence, A’s possibility? Unless there is doghood, God could not acquire the power to actualize dogs.<sup>183</sup>

Leftow is not without answers. Causal possibility, *pace* Bohn, is downstream from the Bang. It does not embrace a detached, pre-Bang modality. ‘In Him’ will not warrant the inference from ‘it is *in God to otherwise*’ to ‘God *could* have done otherwise.’ He could not have.<sup>184</sup> He received these powers in the Bang, had them from eternity and cannot change His mind. They are not contingent but metaphysically necessary. Even granting ‘in Him’ a modal operator, it would simply *collapse* into ordinary modal semantics. If God has not thought up

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<sup>182</sup> Oppy, “Leftow on God and Necessity,” 7-11.

<sup>183</sup> Craig, “Book Review of *God and Necessity*,” 465-467.

<sup>184</sup> Leftow parses this out using Kadri Vihvelin’s work on free will and determinism. An agent could have chosen otherwise in a situation even if they are determined because they have the disposition to do otherwise. Conceding determinism and holding the laws of the universe up to a time *t* fixed, the agent will always choose the same thing. They are determined by antecedent factors, whatever those are. Nevertheless, Vihvelin thinks that a disposition in them allows us to say that they have it in them to do otherwise, not simply with different laws and conditions, but with these *same* laws and conditions. They would never trigger that disposition but it is in them in any case just as a diamond remains hard even if never in a triggering situation where the power is displayed by being pressed. Leftow acknowledges that we might say that we think the agent could do otherwise because in a possible world they do and there is no analog for God. But, to take another example, God could have seen to it that in every possible world, human beings would at every time have a genie at their side so that when we swallowed cyanide (either accidentally or out of punishment for being philosophers) the genie would cause an antidote to be in our bloodstreams and we were never poisoned. The power of the cyanide is still there, though it would have no effect on its hosts. The cyanide’s power being activated and God having it in Him to do otherwise both are counterpossibles but significant ones. Brian Leftow, “Omnipotence, Evil and What’s in God: Replies to Oppy, Bohn and Forrest,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 6, No. 3 (Autumn 2014): 51-56; Kadri Vihvelin, *Causes, Laws and Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 187. It is statements like the genie possibility that give pause with Leftow’s other statements on God’s preferences being set by His nature and being unalterable. Could one really speak of it being impossible for a genie to be separated from the cyanide situations? Modality is not that flexible.

another kind, it is impossible, for it occurs in no possible world (as the semantics says) and God will not/cannot go beyond the possible worlds He has. He has not done so, so it is impossible.<sup>185</sup> Having dealt with Bohn and Forrest in this, he turns to Oppy. Leftow reiterates that omnipotence is best not defined, and historically has not been defined, as the power to do anything but more accurately is the power to actualize possible states of affairs and God can delimit those over time (e.g., He cannot change the past, cannot break promises, etc.). God can will to have a set of powers and there not be a possibility for more as he argues in *G & N*. Craig misunderstands the phrase ‘what it is in God to do.’ The ‘in Him’ power is a general power to think up states of affairs. There was no secular thing in it; those powers come on the scene at the Bang. The perfect

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 31-32. A “collapse” occurs in modal logic when an equivalential theorem is part of a system that effectively allows for the reduction of a sequence of modal operators to a shorter sequence. Examples include  $\diamond\diamond p \equiv \diamond p$  and  $\Box\Box p \equiv \Box p$  in **S4**. Cresswell and Hughes refer to this as a “reduction law” and implementing it allows for the replacement of  $\diamond\diamond p$  with  $\diamond p$  and  $\Box\Box p$  with  $\Box p$  on any *transitive* and *reflexive* frames (i.e., where the relation R between worlds is (1) if  $w_1Rw_2$  and  $w_2Rw_3$ , then  $w_1Rw_3$  and (2) for any W,  $wRw$ ). The reduction is possible because the system **S4** is *sound and complete* with respect to these frames. For example,  $\diamond\diamond p \equiv \diamond p$  is valid on *all and only* reflexive and transitive frames. Now, **S4** is **T** + the axiom,  $\Box p \supset \Box\Box p$  (hereafter, **4**). If **4** is sound and complete with respect to all reflexive and transitive frames, so is  $\diamond\diamond p \equiv \diamond p$  because the latter is a derived theorem of the axiom. This axiom (and its theorems by extension) is valid on *all* of these frames because if  $p$  is necessary in  $w_1$  then that means that  $p$  is true in all worlds accessible to  $w_1$ . So for **4**, given reflexivity and transitivity,  $p$  will be true in  $w_1$ , and if  $w_1Rw_2$  and  $w_2Rw_3$ , then  $p$  will be true in both  $w_2$  and  $w_3$ . If this is the setup, the consequent ( $\Box\Box p$ ) cannot be false while the antecedent ( $\Box p$ ) is true and so, it is valid on this frame. If it is not transitive, then  $p$  could be true in  $w_1$  and  $w_2$  but false in  $w_3$ . Thus, if  $\Box p$  is false in  $w_2$  because  $w_2Rw_3$  and  $p$  is false in  $w_3$ , then the antecedent is true but the consequent false. To prove completeness, one needs to demonstrate that if a wff (well-formed formula) is valid on only a transitive and reflexive frame, then it is a theorem of **S4**. **S4** contains **T** so as long as **T** is complete in regards to the class of all reflexive frames, **S4** is too. For the transitive component, we must show that not only is the axiom **4** valid on a transitive frame but *only* on a transitive relation. In a sense, **4** does not merely work on a transitive frame, but presupposes it. For ‘ $w_1Rw_3$  only if  $w_1Rw_2$  and  $w_2Rw_3$ ’ to be true, then if  $\Box p$  is true in  $w_1$ , then  $p$  must be true in  $w_3$ , since  $\Box p$  is true in all worlds accessible to  $w_1$ . Next, if  $\Box p$  is a member of a world, by **4**, so is  $\Box\Box p$ . This means that  $\Box p$  in  $w_1$  becomes  $\Box\Box p$ . As  $w_1Rw_2$ , then  $\Box p$  will be true in  $w_2$  and  $p$  in  $w_3$ . This could be extended to any number of worlds as  $\Box\Box p$  can always be substituted with  $\Box p$ . Via substitution and utilizing the axiom/theorems of **T**, we can arrive at  $\diamond\diamond p \equiv \diamond p$  and  $\Box\Box p \equiv \Box p$  as theorems of **S4**. If all modal operators are the same (‘ $\Box$ ’ or ‘ $\diamond$ ’), they can be removed before the last in the series (e.g.,  $\Box\Box\Box p$  is equivalent to  $\Box p$ ). Hughes & Cresswell, *A New Introduction to Modal Logic*, 36-39, 51-52, 55-57, 114-115, 120-121. What Leftow states when commenting on the ‘What It is in God to Do’ section of *G & N*, is that any in-Him-modal-operator would reduce to the normal modal operators: that is, ‘ $IP \equiv (p \vee \Box p \vee \diamond p \vee \sim\diamond p)$ .’ When powers are acquired through God’s imaginative Bang, they will fall into one of these categories. There is no overarching modality standing over them. Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 252-254; Leftow, “Omnipotence, Evil and What’s in God,” 50-51.

creativity of God affords Him the ability to come up with completely new concepts for creation.<sup>186</sup>

### B. Final Analysis of the 'in Him' Locution

Honestly, I do not find Leftow's avoidance of the questions convincing. Whether he is taking the concept of possible worlds too far or not far enough, something is amiss in saying that it is in God to have had a different set of creature candidates but this is not possible. Bohn is right in claiming that a possible world is just a total way reality could be and Oppy intuitively observes that "it is hard to escape the feeling that we have been led around a very small circle" when saying that it is *in God* to think otherwise but this *is not* possible.<sup>187</sup> If God had another Bang, there would be more possibilities. Realistically, each set of possible worlds does shrink into individual possible worlds in the Leftowian structure, ways that reality could go. It is simply the fact that, oddly, God does not grant Himself access to the rest of these possible worlds. Therefore, absolute modality ranging over all of this is **T** at best. We have a reflexive relation on a world  $w_1$  containing the possibilities it does but nothing more. Those other possible worlds are possible relative to themselves but not one another. It stands to reason that this would have wild implications for modality.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Leftow, "On God and Necessity," 446-448.

<sup>187</sup> Bohn, "Divine Contingency," 23; Oppy, "Leftow on God and Necessity," 11.

<sup>188</sup> It could be reiterated on Leftow's end that the 'in Him' locution does not carry modal implications and that the operator would only collapse into the regular operators. All the same, I think this is confused. As in n. 185, modal operators collapse when they essentially *come to the same thing* as the reduction, modally speaking. In an *equivalential* frame that allows for the reduction, something like  $\Box\Diamond\Box\Diamond\Box\Diamond p$  will reduce to  $\Box p$  because the accessibility relation within that frame makes it the case that if  $\Box\Diamond\Box\Diamond\Box\Diamond p$  is true in a world  $w_1$ , then so is  $\Diamond\Box\Diamond\Box\Diamond p$  and so on down to  $\Box p$  (and consequently  $p$  alone since the relation includes reflexivity). Hughes & Cresswell, *A New Introduction to Modal Logic*, 59-60. Does Leftow's in-Him-modal-operator (IP) do the same? Well, that depends. If we are only considering what God *knows* is in Him to do, then it will collapse. This is a post-Bang collapse. We are told that 'IP  $\equiv (p \vee \Box p \vee \Diamond p \vee \sim\Diamond p)$ ' is the case when, in reality, we have 'GIP  $\equiv (p \vee \Box p \vee \Diamond p \vee \sim\Diamond p)$ ' where GIP is the what-God-knows-is-in-Him-to-do-modal-operator. Here is the temptation in qualifying

One can say until they are blue in the face that there are no other possibilities, but I can make no sense of this. The fact that Leftow would give us a friendly slap on the hand for saying “*If God were to dream up more...*” or “*It is possible for God to have done otherwise in modality...*” does nothing to thwart the intuition. Leftow actually seems time and again to rely on atemporality to bail out the position and equates a thing’s being eternal or from eternity with it being necessary. But this is obviously false. For one, those who demur from divine timelessness would have ample reasons to reject it.<sup>189</sup> Also, I think it is fairly well supported that eternity cannot be equated with necessity.<sup>190</sup> There is a sense in which if the sun is, was and always will be hot, then it is true (and unsurprisingly uncontroversial) that it *never* could fail to be hot.<sup>191</sup> But this is trivially true and it could still be *contingent on* a necessary being.

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a Leftowian semantics. We already know that it is in God to have done differently and done more; hence, there are things in God that are not either possible or impossible, and possibly, there are things that obtain, are possible, impossible or necessary now that could have been not either possible or impossible. We then should add a qualification: ‘IP  $\equiv (p \vee \Box p \vee \Diamond p \vee \sim \Diamond p \vee \sim (\Diamond p \vee \sim \Diamond p)) \cdot \Diamond \sim (\Diamond p \vee \sim \Diamond p)$ .’ It is quite obvious why this should be avoided and why Leftow would desperately want to avoid it. A dash of DeMorgan’s reveals that this is logically equivalent to: ‘IP  $\equiv (p \vee \Box p \vee \Diamond p \vee \sim \Diamond p \vee (\sim \Diamond p \cdot \Diamond p)) \cdot \Diamond (\sim \Diamond p \cdot \Diamond p)$ .’ Leftow would say that there are no Menongian entities that could be thrown into the mix nor is it **now** possible for God to rid Himself of the ontology He has – it is just *in Him* to have done differently. Once God knows DOGS, they must be possible. He cannot forget them. Similarly, ZOGS are not around to join the collapse. However, this does not exhaust IP, only GIP. Whatever IP could mean, it must go beyond Leftow’s disjunctions or it would not allow us to speak coherently of God thinking of more or thinking differently. Leftow could say that these are counterpossibles, but informative ones. But again, this is only if we find it reasonable to accept Leftow’s system that God cannot possibly do more even if it is in Him to do more, and that it is impossible for things to have gone differently even if God has it in Him to do differently. And that, is exactly the point at issue! I confess I do not know what to make of IP in the end, but ‘IP  $\equiv (p \vee \Box p \vee \Diamond p \vee \sim \Diamond p)$ ’ does not cut it.

<sup>189</sup> For temporality: If God has set the parameters on the Bang and His goodness ensures that worlds will not be too horrific, as Leftow seems to be currently holding, He should not worry about subsequent Bangs. He could think up creatures continually. Leftow says that God wants to create and this might not be beneficial for His purposes and desires. Maybe, but who are we to say that God finds enjoyment in possibilities for that purpose alone. He might select, or use a mechanism to select (per Leftow), a world to actualize from these Bangs and a time to create it. As long as it is a good world, that should be fine and He can continue *reading a new book every night*, to put the matter crudely. The fourth chapter questions the idea of more Bangs in God, however.

<sup>190</sup> Alexander Pruss, *Actuality, Possibility and Worlds* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 26-27.

<sup>191</sup> Stephen Makin and Nicholas Denyer, “Aristotle on Modality,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 74. Supplementary Volumes (2000): 163-178.

Leftow might say that the universe is contingent because there are other possible ways it could have gone but *no possible way* the Bang could have gone. But this is only if we are extremely liberal with our use of “no possible way.” Once ‘it is in Him to do otherwise’ is introduced, I have more than a sneaking suspicion that ‘no possible way’ goes out the window. Broadly speaking, it is either possible or impossible. God could do it without contradicting logic or His nature so it is possible. The examples Leftow uses (n. 184 above), involving dispositions and the like, all bear this problem out. We make good sense of all of them because alternative possibilities exist.<sup>192</sup> Technically, it will also not work as an analog to utilize God’s delimitation of possibility in cases of the past, His promises, and others like these, because we understand that God more or less has counterfactual control of the past so that *had* He chosen differently, the past *would have been* different, though it is fixed now.<sup>193</sup>

Furthermore, it is getting things the wrong way round to say that causal dispositions and powers would exist even if they were never used among possibilia without causal prevention. On a powers theory of modality, which Leftow seems to accept, the possibilities *arise* and are there because objects have causal powers and there is interaction among objects and their causal powers and various arrangements in which these could obtain.<sup>194</sup> Oppy is not alone in wanting a

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<sup>192</sup> Maintaining that these alternative possibilities could plausibly have been different is to beg the question in favor of Leftow’s position (or at least his position as interpreted in a radical way).

<sup>193</sup> J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 527-529; Penelope Mackie, “Counterfactuals and the fixity of the past,” *Philosophical Studies* 168, No. 2 (March 2014): 399. These are known as “backtracking counterfactuals.”

<sup>194</sup> This is what makes counterfactual theories of causation and even a powers theory based solely on dispositions problematic. Specifically, dispositions can fink. *Overtly* stated, an entity is disposed to manifest *M* in reaction to a given stimulus *S* if and only if the entity were to receive *S*, then it would *M*. These conditions can be *covertly* contained in words like “fragile,” “soluble,” and “inflammable.” An object could be disposed to *M* at *t* when receiving *S* but it could lose the disposition to *M* in response to *S* after *t* so rapidly that when it would normally manifest the disposition, the process is halted such that *M* no longer occurs. Attempts have been made to salvage a counterfactual analysis by altering it to allow for finks but they also run aground on cases of *antidotes* (or *masks*) in which interferers do not eliminate the disposition required for the causal basis but instead interrupt another aspect of the process to prevent it from leading to *M* (e.g., environmental conditions). Alexander Bird, “Limitations of Power,” in *Powers and Capacities in Philosophy: The New Aristotelianism*, eds. Ruth Groff and John Greco (New

“tight connection” to hold between causal powers and possibilities and finding the thought “irresistible” that what happens “downstream” causally was, at any rate, possible “upstream.”<sup>195</sup>

In the end, Leftow’s **S5** modal system feels like a cheap imitation. Two of the driving motivations for accepting **S5** are: *how things are* could not have been impossible and *broadly logical modality* could not have been any different.<sup>196</sup> Leftow does not do justice to either of these because the overarching necessity of possibility we get is not a metaphysical one. In reviewing just a few of the problems for a Leftowian modality, I think it is best to look elsewhere and I hope to start my search in the final chapter.

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York: Routledge, 2013), 27, 38-41. Additionally, counterfactual analyses of event causation can suffer from cases of causal overdetermination, pre-emption and fail-safe cases. In actual *overdetermination*, an event may have another cause such that even if the first object had not existed, the second one still would have occurred. *Pre-emption* cases involve an event occurring which is not the cause of the effect but all the same, it would have been if the cause had not occurred thereby contradicting the counterfactual. Lastly, *fail-safe* cases put forth instances where an event that did not actually occur would have occurred had the cause not come about, and it would have caused the effect. E.J. Lowe, *A Survey of Metaphysics* (Reprint; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 178-179. For more on powers theories of modality, see Jonathan D. Jacobs, “A Powers Theory of Modality: or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Reject Possible Worlds,” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 151, No. 2 (November 2010): 227-248; Alexander Pruss, *Actuality, Possibility and Worlds* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 206-234.

<sup>195</sup> Oppy, “Leftow on God and Necessity,” 6-7.

<sup>196</sup> Pruss, *Actuality, Possibility and Worlds*, 14, 17.

#### 4. Imagination Bodying Forth: A Leftowian Deity Theory?

##### I. A General Defense of Deity Theories: Brutality for Brutality

If we are to maintain some sort of deity theory while not falling prey to Leftow's attacks on them, a couple of options are available to us. The first chapter began his diatribe against these theories with the claim that necessary truths do not get a free pass when it comes to explaining their ontology. Their content does not in any way provide a satisfying explanation for this and resorting to an account on which they are brute facts does no better. Does Leftow succeed where the other theories failed? Not exactly – leastways, not in coming to something less brute. He admits as much when he writes,

I have no answer, nor do they. For me, God just does think up what He does, and there is no more to say; for them there just are the Platonic states of affairs or divine impulses there are, and there is no more to say. Brutality for brutality, then, they and I are on a par. The bump in the rug does not disappear. We just move it to different places... For the rest, there is the brute fact that there is such a content as dogs' having tails. For me the brute fact is that God thinks this up. These facts are equally brute. So how are things more arbitrary on my view? I submit, then, that at this point my story parallels and is no worse than its competitors.<sup>197</sup>

He does think that the scales tip in favor of his own theory given that the other theories do not ontologize such necessary truths in the way his does and he explains their bruteness by a divine imaginative act. Still, many would disagree with this claim. Leftow's own passages on Scotus concede that in Scotus, God thinks up secular modality – which could not be otherwise – but denies that it is in Him to do otherwise or do more.<sup>198</sup> Such an account parallels a Leibnizian position, which is echoed by contemporary philosophers of religion across the board (what I have called a BFO).<sup>199</sup> Any of these would allow God to be the source of all secular modality

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<sup>197</sup> Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 496.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 477-478.

<sup>199</sup> Theistic activists (Morris and Menzel) hold that abstract objects are causally dependent on God though He necessarily creates them. *Modified* theistic activists exempt God and His nature from this process (Gould and

without compromising the sovereignty/aseity intuition. Leftow could reply that we have not lost any of the modality that we previously thought we had but added something more: God could have done, in the sense that it was in Him to do, exceedingly and abundantly above what we could ask or think makes up the modal realm. Deity theorists could easily agree that there is more in possible worlds than we could ever grasp without abandoning the deeply held conviction that what *could be* there, *is* there. Leftow could press that the ontology of these claims is not under God's control as it is in His account but one could simply ask how much more control God has for Leftow than He does on deity theories. God's nature necessitates Him thinking up some possibilities, He has no power over their content and His nature constrains what He finds possible and impossible in them. This resurfaces Craig's argument that Leftow's theology either becomes too voluntaristic or is a closet deity theory.<sup>200</sup>

Deity theorists have also questioned the idea that secular modality has nothing to do with God. The truths of secular modality, even if they do not imitate God or are a consequence of it

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Davis). Theistic conceptual realists (Welty and Moreland) say that these are God's thoughts but they are ontologically, not causally, dependent on God. Some nominalists (Craig) are similar to Leftow in that there is truth behind our talk of possible worlds, propositions, and the like, though these things do not actually exist. Nevertheless, they would say that it is not in God to think more. For work on each of these, see: Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel, "Absolute Creation." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23, No. 4 (October 1986): 354-355; Paul Gould (ed.), *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on The Problem of God and Abstract Objects* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Paul Gould, "A Defense of Platonic Theism," Ph.D. diss., Purdue University, 2010; Richard Brian Davis, "The Dependence Problem: Theism, Counterpossibles, and Necessity," Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1998; Scott A. Davison, "Could Abstract Objects Depend on God?" *Religious Studies* 27, No. 4 (December 1991): 485-497; Matthew Davidson, "A Demonstration Against Theistic Activism," *Religious Studies* 35, No. 3 (September 1999): 277-290. William Lane Craig, "God and the Platonic Host." Lecture; available from <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/god-and-the-platonic-host>; (Lecture originally given at the C.S. Lewis Society in Oxford University); accessed 25 April 2014; William Lane Craig, "Why are (some) Platonists so Insouciant?" *Philosophy* 86, No. 2 (2011): 213-229; William Lane Craig, "Nominalism and Divine Aseity," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 44-66; J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 504-507; Greg Welty, "Theistic Conceptual Realism: The Case for Interpreting Abstract Objects as Divine Ideas." Ph.D. diss. (Oriental College, University of Oxford, 2006); Alvin Plantinga, "How To Be An Anti-Realist (Presidential Address)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* 56, No. 1 (September 1982): 47-70.

<sup>200</sup> William Lane Craig, "Book Review of *God and Necessity*," *Faith and Philosophy* 30. No. 4 (October 2013): 468. Benjamin McGraw makes a similar observation. Benjamin W. McGraw, "Review of *God and Necessity*," *Ratio (new series)* 28 (March 2015): 117.

logically, still say something about God's power and thoughts. The counterintuitive nature of God's nonexistence following from the nonexistence of WATER is trivial for all we are saying is that God depends on God.<sup>201</sup> What this reveals is an underlying motivation for the deity theorist's position. There is a strong inkling that the secular possibilities we have are *just as* necessarily possible as the non-secular laws of logic and mathematics.<sup>202</sup>

Moreover, we really do not have an "easy, intuitive, or quick" method of delineating between so-called "non-secular" modal truths and "secular" modal truths.<sup>203</sup> Leftow strives to

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 113-114. Chris Tweedt presents a couple of analogs for this. In a proposition theory of meaningfulness, a sentence is meaningful iff it expresses a proposition. We may stipulate that (1) "Water is H<sub>2</sub>O" and (2) "7 is a prime number" are then meaningful on this theory iff they express propositions. We can say that (1) is a clear example of a proposition, either it expresses a proposition or nothing does. This means that if (1) fails to express a proposition, so does (2). The propositional status of both initially seems disconnected and unrelated but to an initiate of the proposition theory, their relation becomes clear. Analogously, the truth of (1) and (2) and God's existence all seem disconnected but once one is aware of deity theory, the connection is solidified. Nor does the deity theorist have to convince Leftow of this relation for it to be plausible, as many share the intuition that we are talking about God when we talk about the things that just He can bring about. In the same vein, the possibility axiom says that something is true iff it is true at some possible world. Both '7 is prime' and 'Obama is in China' are possibly true iff they are true at some possible world. '7 is prime' is true at some possible world if anything is. Assuming its impossibility, 'Obama is in China' is not possibly true, either. Despite their apparent irrelevance to one another, the possibility axiom shows that they are in fact related. Chris Tweedt, "Splitting the Horns of Euthyphro's Modal Relative," *Faith and Philosophy* 30 (April 2013): 5-9. Brian Leftow has responded to Tweedt at length and I find his response convincing and final. That is why I have kept Tweedt's comments in the footnotes but included it for the sake of thoroughness. Proposition theory states that the meaningfulness of a sentence depends on it expressing a proposition. Tweedt's analogy would work only if "Water is H<sub>2</sub>O" expresses a proposition in every possible world. Obviously, it does not! There are plenty of worlds in which this does not express anything in any language. Yet, in those worlds "7 is prime" could still express a proposition and count as meaningful on a proposition theory of meaning. As to Tweedt's second analogy, Leftow constructs an argument without the possibility axiom. S5 makes these conditionals true but it does not require a connection like Tweedt's in order to succeed. Within Tweedt's article is also an epistemic claim, next to the metaphysical ones. It is that we *ought to see* a connection once we grasp deity theory. Leftow finds this even more bankrupt since Leftow's whole argument against deity theories is built on the "surprising and unintuitive" nature of the conditionals he gives. Brian Leftow, "On God and Necessity," *Faith and Philosophy* 31, No. 4 (October 2014): 439-445.

<sup>202</sup> So Greg Welty in conversation.

<sup>203</sup> McGraw, "Review of *God and Necessity*," 117. McGraw's point is that Leftow draws too sharp of a distinction between substantive and formal truths. The truth of water being H<sub>2</sub>O may come along with the water being possible, as 'water is H<sub>2</sub>O' is very substantial. The formality could follow with this. However, what about there being no square circles? There would need to be a formal element up front if the truth of this proposition were necessary, but it also appeals to the substantive content of roundness and squareness in doing so. I could foresee two plausible rejoinders from Leftow. The first is that the latter is part of geometry, which follows from non-secular mathematical truths in some way. Leftow seems to suppose this at the outset of his book but it may have just been for the sake of argument. Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 154-155. In this case, McGraw would need a different counterexample to get his objection off the ground. Secondly, even granting that it is a secular truth, and Leftow does seem to think this, I do not see a problem in saying that the formal laws of God's nature dictates that He cannot combine concepts He receives in the Bang due to their intrinsic nature. Ibid., 315, 351, 448 n.6. Intuitions may lie on

keep the two separate but many secular truths say things about God by reflecting Him (as in Aquinas) and many non-secular truths do not seem to have anything to do with God either (e.g., ‘7 is prime’). Perhaps this awaits a good answer from Leftow on *how* and *why* non-secular truths are non-secular seeing that we are given only a promissory note in *G & N* for such an account.<sup>204</sup> Pending a compelling story there, I think that the deity theorist is perfectly fine with questioning the disunion of the non-secular and secular. Leftow thinks that non-secular truths quantify over everything, including God, so we cannot *get away* with removing them like we can with secular modality.<sup>205</sup> Deity theorists tend to think that secular modality equally has to do with God and what He knows He can do, so we cannot *get away* with saying He does not know all that is in Him to do. Without more on this distinction, I see nothing but a war of intuitions. Someone can still retain a BFO and be somewhat content.

## II. An Alternative Imaginative Account

### A. *Imagination and God*

All that said, I think Leftow is right in saying that a theory that does explain God ontologizing secular modal facts – or better put, substantive creaturely modality (**SCM**) – is, *ceteris paribus*, to be preferred.<sup>206</sup> I, like Leftow, also believe that God’s imagination should be

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either side of dividing substantive and formal possibility. I am inclined to accept them as distinct (see n. 206 below). Still, I think McGraw’s overall point is a good one (see below).

<sup>204</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 435.

<sup>205</sup> The deity theorist may plausibly press that without an intuitive link to God or His nature making them true, many logical and mathematical truths should count as secular and as such, would, given Leftow’s arguments, also stand over God and challenge His aseity and sovereignty. Leftow does speak of secular mathematical and logical modalities but he is not saying that these are *under God’s control* in the way that purely secular truths are. These references include ‘Gene Wilder = Gene Wilder’ or ‘Gene Wilder is one person’ and God’s nature sees to it that their complements are prevented. *Ibid.*, 367-368.

<sup>206</sup> I do not really, fully accept Leftow’s division of ‘secular’ and ‘non-secular’ truths without qualification. What I do endorse, on the other hand, is Leftow’s distinction between what McGraw deems “substantive” and “formal” truths/possibilities (n. 203 above). These were briefly covered in chapter two (pg. 41). There, we saw that

central to the account. But for reasons already put forward, and reasons yet to come, I cannot endorse his full theory. So, where Leftow began with Aquinas and took a half step in the direction of Descartes, I start off at Aquinas and take a quarter step towards Leftow. It is a deity theory in line with Thomas Aquinas's belief that the contents of SCM reflect God's nature but the mechanism for God coming to these truths is His imagination. This imagination leads to novel, but not ungrounded, truths, and these are necessarily accomplished,<sup>207</sup> as God is necessarily imaginative in the manner put forth here.

We can first ask some basic questions of what is meant by "imagination." Gregory Currie has distinguished two types of imagination: *creative* and *recreative* imagination. **Recreative** imagination is best described as a sort of copy or counterpart of something else. A model car, or even the mere imagining of a car, simulates an actual car in relevant ways. This is not to say that the similarity between original and copy is always literal or exact, but the copy cannot be understood apart from the original.<sup>208</sup> Inversely, **creative** imagination involves an *imaginative leap*. It can be associated with the abductive reasoning employed in scientific theorizing, creation of art and the practical reasoning in daily life. Though recreative imagination can be imaginative in the sense of being creative, it does not always have to be. The recreative is also easier to track, as creative imagination combines ideas in ways that go beyond our normal practice and even our

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there was a difference between the identity conditions of " $(\forall x) (x = x)$ " and "Mark Twain = Mark Twain." The former gives mere formal requirements for existence while the latter specifically refers to an entity. Logical and mathematical truths fall under the *formal* aspect for my account, while God's ideas for what to create constitute the *substantive* (or *material*) part. They are secular insofar as they are neither God, a part of God's nature, a reasoning process in God, nor are they logically entailed by these (see pg. 90 below). Nevertheless, all of these make reference to God in being about His power and knowledge and, more significantly, being like Him in certain respects. I have substituted "SCM" for "secular modal truths" and will be using it hereafter to avoid any confusion on this point.

<sup>207</sup> I mean here *metaphysical* and not *logical* necessity, and this should be consistently remembered throughout my account.

<sup>208</sup> Gregory Currie, "Imagination and Make-Believe," in *Aesthetics: A Reader in Philosophy of the Arts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. David Goldblatt and Lee B. Brown (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc., 2005), 309. This is comparable to Aquinas's technical use of "exemplar" in his theology. Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 8-13.

expectations. The lack of purely representational features in creative imagination often makes it difficult to predict and explicate.<sup>209</sup>

It is not that the creative imagination has no material with which to work. For example, abductive inference, in our experience, is an explanatory hypothesis of some phenomenon in scientific and legal cases. Charles Sanders Peirce, who is famous for calling attention to abductive reasoning and coining the term for it, saw it as casting an explanation that could afterwards be tested using deductive and inductive methods. We have a surprising body of data and a hypothesis is formulated that strikes us as plausible in light of our background knowledge of the facts. It is firstly a very good guess and later, evidence can serve to confirm or disconfirm it.<sup>210</sup> Once the supporting evidence is in place, we tend to wonder why we did not see the hypothesis sooner.<sup>211</sup>

Although imagination is not always a guide to what is possible, we still draw from reality in our creativity. What I see no analog for, however, is Leftow's baseless and spontaneous imagination that gives rise to God's candidates for creation. Where does God get these ideas? Leftow partially attacks deity theories by saying that if God reasoned from His own nature, He must do so by way of a process with which we are acquainted.<sup>212</sup> I am not familiar with this

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<sup>209</sup> Currie, "Imagination and Make-Believe," 309-310. Currie clarifies that the two are not always separate as in the case of me imagining that I say something brilliant and witty. Another qualification is that recreative imagination can be equally helpful in science, art and daily life. For example, recreative imagination allows for thought experiments in science that usually yield significant and creative breakthroughs.

<sup>210</sup> Douglas Waton, *Abductive Reasoning* (Tuscalossa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 2-4, 31-36. We will see later that this does work analogously for God but the details will change substantially.

<sup>211</sup> Think of Sherlock Holmes telling Watson how he came to the conclusion he did. Watson's reply: "I could not help laughing at the ease with which he explained his process of deduction [*read* "abduction"]. 'When I hear you give your reasons,' I remarked, 'the thing always appears to me to be so ridiculously simply that I could easily do it myself, though at each successive instance of your reasoning I am baffled until you explain your process. And yet I believe that my eyes are as good as yours.'" Holmes response: "'Quite so,' he answered... 'You see, but you do not observe.'" Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Scandal in Bohemia," in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*. Vol. 1 (Las Vegas: Thomas & Mercer, 2012), 258.

<sup>212</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 160, 162.

completely *ex nihilo* imaginative faculty. He will later say that our imagination is limited so we rely on modifying prior concepts while God's is not, but, again, what do we mean by imagination then?<sup>213</sup> He began by comparing God's imagination to our insuppressible creative bursts but if our imaginations are this incongruent, how are we to understand the analogy?<sup>214</sup>

I submit that God's imagination is both creative and recreative, and in that order. He comes up with creature concepts creatively and His actualization of them is recreative. No doubt, elements of both are involved in each stage of God's creative process but I will say that each phase is primarily one or the other. Firstly, I follow Leftow in saying that some truths are not part of God's imagination (e.g., logical and mathematical truths) but I will also defer that explanation for another time.<sup>215</sup> Secondly, as in Leftow, God can conceive of things other than Himself. God is pre-equipped with the laws of reason so this means that if God is thinking of separate things, they must contrast Him in some way in order to be distinct. God's omnipotence guarantees that He be able to think of whatever is different from Himself for there is nothing that contradicts His nature in doing so; His omniscience also assures it. An imagination of this sort is a great-making attribute and a perfect being would have it. After laying out an account of this imagination, I will

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 459-460, 460, 460 n.4.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 273-274. Some might object that if the claim now is that God's abductive reasoning is infallible, has no alternatives and comes to necessary conclusions, we have no analog for it, either. Firstly, I am only claiming that God can take imaginative leaps *like* ours, not that they are exactly alike. Leftow's divine imagination is an experience wholly disparate from our own. Secondly, is it really that counterintuitive that there could be a situation in which an individual abductively reasons but lacks some of those things we attach to this form of reasoning in our current state? Picture a *Garden of Eden* scenario where Adam is doing a bit of botany in his garden – not **the** Garden but a small subset of that one. He has no deficiency in his cognitive processes without those pesky noetic effects of the Fall. He then sees that plants thrive in sunlight while growth in constant darkness is stunted. He immediately makes the inference that plants need sunlight. He knows it is right, as He knows nothing of error in a perfect world. No competing theories are entertained and a causal connection is grasped. But surely God's leaps would be even surer than this.

<sup>215</sup> This is partly due to space and partly to my lack of ability to provide an explanation at the present moment. I have far fewer pages with which to work than Leftow, for one. To be brief, I too believe that logical truths can be grounded in how God thinks. I am only adding another reasoning process: namely, God's imaginative (or abductive) reasoning. Leftow's mechanism for God arriving at SCM is pure magic.

consider two principle challenges in considerations of vagueness and the existence of evil possibilities. Here, then, is a tentative definition of God's imagination with its products:

- I<sub>G</sub>. A is a product of God's imagination = df. Something neither is God, a part of God's nature, a reasoning process in God, nor is it logically entailed by any of these, but can be cognized by God through a conceptual negation, reversal or modification of God or a part of His nature (that is, differs from God in some way), and
- i. A has content iff it is like God in at least one respect and
  - ii. A is possible (i.e., actualizable by God) at a time *t* iff A has content and is a state of affairs<sup>216</sup> that is such that it is consistent with the laws of logic and mathematics, God's person and nature, the natures of the objects involved and what God has actualized prior to *t*.<sup>217</sup>

The first part of (I<sub>G</sub>) before (i) and (ii) allows for God to use Himself as a basis for SCM.

(i) and (ii) say that in order for something to have positive content and be possible, it must be like God in some manner. At a minimum, it must be able to exist without contradiction or

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<sup>216</sup> A state of affairs can best be described as something that could obtain or not and involves objects and properties. They range from *minimal* states of affairs (e.g., Nathan *being a philosophy student*) to *maximal* states of affairs. A possible world, and the actual world *a fortiori*, is a maximal or complete state of affairs. There are all sorts of possible states of affairs and some of these include or preclude others. A state of affairs includes another state of affairs if it is impossible for the first to obtain without the second. If it is impossible for both to obtain together, then the first precludes the second. Now, we are in a position to see when a possible state of affairs is maximal or not. It is maximal if it includes every other possible state of affairs or it precludes it. When a possible state of affairs is maximal in this way, then it is a possible world – a complete way that the world could have actually gone. Mark Textor, "States of Affairs," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.); available from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/states-of-affairs/>; accessed 9 January 2016; Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 44-45; Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 79 n. 23.

<sup>217</sup> I think I have covered all my bases here as far as omnipotence is concerned. This should satisfy not only Leftow's views of omnipotence but widely held intuitions about the property. Consistency with God's nature prevents the state of affairs of a rock too heavy for God to lift, His torturing babies for fun, etc. I include among consistency with creatures' natures things of metaphysical repugnance such as an object being red and green all over at the same time and the same sense as well as counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (i.e., given Middle Knowledge or at least libertarian freedom, God cannot force creatures to do something freely). The last qualification deals with facts of the 'hard' past (not to be confused with Ockham's definition of this). Once God has actualized or permitted the state of affairs involving, say, (N): 'Nathan is born on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, 1987,' He cannot now change the fact that this has happened. It is causally closed. At most, He may indirectly prevent it if it is a so-called "backtracking counterfactual." Such counterfactuals are 'soft facts' of the past. Someone could bring about something now such that God foreknew this would happen and prevent (N) before it occurred. This is a counterfactual control of the past. Thomas Flint and Alfred Freddoso, "Maximal Power," in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Alfred Freddoso (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 81-113; Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 527-529; P.T. Geach, "Omnipotence," *Philosophy* 48, No. 183 (Jan., 1973): 7-20; William Lane Craig, "Hasker on Divine Knowledge," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 67, No. 2 (August 1992): 92-97, 108 n.4; William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 83-97. Much of this has to do with one's view of changing the past but I, at least, think that there are too many problems with the logical consistency of doing so to advocate the possibility. E.g., E.J. Lowe, *A Survey of Metaphysics* (Reprint; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 336-342.

metaphysical repugnance. This is similar to God. Further stipulations occur when it enjoys a quality God possesses; the quality must, naturally, be like His. For example, if something has power, it must be analogous to God in that it can bring things about. If something is concrete, it must have a form or nature at instantiation. If it is to be beautiful, then it must be ordered but not monotonous, etc. The concepts, like in Leftow, are new but, unlike for Leftow, not completely.

### B. Imaginative Leaps I: Nothing and General Possibilities

God can conceive of the very opposite of Himself to start with: namely, nothing. This does not make a world with nothing in it possible.<sup>218</sup> God simply has a conception of it, as He grasps what is true concerning it.<sup>219</sup> God could have thoughts concerning *nothingness*. The

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<sup>218</sup> The argument for the possibility of an empty world, what Thomas Baldwin calls the *subtraction* argument, is generally only effective on certain understandings of the ontology of possible worlds. The subtraction argument moves from a small, finite amount of concrete objects existing to the legitimacy of no concrete objects obtaining. The *compositional* view takes concrete objects to be what make up possible worlds but there cannot be an empty world on this view since at least some object must exist in order for it to be a world. The *container* view sees a possible world as a sort of object in itself that contains other objects; it would most likely allow for the empty world. However, the container view is not easy to get a grasp on: how does it contain? is this an empty metaphor? is the container in an empty world abstract or concrete? if abstract, how does it contain concrete objects? if concrete, the empty world is no longer empty, etc. Suppose the container is space-time, as regions of space-time can reasonably not be listed with concrete objects. The upshot is that this would involve an ontological commitment to absolute time and space in spite of a great many physicists and philosophers believing these to be relational and contingent on physical objects existing. A third (and very popular) view is *ersatzism*. Here, possible worlds are maximal and consistent ways that things could have gone, often understood as abstract objects. These could be anything from states of affairs to God's ideas. It does seem to allow for the empty world (or so-called, *metaphysical nihilism*), as it is a maximal consistent way things could have been (it can be likened to a club that has rules for members even if no members are there for the rules to govern). I would see myself most closely aligned with the ersatzist so a few words need to be said. The empty world is not exactly compatible with a robust ersatzism, for a robust ersatzism holds to the existence of *essences* or *haecceities*. A haecceity is a set of essential properties that are unique to an object and so, make it what it is. Ersatzists need this because we can then say that even though a possible object may not exist at the actual world (that is, is a non-actual object), its haecceity does exist. The subtraction argument would deny this in order to say that it is possible for a *finite amount* of concrete objects to exist. Spatiotemporal location, and not properties, determine distinctness and uniqueness. This implies either that an infinite amount of concrete objects has to exist or there is a necessary being. Thomas Baldwin, "There Might be Nothing," *Analysis* 56, No. 4 (October 1996): 231-238; Geraldine Coggins, "World and Object: Metaphysical Nihilism and Three Accounts of Worlds," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 103, New Series (2003): 353-360. I think the intuition favors haecceities and either way, God can satisfy the requirements. He exists necessarily *and* has an infinite amount of concrete thoughts.

<sup>219</sup> I am once again indebted to Leftow here for the idea of the conception of something being beneficial for God and for us without such things being possible. Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 412. Another note could be helpful for readers at this point. Leftow's earlier work on counterpossibles allows for the concept of the null world and

conception of ‘nothing,’ in itself, is an imaginative leap. Speaking very loosely, no one can look at God alone apart from any SCM and say, “I can think of non-existence now that I have seen existence.”<sup>220</sup> Supposing one existed necessarily and lacked the concept, I do not think they could get to it by thinking of themselves. All that they have is their existence to go on. This brings us to imaginative leap one.

**I<sub>L</sub> 1:** God *conceives* of non-existence.

I<sub>L</sub> 1 is very significant.<sup>221</sup> As in Aquinas, God may use nothingness as a sort of principle in thinking.<sup>222</sup> It marks the boundary of God’s imagination, although it is not even possible.

Between God and nothingness, however, there can be an infinite amount of things that could

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speaking about it, while not thinking that it is a possible state of affairs. He does this by borrowing Adams’s point that we can speak of a proposition about someone not existing in a world being true *at* a world but not *in* that world, since they do not exist there for something to be predicated of them. Richard Brian Davis, “God and Counterpossibles,” *Religious Studies* 42 (2006): 371-391; Brian Leftow, “Impossible Worlds,” *Religious Studies* 42 (2006): 393-402; Robert Merrihew Adams, “Actualism and Thisness,” *Synthese* 49, No.1, Demonstrative and Indexical Reference, Part 1 (October 1981): 22-32. Christopher Menzel, has also sought to support Adams’s thesis and expand on it. Christopher Menzel, “Singular Propositions and Modal Logic,” *Philosophical Topics* 21, No. 2, Philosophy of Logic (Fall 1993): 113-148. This could make sense of God’s relation to the null world in the way Leftow implements Adams. God’s thoughts would always be *about* the empty world for it could never be actual for Him to be in it and have thoughts *in* and *of* it. (These prepositions are appropriate if propositions are nothing but God’s thoughts. Welty, “Theistic Conceptual Realism,” 220-222; Plantinga, “How to Be An Anti-Realist,” 70) If something were true *in* the empty world, it would no longer be *empty* as a proposition would be true *in* it. However, both Menzel and Adams operate on the assumption that some propositions are contingent. And so, if anything, I would prefer to limit the *at/in* distinction to just the null world. I happen to find Plantinga’s notion of haecceities more convincing than saying that *thisness* only applies to actual objects. With all that said, I have to say that the present account is not somehow intimately and indivisibly bound to a Plantingan account as it will later assume in the section on haecceities. I think that Adams’s notion can be adapted to the overall details just as well. The take away at present is that, with the way I am using the null world here, it is not a possibility but just a conception, so I do not have to defend it as such.

<sup>220</sup> I follow Leftow in using such counterpossibles and consider some of them to be informative even if the current semantics does not distinguish between significant and insignificant counterpossibles. *Ibid.*, 210-211; Linda Zagzebski, “What if the Impossible Had Been Actual?” in *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, ed. M. Beatty (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 165-169.

<sup>221</sup> These are not chronological steps. They are, in fact, more of connections that exist eternally in God’s mind. I am not going to take a position on God and time in this paper, as there is no need to do so. An omniscient, all-imaginative and omnipotent God could and would do His imaginative reasoning all at once regardless of His relation to time. They are not necessarily logical either. This is not to say that there might not be a logical order in them but I am thinking of them more as a list of things God does imaginatively.

<sup>222</sup> See, again, Vincent P. Branick, “The Unity of the Divine Ideas,” *The New Scholasticism*, Vol. 42, Issue 2 (1968): 184-185, 195-201. It may also serve as a marker as in Aquinas. The more something is like God, the more being it has.

maintain an existence like God's but that are different. God cannot not exist. For a second time, if a necessary being had only himself to contemplate, He would not reason to merely possible/contingent beings using his nature and formal logical principles.<sup>223</sup> This is another leap of imagination. But they are not unintuitive leaps. God's omnipotence and omniscience would seem to say that God could go outside of Himself in this way. He is merely taking what He knows in Himself as a springboard and negating or reversing it imaginatively to come to these concepts and possibilities. We appear to do the same when thinking of God in the *via negativa*, the use of analogy or simply a perfect being theology where we think of good, compossible properties at their maximal amount.<sup>224</sup> If we can creatively do this, what is prohibiting God from doing something similar to reach us imaginatively?

Next, this implies that God has not only imaginatively gone beyond Himself from necessary existence to contingencies and mere possibilities but also thought of dependent creatures whereas He is independent.<sup>225</sup> His imagination dictates that He think of something new

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<sup>223</sup> Leftow has wonderfully emphasized just how imaginative God is by demonstrating the inability to have creature concepts logically follow from Himself and His nature. I actually think Leftow may have been a tad *too* successful for his own good. Leftow wants to say that creatures are not written into deity but God knows Himself perfectly and knows He can create. *Ibid.*, 272-273. But no creature is written into his nature at all. How does He get to the notion of something apart from Him? We could say "imaginatively" but then we must define our terms. If it is Leftow's sense, God gives Himself the power to give Himself the power to think up the idea of creatures at all. Then we are on the way to an infinite regress (as Craig similarly suggests in a different critique). Craig, "Book Review of *God and Necessity*," 467. Leftow may be in danger of being hoisted by his own petard. If the imaginative is more ordered than Leftow gives it credit, he may be safe if the present account checks out. The issue there would be if he could use one feature of imaginative reasoning but deny that God can use His nature in any other part of His system (i.e., to get candidates for creation).

<sup>224</sup> Again, see John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Distinction and Derivation of the Many from the One: A Dialectic between Being and Nonbeing," *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (March 1985): 567, 570-571. This is heavily Thomistic and I am not endorsing a purely negative theology when speaking literally of God with everything else being metaphorical language. But I do not think that this should remove all talk of negating and metaphor in theology and I am sure even non-Thomists, like myself, can find a use for these concepts. For a critique of a strict *via negativa* method and metaphorical language of God, along with an endorsement of perfect being theology, see Thomas Morris, *Our Idea of God*, Contours of Christian Philosophy, Series Ed. C. Stephan Evans (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 22-26, 35-40.

<sup>225</sup> Leftow would probably not think that this property has any positive content. If God exists without anything else, would He know He was *independent*? Would those concepts mean anything? I think so. God would know He was complete in Himself and by going beyond Himself He would grasp creatures that were incomplete

and that does not contradict His nature. By imagining them, they are thus dependent on Him to be brought into existence by an act of His will. So, for a general thought, we have:

**I<sub>L</sub> 2:** God can think up possible/contingent creatures.

Clearly, I<sub>L</sub> 1 and 2 are very broad and do not give God much with which to work. The possibilities lack specificity. Let us try to fill them out more. Everything God is or has is good. Our perfect being theology rests on the belief that the attributes are great-making properties, *better* to have than to lack.<sup>226</sup> A good existence is all God knows so whatever possibly exists must be good, as it must be like Him in the respect in which it has something He does (in this case, properties).<sup>227</sup> If He is to enjoy them, they must be similar to God and if they are to be capable of instantiation, which is why God thinks of them, then they have to resemble Him to an extent at least in the relevant ways. So, all creaturely natures will be good.

Leftow allows this as a possibility but denies it would give God anything specific.<sup>228</sup> How is that God's nature does determine some things for Leftow: like the concepts of goodness, personhood, etc.?<sup>229</sup> Why these and not more? Indeed, I find it puzzling why creation does take after God on Leftow's theory. If they must resemble Him, it seems He would know all that could resemble Him. I must confess that, in addition to this, I find the notion of His nature *vaguely* setting the parameters of the Bang to be itself far too vague to be useful.<sup>230</sup> This takes Craig's

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apart from His action. Again, we think of God as *a se* even though our experience is with things that are dependent on other things. God could surely do something similar.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 35; Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 9-10.

<sup>227</sup> It is imaginative to think of possible objects that could lack goods that belong to their nature and this is the theory of evil I will be defending towards the end of the chapter.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 162, 255.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 282, 370-371, 459-460. A note here for my account: I do not adhere to the idea of a 'Bang' in God thinking up SCM, as this carries with it the connotations of Leftow's theological modality. I use the term here as part of Leftow's terminology for his position. Of course, the Bang, in itself, is really just God thinking up SCM and

criticism up a notch: if God's nature constrains the parameters too narrowly, we have Aquinas; if not at all, we do not even have Leftow. Unfortunately, without this resemblance, God could not possibly judge the worth, take attitudes towards, prevent, permit and take preferences concerning states of affairs.<sup>231</sup> God would be enormously lucky to get the candidate creatures He did.<sup>232</sup>

The story I am telling proceeds along the lines of what Leftow sought to dismantle but with the disclaimer that God is not reasoning deductively from His nature but He thinks imaginatively about it to do this. It may be questionable as to how this makes a difference but I hope the reader will indulge me for a moment and though I cannot promise a reward for your patience, I ask for it, nonetheless. First of all, Leftow's radical construal of deity allows him some of his argument but it is motivated by a divine simplicity I am more than rational and happy in rejecting.<sup>233</sup> It is doubtful that conjuncts can do the heavy lifting that conjunctive

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neither my account nor any other deity theory differs from Leftow in the minimalistic sense that God thinks up SCM.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 322-323, 363, 374-378.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 458-460. Keep in mind that God cannot intend any creature in particular prior to the Bang.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 307; Brian Leftow, "Is God an Abstract Object?" *Noûs* 24, No. 4 (September 1990): 581-598; Paul Gould, "Review of *God and Necessity*, by Brian Leftow," *Philosophia Christi* 15, No. 2 (2013): 497. Leftow's simplicity separates God's ideas from God's nature and person. He is simple in that He is the property of *deity*, but His ideas are complex. Robert Lawrence Kuhn, "Is God Simple?" *Closer to Truth*. Interviews [interviews online] accessed from <http://closetotruth.com/series/god-simple>; interviews with Robert Spitzer, Brian Leftow, Eleonore Stump, Oliver Crisp and Matthews Grant; accessed on 16 February 2016. Morris distinguishes three types of the simplicity thesis: God has no spatial parts, no temporal parts and no metaphysical parts as in exemplifying properties that are separate from Him ontologically. While the first is relatively uncontroversial and the second a little more so, the last is the most controversial by far: God is His nature and His essence is His existence (both of which Leftow believes). Morris, *Our Idea of God*, 114. Richard Brian Davis lists three separate ways that this divine simplicity has been held: the *property view* – what God has, He is; the *property-instance view* – God is an instance of a single essential property of *being a Godhead* (here there is no plurality of properties that God exemplifies); and the *property-individual view* – this seeks to avoid Plantinga's incoherency charges and say that it is not obvious that just because God is a property, He cannot be a person. Davis, "The Dependence Problem," 88-134. I will not argue against divine simplicity in depth here but I am more or less convinced by Plantinga's arguments and will direct the reader there for the purpose of scope and space. Put succinctly, I do not see how God's properties could be identical to one another or to His person. Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature? The Aquinas Lecture, 1980* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 47. I am aware that there have been challenges to Plantinga's challenges, most notably in Nicholas Wolterstorff's correction that the philosophers and theologians who formulated the doctrine held to a constituent ontology (i.e., where properties were had as ontological constituents) as opposed to Plantinga's relational ontology (i.e., where an object is what it is by virtue of its relation to abstract properties external to them). On this rejoinder, Plantinga raises a difficulty that is a difficulty only on his own ontology. Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Divine Simplicity," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5, *Philosophy of Religion* (1991): 531-552; William F. Vallicella,

properties can without sacrificing something. Just as the wetness of water supervenes on the compound of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom, *being rational* and *being an animal* give rise to a property of *being human* that involves an embodied mind and so, experiences not prevailing on either rationality or animality alone.

Secondly, whatever comes of that, I am not sure what Leftow was hoping to achieve in saying that deity is not a conjunctive property. If God is an Aristotelian substance and has His properties inhere within Him,<sup>234</sup> why could He not reduce these individually without all these properties being conjoined under one big property of deity?<sup>235</sup> Even Leftow, though he accepts that deity is not a conjunctive property, proceeds to make distinctions among God's properties without it.<sup>236</sup> God could indubitably achieve the intellectual feats of Leftow. The property seems to be superfluous and a red herring with that in mind, garnered by the divine simplicity from which it springs. In short, though Leftow goes to great lengths to make his theory amenable to

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“Divine Simplicity,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.); accessed from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/divine-simplicity/>; accessed 10 February 2016. I think that many of the problems nonetheless re-surface even granting a constituent ontology. Also, Morris adds that it is hard to make sense of distinctions we give when speaking of God, especially contingent properties we predicate of Him (e.g., *having created the world*, *being the Creator of Leftow*, *having spoken to Moses*, etc.). On the other hand, divine simplicists respond that these are mere Cambridge properties that obtain in something merely by its relation to something else and not a real distinction in itself. Stump, thus, argues that just because an object has a property in some possible worlds but not in others, this does not make it accidental. Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 97-98, 122-127. Again, I do not find this answer cogent. Now, perhaps all this amounts to an incredulous stare as an argument on my behalf. But I do not see the doctrine as “hogwash” as C.B. Martin claimed. Quoted in Jeffrey E. Brower, “Making Sense of Divine Simplicity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 25, No. 1 (2008): 2. I just do find it too problematic to believe. I am certainly not alone in thinking the doctrine is unintelligible. I would quickly relate, with Thomas Morris and other non-simplicists, though, that most Christians would affirm some metaphysical mystery to the unity of God but the doctrine of divine simplicity does not do justice to it. Morris, *Our Idea of God*, 115-118.

<sup>234</sup> Gould, “A Defense of Platonic Theism,” 92-126.

<sup>235</sup> God has a haecceity, no doubt. But it would be confusion to equate this with a property of deity, as Leftow sees it. God's *Godness* could include all those essential properties that go into making God divine. What I mean to say is that a haecceity, or essence, could be a property but we could also view it as a *group* of essential properties, each necessary but none in themselves sufficient to make the object what it is. Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 70-77.

<sup>236</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 7-10.

philosophers of a host of philosophical persuasions, his argument against deity theories is founded on highly contested territory.

So, God has multiple properties but has them at their fullest. He has the ability to abstract these from Himself<sup>237</sup> through imagining, and think of them in multiple ways. God could generically think of finite amounts of goodness even though He is wholly and immutably good. Some of the possibilities could have greater power than others or have no power at all (see below for negations). Some could be conscious but to a lesser degree, or at least quality, than God.<sup>238</sup>

It could be argued that we need not invoke God's imagination for these things. It looks evident that God can create things with lesser power if He has a concept of unlimited power in Himself (along with goodness, consciousness, and so on); it feels like a short walk conceptually from one to the other.<sup>239</sup> I do not think that this is taking Leftow's critiques seriously enough. "Unlimited" may be how we conceive of God and His attributes and we can do this because we perceive degrees of great-making properties to imagine at a maximum.<sup>240</sup> But God, if He is

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<sup>237</sup> There are multiple accounts of abstract objects but the 'Way of Abstraction' (as David Lewis puts it) seems to work the best for our purposes in illuminating God's arrival at what we know as 'abstract' – whatever those things might be. The 'Way of Example' simply picks out things we know to be abstract and concrete; the 'Way of Conflation' makes the distinction between concrete and abstract to be a distinction between sets and members of sets (i.e., particulars and universals); the 'Way of Negation' says abstract objects are generally those things that are *not* spatiotemporally located. Yet, we are, after all, here talking about epistemological categories so the 'Way of Abstraction' works best for a way that God can get at properties to set up for creatures. Example and Conflation would get Him nowhere and Negation lands in the same boat (besides succumbing to a theological objection in God not being abstract but being outside of space and maybe, time). God can first get creature concepts by imagining these properties as distinct from specificity in His own substance. Abstraction allows for properties to be pulled out from particulars. David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 81-86; Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 121; Welty, "Theistic Conceptual Realism," 6-8, 21-23.

<sup>238</sup> The parsing out of this will greatly depend on how one thinks of consciousness but I think it is fairly uncontested that God would enjoy a fuller consciousness, in some sense or other, than finite agents (in what He is conscious of at least).

<sup>239</sup> So Greg Welty in conversation.

<sup>240</sup> I am not trying to take a Lockean approach to knowledge of the infinite over against the Cartesian eidological argument. I am just saying that this is a reasonable way to have knowledge of the infinite. If such knowledge were innate, the argument for the parallel would not really vary. Either we have the concept of infinitude innately or through some reasoning process. Either God has the concept of finitude innately or through imaginative reasoning. The difference is that we at least see degrees of properties we attribute to God whereas God does not have

reasoning to something outside of Himself, has nothing to which to compare and contrast Himself *logically prior* to imagining possibilities. He exists *a se* and would have no concept of ‘lesser beings’ unless He were either imaginative or knew them innately. In other words, they do not follow logically from His person or nature. If this is the case:

**I<sub>L</sub> 3:** God abstracts His properties and imagines them at varying degrees.

### *C. Imaginative Leaps II: Specific Natures and Leftow’s Leaky Boat*

If God simply combines and recombines these abstracted properties with one another as far as He can, He would have a great variety of general natures. For instance, there could be finite minds that are good and have a finite amount of power with relative independence to other possibilities that are now possible. It remains a far cry from what we think of in the *possibilia* of our beloved ontological space (not that there *could be* another).

This is where God’s other resources of going beyond Himself take His imagination far beyond what He would have without it. We have seen that God can, in effect, reverse His aseity to have dependent creatures. Similarly, He can also think of non-personal and non-spiritual entities. What would reversals such as these lead God to once He has conceived of them and arranged them in every possible combination? Anything and everything! As long as it is like him in some way, by being able to exist without being contradictory or being inconsistent with His nature to bring about, then He imagines it. Matter and space could *easily* be derived from this

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degrees of things by which to attribute to us. He would have to get this imaginatively. See below. John Locke, “Book II. Of Ideas: XVII. Of the Idea of Infinity,” in *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*, Vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1959), 276-293. René Descartes, “Meditation III. Of God: that He exists,” in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Vol. 1, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Reprint; London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 165-171.

(effortlessly from an all-imaginative being's perspective).<sup>241</sup> Indeed, matter is the most distant point next to nothing in God's imagination as it is the farthest, conceptually, you can get from the nature of God (e.g., changing, spatial, material, malleable, finite, unconscious, inert, powerless without other things in place, etc.) but still be something that could exist (i.e., its existence would not pose a threat to God, His nature, other natures, etc.).<sup>242</sup> What is more, even though God's nature does not contain the color red and He may have no initial phenomenal consciousness of it, He dreams in vibrant color. This alleviates Leftow's concern that spirit is not a positive or negative property (*being a spirit* or *being immaterial*).<sup>243</sup> He knows what He is and can think about what He is not imaginatively.

**IL 4:** God can reverse (or negate) properties He possesses to achieve concepts for creatures' natures.

Leftow might not agree but I think his own position is not safe from these conclusions. What is it about God that keeps it from being the case that **whatever** can be generated 'in Him' will not be so generated from eternity? He has no control over the first Bang occurring, really, aside from vague directions. Why is not everything contained in it? Leftow thinks that *what is in God to do*, creatively, would be inexhaustible but I see nothing behind this but an unsupported claim.<sup>244</sup> I agree that His imagination is infinite but there is no reason that an omniscient mind

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<sup>241</sup> Aquinas did not think that *prime* matter (i.e., matter without form) was possible but God could have a concept of it as a distinct idea. Matter is part of what Aquinas calls God's "*speculative* reason" for it is not actualizable. I am inclined to follow him on this for if something is to be concrete, it must be like God in His concreteness in having a form at least. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 133-135.

<sup>242</sup> Aquinas seems to agree that matter is the "lowest grade of being," pure potency. *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>243</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 159-162.

<sup>244</sup> Leftow gives it a mere "...*perhaps* the perfection of His cognitive power or imagination is of the inexhaustible sort." (emphasis mine) *Ibid.*, 292. That may, in fact, given the weight of the book (literally and metaphorically) that is riding on it, be the biggest "perhaps" I have ever seen in a philosophical argument. I find no other talk of it in the piece. Furthermore, would this not come to a *rock-lifting* paradox? God is so creative that not even He can keep up.

could not house the content of a super-imaginative one.<sup>245</sup> Bohn hits on a fair charge that we want a satisfying answer for the modal intuitions of every single thing that could ever be possible.<sup>246</sup> A more robust modality would be, *ceteris paribus*, more preferable. Why not have all the Bangs in one momentous one? God's omniscience could hold such infinities without a problem and indeed, theistic modalists of all stripes think that God knows an infinite amount of things or there is reality behind this language that more or less gives us the same thing.<sup>247</sup>

This next objection takes the problem further, however, in something I will label "Leftow's Leaky Boat."<sup>248</sup> Picture Leftow's theological modality as a boat.<sup>249</sup> God's mind and nature serve as the boat itself and whatever is in the boat, mental events and powers, are possible.<sup>250</sup> For simplicity's sake, let us say that all that is in the boat is water, this water representing SCM. Nothing is outside of the boat as far as modality or anything else is concerned. The boat is all there is. It is in the boat to have had different contents (here, water molecules) but it has the contents it has and that *cannot* change. For other modal realists,

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<sup>245</sup> It may be that super-imagination requires God to imagine all that is in Him to do. Leftow argues that it is ability, not action, that determines this perfection. This is most certainly the case in actualization for, as Leftow argues, God's actualization would not differ from His blueprint for said creation. *Ibid.*, 274-276. But imagination would involve new and fascinating things. Most imaginative people stop imagining due to other factors (e.g., time, ability, age, motivation) but surely a perfectly imaginative being with the other divine properties would not be hindered by anything outside Himself and I think, intuitively, a more imaginative person would imagine all they could. Why not? Imagination is not purely for utilitarian purposes; often, it is not.

<sup>246</sup> Bohn, "Divine Contingency," 21-22.

<sup>247</sup> E.g., see the contributions to Paul M. Gould (ed.), *Beyond the Control of God?* If one is bothered by the idea of an actual infinite number of thoughts in God's mind leading to logical absurdities and contradictions, a couple of options are available. One could abandon the 'thoughts' for coherent versions of nominalism or something else. But for those sympathetic to actual infinities, see J. P. Moreland, "A Response to a Platonistic and to a Set-Theoretic Objection to the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument," *Religious Studies* 39, No. 4 (December 2003): 373-390.

<sup>248</sup> In what follows, I am not saying that, for my theory, God has a 'Bang' with select natures and then reasons to all other SCM from there. I will be arguing that Leftow cannot avoid that conclusion. Instead, I argue that God reasons to all SCM all at once because He can tweak His own nature and reason to all others. None are left out because any possible nature can be conceptually derived from any other.

<sup>249</sup> Really, any structure could be used, but this will work best for the illustration.

<sup>250</sup> I know that Leftow would construe this nominalistically so that mental events and powers take the place of divine concepts but the analogy should not detract from that. Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 303.

modality is a vast ocean that could not hold one more drop of possibility. It would engulf the boat easily and for theists, God knows every square inch of this ocean since it is in His omniscient mind.

Suppose, though, that God gets a boatful of modality in the Bang. God's nature may not be a zoo for Leftow but His boat is a Noah's ark of sorts, filled with animals, rocks, stars and there is even room for Leftow. All these properties and haecceities are on board.<sup>251</sup> What is the problem? It is not just that, in God, other Bangs appear to be possible, as was contended at the end of chapter three, but Leftow tries to keep them shapeless in God. Yet, intuitively, God could just take what was given to Him in the Bang and reshape it, modifying it here and there to get new possibilities and so on, until He exhausts what is in Him to do.<sup>252</sup> It does not take much imagination to have a giraffe, shrink it down, push in its neck, pull out and fluff its tail, paint it black and white in Pepé Le Pew fashion, all among a host of tiny other variations and have a skunk. The same could be reasonably said from anything from mountains to cars, angels to men, *ad infinitum*.<sup>253</sup> In a sense, this is analogous to David Hume's missing shade of blue, in which

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<sup>251</sup> I would like to keep these two distinct from here until the section on vagueness is finished. Thus, when I speak of natures, I am referring to non-haecceities. I mean, by this, natures that would work on generalism and not singular concepts. For an example, compare the property of 'Nathanness' with that of 'humanity.'

<sup>252</sup> It could be objected that this is not really thinking of new natures but just variations of old ones or something that looks like a new nature but is not. Consider Alexander Pruss's thought experiment given for an interesting way to reconcile evolutionary theory with direct creation of creatures by God (a story he does not accept or find probable at all but entertains, nonetheless). God arranged particles of matter to be shaped like birds, dinosaurs and the like, and through physical laws, there came to be shapes resembling human beings. At this time in history, there were only treelike, birdlike, apelike... bundles of matter (no trilobitelike or dinosaurlike shapes anymore). God then spoke to say, "Let there be trees, let there be apes, let there be humans, etc." (Only God did not say, "etc." He most likely kept *speaking*). What God is thereby doing is creating forms that animate the physical stuff in accordance with their essence. Alexander Pruss, "A Thomistic creationism of sorts," in *Alexander Pruss's Blog*; Blog entry; available from <http://alexanderpruss.blogspot.com/2014/11/a-thomistic-creationism-of-sorts.html>; (Blog originally posted on 10 November 2014); accessed 7 January 2016. To bring it back to my *leaky boat objection*, who is to say that God is not just getting shapes in the place of actual substances? Part of this will, I hope, be answered momentarily and part of it when I look at the challenge of vagueness later on.

<sup>253</sup> This could be what is behind the intuition in Aristotle that given enough time, all possibilities will be realized. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 9.4.1047b-1048a. For that reason, Aristotle often speaks as if something is possible if it happens at least one time or another and necessary if it occurs at all times. Aristotle, "On the Heavens: Bk I,12," in *The Works of Aristotle Translated into English*, ed. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), 882-887. It is

Hume posits that a person could be shown a spectrum of shades of blue with one omitted – of which they had never had a sense impression – but, nevertheless, they could plausibly imagine the missing shade.<sup>254</sup> A possible reply would be that God stops Himself from reasoning to these, but is that really possible? An omniscient and perfectly rational being would just know what He could do with what He has. A perfect sculptor could see every possibility for molding the clay with which he was working. Leftow’s boat has likely sprung a leak and I see no way to plug it.<sup>255</sup>

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true that this is not actually possible because scores of possibilities are mutually exclusive so they could not all obtain in the same world. Possible worlds are maximal states of affairs for just that reason. William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez*, Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History, Vol. 7 (New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), 44-45. However, it might be best to take Aristotle as referring not to particulars but, instead, as saying that the species of possibility will happen (e.g., a general nature, event, etc.), and in this case, the claim would perhaps support the intuition that God could reason to all possible species given a finite amount. *Ibid.*, 44; Jaakko Hintikka, *Time & Necessity: Studies in Aristotle’s Theory of Modality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 101-102, 171-174. This footnote was inspired by a conversation with Dr. Edward Martin. This may be reinforced by the intuition of the modern philosophers who argued that we come to possibilities and *other-worldly* essences by modifying what we know from experience. See, n. 254 below, Locke, “Book II. Of Ideas: XXX. Of Real and Fantastical Ideas,” in *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*, 497-501; Descartes, “Meditation III. Of God: that He exists,” in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, 165-171. Nor is this conception contrary to the spirit of the contemporary period. We could not hope to speak in terms of the proximity to the actual world in a theory of conditionals unless we can conceptually come to other possible worlds from our own. For the most part, the commitment to empiricism on such matters has not even close to vanished. E.g., Robert Stalnaker, “A Theory of Conditionals,” in Nicholas Rescher (ed.), *Studies in Logical Theory*, American Philosophical Quarterly Monograph Series, 2 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), 111-112.

<sup>254</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding with A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh and Hume’s Abstract of A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed., ed. Eric Steinberg (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), II, 12-13. Many question this thought experiment on Hume’s empiricism and have tried to reconcile it with his epistemology by appealing to the fact that our imagining the missing shade could not be possible without first experiencing other shades of blue. John Morreall, “Hume’s Missing Shade of Blue,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 42, No. 3 (March 1982): 414-415. Far from challenging my argument, Morreall’s comments would reinforce how imaginative God is to find these ‘missing shades’ without prior knowledge or experience. We could add to this a principle Hume might have accepted: perception could allow for a novel perception as long as it resembles perceptions that we had beforehand, though not a perfect copy. Robert J. Fogelin, “Hume and the Missing Shade of Blue,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 45, No. 2 (December 1984): 270-271. This would only serve to make the analogy that much stronger. God is imaginative enough to think of new ideas, given that they resemble Him enough. Interestingly, Leftow brings up Hume’s missing shade when speaking of God’s ability to experience phenomenal qualities when He does not have the bodily means to do so. Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 285-286. There just seem to be more interesting applications of this for modality as a whole as I am arguing here.

<sup>255</sup> Leftow could say that it is in God to do more once He has exhausted the possible modifications on His current set but then we can provide another objection that applies whether the *leaky boat objection* holds water or not. How does God **know** it is in Him *to do more*? The set He has would have to differ in some respect from what else is in God to do. What assures God that He will not get duplicates of the same thing even if He were to try another Bang? It is not as if He could have another go and say, “Okay, let’s try something different this time.” He cannot intend to do something else. But if there were truths about these other Bangs that make them distinct, God would know them. They would then be possible. Leftow could reply that He just knows He can and that is that. He

### D. Imaginative Leaps III: Vagueness and Definite Creature Concepts

With the sinking of the S.S. Leftow, we can take this account of *evolutionary* natures to take another imaginative leap. First, something needs to be said about making these natures definite. We come then to our first objection. How could anything be conclusively arrived at in this way? If God does not come pre-equipped with creatures' natures or get them pre-arranged in the Bang, He would be in a terrible fix in hoping to fix one nature in the molding process in a non-arbitrary way. This is an example of a *sorites* paradox, arguments that take this form:

- (A)  $Fa$
- (B)  $(\forall x)(\forall y)(Fx \ \& \ Rxy \rightarrow Fy)$
- (C)  $\sim Fz$
- (D)  $(\exists b_1 \dots b_n) (Rab_1 \ \& \ Rb_1b_2 \ \& \dots \ Rb_{n-1}b_n \ \& \ Rb_nz)$ <sup>256</sup>

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is God and that comes with the job description. But if one has reservations about the grounding objection to God's having middle knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, they should steer away from Leftow's counterfactuals of things 'in God' to do. This would include Leftow himself since he is not a Molinist. For him, God grounds the possibility of possibility in His power and there is no place for groundless counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 94, 94 n. 56, 371. Still, it may be objected that the *leaky boat objection* relies on the absolute modality including **S5** and should be rejected for that reason. One cannot argue to **S5** that easily so something must be amiss. I have two brief responses. Firstly, one could accept the move to **S5** and utilize it as intuitive support for **S5**. **S5** is popular enough that I do not foresee much backlash for that reason alone. Leftow acknowledges it in his theory and that appears to be enough to use the above objection. Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 450. Secondly, one could deny that just because you could, in principle, derive any creaturely essence given another one and then fill out possible worlds with these, it need not mean that every possible world is accessible from every other world. You could still suppose that some worlds are not possible relative to others. This is not as counterintuitive as one might initially think, as it is widely held among many modal epistemologists that conceivability is not a guide to possibility. E.g., Stephen Yablo, "Is Conceivability a Guide to Possibility?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53, No. 1 (March 1993): 1-42. I have made use of this fact earlier concerning conceptions of the null world. Nevertheless, the question is not whether or not our conceivability of certain things is a guide to possibility, but whether God's is. Could Leftow use the second option, then, to evade the *leaky boat objection*? I doubt it. One would have to argue that God could have a novel creaturely essence in mind but it still be impossible despite passing all current tests for being metaphysically possible. I do not see that as plausible. A theistic modality of any kind would want to conserve omnipotence by seeing these as possible. Leftow, himself, relies on the fact that God's imagination does give Him genuine possibilities as long as it is consistent with deity to bring about. Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 460 n. 4. Therefore, one who detracts from **S5** could still think that there could be other considerations that rule against accessibility between all worlds, even with God in the modal picture, but that Leftow's pre-commitments would cause him to accept that *his* boat is leaky. Either way, I believe the objection succeeds. Leftow accepts **S5** as holding for what God knows He can do and even if one does not see **S5** as the absolute modality, they could, that fact notwithstanding, see this as devastating for Leftow's account.

<sup>256</sup> Delia Graff Fara, "Shifting Sands: An Interest-Relative Theory of Vagueness," *Philosophical Topics* 28, No. 1 (Spring 2000): 49-50.

Here, (A) something  $a$  is an  $F$  in that  $F$  can be clearly predicated of  $a$ , (C)  $F$  can clearly not be predicated of something else  $z$ , but (B), there is a relation  $R$  that relates two things  $x$  and  $y$ , that, together with  $x$  being  $F$ , entail that  $y$  is  $F$ . (D) states that a sorites series can be generated linking  $a$  (A) to  $z$  (C) such that  $z$  should also be an  $F$  given that  $z$  stands in the relevant  $R$  to  $a$ . But we already know there is a stark difference between  $a$  and  $z$  that excludes  $z$  from being an  $F$ .<sup>257</sup> The arguments capitalize on so-called *borderline* cases between two predicates, as opposed to what are known as *sharp* boundaries. Marginal changes can be made in a predicate when it is vague and they ‘tolerate’ these changes. We can, for example, take a red patch and say that if a patch  $n$  is red, then a patch  $n + 1$  will be red. You next start looking along a range of colored patches, each slightly darker than the last, all the while pointing and confidently pronouncing “Red!” at each one, and before you know it, you are looking at an orange patch and wondering where you took a wrong step.<sup>258</sup>

It has particular interest for the present study as we are attempting to see how God might determine the natures of creatures and it is a worry that on the present account, all properties come out vague because they could always be molded into other ones. Clearly, zebra-ness is not platypus-ness.<sup>259</sup> But it seems that if you shaved a zebra, it would still be a zebra. You could go on tweaking little parts of zebra-ness, abstractly, and eventually you will get platypus-ness on this account. Realistically, there are many intermediate stages between the two, so when does a zebra just become something else and stop being a zebra? An unacceptable answer would be to say that

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Diana Raffman, “Vagueness without Paradox,” *The Philosophical Review* 103, No. 1 (January 1994): 42.

<sup>259</sup> I am assuming that there are natural kinds not only for the sake of the objection but I firmly believe that arguments favor essentialism and the existence of natural kinds. Questions of how composite objects might relate to their constituent parts as well as answering arguments from reductionist programs in biology and chemistry are side-stepped for now. For more, see Timothy O’Connor, *Theism and Ultimate Explanation: The Necessary Shape of Contingency*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2012), 54-55.

God does not have to arrive at definite natures if He is thinking of things other than Himself as an imaginative reasoning account suggests He does. Substances must be like God in some way to have content and be possible *as a substance*. God is a concrete object with a nature/form, so it follows that it must be similar for other substances.

How does God get these natures? This is a difficult question and I have to say that it does not simply plague my account of God and possible natures. It is a problem for anyone who accepts sharp boundaries and the principle of bivalence (i.e., that something is either truly or falsely predicated of something).<sup>260</sup> I am not sure how to completely answer but part of our problem with vagueness stems from our inability to recognize sharp boundaries when they occur.<sup>261</sup> If sorties paradoxes result from an *epistemological* problem, surely an omniscient and perfectly rational being would know where to draw the line – when a nature was and was not the same nature. He would likewise not fall short in being able to keep them separate, as He would not suffer from the exasperating throes of a finite language to identify and label them.

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<sup>260</sup> A more familiar sorites argument involves the existence of heaps. If a pile of sand  $n$  is one million grains, it is a heap. So  $n-1$  would be a heap of sand and so on. Roy Sorenson calls the claim that a pile of sand containing one million grains of sand is a heap, the “base step.” The “inductive step” of the argument is when we say that  $n-1$  would also be a heap. There are many options open to us in rejecting either step if we are willing to concede some things. We could say with Bertrand Russell that the argument itself is neither valid nor invalid, as logic does not really have application in the ordinary world. One could say there is no such thing as a heap or any other vague predicate, but this leads counterintuitively to the non-existence of people, chairs, cars or whatever else, as most of our predicates are vague. Classical logic could be abandoned or we could deny that the inductive step has a truth-value. Supervaluationists deny borderline cases a truth-value but equally affirm that disjunctions involving them (e.g., ‘either this is a heap or it is not’) do have a truth-value. This is because no matter how precise one makes the predicate, it will still be either true or false. If it is true, it is supertrue; if it is false, it is superfalse. They thus feel they have spared classical logic an untimely departure while acknowledging the force of the sorites series. There could also be intermediate truth-values for borderline cases. Roy Sorenson, “From *Blindspots*,” in *The Philosophy of Language*, 6<sup>th</sup> Ed., eds. A.P. Martinich and David Sosa (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 588-599; Roy Sorenson, “Vagueness,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.); available from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/vagueness/>; accessed 8 January 2016; Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 55. Wittgenstein spoke of ‘family resemblances’ in his later work where similarities between things cause us to categorize them together and these categorizations are inexact and lead to sorites’ problems. P.M.S. Hacker, “Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951),” in *A Companion to Analytic Philosophy*, eds. A.P. Martinich and David Sosa (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 82-85. I find all of these unacceptable for reasons I will not divulge here but I list them as options for circumventing the concerns surrounding vagueness.

<sup>261</sup> Sorenson, “From *Blindspots*,” 599-602.

Let us take a stab at it anyway. According to Delia Graff Fara, vague predicates rest on the fact that persons have vague interests, goals and purposes. We are not sure when enough coffee is enough to satisfy our desire (for caffeine, enjoyment, etc.), but we are justified in ignoring any slight differences in amount if the cost of attending to them outweighs the benefits for our present purposes. Be that as it may, she holds to bivalence and believes that there are sharp boundaries that exist in a brute sense.<sup>262</sup> If there is something similar happening when God establishes distinct natures, His purposes would be definite as He sees the properties of a nature, such as powers and dispositions,<sup>263</sup> which allow them to be a certain thing in a possible world and play a role there. Modifying a thing too much would alter this purpose and role and so, would institute a new purpose and hence, nature.<sup>264</sup> Remembering *Leibniz's Law*, the indiscernibility of identicals, two things will have all the same properties if they are identical.<sup>265</sup> Things may have similar purposes, but an identical purpose (as I am using the word here) forms an identity relation and God adheres to the laws of identity and non-contradiction given His

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<sup>262</sup> Fara, "Shifting Sands," 45-49, 75. Some vagueness, in some cases, for Fara, can be based on having a quantity of something that is significantly more or less than expected. So, if my friend opens my refrigerator and says, "Wow, that is a lot of soda!" she undoubtedly means that it is more than she expected even if the amount will not serve my purposes for the large party I am throwing later and my friend knows this. *Ibid.*, 64-67.

<sup>263</sup> By explicitly mentioning these, I am not implying that all properties just are powers or dispositions, though some philosophers accept that. E.g., see Peter Achinstein, "The Identity Conditions of Properties," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 11 (1974): 257-275; David M. Armstrong, *Nominalism and Realism, Vol. I. A Theory of Universals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 43-52; Sydney Shoemaker, *Identity, Cause, and Mind: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 206-260; John Hawthorne, "Causal Structuralism," *Philosophical Perspectives* 13 (2001): 361-378. For problems with that account, see Alexander Pruss, *Actuality, Possibility and Worlds* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 241-243.

<sup>264</sup> Properties that can be added to a thing without thereby changing its teleology are merely accidental.

<sup>265</sup> Gottfried W. Leibniz, "Discourse on Metaphysics: Section 9," in *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays: On the Ultimate Origination of Things, Preface to the New Essays and the Monadology*, ed. and trans. Daniel Garber and Roger Ariew (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), 9.

logical reasoning.<sup>266</sup> As Leftow rightly notes, God can combine properties in accordance with their content<sup>267</sup> and a combination is a nature when God grasps a distinct *telos* among other *teloi*.

God can group together all the concepts He has in whatever way imaginable and so multiple factors will go into setting natures apart. Each essence will have powers, dispositions and other qualities that interact differently with different things, and other concepts (e.g., time and space) can supplement these to imagine all scenarios that could take place. This would account for much in possible worlds. If we are relatively safe from apprehensions spawned by vagueness, we have:

**IL 5:** God can rearrange all the concepts He has in all possible combinations to get definitive natures that could be instantiated and the states of affairs in which they could obtain.

Unless we are avowed generalists, we will want to say that God has specific creatures in mind before He actualizes anything. There are infinite things that, if instantiated, would exemplify the forms to which God has creatively reasoned. God can thus know *essences* (or *haecceities* or *individual natures*) through an imaginative leap to all singular creature concepts. To exist as a concrete object, one must do so similarly to God and this includes being an object distinct from other things. An essence of something is unique to that object and individuates it. Whatever makes an object what it is and could not be otherwise without a change in the identity of the object is an object's essence. It not only has this essence but all other possible objects have its complement.<sup>268</sup> Nothing is to stop God from, say, thinking of infinite centers of consciousness

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<sup>266</sup> Leftow suggests that had God thought of quarks a little differently (call the new thought, "schmarks"), they might still be quarks for they play the same role in reality. Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 289-290. I am somewhat expanding on this but the account here is mostly different.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 410-412.

<sup>268</sup> Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 70-77. As we saw earlier, a *haecceity* need not be one property but could plausibly be a set of properties essential to an object.

for human beings and angelic creatures<sup>269</sup> and the same goes for thisnesses of all essences. He would furthermore know what properties these individuals could take on in any state of affairs without violating their essence and so, the accidental properties they could have. With adding this, God would, possibly, complete His natural knowledge in regards to creatures' natures.<sup>270</sup>

**I<sub>L</sub> 6:** God can think of all haecceities.

And as God essentially thinks of creatures with causal powers that arguably produce possibilities through interaction with one another and Himself, God essentially constructs stories and actualizing a world amounts to telling one of these stories.<sup>271</sup>

### *E. A Different Problem of Evil*

One final objection awaits us. If God creatively thinks up everything that is distinct from Himself by mentally modifying, negating or reversing parts of His nature, why are there are not untold numbers of possibilities that are pure evil? There are two potential replies. The first is to steel ourselves as best we can and say that God does get these concepts in reasoning creatively but He would never create them unless there was a good purpose they served in bringing about

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<sup>269</sup> This is assuming a view of personhood where somehow consciousness accounts for the essence of a person.

<sup>270</sup> God's *natural* knowledge is that in which consists all possibilities and necessities. Alfred J. Freddoso, "Introduction," in *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)* by Luis de Molina, trans. with an Introduction by Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 47.

<sup>271</sup> God thus sets the paradigm for our own imagination in thinking up stories. Our stories, as prominent myth-makers/scholars like J.R.R. Tolkien have maintained, must have the "inner consistency of reality" by being believable and metaphysically possible. Verlyn Flieger, *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World*, Revised ed. (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2002), 24-25. Hence, as other philosophers have argued, our imagination really only 'discovers' God's stories (i.e., possible worlds) in our finite imaginative acts. Cf., Chris Daly, *Philosophy of Language: An Introduction* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 261-262; Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 153-159; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward A Christian Aesthetic* (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 122-155; Amie L. Thomasson, "Fiction, Modality and Dependent Abstracta," *Philosophical Studies* 84 (1996): 295-320. Yet, God's imagination is so powerful but rationally ordered that it can actually extend the possibilities for reality, though He comes to these stories with metaphysical necessity.

some ultimate good. I think this is not just a problem for my account, though, as God created everything originally good and concurs with or conserves it. If there are actual, positive evils, or could be, this means that God would, or could, actively cause them in some way.<sup>272</sup> The second is to accept the Augustinian/Thomistic belief that all existence is good so there cannot be a purely evil existing thing.<sup>273</sup> Evil is the absence or lack of a good property or quality that should be in a thing according to its essence. Not all accept the privation argument as tenable.<sup>274</sup> It implies that there is always some being that is deprived but what of the case of a being completely destroyed, as when a meteor destroys the earth? What about cases of pain? Pain cannot be said to simply be the absence of pleasure or wellness. Lastly, there are moral evils that do not fit this theory. A person murdering another person is not just a lack of love on the murderer's part; it defies explanation in terms of privation only.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Patrick Lee, "Evil as Such is a Privation: A Reply to John Crosby," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 64 (2000): 470. Cadler has argued that God could actualize evil without a problem since, just as in active and passive euthanasia cases, there is little difference between God actively bringing about evil and passively allowing it. Todd C. Calder, "Is the Privation Theory of Evil Dead?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 44, No. 4 (October 2007): 376-378. For James Rachels' famous (or infamous) argument for collapsing the active/passive euthanasia distinction, see James Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia," in *Bioethics: An Introduction to the History, Methods and Practice*, eds. Nancy S. Jecker, Albert R. Jonsen, and Robert A. Pearlman (Sudbury: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, Inc., 1997), 78-81. Cadler's example from Rachels does not seem to work. For one, this is a highly controversial topic and it will not do to use in support of another controversial thesis. Even granting Rachels's point, Cadler has a long way to go in arguing that this means that an all-good God can directly be the originator of evil.

<sup>273</sup> Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas*, 137-138; Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas's Shorter Summa: St. Thomas Aquinas's Own Concise Version of His Summa Theologica*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (Manchester: Sophia Institute Press, 2002), 125-130; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.7-15, 71; Augustine, "Against the Manichees: 2.2, 2.3, 3.5, 4.6, 5.7, 6.8, 7.9," in *Augustine in His Own Words*, ed. William Harmless, S.J. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 217-220.

<sup>274</sup> Todd C. Calder, "Is the Privation Theory of Evil Dead?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 44, No. 4 (October 2007): 371-381; John F. Crosby, "Is All Evil Really Only a Privation," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 75 (2001): 197-209; John F. Crosby, "Doubts About the Privation Theory Will Not Go Away: A Response to Patrick Lee," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81, No. 3 (2007): 489-505; G. Stanley Kane, "Evil and Privation," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11, No. 1 (1980): 43-58.

<sup>275</sup> Crosby, "Is All Evil Really Only a Privation," 198-203. Crosby surveys a number of attempts to characterize the murderous act as privation such as the murderer lacked the knowledge to do the right thing or the murderer wanted to bring the victim to non-being. The problem, Crosby says, is that none of these really do justice to the act itself being a privation of the good. It could be said that the real issue is in the murderer desiring some good in the act but the desire is wrongly ordered. So, there is a lack of right order. Still, it seems that often in cases of murder, it is aimed at the destruction of life, a particular person's life to be exact, and not a misdirected intention for good. *Ibid.*, 205-208. G. Stanley Kane uses the same problems as Crosby. Kane, "Evil and Privation," 48-52.

I happen to believe there is more wisdom in the ancients than these objections suppose. The first counterexample is easily answered as the Christian tradition affirms life after death so the souls of the dead would be there to make the destruction of earth evil. Even granting that the soul does not survive death, Crosby's point is irrelevant. This is because the puzzle plagues any account of evil. Who is there to suffer a harm after they have been annihilated to make the annihilation evil? In any case, it is false to suppose that the privation and its subject must co-exist simultaneously in order for the evil to be a privation. A subject may have long since died but if his children go against his last wishes in his will and testament, we would still consider it evil.<sup>276</sup> As to pain, pain is not necessarily an evil for it is well documented that some can suffer without pain and others can feel pain without suffering.<sup>277</sup> For the pain that does hurt, it serves as a warning system to let agents know they are hurting their bodies, administers punishment and allows us to acquire moral and scientific knowledge.<sup>278</sup> Adam Swenson has interestingly posed the possibility that pain is bad in virtue of the fact that it is related to a privation. Sin, which is a privation, makes the badness of pain possible.<sup>279</sup> In acts of moral evil, the act itself is never really evil. Stirring poison into a cup of tea is not evil. The person does lack something good in wishing to take a life: viz., the lack of respect for life.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Lee, "Evil as Such is a Privation," 472-473.

<sup>277</sup> Bill Anglin and Stewart Goetz, "Evil is Privation," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 13, No. 1 (1982): 5. Michael Murray discusses the phenomenon of *blindsight* where patients may be damaged so that they are subjectively blind but still are able to detect visual stimuli and react accordingly. In speaking of the problem of animal pain, he suggests that animals, as exhibiting a lower order consciousness, may experience *blindpain* in this way. Thus, this would be a further example of a creature experiencing pain without suffering. Michael Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (New York: Oxford, 2008), 52-58.

<sup>278</sup> Anglin and Goetz, "Evil is Privation," 5-6.

<sup>279</sup> Adam Swenson, "Privation theories of pain," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 66, No. 3 (December 2009): 146-154.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

The worlds God has in mind would have a range of goodness, some that He would never actualize given the few goods that obtain there. He could pick a world with a value of good that falls into a certain range to bring into existence, if He wishes to actualize a world.<sup>281</sup>

### III. Concluding Remarks

#### A. *To Infinity... and Beyond? Are there further Leaps?*

There seems to be the potentiality for more leaps than are presented in this chapter. First of all, it would be interesting to see if these considerations may have an impact on the grounding objection in middle knowledge. A good chance exists that it does not but I think it at least makes the doctrine of middle knowledge just a tad more palatable – to wit, if God has such imaginative capacities and can use them, it is plausible that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom do not pose as serious a difficulty as was supposed.<sup>282</sup> Still, another interesting direction to go in comes from Leftow and Robert Adams. They have both argued that God has, or could have, phenomenal awareness of certain states that would require a body to have experientially.<sup>283</sup> I see no way to do this unless it involves God’s imagination and it would certainly be fascinating to apply the

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<sup>281</sup> Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 408-409.

<sup>282</sup> For discussions on Molinism, see Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)*; Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998); Ken Perszyk (ed.), *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010). William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987). For authors specifically on the grounding objection and other objections to middle knowledge, see Graham Oppy, “Arguments from Moral Evil,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 56, No. 2/3 (Oct. - Dec., 2004): 59-87; Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 29-52; Adams, “Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil,” 109-114; Timothy O’ Connor, “The Impossibility of Middle Knowledge,” *Philosophical Studies* 66 (1992): 139-166.

<sup>283</sup> Robert Adams, “God, Possibility, and Kant,” *Faith and Philosophy* 17, No. 4 (October 2000): 435-439; Robert Merrihew Adams, “Necessary by Nature? Possibility and the Mind of God,” Book Review; available from <http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/necessary-by-nature-possibility-and-the-mind-of-god/>; (Book review originally posted 20 December 2013); accessed 13 August 2015; Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 285-286.

results of such a study to problems in divine impassibility and experiential knowledge.<sup>284</sup> These just highlight some of the ways a super-imaginative God exercises His imaginative capacities and I have no doubt that there are others.

### B. Further Research

There is much that needs to be worked through in this area and still further nuancing in the concepts that have been touched on in this paper. The notion of essences and haecceities deserves far more space, as do the details of God's organization of what He receives through imaginative extraction and reasoning into possible worlds. A number of metaphysical issues may be entangled in the fray as well. For one, if something's having a quality like God's means that it must be similar, this may entail that personhood always has an immaterial component. Materialists would not abandon their posts without a fight and if they accept part of the system outlined here, I would be eager to listen to attempts at reconciliation.

It would likewise behoove an account along these lines to talk about impossible worlds in some depth.<sup>285</sup> Another, perhaps, promising enterprise would be in the arena of natural theology. Theistic arguments from abstract objects have been around since at least Augustine and there has recently been renewed interest in them.<sup>286</sup> Arguments from possibility include the likes of Kant,

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<sup>284</sup> For an overview, see Marcel Sarot, "Omniscience and Experience," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 30, No. 2 (Oct., 1991): 89-102. Specifically, God's suffering with His creatures and Christ experiencing the feelings of sinners in His passion on certain theories of the atonement could certainly make use of God's imagination in this way. For Luther's theory of the atonement including something like this notion, see Stump, *Aquinas*, 453-454.

<sup>285</sup> I have a hunch that there really are not impossible worlds in the same way that there are possible ones. They are just the trash heap of the modal universe. We take things that are really possible and put them together to derive contradictions and other necessarily false propositions. Leftow presents the same *possibility*. Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 312-315.

<sup>286</sup> Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will (De libero arbitrio)*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993) 2.14-2.17, pg. 58-63; Plantinga, "How to Be An Anti-Realist (Presidential Address)," 47-70; Alvin Plantinga, "Two Dozen (or So) Theistic Arguments," Lecture; [https://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual\\_library/articles/plantinga\\_alvin/two\\_dozen\\_or\\_so\\_theistic\\_arg](https://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual_library/articles/plantinga_alvin/two_dozen_or_so_theistic_arg)

Adams and we can now add to this impressive list, Leftow.<sup>287</sup> It may be that one can be drawn from the above, but I am presently at a loss how to do so. I have tried multiple things but as of right now, they have all come up dead ends. All the same, the risks are light and the sea is fair, so a short voyage or two may discover something worth the venture.

The topic of the imagination of God, overall, merits a great deal of attention. Even allowing that the path traced in this paper leads to nowhere, it could possibly open up viable alternatives for thinking about God and abstract objects and disputes emerging from them. If these are not enough to motivate, as we speak about a perfect being theology and what is essential to personhood, imagination immediately arises as a quality that is integral to our experience as persons and we consider one of the primary aspects of our own lives (whether personal, artistic, philosophical, scientific or otherwise). Yes, it is true that our own imagination is mainly based on our ignorance, finitude and fallibility but investigating the divine imagination could yield interesting, albeit *dissimilar*, results for imagination and theology. And if in our original story, Shem were indeed the most creative, we would do well to see how such creativity could be incorporated into our theology, philosophy of religion and philosophy in general. The

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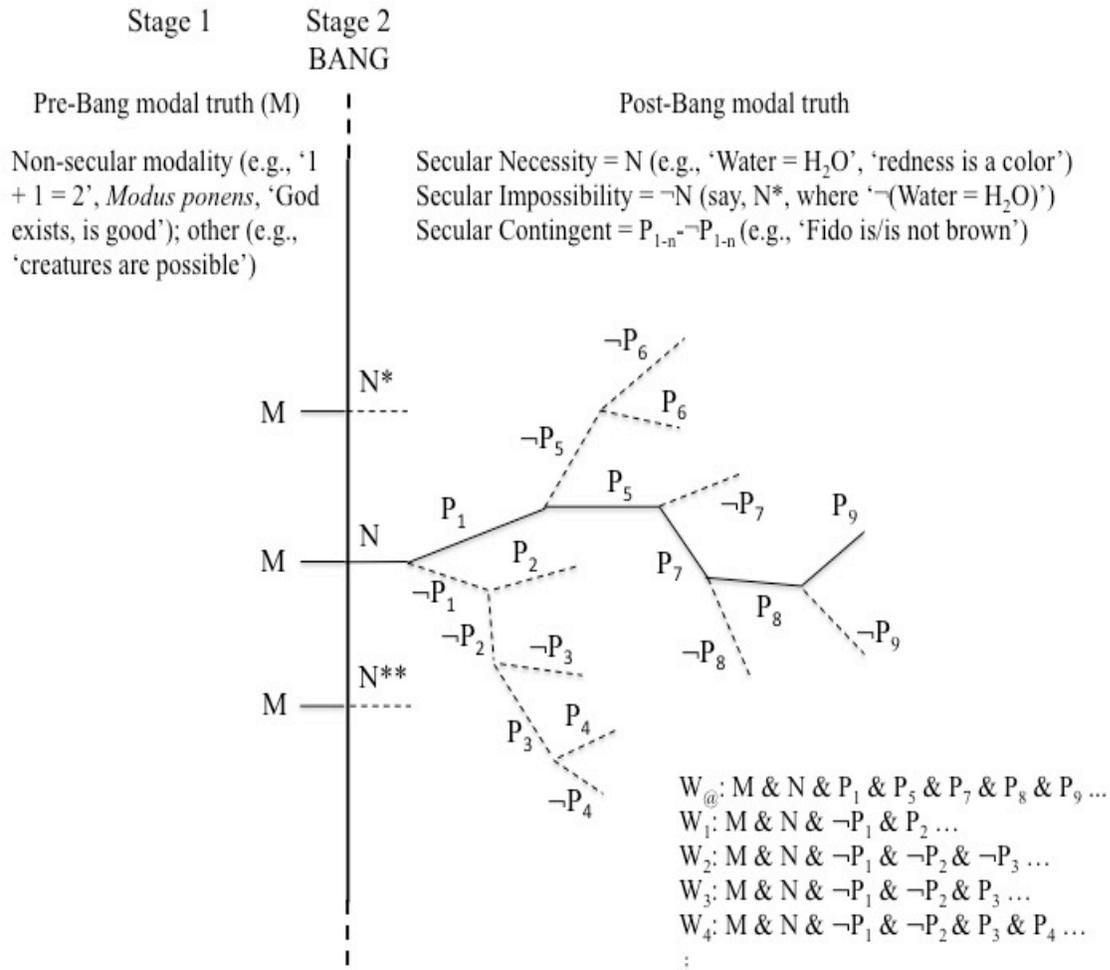
uments.pdf; Paper originally presented at the 33rd Annual Philosophy Conference, Wheaton College, October 23-25, 1986; accessed 12 January 2016; Quentin Smith, "The Conceptualist Argument for God's Existence," *Faith And Philosophy* 11, No.1 (January 1994): 38-49; Victor Reppert, *C.S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea: In Defense of the Argument from Reason* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 76-78, 81-82, 94-98, 101-104. Reppert takes the argument from logic and truth leading a person away from naturalism to either idealism or theism whereas Welty and Anderson argue directly from the experience of mind-dependency and intentionality in logic to God. Victor Reppert, "The Argument from Reason," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, eds. J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012), 347-348; James N. Anderson and Greg Welty, "The Lord of Non-Contradiction: An Argument for God from Logic," *Philosophia Christi* 13, No. 2 (2011): 321-338.

<sup>287</sup> For an outline of Kant's, see chapter one; Adams, "God, Possibility, and Kant," 435-439. Leftow's can be seen partially in Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 536-551, and more fully from Brian Leftow, "The Argument from Contingency," Lecture; available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnPEi9NIOmY>; Lecture originally given at Baylor University at *Plantinga Workshop: Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments Conference* on 8 November 2014; accessed 26 December 2015. Leftow's apologetic in the argument relies heavily on the rule of parsimony, which severely weakens it. Accepting the criterion of simplicity in other fields such as science is tendentious enough but waving difficulties there, what makes us think that the criterion holds for metaphysics? This point was raised by Alexander Pruss at the lecture Leftow gave above. For challenges to the simplicity criterion in arguments along with a defense, see Richard Swinburne, *Epistemic Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 82-102.

concepts that the undertaking would award would only do wonders for our philosophical endeavors as a whole, serving to make them both more rationally compelling *and* attractive. I just do not think Leftow's model of God's imagination works for the reasons discussed here.

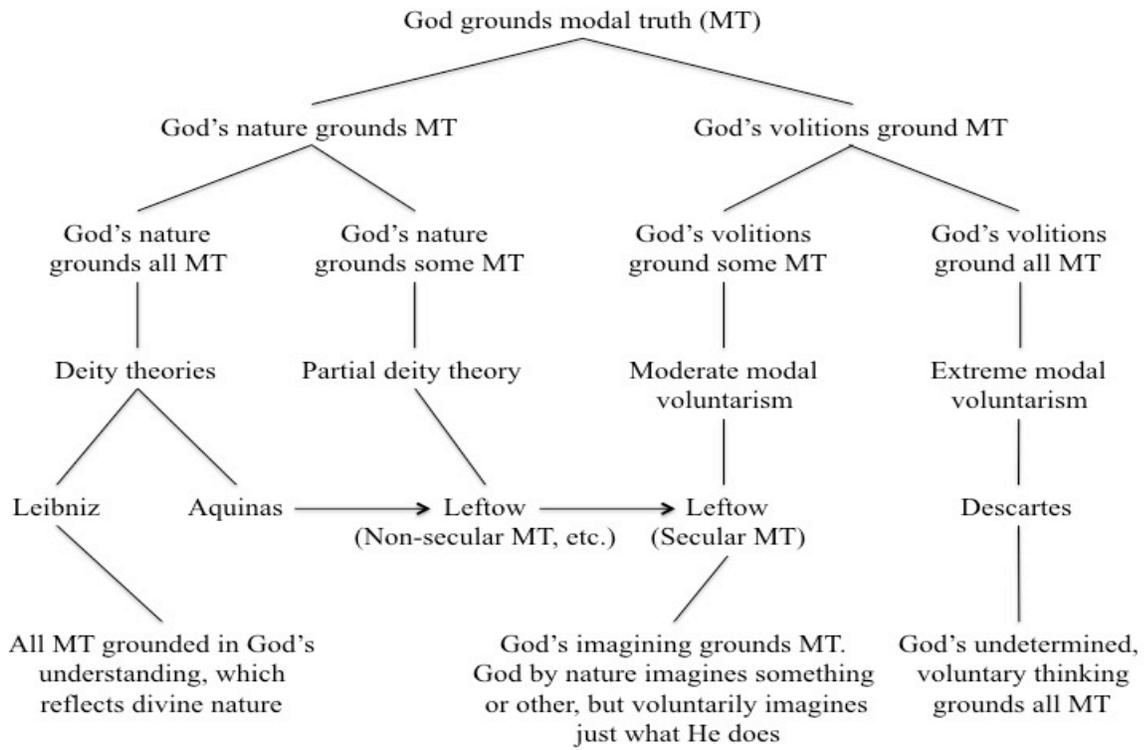
## Appendix 1: Chad McIntosh's Figures for Leftow's Modal Ontology

Fig. 1 – Leftow's Modal Tree<sup>288</sup>

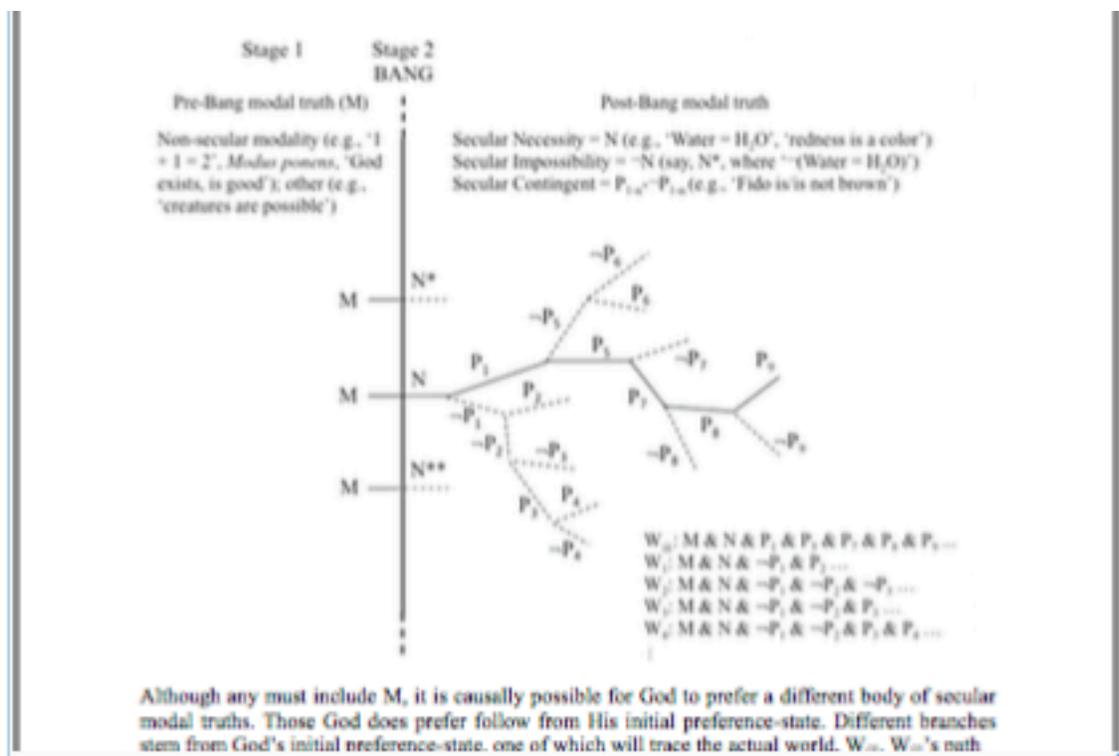


<sup>288</sup> Chad McIntosh, "Review of God and Necessity," *Philosophy in Review* 34, No. 3-4 (2014): 144. See pg. 117 for copyright info.

**Fig. 2 – Leftow Alongside Other Theories<sup>289</sup>**



<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 143. See pg. 118 for copyright info.



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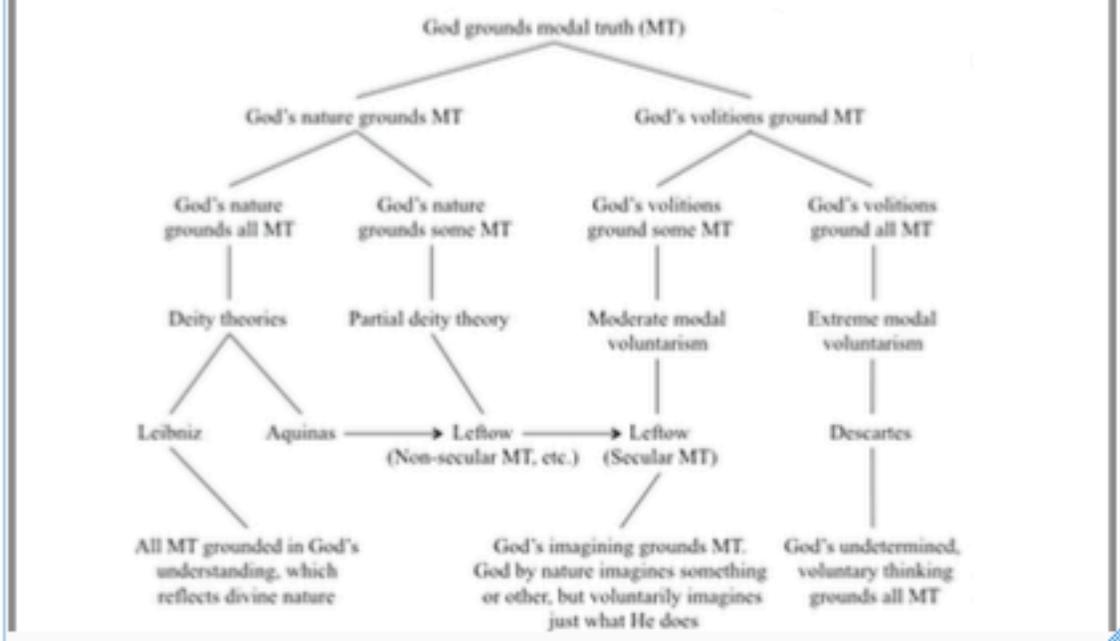
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