

*Theism & the Metaphysics of
Modality*

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

Much cutting-edge research has been produced in the quest to find out which metaphysical account of modality is best. Comparatively little rigorous investigation has been devoted to questioning whether such accounts are compatible with classical theism. This thesis remedies some of this neglect and charts some of this previously under-explored territory existing at the intersection of metaphysics and philosophy of religion. Such an investigation is important since salient among the tenets of classical theism are ones that are characteristically modal. Not only is the classical monotheistic deity supposed to exist and possess the various divine-making properties necessarily; many of these properties themselves seem to include a modal component. An omniscient being is one who *could not fail* to know some proposition (once it's true); and an omnipotent being is such that, for an appropriate set of tasks, it *could* perform them. Classical theism also comprises modal commitments about non-divine individuals: everything distinct from God is supposed to be *necessarily dependent* upon God; and human beings are supposed to have been granted the freedom to do otherwise. In short, the unique metaphysical properties of a classical monotheistic deity burden the theist with substantial metaphysical and ethical commitments any theory of modality must uphold; this thesis questions which one may do so best. However, the discussion must be limited to a small number of theories. Those examined here explain modality in terms of something ultimately *non-modal*; either by reducing modality to something else (e.g., a particular ontology of possible worlds), or by denying that modal discourse has the function of describing, in a truth-apt way, some part of mind-independent reality. So this project is a partial investigation into a more specific question: which of these theories which deny that modality is *fundamentally real* best fits with theism?

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Abbreviations

CT:	Counterpart Theory.
DI:	Divine Idealism.
EA:	Essence Assumption.
GR:	Genuine Realism.
GRO:	Genuine Realism with Overlap.
IA:	Independence Assumption.
MAB:	Must actualise the best.
MPE:	Modal Problem of Evil.
N:	God necessarily exists.
N1:	According to every possible world, God exists.
N2:	God is a part of every world.
N3:	For every world, w , there is a region of spacetime, R , such that God is wholly present at R , and R is part of w .
N4:	In every possible world, God has an (appropriate) counterpart.
N5:	God exists from the standpoint of every world.
NSBAW:	No single best actualizable world.
PB:	Principle of the Best.
PR:	Principle of Recombination.
SV:	The Standpoint View.
TI:	Transworld Identity.
TPR:	Theistic Principle of Recombination.

Introduction

§1 introduces the topic of modality, explains possible world theory in as broad terms as possible, and then explains why understanding modality should be of importance to philosophers of religion. §2 provides an outline of the thesis.

1. Modality, Possible Worlds, & Theism

Sarah studies philosophy. Nothing that's wholly green is partly yellow. Both of these statements are true. But they're not true in the same way. The former, most would suppose, could have been false. The latter, by contrast, could not. Modality, as the name suggests, is concerned with this distinction between *modes* of truth, or ways of being true. It's concerned with the distinction between statements that are *contingently* true (true but could have been false), and those which are *necessarily* true (true and could not have been false). But modality is not just concerned with *true* statements; falsity also has modes. *Squirrels smoke cigars* is false; so is *Squirrels are cigars*. Yet, though in fact false, the former, unlike the latter, at least could have been true: its falsity is *contingent*. When a false statement couldn't have been true, it's said to be *impossible* (its falsity is necessary). So we can recognise another division, one that cuts across *all* statements. A statement is possibly true when it either is true or could have been true; so *every* statement – whether true or not – is either possible or else not, and modality is concerned with this distinction also. Following John Divers (2002), call these notions – possibility, impossibility, necessity, and contingency – *cases* of modality. These four cases of modality are interlinked:

Possibility rules out impossibility and requires (exclusively) contingency or necessity. Impossibility rules out possibility, rules out necessity and rules out contingency. Necessity requires possibility, rules out impossibility and rules out contingency. Contingency requires possibility, rules out impossibility and rules out necessity. (Divers, *ibid.*: 3-4)

Relatedly, just as there are different modes of *truth* – different ways sentences, or propositions can be true – there are also different modes of *being* and of property possession: individuals can exist and possess properties in a necessary or a contingent manner. For example, I could lack (or could have lacked) the property *being a philosophy student*; but I could not fail to possess the property *being human* (so long as I exist). The terms *de re* and *de dicto* mark the distinction between the types of entity modality can be said to be a feature of. Modality *de dicto* is what we're interested in when we're interested in modes of

truth (or falsity). It's said to attach to *sentences* or *propositions* (meaning that the 'possibly' or 'necessarily' acts as a propositional or sentential operator). Modality *de re*, by contrast, is said to be a feature of *things* (that is, *non-linguistic* things or objects); it's what we're concerned with when we're concerned either with the manner of something's existence (i.e., with whether it exists contingently or necessarily), or with the manner in which something possesses certain properties (does it possess them contingently, or necessarily?).¹

The meanings of modal verbs can vary between different contexts. It's one thing to say *You can't talk in the library*; it's quite another to say *A shape can't be both circular and non-circular*. This is partly because the thing that rules out talking in the library (i.e., the rules of the library), is not what rules out any shape's being circular and non-circular (i.e., the laws of logic). *You can't talk in the library* is true because it's not possible to talk in the library and obey the library's rules: these two things are inconsistent. *No shape can be both circular and non-circular* is true because a shape's being circular and non-circular would contravene the law of logic that if a proposition is true, its negation is false. So we can recognise another distinction: one between different *kinds* of modality. Different kinds of modality amount to consistency with different kinds of constraints (*ibid.*: 4). Hence, we can talk about *logical* possibility (what's consistent with the laws of logic); *nomological* possibility (what's consistent with the actual laws of nature); *epistemic* possibility (what's consistent with what we know); and so on. Likewise, we can talk about logical necessity (what follows from laws of logic); nomological necessity (what follows from the laws of nature); epistemic necessity (what's required to be true, given what we know); and so on.

Logical modality is absolute: any logically necessary truth is true *no matter what*. However, there are some modal truths which are true no matter what, and yet, do not themselves follow from any law of logic.² Take *Sarah is human if she exists*. While the denial of this statement does not seem contradictory, it nonetheless strikes us as something that is absolutely and strictly impossible. So here another distinction can be made. We can distinguish amongst the absolute modalities between those that are required by the laws of logic – call these the *narrowly*-logical modalities, and those that are not – call these the *broadly*-logical, or *metaphysical* modalities.³ As the names suggest, the narrowly-logical modalities are a proper subset of the broadly-logical modalities: we've seen that there are broadly-logical necessities whose denials are not *contra*-logical. (Metaphysical possibility is, however,

¹ The qualification is needed, since we may reasonably regard propositions as objects. The distinction is also commonly drawn in a grammatical or syntactic way. See, e.g., Sider (*ibid.*: 182-3). For more on the *de re*/*de dicto* distinction see Plantinga (1974b: 9-13).

² For some famous examples see Kripke (1972: 35-8 and 99-105).

³ 'Broadly logical' is Alvin Plantinga's term (1974b: Chapter 1).

narrower than purely logical possibility.) Hereafter, where I speak of something as being *strictly* or *absolutely* necessary, I shall be using this term to mean ‘*metaphysically*’ (i.e. broadly-*logically*) necessary’.

Some kinds of modality are *alethic*. This just means that, for certain kinds of modality, something’s being necessary entails its being true in our world, and something’s being impossible entails its being false in our world. Others are non-alethic: the relevant *can*’s and *must*s place no such requirements on the actual world. Consider the above examples. Even though it’s true that you can’t talk in the library, it doesn’t follow that people *never actually do* talk in the library: indeed, people are, currently, talking in the library. By contrast, the truth of *no shape can be both circular and non-circular* does rule out there being such things as non-circular circles in the actual world. More formally, the alethic modalities are the ones for which the following inferences are valid: necessarily *p*, therefore, actually *p*; not possibly *p*, therefore, actually $\sim p$; actually *p*, therefore, possibly *p*. (*ibid.*: 6). The narrowly-logical, broadly-logical, and nomological modalities are those taken to be alethic in this way.

I’ve noted that modal talk is pervasive; but it’s also indispensable to many of our ordinary ways of thinking and talking. If we described the world in purely categorical terms, many of us would take it that our description would not be complete; that we’d have failed to describe an important part of reality. We have many beliefs about the ways things must be, can’t be, or might have been different; and we find it important to think about what would be true if such and such were the case. Many of us would not be prepared to give up on those beliefs and ways of thinking (see Melia, (2003: 1-10), and Pruss, (2011: 2)). For example, many would have it that an individual, *x*, can be held to be morally responsible for a certain action, *A*, only if it was at least *possible* that *x* not perform *A*, and so, modality is of importance to ethics. Modality also has an important role to play in scientific theorising. As Joseph Melia notes, ‘the laws of physics are universal truths, but not *just* universal truths’ (2003: 6-7); part of what makes the physical laws *laws* is that we *could not* break them. Science also has a deep interest in causation – the phenomenon of certain events and occurrences *necessitating* others. Additionally, as Aime Thomasson highlights, modality – and *alethic* modality in particular – is at the heart of almost any debate in metaphysics:

No notion plays a more central role in metaphysics than modality... Debates about metaphysical modal facts are tacitly at issue in debates about persistence ([i.e.] debates about what sorts of change it is... possible for a given entity to survive), about reduction and material constitution (since the main barrier to reduction and identity theses is often said to be that the entities have different modal properties), and even debates about existence (since the question of the existence of objects or kinds is often thought to be tied to the question of whether or not there is anything with the relevant ‘intrinsic modal features’). (2007: 135)

We might add to this list the notion of *supervenience* (of there being no difference in A facts without there being a difference in B facts), and the notion of a *valid* argument (one whose premises *necessitate* its conclusion). (Although validity is, of course, of central importance to all of analytic philosophy's sub-fields.)⁴

Yet, despite the pervasiveness and indispensability of modal facts and notions, modality is a source of much puzzlement and controversy. One of the primary reasons for this is that there is no easy answer to the question of what, in reality, *makes for* the distinction between the possible and the impossible, and the necessary and the contingent. Many of us would have it that truth is related to reality in a certain way: it's *grounded* in it, and doesn't just 'float free' from the way the world is. Often, when some statement about the world is true and contains no modal vocabulary it is not so difficult to see what determines its truth. *Sarah is anxious* is true because here is Sarah, being anxious: this state of affairs actually obtains. But no state of affairs including the existence of tap-dancing turtles actually obtains; so what makes for the fact that there could have been tap-dancing turtles? What makes for the fact that we could have done otherwise? In virtue of what couldn't there be square circles? We see very well that all the extended things we've come across *do* have a shape, but what part of reality grounds the fact that they *must do*? As Ross Cameron neatly puts it: 'The way things are seems only to account for what is in fact the case, not what must be the case, or could have been the case but isn't.' (2009c: 11). Hence, 'paradoxically, talk involving possibility does not appear to be *about* anything real.' (Pruss, 2011: 2).⁵

This perplexity surrounding modality is sometimes referred to as 'the grounding problem', since it concerns how modal facts can be grounded in ontology. The question is *just what makes for the truth of alethic modality? Or, what conditions must reality meet such that modal claims are true?*⁶ Perhaps owing to the level of significance modal facts and notions have for

⁴ During the mid-twentieth century, philosophers seemed to be much more hostile to the notion of modality. Most notably, W. V. Quine often called into question the intelligibility of modal notions and the plausibility of any statement's being true *come what may*. See, e.g., Quine (1951) and (1960: 195-200). However, Quine's scepticism about the clarity or intelligibility of modal notions no longer holds much sway. This is partly due to Kripke (1972: 35-8 and 99-105) offering persuasive reasons for thinking that the distinction between the a priori and the a posteriori is not exactly the same as the distinction between the necessary and the contingent. The former distinction is epistemological (it concerns how a statement can be *known* to be true), the latter is metaphysical (it concerns *the nature of things in reality*); and as some examples show, these cases come apart.

⁵ Analogous questions (concerning past and future-tensed truths) can be put to presentists – those who believe that only the present moment exists. See, e.g., Sider ((2001a: 40-41) and (2003: 185)).

⁶ Why not say the issue is one of asking what the truthmakers for modal claims are (rather than truth-conditions)? For the reason that, under certain understandings of truthmaking, there is no problem of accounting for modal truth. If one takes it that all there is to truthmaking is necessitation – that, for any entity, *t*, *t* is a truthmaker for some proposition, *p*, iff *t*'s existence necessitates *p* – then *anything* will be a truthmaker for any necessary truth since its existence will necessitate that truth. Analogous reasons also apply to truths concerning possibility given the commonly accepted S5 system of modal logic. This system has as a principle that if some proposition, *p*, is possibly true, then it's necessary that *p* is possible ($\Diamond p \rightarrow \Box \Diamond p$); facts about absolute possibility are non-contingent. So, given S5, any object will necessitate any truth of the form ' $\Diamond p$ '.

both philosophy and for our everyday lives, modality has, especially since the latter third of the twentieth century, become an important area of philosophical enquiry in its own right as philosophers have devoted a significant amount of time both to answering both this question, and others related to it.⁷

In answering the question of what the truth-conditions are for modal statements, many have seen fit to endorse a framework of possible worlds, since it provides us with a neat model for understanding and evaluating modal claims. Following Saul Kripke (1963), modal truth can be understood not (just) in terms of what the actual world is like, but in terms of how *other* possible worlds are. In possible world semantics, the modal operators ‘necessarily’ and ‘possibly’ are taken to be quantifiers over possible worlds. Broadly speaking, when we are dealing with cases of absolute modality, we say that – quantifying over *all* possible worlds – a sentence of the form ‘necessarily, p ’ ($\Box p$) is true iff p is true according to every possible world (i.e., iff $\forall w$ (p is true according to w)), and a sentence of the form ‘possibly, p ’ ($\Diamond p$) is true iff p is true according to at least one possible world (i.e., iff $\exists w$ (p is true according to w)). Relatedly, p is contingent iff p is true according to at least one possible world and false according to another, and p is impossible iff p fails to be the case according to any possible world. When we are dealing with other kinds of modality, the modal operators still function as quantifiers over worlds, but we simply restrict our quantifiers to a relevant subclass of worlds. For example, in the case of nomological modality, we restrict them to those worlds where the physical laws exactly match the laws that hold here in our world.

Although this discourse enables us to neatly describe the truth-conditions for modal claims, the original ontological problem remains. We began asking what modal facts are,

(See Lewis (2001: 604) and Armstrong (2003: 14).) Not all will accept this as a reason not to look for modal truthmakers. For example, Trenton Merricks (2007) takes this as reason to reject the idea that truthmaking can be trivial in this way, rather than to think there’s no problem in providing truthmakers for modal truths. He claims: ‘Your thumb is not a truthmaker of any sort for FLT [Fermat’s Last Theorem]. And, in general, a ‘trivial truthmaker’ is not really a truthmaker at all. As a result, it is a mistake to say *both* that necessary truths have truthmakers *and also* that those truthmakers can be trivial...Necessary truths require only ‘trivial truthmakers’ just in case necessary truths do not require truthmakers at all. (2007: 24) Merricks (*ibid.*: 26). Others, such as Barry Smith (1999: 279), contend instead that *each truth’s truthmaker is that which that truth is about*. (Your thumb’s existence is not the truthmaker for FLT because ‘FLT is not about your thumb. And *bona fide* truthmakers are that which their respective truthmakers are about.’ (2007: 27)) (See Cameron (2008a) for a discussion of the issues associated with truthmaking and modality and a defence of the claim that modal truths do require substantive truthmakers.) However, to avoid this and other issues (e.g., concerning what kinds of entities truthmakers can be) which may obscure and derail the discussion, I will stick to talking in terms of truth-conditions. If I use the term ‘truthmaker’ in places, I will be using it accordance with the following characterisation: x is a truthmaker for p iff x is something (some part of reality) the existence of which satisfies the truth-conditions for p .

⁷ Another important question associated with modality is epistemological: how do we come to *know* the modal facts? The answer to this will, of course, be linked to the metaphysical question of what modal facts *are*. Since many of us would take it that we do have modal knowledge, it better turn out that the modal facts are of a kind that we could have access to.

but now we can ask *what are possible worlds?* Broadly, possible worlds are supposed to be complete or maximal representations of spacetime; they represent different ways our entire universe – for all of its history – might have been. So, just as we can think about the largest situation of which we are a part – the situation which encompasses all times, locations, and objects we are in any such way related to – we can also think about largest-sized situations of which anything may have been (or failed to be) a part. That is, just as we can think about the maximal way things *are*, we can also think about the maximal ways things *might have been*. Possible worlds represent these largest-sized possibilities (ways things might have been); smaller possibilities are embedded within them. (Hereafter, I may often speak of possible worlds simply as ‘worlds’.)⁸

Worlds are representations, then, but what are these representations? Some take them to be concrete, and to be the same kind of thing as our universe. Such theorists – I will refer to them as *genuine realists* – accept the existence of entities that are not actual (from the standpoint of our world). Other theorists – *actualist realists* (or *ersatzists*) – don’t countenance the existence of anything non-actual. On their view, although all worlds represent our universe, only one represents it accurately, and this one alone is said to be *actualized*. The worlds which *misrepresent* our universe are the *merely* possible worlds; by misrepresenting our universe they represent the different ways it might have been. Although, on this view, all worlds are actual (actually exist), they are not the same kind of thing as the universe (actual world) we inhabit;⁹ instead they are identified with certain constituents of it: usually as some kind of abstract entity.^{10,11} Both of these stances count as realisms about possible world discourse because they accept that statements involving possible worlds terminology are truth-apt; are sometimes true; and refer to mind-independent entities.¹² The differences between the views fall out from what they take

⁸ If possible worlds are to be of use to us here, then they should provide for and respect the broadly logical modalities: there should be no world where any metaphysical necessity is false, and there should be enough worlds so that every metaphysical possibility can be accounted for. It would be of no use if there were no worlds where the Green party win the 2015 UK General Election, or where all that exists is a bowl of almonds balanced precariously on the nose of a pirouetting porcupine; nor would it be of any use if there are worlds where something is wholly green and yet partly yellow. (It merits mention, though, that some (e.g. Yagisawa (2010)) find a use for *impossible* worlds (ones which represent impossibilities). Those who do invoke such worlds must, however, have some principled way of distinguishing them from the possible worlds.)

⁹ This is true of all worlds, including the one that does represent our universe accurately.

¹⁰ E.g.: Robert Stalnaker (1976) takes possible worlds to be (complexes of) uninstantiated properties; Robert M. Adams (1974) explores a view whereby worlds are maximally consistent sets of propositions; and Plantinga (1974b) takes worlds to be maximally consistent states of affairs.

¹¹ Ersatzists don’t *have* to take worlds to be abstract entities. As we’ll later see with the divine idealist account, some ersatzists maintain that worlds are different in kind from our universe, but are nonetheless *concrete* (or at least, are concrete on one plausible way of drawing the abstract/concrete distinction.)

¹² ‘Mind-independent’ here should be taken to mean independent of *non-divine* minds. Divine idealists take worlds to be ideas in God’s mind, and plausibly, this still counts as a realism about worlds.

worlds to *be*. Actualist realists and genuine realists also differ with regards to whether they take all worlds to be *possible* worlds. For some actualist realists, some worlds represent ways the world couldn't have been; they represent *impossibilities*. The most discussed versions of genuine realism, based on Lewis (1986a), don't invoke impossible worlds. However, an exception is the version presented by Takashi Yagisawa (2010).

Others, however, take an *anti-realist* approach to possible worlds discourse, either by denying that possible worlds terminology and sentences involving it refers to any mind-independent entities at all (whether concrete or abstract); or by denying that statements involving possible worlds terminology are truth-apt (capable of being evaluated as true or false), instead understanding the idiom as nothing more than a useful way of talking; or by denying that any sentence involving possible world terminology is ever true. (We must be careful here to distinguish between realism about *possible worlds discourse* and realism about *modality*. Being an anti-realist about possible worlds or possible world discourse, for example, does not make one an anti-realist about modality or modal discourse. One will be a realist about modality – under a standard definition of minimal realism – when one likewise takes statements involving modal terminology to be truth-apt; sometimes true; and as referring to mind-independent entities or properties.¹³)

There is a consequent disagreement amongst possible world theorists about what sentences involving the term 'possible world' *mean*. According to all possible worlds theorists, something is possible iff it is the case *according to* one or more world; and what is the case *according to* a world, *w*, is just what *w* represents as being the case. However, possible world theories differ in their accounts of what it is for a world to represent that something is the case – of what it takes for something to be true according to a world.¹⁴ Hence, just how, precisely, possible world talk should be interpreted depends upon the particular possible world theory at hand.

Some possible world theorists claim that the idiom of possible worlds can provide modal statements with entirely non-modal truth-conditions, and therefore claim that it can offer *fully reductive* accounts of modality. Whether they are entitled to do so will, again, depend upon what ontology they provide for these worlds, and how they define the notion

¹³ One will be realist with respect to modality but anti-realist with respect to worlds if one is anti-realist about worlds and adopts, e.g., a version of essentialism, or dispositionalism, or modal primitivism. Modal primitivists, as the name suggests, take modality to be a *sui generis* primitive feature of the world (see, e.g., Hancks (2008)). Essentialists take modal facts to be grounded in the essences of things (see, e.g., Fine (1994)). Dispositionalists take modality to be grounded in the dispositional properties of things (see, e.g., Molnar (2003)). See Pruss (2002; 2012) for an account whereby modal facts are grounded in *divine* powers). Vetter (2011) provides an overview of some of the recent accounts of modality which don't appeal to possible worlds.

¹⁴ In fact, some possible worlds theories – and Lewisian genuine realism is one such theory – do not offer a uniform account of how a world represents something *de re* and how a world represents something *de dicto*.

of truth according to a world.¹⁵ As we'll later see, the main proponent of genuine realism about worlds – David Lewis (1986a) – claims to be able to accommodate a full reduction of modal truth and concepts, since he can define the relevant notions of 'world' and 'truth at a world' in non-modal terms. Most actualist realists, however, cannot; but invariably such theorists expressly deny that there's a need to do so (see, e.g., Plantinga (1974b)).

While much cutting-edge research has been produced in the quest to advance, develop, and compare different metaphysical accounts of modality, there's been comparatively little rigorous investigation into whether such theories are compatible with classical theism. Classical, or Anselmian,¹⁶ theism has many elements. Chief among them is the conception of a God who is a perfect, divine (or holy) and in some sense eternal personal being. *Qua* perfect personal being, God not only possesses mental states of a kind required for personhood, but also possesses the properties thought to be constitutive of perfection: *inter alia*, omnipotence, omniscience, moral impeccability, sovereignty, and aseity.¹⁷ These 'omni-attributes' should be fairly familiar: in saying that God possesses them, the theist is saying of God that he is maximally powerful and knowledgeable. The latter two may be less familiar. To say that God is sovereign is to say that all reality distinct from God is in some sense dependent upon God; and to say that God possesses aseity – 'exists *a se*' – is to say that God possesses the highest possible level of independence.

This conspicuous gap in the literature seems doubly unwarranted when one considers, not only the global prevalence of theism, but also the fact that salient among the divine properties mentioned above are ones that are characteristically *modal*. For, to say, e.g., that God is omniscient is not just to say that God in fact knows everything there is to know; it is to say that God *could not fail* to know some proposition (once it's true); and, to say that God is omnipotent is to say that for an appropriate set of tasks, God *could* perform them. Likewise, to say God is sovereign is to say that nothing *could* exist (or occur) without God. Further, God is supposed to be necessarily existent: it's not possible that he fail to exist. Nor is it possible that God lack any of the earlier mentioned perfections. God exists and is

¹⁵ However, see Lycan (1988) and Shalkowski (1994) for arguments to the effect that any possible world theory can afford us with wholly non-modal truth-conditions for modal statements. Shalkowski thinks that any possible world theory must fail in this respect for precisely the reason that such a theory's reductive base (its worlds) must be extensionally accurate (complete and consistent) and the only way to secure its accuracy involves appeal to modal facts.

¹⁶ So-called since the *locus classicus* of perfect being theology is Anselm's *Proslogion*. Perfect being theology proceeds by means of *a priori* reflection on the concept of a perfect being (or, in Anselm's case, from the concept of a being which is *that than which nothing greater can be conceived*) to reveal certain truths about the nature of such a being.

¹⁷ Others would add to this list such properties as simplicity and immutability. Those who think God must be simple and immutable often do so because they believe these properties to follow from other divine properties, e.g., simplicity from aseity; immutability from eternity, etc. However, since these are contentious, I leave them off for the time being.

perfect in every possible world. As such, God is necessarily omnipotent, necessarily omniscient, necessarily independent, and so on. (We should note here that the sort of necessity at play in these claims is supposed to be absolute – that is, broadly-logical, or metaphysical. So, e.g., God exists necessarily, not relative to some thing, but *simpliciter*.) It's surprising, then, that comparatively little work has been done to investigate how the properties of a classical monotheistic deity may best be accounted for by a theory of modality, especially since the unique metaphysical properties of a classical monotheistic deity burden the theist with substantial metaphysical and ethical commitments that any theory of modality must uphold.

This thesis charts some of this previously under-explored territory existing at the intersection of metaphysics and philosophy of religion. Loosely, the primary topic of investigation is: *which metaphysical account of modality best fits with classical theism?* While this topic has been largely under-explored, some important ground has been covered, so I will be mindful to address much of the extant literature in this area in the chapters that follow.¹⁸ Now I cannot, of course, hope to undertake anything like a full investigation of the answer to this question: I will have to limit myself to an assessment of the compatibility of theism with a small number of theories. Those examined have something in common: each takes modality not to be a part of the world at the *fundamental level*; either because it reduces modality to something else (e.g., a particular ontology of worlds), or because it denies that modal discourse has the function of describing any part of mind-independent reality at all. Each, in its own way, ultimately explains (or purports to explain) modality in terms of something non-modal. So consider this project a partial investigation into the more specific question: which of these modal theories which deny modality is *fundamentally real* best fits with classical theism?

Why focus on such accounts? I explained above that one of the main motivations for devising a theory of modality is our desire to find something in reality that grounds modal truth. Something in the very nature of modal facts and properties – their being non-categorical (or 'hypothetical') – makes us unable to see what this could be. Categorical properties comprise how an individual *actually* is; hypothetical properties, by contrast (such as causal, and past and future-tensed properties), 'point beyond' their instances. Our puzzlement with modality and other hypothetical notions suggests that we are uncomfortable with accepting them as primitive features of the world. This is why some authors, such as Ted Sider, think that 'a proper ontology should invoke only categorical, or occurrent, properties and relations.' (2001a: 41).

¹⁸ E.g., Leftow (2012) and Pruss (2002; 2011) propose distinctively theistic accounts of modality.

In metaphysics one seeks an account of the world in intelligible terms, and there is something elusive about modal notions. Whether something *is* a certain way seems unproblematic, but that things might be otherwise, or must be as they are, seems to call out for explanation. (Sider, 2003: 184)¹⁹

A metaphysical picture which did not at least attempt to remove modality from the ontological bedrock of reality would not succeed in alleviating the initial mystery and puzzlement that surrounds it. Similar sentiments have been expressed by Simon Blackburn (1984; 1987), amongst others (e.g., Cameron (2012)). I take it, then, that there's good reason for anyone perplexed by modal phenomena – theists and non-theists alike – to be interested in the first instance in looking at these kinds of accounts.²⁰

2. Chapter Outline

Chapter One advances a new theistic paradox: many divine-making properties both must and must not be intrinsic to God. The main focus is on omnipotence, but towards the end analogous considerations are shown to apply to other divine attributes. Two arguments (utilising notions of essence and aseity) are advanced for the conclusion that any divine-making property must be intrinsic to God, and an additional argument is given in support of the claim that omnipotence in particular must be intrinsic to God. Next, some necessary conditions on omnipotence and certain other divine attributes are shown to be extrinsic, meaning that a number of divine-making properties cannot be intrinsic to God. Three different ways of resolving this conflict are dismissed as unsuccessful. Accordingly, theists are urged to seek an alternative solution.

According to some theories of modality, the truth-conditions for modal statements involve entities which are internal to God – parts of God's mind. Chapter Two suggests that such a theory of modality should be attractive to theism for two reasons. First, it complies with the sovereignty thesis: traditionally, everything distinct from God is supposed to depend upon God in some sense, and so, if there is an ontology for modal truths, there is – at the very least – a *prima facie* case for thinking that that such an ontology should too depend upon God. If the objects of such an ontology are divine mental entities, then such entities will not be ontologically independent of God. Second, such a theory offers theists

¹⁹ As another example see Cameron (2012).

²⁰ There are also epistemological reasons to be first interested in exploring accounts which remove modality from reality's bedrock. See, e.g., Sider (2003: 184-5). Such accounts will also appeal to those who consider parsimony a theoretical virtue.

a way out of the paradox advanced in Chapter One. The contention will be that if the truth-conditions for modal statements involve facts about God's mind, then the set of necessary conditions on being divine deemed in Chapter One as being *extrinsic* turn out not to be that. The problem thus dissolves: God's nature-making properties are required to be intrinsic to him, but there's no longer any reason to think that they can't be.

However, this particular solution to the intrinsicness paradox depends on the viability of such a distinctively theistic modal theory. It will be necessary, then, to expound and explore one of the most prominent views which grounds modal facts in the mind of God: the divine idealist view of worlds. I argue that this approach to modality is untenable, since when taken together with the thesis that God necessarily acts for the best, this view entails modal collapse: the thesis that the actual world is the only possible world.²¹ In summing up this objection to divine idealism, I suggest that theists who (a) wish to analyse modal facts in terms of facts about possible worlds and (b) wish to avoid modal collapse should instead take the view that *all* worlds are actualized by God.

Since any world actualized by God will be a concrete object of the same kind as the actual world, any theist seeking to avoid the modal collapse divine idealism seems to entail has good reason to adopt the genuine realist view of worlds, such as that advocated by Lewis (1986a). For, according to this view, all worlds are concrete entities, no different in ontological kind to our world. To this extent, the theist seems to be left with a dilemma: adopting genuine realism means the problem of modal collapse (to which divine idealism is held accountable) can be avoided, but then the newly proposed paradox will be left unresolved; adopting divine idealism, on the other hand, means that the intrinsicness paradox can be avoided, but only at the expense of modal collapse. To bolster the conclusion that theists should favour genuine realism, I therefore offer what I take to be a proper way of dealing with the intrinsicness paradox: imposing a restriction on divine aseity.

Chapters Three and Four assess how theists endorsing genuine realism should view God's relation to the worlds it posits: should God be viewed as inhabiting all worlds, just

²¹ I say it's untenable, but there is historical precedent of theists (or theists *broadly-considered*) thinking that there's only really *one* way reality could have been. Many have interpreted Spinoza as advocating such a view, since 'Proposition 29' in part I of his *Ethics*, states 'Nothing in nature is contingent, but all things are from the necessity of the divine nature determined to exist and to act in a definite way.' (1992: 51), and 'Proposition 33' of that same text states 'Things could not have been produced by God in any other way or in any other order than is the case.' (*ibid.*: 54). Others, as we'll see in Chapter Two, also take Leibniz as being committed to such a view – even if unwittingly. Such a view will, however, be unacceptable for those who *do* hold a common sense opinion about what modal facts there are; and it is surely in holding such an opinion that one is driven to devise a modal theory. One will not be so concerned with answering the question of what grounds the distinction between the necessary and the contingent if one believes that no facts *are* contingent. A modal theory which forces such a drastic revision in one's modal beliefs, thus undermines the very reason for adopting a modal theory in the first place.

some of them, or none? Chapter Three focusses on the third of these options, which involves adopting the transworld identity theory of representation *de re*. Under this view, God – numerically the same individual – literally inhabits, or *exists in* – all worlds. Lewis himself rejects this theory, so this chapter examines whether theists should be persuaded by his reasons for doing so. In addition, it questions whether there are any reasons for thinking that this theory is especially problematic in the context of theism.

Chapter Four considers whether theism fares any better under Lewis' own theory of *de re* representation: counterpart theory. Under this view, God literally inhabits only one world – this world. However, God still exists *according to* all worlds (and so is necessary) by virtue of being a spatiotemporal entity who is counterpart-related to certain individuals inhabiting other worlds. As well as seeing how well this analysis fits with theism, it examines how well theism fits with the view that God inhabits *no* world, but rather exists *from the standpoint of* all worlds as a non-spatiotemporal entity; much in the same way that Lewis ((1968: 126) and (1983c: 40)) recommends that we view abstracta.

The discussion across these two chapters will show that theists should eschew a counterpart-theoretic treatment of divine *de re* modality, since it (a) fails to respect the thesis of divine sovereignty or 'ultimacy', (b) compromises divine omniscience, (c) introduces a problem of luck, and (d) conflicts with one main motivation for theistic genuine realism. However, the standpoint and transworld identity views are not at fault in these same ways, and can also meet the particular challenges that might be raised against them. Hence, theists adopting genuine realism should prefer one of these options; and since each requires a different take on God's relation to spacetime, it turns out that, regardless of what prior commitment one might have towards divine spatiotemporality, a theistically acceptable account of divine *de re* representation is available.

Chapter Five considers whether theists should reject genuine realism on moral grounds. Three different authors – Robert M. Adams (1974), Andrew Beedle (1996) and Mark Heller (2003) – have argued that genuine realism permits us to be indifferent about the ethical quality of our actions. The first half of the chapter assesses each of these arguments and contends that, while they do not only arise under theism, their conclusions, if true, are more problematic under theism. While the arguments from Beedle and Adams will be seen to rest on faulty premises, the argument from Heller will be shown to be more damaging; I conclude that a response to the type of problem he introduces is not available, especially in the context of theism.

The second half of the chapter deals with the modal problem of evil, i.e., the problem that there are worlds at which God is not morally impeccable, since there are

worlds containing evils of a number and kind that a benevolent God would not allow. It examines *inter alia* whether an extended free-will defence can account for worlds with extreme levels of *moral* evil; and whether worlds with extreme levels of *natural (non-moral)* evil can be shown to be theistically unproblematic by endorsing the following thesis about natural goods: that it is better to have them, than to lack them. I conclude the solution is not a good one, and so there are two moral grounds for theists to reject genuine realism.

Having found grounds for theists to reject both divine idealism and genuine realism, I turn, in Chapter Six, to consider an entirely different kind of modal theory: *modal projectivism*. Unlike the former theories, modal projectivism is not what Simon Blackburn (1993) calls a *truth-conditional* approach to modality; for it does not attempt to tell us what conditions reality must meet such that modal claims true. Blackburn (*ibid.*) motivates modal projectivism by contending that any truth-conditional approach faces a dilemma. Robin Le Poidevin (2012) claims that a related dilemma gives theists in particular reason to depart from a truth-conditional approach to modality. I thus outline each of these dilemmas and explain modal projectivism before examining whether it presents a coherent and viable way of understanding theistic and non-theistic modal commitments. I conclude on the following grounds that it does not: (i) there's an aspect of mind-dependence to the account which is theistically problematic; (ii) its account of theistic commitments cannot get off the ground; and (iii) there's no clear way in which the mental states supposedly underlying modal projections can be properly understood in non-modal terms.

1

Is God's Nature Intrinsic?

1. Introduction²²

Classical theism takes God to be a maximally perfect being. Since the properties of omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and moral impeccability are considered to be at least partly constitutive of maximal perfection, any being worthy of the title 'God' could not fail to possess them: God has them *necessarily*. However, as sure as some theists are that God *must* have these properties, others are equally sure that he *could not*. Critical examination of these concepts, they say, reveals them to be unintelligible. Some puzzles concern whether certain of these properties are internally coherent. For example, could an omnipotent being create a stone they cannot lift? Here we find ourselves led to paradox; for whichever answer one gives to this question, there's something this being cannot do. Other puzzles question the compatibility of the divine-making properties. For example, if God possess omniscience and moral impeccability necessarily, as he's said to, then it's not possible for him to sin; nor is it possible for him to forget something, once he knows it. But if God is necessarily omnipotent, it *must* be possible for him to do these things; after all, these are things we mere mortals can do!

Many are not persuaded that these paradoxes are irresolvable. All we need to do, they say, is reflect more carefully on 'omnipotence', 'omniscience', etc., and then offer more nuanced (and all too often, increasingly complex) definitions of these terms. Thus, different (and usually conflicting) characterisations have been offered as philosophers and theologians have sought to resolve these problems in different ways. Subsequently, there's little agreement on just what omnipotence, omnipresence, etc. *are*. Here, I argue that an entirely new consideration threatens to render the divine-making attributes paradoxical and that this paradox cannot be resolved in the same way as those previously discussed.

The paradox arises when we ask whether the divine-making properties are amongst God's intrinsic properties. It's often taken for granted that they are.²³ But no *arguments* have

²² A large portion of this chapter appears in S. Adams (forthcoming).

²³ More on this in §3.1 and §4.2.

been offered for this view; nor has this view received any critical examination. This chapter tends to this hitherto neglected issue by uncovering some of the thoughts that might be guiding the intuition that the divine-making properties are intrinsic. It will argue that philosophical reflection on the concepts of essence and of aseity reveals that the divine-making properties must, indeed, be amongst God's intrinsic properties. However, it will also show that once we examine the content of the divine-making properties themselves, we see that they *cannot* be amongst God's intrinsic properties. The conclusion, then, is that the supposition of classical theism entails a contradiction. For reasons of space, the discussion will centre on the case of omnipotence, but towards the end of the chapter, we'll see how similar paradoxical results apply to other divine-making attributes.

2. Preliminaries

2.1. Intrinsicness

So far, I've framed the central question of this chapter as one about the divine-making properties. This is misleading. I'm not just concerned with whether certain *properties* are intrinsic; I also want to pay attention to whether certain properties are *possessed in an intrinsic manner*. There are two separate notions here, and we must be careful not to confuse the two. Call the notion of a property's being intrinsic (or extrinsic) the 'global' notion, and call the notion of an individual's having a property in an intrinsic manner (or an extrinsic manner) the 'local' notion of intrinsicness (or extrinsicness).²⁴ Global intrinsicness is a property of properties; local intrinsicness is a relation between properties and individuals. Both global and local notions are needed since some properties are intrinsic to some things, yet extrinsic to others. Consider, e.g., the property *being such that there are dogs*. This property is intrinsic to dogs, but extrinsic to non-dogs (see Cameron (2009)).²⁵ I'll say properties are globally intrinsic iff they are intrinsic to each of their possible bearers and globally extrinsic otherwise. To distinguish between extrinsic properties that are extrinsic to each of their possible bearers and those that are not, I will use the terms 'pure extrinsic' properties, and 'impure extrinsic' properties respectively. As noted, I will, in places, be concerned with the global notion – I'll ask whether the divine-making properties are intrinsic. However, since answers to 'local' questions are not always inherited from answers to their more global counterparts, in some places I will ask whether certain divine-making properties can be

²⁴ I take the terms 'global' and 'local' from I. L. Humberstone (1996).

²⁵ More contentious examples involve disjunctive properties (which some many deny the existence of). Call the property *being female-or-an-uncle* ' φ '. φ may be intrinsic to me, but extrinsic to you, if I possess φ in virtue of my being female and you possess φ in virtue of your being an uncle.

intrinsic to *God*. This chapter gives reasons to think that the answers to these two questions are incompatible.

Since I've defined the global in terms of the local notion, I need to say something about what it is for a property to be intrinsic to a thing. David Lewis (1983: 111-2) cites three platitudes which one might think could be used to describe this notion:

- (1) F is intrinsic to x iff a sentence ascribing F to x is entirely about x ;
- (2) F is intrinsic to x iff x possesses F in virtue of how x itself, and nothing else, is;
- (3) F is intrinsic to x iff every duplicate of x possesses F.

I recommend against using (3). Not all properties that are invariant between duplicates are intrinsic to their bearers; consider, e.g., *being such that there are no round squares*, or *being such that the future is either open or closed*. Nor is it true that all intrinsic properties are shared by duplicates, as haecceitistic properties such as *being Socrates* show. (Not everyone admits that there are such things, but most would agree that if there were, they would be intrinsic to their bearers.)²⁶ The notion described in (2) is sometimes called 'interiority'. Very plausibly, (1) is a consequence of interiority; so interiority seems to get at what it *more fundamentally* is, for x to be intrinsically F. Further, interiority seems to capture most accurately our intuitive understanding of what it is for a property to be intrinsic to its bearer. Therefore, I suggest we appeal to interiority in determining whether or not something possesses a property in an intrinsic manner.

Presumably, interiority only serves as a platitude, not a *definition*, of intrinsicness because it doesn't seem illuminating enough to be capable of providing a proper analysis of the term. With (2), we may still wonder under what conditions a thing possesses a property purely by virtue of the way it is in itself. Jaegwon Kim's (1982) definition of intrinsicness might give us one way of spelling out what it is for x to be F purely by virtue of the way it itself is. Using Kim's definition, we could say that x is F purely by virtue of the way it itself is iff x could possess F and exist unaccompanied by another wholly distinct contingent thing (or, in Kim's words: iff x could be *lonely* and still possess F). However, as pointed out by Lewis (1982), compatibility with loneliness is not sufficient for a property's counting as intrinsic to a thing.²⁷ Indeed, the property of loneliness itself could be possessed by a lonely

²⁶ Here's a further reason why duplication may not be the best way to understand intrinsicness. Duplicates are defined as individuals who have all their *intrinsic* properties in common. (One might try to patch up the duplication criterion by explicating duplication in terms of the sharing of *perfectly natural* properties (as Lewis and Langton (1998) do), or in terms of the sharing of *qualitative* properties. However, it might be difficult to articulate the notion of a qualitative property without appealing to intrinsicness.)

²⁷ Though, it may be true that all intrinsic properties are compatible with loneliness.

thing, but a thing could not be lonely in an intrinsic manner. (Far from it in fact: loneliness is an extrinsic property *par excellence*.)²⁸ So where does this leave us? Well, the observation made about loneliness can aid us in making the notion of interiority more informative. Why could nothing possess loneliness in an intrinsic manner? Because whether an individual, x , is lonely or not depends upon what x 's actual external circumstances are like. Generally then, we can say that x is F by virtue of the way it itself is iff x 's possession of F does not depend upon what x 's surroundings are like.²⁹

2.2. Dependence

Having argued that x is intrinsically F iff x 's possession of F does not depend upon what x 's surroundings are like, it will now be crucial to pin down the conditions under which an individual depends upon its surroundings for its possession of F.

First, we can see from the discussion above that the following way of construing this notion would be inadequate:

- (4) Necessarily, for any individual, x , and any property, F, x 's being F depends (at least in part) on x 's surroundings iff x could not exist in isolation and still possess F.

As shown above, an individual could exist in isolation and possess the property *being the only object*; yet, some x 's being the only object depends upon what x 's surroundings are like; it depends upon there being no individual distinct from x in the presence of x . (This is precisely why Lewis finds Kim's definition of intrinsicness wanting.) This failing leads us to another natural suggestion:

- (5) Necessarily, for any individual, x , and any property, F, x 's being F depends (at least in part) on x 's surroundings iff there are possible variations in x 's surroundings in which x would lack F.³⁰

²⁸ Some philosophers of religion have employed Kim's loneliness criterion as a test for intrinsicness, and have therefore been too quick to infer that certain properties are intrinsic to God. E.g., Leftow (2012: 176) claims deity is intrinsic since God would have possessed it even if he'd created nothing at all (and thus existed unaccompanied).

²⁹ I use the word 'surroundings' here quite loosely, and for want of a better term. For the purposes of the discussion, I will stipulate that something's surroundings, or environment, includes all (and only) the conditions that hold true of things distinct from it or any of its parts. Thus, if God exists, or if there are, e.g., Platonic Forms, or abstract laws of nature, these will be classed as part of my environment.

³⁰ I'm also grateful to an anonymous reviewer for *Philosophia* for making suggestions expressed in (4) and (5).

It's a consequence of (5) that counterpossible³¹ dependence isn't genuine dependence. If the conditions under which x would fail to possess F are *impossible* – if there *are no possible* variations in x 's surroundings under which x would fail to possess F – then, according to (5), x does not depend upon its surroundings for its being F .

However, theists *by their own lights* cannot accept this. Suppose that 'F' denotes the property *being such that God exists* and that classical theism is true. In that case, God exists necessarily, and it is *de dicto* necessary that all things distinct from God depend upon God. It follows from these suppositions that no non-divine individual, x , is such that there are *possible* variations in its surroundings such that it lacks F , even though every x depends upon what its surroundings are like for its possessing F . In other words, classical theists endorse a counterexample to (5).

Theists cannot, then, claim that where a putative dependency claim specifies an impossibility in its antecedent clause, the putative dependency is only that; i.e., *putative*. For, if they did, 'necessarily, all things distinct from God depend upon God' would be false. Indeed, because, according to them, it is *de dicto* necessary that all things distinct from God depend upon God, classical theists cannot accept any modal characterisation of dependence in terms of possible worlds. 'All things distinct from God depend upon God', can't be understood as 'if God didn't exist, then neither would anything else', since, under the standard semantics for counterfactuals invoking possible worlds,³² it would be true that all things distinct from God would exist even if God didn't. (Of course, under this semantics, 'if God didn't exist then neither would anything else' will also be true, but its truth will be vacuous. The dependency of all other things on God is, however, meant to be a *substantive*, not vacuous, matter.) So theists require a *hyperintensional* notion of dependence, and must accept that counterpossible dependence is genuine dependence.³³

Our initial question thus remains unanswered. Under what conditions *does* an individual depend upon its surroundings for its possession of F ? In light of the forgoing points, it seems that the best thing to say is this:

³¹ A counterpossible is a counterfactual conditional whose antecedent clause involves an impossible state of affairs.

³² The canonical presentation of which is given in Lewis (1973a) and Stalnaker (1968). On this semantics, any counterpossible is trivially true. More on counterfactual dependence and the possible worlds analysis of it in Chapter Three §11.

³³ It may be that two facts, F_1 and F_2 are intensionally equivalent (it may be that any metaphysically possible world in which F_1 obtains is world in which F_2 obtains, and vice versa), but it may be that ' F_1 metaphysically depends upon F_2 ' is true while ' F_2 metaphysically depends upon F_1 ' is false, and vice-versa. E.g., the fact that Socrates exists is intensionally equivalent to the fact that {Socrates} exists, but while the fact that {Socrates} exists metaphysically depends upon the fact that Socrates exists, the converse is not true. More on this in §3.1.

- (6) Necessarily, for any individual, x , and any property, F , x 's being F depends (at least in part) upon x 's surroundings iff either the presence or the absence of something or some things distinct from x partially grounds x 's being F . (Where y is distinct from x iff y has no part in common with x .)

What does 'grounds' mean in (6)? Following recent work on grounding, this term should be understood to specify an explanatory relation: if the fact that a is F is grounded in the existence of some individual, y , or in the obtaining of some further state of affairs, S , then y or S *account* for, or make true, Fa . (See, e.g., Fine (2001); Litland (2013); and Dasgupta (2014).)

(6) avoids the problems with (4) and (5). (4) is inadequate because, *contra* (4), an individual can depend upon there being an *absence* of certain things in its surroundings for its possession of a property. (6) is not inadequate in this respect since it is built into (6) that if the fact ' x is F ' is even partially grounded in there being *no* things of kind K in x 's environment, x will depend upon its surroundings for its possessing F . (In particular, it will depend (at least in part) on its environment being such that it lacks K s.) (5) is inadequate since it doesn't allow that 'necessarily, all things distinct from God depend upon God' is true (or at least, it doesn't allow that it's substantively true). (6) is much more amenable to theism in this respect. Unlike (5), (6) does allow this claim to be substantively true. Further, since we've seen that metaphysical dependence is (or at least, that theists must accept that it is) hyperintensional, expressing metaphysical dependence in terms of grounding looks like a good way to go. For, there are good reasons to think that explanatory relations – and so grounding relations – are also hyperintensional. (See Bliss and Trogden (2014).)

Now that we have an adequate explanation of what it is for some thing to depend upon its surroundings for its possession of some property, we are finally in a position to offer a more informative characterisation of intrinsicity:

- (7) Necessarily, for any individual, x , and any property, F , x is intrinsic to F (i.e., x 's being F does not depend even in part upon x 's surroundings) iff neither the presence, nor the absence of something or some things distinct from x partially grounds the fact that x is F . (Where y is distinct from x iff y has no part in common with x .)

It's important to make as explicit as possible consequences of (7) that are crucial to the discussion that follows. First, any property, F , will be *extrinsic* to God if either of the

following holds true: (a) the *presence* of something distinct from God partially grounds the fact that God is F; (b) the *absence* of something distinct from God grounds partially grounds the fact that God is F. Second, should (b) hold true, F will be extrinsic to God even if the things (or states of affairs) whose absence is required for God to be F are impossible. That is, F will be extrinsic to God even if God's being F involves counterpossible dependence upon God's surroundings.

I should also mention that the paradox presented here depends upon the assumption that each of the divine-making properties must be one or the other: intrinsic *or* extrinsic to God. But absent any apparent counterexamples to the general principle that for *every* property, F, and for every individual, *x*, if *x* is F, either F is intrinsic to *x*, or F is extrinsic to *x* (this distinction is exhaustive) and no F is both intrinsic and extrinsic to *x* (the two are mutually exclusive),³⁴ I take this assumption to be entirely uncontroversial.

2.3. Strategy

The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. §3 argues that properties that constitute God's essence must be intrinsic to God *simply because* they constitute God's essence. §4 likewise argues that all divine-making properties must be intrinsic to God, but instead utilises the theistic notion of aseity. §5 argues that a fact about power-possession requires omnipotence, in particular, to be intrinsic to God. §6 identifies four necessary conditions on being omnipotent and argues that each of these renders omnipotence a pure extrinsic property. §7 considers three different attempts to resolve this conflict, but finds each to be unsuccessful. §8 shows that similar paradoxes arise for other divine-making properties. §9 concludes that the supposition of God's existence thus entails a contradiction: God's nature both must and must not be intrinsic to him; and since this is something theists cannot accept, a different kind of solution is needed. Since the question of whether the various divine perfections can be intrinsic has received little to no critical examination in analytic philosophy of religion, much of what I say here is an attempt to plug some of that gap.

3. An Argument from Essence

3.1. The Argument

I suggested above that theists and philosophers of religion often take for granted that the divine-making properties are intrinsic. One such philosopher is Jeffrey Brower, who remarks during his discussion of the theistic doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS) that 'the

³⁴ I also take it that a similar principle applies to the more global notion of intrinsicness.

doctrine requires that God is identical with each of his *intrinsic* properties...goodness, power and so on' (2009: 108, emphasis added). While Brower names God's power and the like as God's intrinsic properties, he does not *justify* his doing so, and he's not alone in this.³⁵ Why, then, might someone be naturally inclined towards the view that the properties constitutive of God's essence are intrinsic? Perhaps it's precisely because of that: *these properties are constitutive of God's essence*. The thought, then, would be that all essence-comprising properties are intrinsic to their bearers, and omnipotence, moral impeccability, and so forth, are comprised by God's essence. Put more formally, the thought is as follows:

- P1. Omnipotence is part of God's essence.
- P2. For any individual, x , and any property, F , if F is part of x 's essence, then F is intrinsic to x .
- C1. Omnipotence is intrinsic to God.

To assess this argument, we first need to clarify what's meant by the term 'essence'. Some take a thing's essential properties to be all (and only) those it possesses as a matter of necessity: F is essential to x iff it is necessary that x possesses F if x exists.³⁶ (On this construal, the essence of a thing, x , will be the collection of all and only the properties it possesses as a matter of necessity.) This is not the notion of essence I'm appealing to here. As contemporary authors such as Kit Fine (1994) have shown, there's a sense of 'essence' that cannot be assimilated to any *de re* modal notion; one according to which essential properties are a proper subset of those that are possessed as a matter of necessity.³⁷ Consider the following. I am (if I exist) necessarily human. I am also (if I exist) necessarily such that everything is self-identical and necessarily a member of my singleton set. But there's an intuitive sense in which my being human is somehow more important to me than my being such that everything is self-identical and my being a member of my singleton set. As Fine says:

Strange as the literature on personal identity may be, it has never been suggested that in order to understand the nature of a person one must know to which sets he belongs. There is nothing in the nature of a person...which demands that he

³⁵ Divine immutability has been often understood as covering all and *only* God's intrinsic properties. Traditionally, immutability requires that God undergoes no *intrinsic* change (but does not require that God undergoes no extrinsic change). (See, e.g., Gale (1986) and Leftow (2012b).) The view that immutability covers God's perfections has also been common. Those who endorse these two views implicitly accept that God's perfections are intrinsic.

³⁶ The 'if it exists' qualification is needed to allow that contingent beings can have essential properties.

³⁷ Indeed, Fine argues that the converse is in fact true: (metaphysical) necessity is reducible to essence.

belongs to this or that set or which demands, given that the person exists, that there even be any sets. (1994: 5)

Thus, authors such as Fine suggest that we need a hyperintensional notion of essence, one according to which an essential property of x is not one that x merely possesses as a matter of necessity, but that also makes up x 's nature. This enables us to say that, for instance, while I'm both a member of my singleton set and a human in every world where I exist, *being human* is essential to me, but *being a member of my singleton set* is not. For, intuitively, the former is part of my nature – part of *what it is* to be me; the latter is not.

Now, when theists say that God is essentially omnipotent, they are not meaning to convey merely that God is omnipotent as a matter of necessity; partly, they also intend to convey that omnipotence is *part of God's nature*. For theists, being omnipotent, etc., is somehow more important to God, than, e.g., being such that Fermat's last theorem is true. A world where God is not omnipotent is, despite this stipulation, just not a world that contains *God*, because *part of what it is to be God*, is to be omnipotent³⁸ (see, e.g., Rowe (2005: 21)). Therefore, I take it as uncontroversial that theists are *de facto* committed to P1 (where the notion of essence involved is hyperintensional) and will not consider it in need of any further support.

What about the second premise? As noted, genuinely essential properties are those that have their source in the identity, or nature, of their bearer. As Fine would say, essential properties are those an individual has *by virtue of which it is the thing that it is*. However, an individual, x , may possess a property, F , as a matter of necessity, irrespective of whether x 's nature or identity is the source of its possessing F . This is why Fine finds the modal account of essence unsatisfactory: *modality is insensitive to source* (1994: 9). This gets us so far: essential properties are those a thing possesses in virtue of its nature. But why think that the properties a thing possesses in virtue of its nature, or identity, are all intrinsic to it? Well, I am, for example, a member of my singleton set, and necessarily so, but I'm not so in virtue of the way *I myself am*; rather, I am so in virtue of the way *my singleton set is*. It's because my singleton set has a certain nature that I'm a member of my singleton set in every world where I exist. Likewise, I'm necessarily such that the product of 6 squared is 36, but not because of the way *I am*; but because of the way the number 6 is.³⁹ And while I'm necessarily such that everything is self-identical, and necessarily such that there are no round squares, nothing about *me* requires that I possess these properties. I suggest that what informs the

³⁸ As an exception to this see Geach (1973). Geach instead advocates ascribing to God the property of *being almighty* (which is the property of having power over all things).

³⁹ Whatever the number 6 ends up being. I don't mean to endorse Platonism about numbers.

intuition that properties such as these are not part of my nature is the fact that we see them as not being intrinsic to me: intuitively, I possess them in virtue of the way things distinct from me are. In contrast, we'd happily say that it's part of my nature to be human. Plausibly, that's because being human is a matter of possessing such and such DNA structure (or something of that kind), and possessing such and such DNA structure is an *internal* matter: it's a matter of how the bearer of this property, and nothing distinct from it, is. I'm contending, then, that we endorse the general claim specified in P2: if a property, F, is part of an individual, x's, nature, then F is intrinsic to x. P2 accounts for our unwillingness to accept certain properties and admit others into the essence of particular individuals.⁴⁰

3.2. Counterexamples to P2

Nonetheless, P2 is not free from potential counterexamples. I deal with what I take to be the most obvious ones here.

Origin. Saul Kripke (1980) makes the case that human beings have their parents 'essentially'. Having a certain origin is certainly not a property a thing could possess in a manner consistent with interiority. Therefore, if it *is* part of the essence of any individual that it has a certain origin, P2 will be false.

I don't think we should accept that any individual has the origin it does as part of its *nature*. Kripke's arguments certainly don't force us to say otherwise. Although Kripke uses the word 'essence', at most, his arguments suggest a (mere) necessary connection between a person and their particular ancestry; nowhere does Kripke mention anything about it being a part of a person's *nature* that they have the origin they do. We have said of genuine essential properties that something about their bearer should require that they possess them. It doesn't sound right to say that *something about me* demands that I have the origin I do; that it's part of *what I am* that I have a certain ancestry. Further, nothing seems to be lost by saying that we have the origins we do merely as a matter of necessity, and not as part of our very natures. Perhaps intuitions will diverge on this point. But since there's no strong case to be made for the contrary assertion, I do not think cases involving of necessity of origin should move us to reject P2.

Shape. Very plausibly, certain objects – e.g., statues – have their shapes necessarily, and as part of their nature. Yet, according to some authors (e.g., Hudson (2005)) material objects have their shape in virtue of occupying a spatiotemporal region which itself has a

⁴⁰ It's subsequently been brought to my attention that David Denby (2014) also argues that all essential properties are intrinsic.

particular shape, and so have their shapes extrinsically. If such accounts are right, there will be many counterexamples to P2. For example, statue *a*, which has shape S essentially will depend for its being S-shaped on something external to *a*, i.e., some spatiotemporal region R's being of a certain shape (and its bearing an occupation relation to R).

A view whereby physical objects have their shape in virtue of occupying spatiotemporal regions which themselves have a certain shape, however, is undesirable. Such a view commits us to a particular metaphysical thesis about spacetime: substantivalism. According to substantivalism, spacetime is an entity in its own right; it does not depend for its existence upon the existence of particular objects and events.⁴¹ Now, if substantivalism were false, physical objects could not have their shape in virtue of their occupying spatiotemporal regions which themselves have a certain shape: there would *be no* spatiotemporal regions over and above the objects that occupy them. It would certainly be a strange thing if our account of something's shape committed us to a particular metaphysical thesis concerning spacetime. Thus, we should accept a different account. One option is to define shapes by means of internal relations. A circle is defined as being a two dimensional figure such that every point on its circumference is equidistant from its centre. Other shapes could be defined in similar ways; i.e., by focussing on the distances and angles holding between different internal features of the figure, or object. By adopting an account such as this, we needn't commit ourselves to a particular, substantial, and controversial metaphysical thesis about spacetime. Since this seems the most sensible route to take, we should not be worried that cases involving necessity of shape threaten P2.

Haecceities. Consider again haecceitistic properties such as *being Socrates*. Earlier I noted that most would take such properties to be intrinsic to their bearers. However, since one feature of these properties is that they are individuating; they could not be possessed by any individual besides their bearer, some may find cause to disagree. For possession of them is partly outward looking – imposing constraints on their bearer's external circumstances. Now, if individuals do possess haecceities, they will possess them not only as a matter of necessity, but also as part of their nature (e.g., it's part of Socrates's nature to *be Socrates*). So, one might think that haecceities threaten P2.

For the many who are simply unwilling to accept that there are such things, haecceities will, of course, pose no problem for P2. But even granted that there are such things, a different response is available. The role of natures is to *characterise* their bearers: genuine essential properties – as opposed to ones possessed merely as a matter of necessity

⁴¹ In contrast, the relationist about spacetime believes that spacetime is nothing over and above the relations that hold between objects and events.

– do more than tell you something trivial about their bearer. Individuating properties, such as *being Socrates*, merely specify the identity of their bearer. I suggest that any property that can properly be said to (at least partly) be comprised by an individual’s nature, or essence, should have a genuinely characterising role. Call properties which do not shed any light on what their possessor is in fact like ‘trivial’ properties. Trivial properties are not the right sort of property to be classed as essence-contributing. As further support for this claim, consider that many of us would find it counterintuitive to suppose that *being human or a goldfish* is part of any particular human being’s essence. Intuitively, this is because if an individual, x , possesses *being human or a goldfish* in virtue of their being human, then *being human or a goldfish* doesn’t confer any character on x . All the relevant character is conferred on x by their possessing *being human*. As with the above cases then, I don’t think we’ve any reason here to reject P2.

Maximal properties. Ted Sider (2001b) contends that certain maximal properties are extrinsic. ‘A property, F, is maximal iff, roughly, large parts of F are not themselves F’ (*ibid.*: 357). Most sortal predicates specify maximal properties, with one such example being *being a rock*.⁴² This property is maximal, says Sider, because large parts of rocks are not themselves rocks. Suppose Rocky is a rock. Now consider a large arbitrary proper part of Rocky, call it ‘Rocky-minus’. Rocky-minus is not a rock because she is (seamlessly) embedded within something which itself is a rock, i.e., Rocky. However, if we were to chip away at Rocky to reveal Rocky-minus, Rocky-minus *would* fall under the predicate ‘...is a rock’. This shows us that whether something is a rock partly depends upon the surroundings in which it is situated; partly, it depends upon whether it is a proper part of something which is itself a rock: ‘Apparently, then, the property *being a [rock]* is not an intrinsic property. For inspection of a thing—for example, [Rocky-minus]—will not reveal whether it is a [rock]’ (*ibid.*). Now, it’s certainly true that many of the things that possess maximal properties do so, not merely as a matter of necessity, but as part of their nature (i.e., *essentially*): Rocky is a rock by nature, it’s essential to this chair that it be a chair, and so on. Thus, maximal properties pose a threat to P2.

It seems perfectly reasonable to deny, though, that it’s part of Rocky’s nature to be a rock and to instead maintain that it’s part of Rocky’s nature to be *disposed* to be a rock. Of course, whether this disposition is *manifested* or not depends upon whether Rocky is a proper part of something else that is a rock; but since, very plausibly, Rocky’s possession of the dispositional property is grounded in certain of Rocky’s intrinsic categorical properties (e.g., his particular molecular make up), the dispositional property itself will be intrinsic to Rocky.

⁴² This is one of Sider’s own examples.

Similar moves could be made, *mutatis mutandis*, for other maximal properties things possess essentially.⁴³

To summarise: any property that is essential to an individual is part of that individual's nature, and that any property that's part of an individual's nature is intrinsic to that individual.⁴⁴ Hence, omnipotence along with the other divine-making properties must be intrinsic to God.

4. An Argument from Aseity

Above I argued that examination of the concept of essence reveals to us that the divine-making properties must be intrinsic to God. In this section, I argue that examination of the concept of divine aseity will do the same.

4.1. Aseity

The God of classical theism is supposed to exist *a se* – that is – entirely from himself, and is entirely self-sufficient. It is thought that an entirely perfect being must possess the highest possible degree of metaphysical independence, since any way of being dependent makes for an imperfection. So strong is the notion of independence involved in divine aseity, that some theists have been compelled to uphold the widely contentious doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS).⁴⁵ DDS says that God does not exhibit any kind of metaphysical complexity and is not in any way a composite. As such, God is not distinct from his existence; not distinct from his essence; and does not have any spatial or temporal parts. If God *did* have parts then – *contra* the aseity doctrine – God would depend upon his parts as any composite thing does.⁴⁶ Likewise, if the relation between God and his essential attributes were *not* one of identity, God would be dependent upon entities numerically

⁴³ By 'categorical' I mean 'not-dispositional'. The distinction between categorical and dispositional properties is hard to define but, roughly, a dispositional property is one the having of which implies certain counterfactual truths, whereas a categorical property does not. No part of the ensuing discussion hinges on our drawing this distinction in a particular way. §6.3 discusses dispositions and their relation to categorical properties further.

⁴⁴ Cameron (2008a: 271) seems to have in mind a similar way of viewing essence, though he doesn't appeal to intrinsicness. According to him, whenever we ask what makes it true that some thing is essentially some way, we should answer that it's 'the very thing itself that makes this true'.

⁴⁵ While many pre-modern theologians (Aquinas, Anselm, and Augustine) endorsed DDS, and while some thus consider it a key part of classical theism, the doctrine has come under much philosophical scrutiny in more recent times; see, e.g., Plantinga (1980). See also Brower (2008; 2009) and Leftow (2006) for some recent attempts to make sense of the doctrine.

⁴⁶ There's an assumption, then, that no whole is prior to its parts. This is itself metaphysically contentious; see, e.g., the priority monism as defended by Jonathan Schaffer (2010). Utilising Schaffer's kind of priority monism, Gregory Fowler (2015) presents an interesting and viable alternative to the doctrine of divine simplicity a 'doctrine of divine priority'. He contends that such a view can equally well respect the aseity thesis whilst avoiding the numerous metaphysical absurdities simplicity entails.

distinct from him for his existence. So God has no *distinct* properties that are his goodness, his omniscience, and so on. And we better not say that God is good, omniscient, and so on in virtue of bearing some kind of relation, such as instantiation, to certain Platonic entities; for otherwise, God would depend upon things distinct from him for his existence and nature.⁴⁷ Indeed, the existence of abstracta more generally has been widely thought to be incompatible with God's aseity. For, abstracta, if they exist, exist necessarily, and this means that, under the popular Lewis-Stalnaker semantics mentioned earlier, it is true – though trivially so – that if (*per impossible*) any abstract object failed to exist, God would fail to exist.⁴⁸

Those who would have it that the trivial truth 'if (*per impossible*) abstracta failed to exist, God would fail to exist' diminishes God's aseity, and those who would have it that God's aseity requires the truth of DDS in the form expressed above, accept, at least implicitly, that dependence on a necessary state of affairs, and hence, dependence on the absence of an impossible state of affairs (e.g., the non-existence of God's nature or the non-existence of abstracta) is a genuine kind of dependence. They also accept that for God to be *a se*, God must not depend even on necessary facts involving entities distinct from him (nor, thereby, on the absence of impossible ones involving things distinct from him). For those endorsing, e.g., DDS, the fact that God's nature exists necessarily is, apparently, by the by when we are considering whether God's having a nature distinct from himself would impugn his independence.

All this is just to say, then, that according to the classical doctrine of divine aseity, God is independent in every way imaginable: God depends neither upon contingent, nor upon necessary entities distinct from himself for his existence or nature; God depends not even upon the absence of impossible states of affairs.

4.2. The Argument

Only one author has been particularly explicit in endorsing the view that omnipotence is intrinsic, and that is Brian Leftow. Leftow (1990a: 581), like Brower, expresses his endorsement of the view that the divine attributes are intrinsic through his characterisation of DDS. Leftow claims that DDS requires God to be identical to his *intrinsic* attributes,⁴⁹ and then cites omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection as the ones meeting this criterion. He also claims that 'being made omnipotent would mean being granted a new

⁴⁷ Such reasoning can be found in Aquinas (1947: Ia q.3 a.7). See also Plantinga (1980).

⁴⁸ Indeed, so many are assured that there really would be a threat to God's aseity here, that the issue of God and abstracta has recently spawned a wide array of literature (see, e.g., the entries in Gould (2014)).

⁴⁹ Although, importantly and unlike Brower, Leftow restricts the thesis to God's *necessary* intrinsic attributes.

intrinsic property in virtue of which one henceforth has that much power' (2009: 173, emphasis added). Importantly though, Leftow is the only author to pay close attention to whether particular definitions of omnipotence respect the idea that omnipotence is intrinsic. For example, Leftow finds Thomas Flint and Alfred Freddoso's (1983) definition of omnipotence wanting because it renders omnipotence a partly *extrinsic* attribute. The definition allows the powers to persuade and to weakly actualize to (partly) constitute omnipotence. (A person, P, weakly actualizes a state of affairs, S, only if P strongly actualizes it that some person P* is in circumstance C such that if P* is in C then P* freely strongly actualizes S. A person, P, strongly actualizes S if P directly causes S to obtain.) Yet, says Leftow:

[P]owers to persuade or weakly actualize are not of the right sort to help constitute a being as omnipotent... 'Persuade' is a success term: I persuade you only if I succeed in my attempt to do so. How much persuading I can do depends on the hearts around me. *So power to persuade is not intrinsic: having it depends on what is the case outside of the agent... But omnipotence is an intrinsic attribute...* [I]f a being can achieve an effect only by exercising a power whose possession must be partly determined extrinsically, it necessarily needs the help of those extrinsic circumstances that help give it the power to achieve that effect. *This is true even if the circumstances obtain necessarily.* [And if] the relevant circumstances can *fail* to obtain, lack of those circumstances is another impeding factor to which it is subject... Power to weakly actualize is power to accomplish things only by means of extrinsic helps... [s]o it can't help constitute an intrinsic attribute. (2009: 180-1, emphasis added.)⁵⁰

It's clear, then, that Leftow is strongly committed to the claim that omnipotence is intrinsic.⁵¹ But again, there's no real argument for that claim; rather, Leftow takes the claim as something of an axiom which he can utilise in arguments for other conclusions. Nonetheless, a closer look at the above passage reveals that a particular thought might at least implicitly underlie Leftow's commitment to this view, and I suggest that it's the idea of God as an independent being. Leftow denies that the powers to persuade and to weakly actualise constitute omnipotence on the grounds that these powers are extrinsic to their bearers. Leftow seems to be suggesting that none of God's powers could be extrinsic to him for the reason that God's possession of them would otherwise (and thereby) be dependent. Thus, the implicit thought appears to be that God's powers should be entirely independent. Something like the doctrine of divine aseity is informing Leftow's view that omnipotence is intrinsic.

⁵⁰ I've highlighted the phrase 'This is true even if the circumstances obtain necessarily' so as to draw the reader's attention back to the points made in §4.1 regarding the strength of the aseity doctrine.

⁵¹ Explicit endorsements of the view are also littered throughout his (2012a).

I believe Leftow's guiding thought is right: God's power(s) should be intrinsic to him. But I don't think aseity requires *just* that God's power(s) be intrinsic to him; I think it requires that *all* of the divine-making properties be intrinsic to him. Recall that, for any individual, x , and for any property, F , x possesses F in an extrinsic manner iff x depends upon external factors for its possession of F . And, as we saw in §4.1, God is independent to the highest possible degree. We can put this reasoning more formally as follows:

- P3. God possesses the highest possible degree of independence.
- P4. Any individual who possesses the highest possible degree of independence possesses the properties that constitute its nature in an independent manner.
- P5. God possesses the properties that constitute his nature in an independent manner.
- P6. If a property, F , is possessed by an individual, x , in an independent manner, then F is intrinsic to x .
- C2. The properties that constitute God's nature are intrinsic to him.

Thus, once we add that omnipotence partly constitutes God's nature, we gain the more specific result that omnipotence is intrinsic to God.

4.3. A Spurious Reply

Alexander Pruss makes the point that dependence in respect to an extrinsic property is not real dependence:

The doctrine of aseity says that God is entirely independent of anything other than himself. Dependence in respect of an extrinsic property is not real dependence, just as change in respect of an extrinsic property is not real change...Extending aseity to extrinsic properties makes aseity entail complete sovereignty, the claim that every proposition p is entailed by what God wills in the productive sense of 'wills'. For if some proposition p were not entailed by what God wills, then God would be dependent in respect of the extrinsic property *being such that p*...But such an extension of aseity appears excessive...Aseity is more naturally thought of as a denial of God's having any *real* dependence on anything other than himself, and the further claim that every contingent proposition has its truth value determined by what God wills seems a separate claim, one that can be rejected by someone who denies that God has real dependence on anything other than himself...[D]ivine aseity [should be] restricted to intrinsic properties[.]' (2008: 165)

In taking this view to heart, one might think it impossible for the argument from aseity to gain any traction. Since aseity concerns God's *intrinsic* properties, it's useless to argue that certain divine properties can't be extrinsic on the basis that there would otherwise be a conflict with aseity. Should God possess omnipotence in an extrinsic manner, there wouldn't be any conflict with aseity: this concerns God's *intrinsic* properties.

Now, Pruss is of course right that to expect aseity to encompass even God's extrinsic properties would be to expect the impossible. However, one who supposed that this prevents the argument from aseity from getting off the ground would be missing the point. The point is that aseity requires all God's *nature-comprising* properties to be intrinsic to him. Part of what it is to be God is to be wholly independent, and if omnipotence etc. were not intrinsic to God, this would not be true.

5. An Argument from Power Possession

5.1. The Argument

In this section, I show that the notion of power-possession can be utilised to formulate a second and more direct route to the conclusion that omnipotence, in particular, is intrinsic to God. This argument relies on the assumption that an individual who possesses their power in an extrinsic manner is less powerful than one who possesses their power in an intrinsic manner. Suppose Armstrong and Gunner both have the power to kill anyone we like, but Armstrong possesses this power in virtue of her degree of personal strength (suppose she can kill everyone using only her bare hands); while Gunner does not (suppose she possesses this power only because she owns (and is able to use) a gun). While we might not deny that the powers themselves are equal, it certainly seems right to say that Armstrong is the more powerful individual. Intuitively then, an individual who depends for its power on things external to itself is not as powerful as one who does not.⁵² Now, earlier we said that when an individual, x , possesses a property, P , in an extrinsic manner, x 's possession of P is dependent. It follows, therefore, that individuals who possess their power properties in an extrinsic manner are less powerful than those who possess theirs in an intrinsic manner. With this thought in mind, and considering also that God, *qua* omnipotent being, is the most powerful being possible, it now seems unquestionable, that *part of what it is* to be omnipotent is to be able to achieve effects unaided, and to depend on nothing else for your power. (This point, I take it, implicitly underlies Leftow's criticism of Flint and Freddoso's

⁵² For a defence of extrinsic powers see Jennifer McKittrick (2003a).

definition of omnipotence.) Given the link between intrinsicness and independence, we can argue as follows:

- P7. God possesses omnipotence.
- P8. Any individual who possesses omnipotence is the most powerful being possible.
- P9. God is the most powerful being possible.
- P10. Individuals who depend on their surroundings for their powers are less powerful than individuals who do not depend on their surroundings for their powers.
- P11. Individuals who depend on their surroundings for their powers possess their powers in an extrinsic manner; individuals who do not depend on their surroundings for the powers possess their powers in an intrinsic manner.
- P12. Individuals who possess their powers in an extrinsic manner are less powerful than those who possess their powers in an intrinsic manner.
- P13. The most powerful being possible will possess its powers in an intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, manner.
- C3. God possesses omnipotence in an intrinsic manner.

5.2. A Reply

It might be objected that there's a distinction between (a) how *powerful* something is and (b) how *stable* or *secure* something's power is, and that if it is at all intuitive that individuals who possess their powers intrinsically are in any sense superior to individuals who possess those same powers extrinsically, then this stems from the fact that individuals who possess their powers intrinsically possess their powers more securely than those who do not. In the case described, it's not that Armstrong and Gunner are not equally powerful (with respect to killing others), it's just that Armstrong's power is more stable or secure than Gunner's. (Of course, it may be conceded that God's omnipotence is maximally stable – but that rather seems to be a consequence of God's aseity, which is the basis of the argument in §4).⁵³

The would-be objector must be thinking along these lines: Gunner's power to kill is more unstable than Armstrong's because Gunner could lose her gun, or have it jam, etc. The fact that Gunner's power to kill depends on something external to her seems to entail

⁵³ I thank an anonymous referee for *Philosophia* for raising this objection.

that Gunner could become unattached from that external factor. Yet, equally, Armstrong could lose her arm or hand in a tragic accident, or be struck down by a debilitating illness, or what not. Hence, there doesn't seem to be any link between the stability of a property's possession, and the manner of its possession (i.e. its intrinsicness). Now there may, of course, be some who don't find P10 *prima facie* compelling at all; for those, the argument from power-possession will have no force (but no problem: the other two arguments will suffice); however, if P10 *is* intuitive, then this fact cannot be attributable to the purported feature of intrinsic powers that they are more stable.

6. What is it to be Omnipotent?

So far, I've argued that omnipotence must be intrinsic to God. In this section, I show that an examination of the concept of omnipotence leads us to the opposite conclusion: omnipotence could not be intrinsic to *anything* (it is a pure extrinsic property). Now, there's no more agreement concerning what the correct analysis of omnipotence is than there is concerning what the correct analysis of intrinsicness is. So how can we go about determining whether something could possess omnipotence in an intrinsic manner? We can't just look at *the* definition of omnipotence to determine what conditions must be satisfied in order that an individual be omnipotent. To go about this task, we'll instead need to ask what facts competing analyses of omnipotence should be aiming to capture. As I go along, I'll ask whether the conditions on omnipotence I identify are consistent with (7). That is, I'll question whether they could be satisfied by a *being purely by virtue of the way it itself is* and so independently of the circumstances in which it is situated. To recap, it will do so iff neither the presence, nor the absence of something (or some things) distinct from x partially grounds the fact that x is omnipotent.

6.1. The Irrelevance of Scope

As noted, omnipotence is traditionally taken to be a power, or a set of powers. But what is the *scope* of this power, and what is its *strength*? I'm not convinced that the scope of a power can inform us as to whether the power itself must be possessed in an intrinsic manner. This might seem surprising. One might think that omnipotence involves bearing of some sort of 'can do' relation to certain actions, or 'is able to actualize' relation to certain states of affairs, and that we can therefore know that it's a pure extrinsic power-property. But that thought would be misguided. When one specifies a power's scope, one simply specifies information about that power's possible *manifestations*, and information about a power's manifestations sheds no light on the manner in which *the power-property itself* is possessed. Take, for instance,

opium's power to induce sleep. The scope of this power encompasses beings of a relevant sort. But knowing this fact only informs us of the circumstances in which this power can be manifested. It does not tell us that opium's power to induce sleep cannot be intrinsic to it. Indeed, we may well say that this power is intrinsic to opium if we attribute it to opium's molecular make up. Thus, to think that omnipotence must be possessed in an extrinsic manner merely because the circumstances of its manifestation are often external to its bearer would be to confuse the circumstances of this power's *manifestation* with the circumstances of its *possession*.

Since the scope of omnipotence has no bearing on the central question with which I'm concerned in this chapter, I won't be addressing that matter here. Facts about the strength of omnipotent beings, however, do have relevance. I turn to discuss these next.

6.2. Strength

Suppose a being, x , could will that a certain state of affairs, S , obtain, and it nonetheless be possible that S fail to obtain. In that case, x would be powerless to ensure that S obtains, and so there would be a diminution in x 's power. Thus, Richard Swinburne is far from alone in maintaining that 'God is omnipotent in that whatever he chooses to do, he succeeds in doing.' (1994: 129). I take as a first condition on being omnipotent, then, that 'wills' is a success term:

- (i) Necessarily, if x is omnipotent, then for any state of affairs, S , if x wills that S , S comes to fruition.

Now, that *whatever x wills comes to fruition* holds only if there are no defeaters to x 's will. But that there are no defeaters to x 's will is not something any x could make true in virtue of the way it is *in and of itself alone*; that (i) is fulfilled depends upon what x 's actual surroundings are like. Thus, while it might be acceptable that *some* powers are intrinsic, it's highly doubtful that powers with 'essential-success' conditions could be. For, these require an absence of defeaters to their being manifested in a way that powers not-of-this-kind do not. Further, (i) doesn't require just that there are no *actual* defeaters to an omnipotent being's will; it also requires that there are no *possible* defeaters to its will. So (i) makes possession of omnipotence dependent upon the nature of its possessor's possible (as well as actual) surroundings. Hence, whether some x meets (i) is not only a matter of what x is like intrinsically; this makes (i) an extrinsic criterion.

(i) doesn't capture everything we'd want to say about the strength of an omnipotent being. It's not enough that (necessarily) whatever an omnipotent being wills comes to fruition; an omnipotent being is one for whom actualizing any of the states of affairs it can actualise is no way a struggle. A being who could accomplish every performable task, but had to struggle to get them done, wouldn't be as powerful as one who could accomplish those same tasks with little effort. Thus, we have a second necessary condition on omnipotence:

- (ii) Necessarily, if x is omnipotent, then for any state of affairs, y , which x can actualise, actualizing y is in no way a struggle for x (x can do y with the minimum possible effort).⁵⁴

A being could not satisfy (ii) purely in virtue of the way it is in and of itself alone. How much of a struggle a particular task, T , is does not depend *only* upon intrinsic facts about T 's performer. At least one factor that has a bearing on how hard it is for an individual to perform T is the question of whether anyone is trying to stop them from performing T . Thus, for any x to meet (ii) there must be no being(s) in x 's actual or possible surroundings capable of making the performance of any T a struggle for x , and hence, (ii) is an extrinsic condition.

6.3. Maximality & Exclusion of Competition

There are, I contend, (at least) a further two necessary conditions on omnipotence that are inconsistent with (7). One is a maximality constraint. An omnipotent being is not just *as a matter of fact* overall more powerful than any other being; an omnipotent being is as powerful as it is *possible* to be. According to Graham Oppy (2005: 78), this claim should be accepted as an analytic truth. Oppy seems right about that. To say that x is omnipotent, even though, possibly, something is or could be more powerful than x sounds like something of a contradiction. Thus, that no other being *could be* overall more powerful than an omnipotent being is another necessary condition on being omnipotent. Before I state this formally, I will note the following point recently made by Martin Lembke (2012). It's not just that an omnipotent being is more powerful than it's possible for any other agent to be; an omnipotent being should be *significantly* more powerful than it's possible for any other agent

⁵⁴ This condition rules out that an omnipotent being can have the 'ability' to find a task hard. However, I concur with Leftow (2009) and Lembke (2012) that the ability to find a task hard is a pseudo-ability.

to be; otherwise, another being could vie with God for supremacy, and this should be impossible:

Envision two beings: X and Y . Suppose that X is maximally powerful and that Y is less powerful – but only infinitesimally so. That is to say, Y is, to all intents and purposes, as powerful as X . But then it is gravely inadequate to call X ‘omnipotent’. *Whatever omnipotence is, it excludes competition*[.] (Lembke, 2012: 438, emphasis added)

If another being was equal in – or closely matched in terms of – power and strength to God, then that being could vie with God for dominance, so we should state our third necessary condition as follows:

- (iii) Necessarily, if x is omnipotent, then there can be no y such that y is *overall* more powerful than x , *equal* in power to x , or *closely matched* in power to x .

As with (i) and (ii), it’s likewise true that no being could satisfy (iii) purely in virtue of the way it is in and of itself alone; so (iii) also makes omnipotence globally extrinsic – extrinsic to each of its possible bearers. *Being the most powerful* is a comparative attribute. In other cases where a comparative predicate applies to a thing, the predicate applies partly in virtue of what holds true of other things in the relevant comparison-class. *Being the tallest person*, for example, depends not only how tall *you* are, but also on how tall everyone else is. Of no particular height is it true to say that your being that height guarantees that no one is taller. So no way a person intrinsically is could suffice for their being the tallest person. Likewise, if a (putative) omnipotent agent were in the presence of a more powerful, equally powerful, or almost-equally powerful agent, the former could not be omnipotent. But that there is and can be nothing overall more powerful than, just as powerful as, or almost as powerful as x isn’t satisfiable by any x in virtue of the way it itself is; no way a being intrinsically is could guarantee its being the (singularly) most powerful being. Equally, that omnipotence ‘excludes competition’ renders it a partly outward-looking attribute. So, whether an individual meets (iii) depends upon what its actual and possible surroundings are like, meaning that we have a third extrinsic condition on omnipotence.

6.4. Uniqueness

(iii) points us towards a further fact about an omnipotent being: that, necessarily, it must be *unique* in its being omnipotent. For, while there may be no incoherence in supposing that more than one being possesses the other divine attributes – omniscience, moral perfection, etc., it would not make sense to suppose that two or more *omnipotent* beings could coexist.

For, should these beings ever have a conflict of will, one of them would, *per impossibile* (and *contra* (i)) have their intention thwarted. Often, it's replied to this point that an omnipotent being is necessarily divine, and that, necessarily, a divine being is morally perfect and omniscient. Hence, every omnipotent being will always correctly identify and will for the best course of action, meaning that two omnipotent beings could never have a conflict of will. However, this is to ignore the fact that there isn't always a *single* best possible course of action to be taken in every situation where a divine being could act. Two omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect beings may, for instance, wish to create exactly qualitatively identical worlds, save for the fact one of them wishes to give Jupiter an additional moon; and thus we'd have the willing to exist of states of affairs which, though incompatible, do not differ in value.

Now, if an omnipotent being, *b*, wills that the state of affairs that Jupiter has exactly sixty-two moons be actualized, then it's not possible for the state of affairs that Jupiter has exactly *sixty-three* moons to be actualized. For, by (i), necessarily, whatever *b* wills to be the case *is* the case, and the former state of affairs is incompatible with the latter. Therefore, another omnipotent being, *a*, could not will for Jupiter to have exactly sixty-two moons. But should we expect of *a* that it have the ability to do so (in this situation)? An omnipotent being can actualize only those states of affairs that could be actualized. So, to argue that *a* can't be omnipotent if *b* is, seems to mistakenly expect of *a* that it be able actualize an unactualizable state of affairs. Since this expectation is unwarranted, one might consider that there's not really a possible conflict of will after all.

This response may well work in cases where there's a putative non-simultaneous conflict of will. However, it won't cut any ice in cases where the willings *are* simultaneous. For, suppose that two omnipotent agents, *a* and *b*, simultaneously will incompatible states of affairs. In that case, we cannot say that, e.g., since *b* has willed otherwise, *a* cannot will that Jupiter has exactly sixty-two moons. For we could equally well say that *b* cannot will that Jupiter has exactly sixty-three moons, given that *a* has willed otherwise. If willing that Jupiter has exactly sixty-two moons *is* impossible for *a*, because *b* is, at that moment, willing otherwise, then willing that Jupiter has exactly sixty-three moons should be impossible for *b*, since *a* is, at that moment, willing otherwise. Yet, if *a* is, after all, unable to will that Jupiter has sixty-two moons, then *b* *is* able to will otherwise! Likewise, if *b* is unable to will that Jupiter has sixty-three moons, then Jupiter's having sixty-two moons *is* a state of affairs *a* could actualize. This is paradoxical.

I contend, then, that if (ii) is true – if an essentially omnipotent being is one who could not possibly be prevented from exercising its will – then, given the extremely plausible

assumption that there's at least two equal-best performable actions in at least one situation where an omnipotent being could act, it's not possible for there to be more than one omnipotent being.⁵⁵ Indeed, Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz (2002: 168) maintain that the impossibility of there being two omnipotent agents is the very reason the monotheist is right to say there's at most one God. Here then, is a fourth necessary condition on omnipotence:

- (iv) Necessarily, if x is omnipotent, then it's impossible for there to be another individual, y , such that y is omnipotent.

I suggested in §2 that loneliness is an extrinsic property *par excellence* because whether something possesses it or not depends *only* upon what the conditions are like *outside* that thing. For the same reason, (iv) is a paradigm case of a condition that could only be satisfied in an extrinsic manner. Whether something meets it depends only upon what else is in its presence. Further, and as with the other conditions, whether an individual satisfies (iv) depends upon what its possible (as well as actual) surroundings are like: (iv) requires that there be no other omnipotent agent in *any* possible world.⁵⁶ Thus, since (iv) is not satisfiable by any x in virtue of the way it itself is, we have a fourth reason why omnipotence could not be intrinsic to anything.⁵⁷

7. Replies

In §3, §4 and §5 I argued that facts about essence, aseity, and power-possession demand that omnipotence be intrinsic to God. In §6, I argued that some necessary conditions on omnipotence require certain things to be absent from God's surroundings, and that, by (7), this shows omnipotence *cannot* be intrinsic to God. In §2 we saw that theists cannot resist this paradox by simply denying that dependence on the absence of an impossible state of affairs is genuine dependence. In this section, I consider three alternative ways of responding that seem *prima facie* more promising.

⁵⁵Swinburne (1994 and 2010b), in advocating social trinitarianism, maintains that multiple omnipotent beings *could* coexist, since each member of the trinity is omnipotent. However, to make sense of this, Swinburne concedes that two members of the trinity are *dependent*, and that all three members are confined to *separate spheres of activity* – ones delimited by God the Father. I thus ignore what Swinburne says, since he's clearly working with a different and somewhat restricted notion of 'omnipotent'.

⁵⁶ None of the other divine attributes imply uniqueness, so none could fail to be intrinsic for this reason (though I leave open whether they fail for other reasons).

⁵⁷ (iv)'s needed in addition to (iii) since being overall most powerful might be insufficient for being omnipotent.

7.1. The Relevance of (i) - (iv)

Here's a first response, which, if successful, would provide a counter to the argument made in §5. (i) - (iv) follow of necessity from an individual's being omnipotent, but why think that fulfilment of these conditions is (partly) what being omnipotent *consists in*? Consider: whenever we have a true predicative statement of the form '*a* is F', '*a* is F' will entail any number of other true predicative statements involving *a*; but it's not true of for *all* of those further facts involving *a*, that they ground, or partially ground, '*a* is F'. For example, if Tina is a triangle, then, necessarily, Tina is such that she has three sides. But it's also necessary that, if Tina is a triangle, Tina is such that numbers exist (if, indeed, they do). So Tina must be such that she has three sides and such that numbers exist if she's to be a triangle. But while we'd happily agree that being three-sided is (at least partly) what makes Tina a triangle, we'd fervently deny that being such that numbers exist is part of what *makes* Tina a triangle; that it's part of *what it is* to be triangular. So, in response to the argument of §5, theists might argue that merely showing that (a): an individual must satisfy (i) - (iv) if it is to be omnipotent; and that (b): (i) - (iv) are extrinsic conditions does not give licence to the conclusion that omnipotence is globally extrinsic. If (i) - (iv) are to have a bearing on whether omnipotence is extrinsic, we must also show that (c): satisfying (i) - (iv) is at least partly what *makes* a being omnipotent – that fulfilment of these criteria is partly what being omnipotent *consists in*. The thought, then, is that while '*a* is omnipotent' entails '*a* fulfils (i)'; '*a* fulfils (ii)' and so on, '*a* fulfils (i)'; '*a* fulfils (ii)', etc., are not what *really* makes '*a* is omnipotent' true.

I think we should take issue with this move. To recap, whenever we have a true predicative statement of the form '*a* is F', '*a* is F' will entail any number of other true predicative statements involving *a*. Call each of the conditions specified in these predicative statements 'necessary conditions on *a*'s being F'. Just how we can fully distinguish between those necessary conditions, C, on *a*'s being F that genuinely constitute *a*'s being F, and those that don't is a hard question to answer. At least, it's difficult to specify what might suffice for some C's being constitutive of *a*'s being F (for any *a*, and any F). But I think we can specify at least one necessary condition on some C's counting as constitutive of *a*'s being F, and that is that the truth of '*a* fulfils C' should not be attributable to something other than *a* being F. For example, Tina's being such that numbers exist is not constitutive of her being a triangle, even though Tina must be such that numbers exist if she is a triangle. The reason for this, I submit, is that 'Tina is such that numbers exist' mainly owes its truth to (or its truth is grounded in) the existence and nature of numbers.

Now, let's ask the would-be objector: what's the *real* source of the truth of 'necessarily, a fulfils (i) - (iv) if a is omnipotent'? Unlike the cases just discussed, where we were able to identify some other source of an individual's having to fulfil a certain condition in order to possess a certain property, there is no other identifiable source of an omnipotent individual's having to meet conditions (i) - (iv). Some individual's meeting (i) - (iv) doesn't follow of necessity from their being omnipotent for some other – non-omnipotence-related – reason. Now, in cases where 'a meets C' is entailed by 'a is F', and 'a meets C' can be accounted for by something other than a's being F, we have grounds for claiming that a's meeting C is not constitutive of a's being F. However, if 'a meets C' is entailed by 'a is F' and 'a meets C' can be accounted for by nothing other than a's being F, we have no such grounds. So, the objector is in a weak dialectical position unless they can provide grounds for the following claim: (i) - (iv) follow of necessity from the fact that God is omnipotent only because of some necessary fact that doesn't involve God's being omnipotent.

7.2. An Acceptable Dependence?

In a second attempt to dissolve this paradox, theists might admit that an omnipotent being is, *qua* omnipotent being, required to fulfil certain extrinsic conditions, but deny, nonetheless, that this requires God to be dependent in any *objectionable* sense. God does depend upon his actual and possible surroundings for his omnipotence, but everything external to God depends upon God, so there really is no problem after all. As Leftow says, 'in God's case there is...no external environment not of His own making.' (2012a: 148) Thus, even if God depends upon his surroundings for his omnipotence, this does not really diminish his aseity.

There are a few points of response here. First, all that's been said is that there's a *mutual* dependency, not that there's *no* dependency. The would-be critic has merely pointed out that certain factors on which God depends also depend upon God. But a mutual dependence relation is *still* a dependence relation. Any theist subscribing to the (extremely strong) traditional notion of aseity (as described in §4.1) would resist this move. Nevertheless, even if mutual dependencies *are* compatible with aseity, not all tensions will be alleviated. The argument from *aseity* might be thereby shown to be based on a false premise (contra P5, aseity will not demand that God's essence making properties are intrinsic to him), but the argument from essence still stands.

Suppose then, to fully dissolve the paradox, theists insist the following. That everything external to God depends upon God means that God's having to meet conditions (i) - (iv) does not, after all, entail that God depends upon his surroundings in any sense. Not

even a mutual dependency holds between God and his surroundings; somehow, the fact that God's surroundings depend upon God means the dependency holding in the opposite direction is only apparent. Omnipotence – despite what was said in §6 – will not, in that case, be extrinsic to God, since x possesses F in an extrinsic manner only if x depends upon its surroundings for its possession of F . Conflict with the argument from essence is thus avoided, since this argument demanded that omnipotence – being constitutive of God's nature – be intrinsic to him.

However, this move rests on an unwarranted assumption. That God fails to depend ontologically upon certain external factors simply because these factors depend causally upon him amounts to nothing more than bare stipulation. Moreover, even if – in an extreme act of charity – we did grant theists this claim, a bigger theistic problem arises. For, theists can no longer admit that *any* property is extrinsic to God, as this argument illustrates:

- P14. All things external to God depend upon God.
- P15. If P14 is true, then for any property, F , even if God's surroundings must being a certain way in order for God to possess F , it is (somehow) not true that God depends upon his surroundings for his possession of F .
- P16. God does not depend upon his surroundings for his possession of any property.
- P17. x possesses F in an extrinsic manner only if x depends upon its surroundings for its possession of F .
- C4. No property is extrinsic to God.

However, *contra* C4, God clearly *does* possess some properties in an extrinsic manner; were this *not* true, theists would be committed to some kind of pantheism: all God's relations will be internal ones, and this requires the relata to be internal to God. For most, this would be too high a price to pay.

7.3. Powers, Bases, & Necessary Connections

Omnipotence is a power, or set of powers. Powers produce certain effects, and are closely linked with certain counterfactual conditionals.⁵⁸ Not everyone agrees that powers must always be grounded in the intrinsic categorical properties of their bearers – call this thesis *Categorical Realism*. But to illustrate why some do endorse this thesis, consider the following

⁵⁸ Powers are sometimes called dispositions.

hackneyed example. Opium has the power to put people to sleep. But, as an answer to the question ‘why does opium put people to sleep?’, ‘because it has a dormative virtue’ is unsatisfying. We want to know *why* opium has a dormative virtue. Thus, the thought continues, an adequate answer must appeal to something beyond opium’s sleep-inducing-power; likely, it will specify the substance’s molecular make-up (and how it relates to certain receptors in the brain).⁵⁹ Now, opium’s molecular structure is amongst its *categorical* properties, and so, as in this instance, the Categorical Realist says that *whenever* we have a power, P, which causes manifestations of type M, there must be a further categorical property, C, such that P is ultimately had in virtue of C, and C explains why P produces M-type manifestations.⁶⁰ In these cases, C is said to be the *causal base* of P. When Categorical Realism is denied and a putative power is said *not* to have a causal base, the power is said to be a ‘bare’ or ‘baseless’ one.

If theists are willing to accept (at least) a weaker form of Categorical Realism – one whereby powers are *sometimes* grounded in the intrinsic, categorical properties of their bearers – they could reply as follows. In most cases, where a power-property, P, is grounded in a categorical base, C, the relation between C and P is not one of logical entailment. For example, salt’s power to dissolve in water is grounded in its molecular structure. However, while salt’s molecular structure gives rise to its being water-soluble in all nomologically possible worlds, its molecular structure does not give rise to its being water-soluble in all worlds *simpliciter*. There are worlds where salt exists and yet is not water-soluble, owing, perhaps, to the fact that the laws of nature are sufficiently different in those worlds. This shows that salt’s water-solubility is dependent upon the nature of its surroundings: partly, it depends upon what laws of nature obtain. There is a good case then, for thinking that salt’s possession of water-solubility is partly extrinsic. Extrapolating from this example, theists could say that in *all* cases, if the connection between possession of C and possession of P is weaker than that of logical entailment, possession of P is partly extrinsic. Thus, in these cases, it doesn’t follow from the fact that C is possessed in an intrinsic manner that P is too. In other words, *being possessed in an intrinsic manner* is not transitive across the relation *being the causal base of* if the connection between C and P is not one of logical entailment.

⁵⁹ Some consider this argument unsatisfying. Attributing opium’s sleep-inducing power to its having a dormative virtue isn’t *wholly uninformative*, for it does rule out rival causal explanations, e.g., that in every case where opium is ingested, sleep is induced not because opium has *in itself* some relevant characteristic, but because God intervenes to put the individual ingesting the opium to sleep. Nonetheless, even if the explanation isn’t *wholly uninformative*, the point still stands. The very fact that we’re still left wondering in virtue of what something has a dormative virtue shows that the dormative-virtue explanation does little more than give ‘sleep-inducing-power’ another name, and tells us, in addition, that it’s possessed by opium in itself.

⁶⁰ I say ‘ultimately’ so as to cover cases in which dispositions are grounded in other dispositions. The claim, then, is that all dispositional chains must *ultimately bottom out* in categorical bases.

(Perhaps we can say that the weaker the entailment relation, the stronger the dependence upon external factors.) However, suppose x possesses C in an intrinsic manner; that C subvenes P ; and that possession of C *does* logically entail possession of P . In that case, one might think there's good reason to say x possesses P in an intrinsic manner. For, x not only possesses P in virtue of the way it *is in and of itself* – that it does because it possesses P in virtue of C , and it possesses C in an intrinsic manner – x possesses P in virtue of the way it *is in and of itself alone*. For, if being C is, *by itself*, enough to guarantee being P , then there could be nothing (in terms of being P) for anything besides C to do.

If theists could show, then, that omnipotence is based in a categorical property God possesses in an intrinsic manner, and that there's a logical entailment between God's possessing that categorical property and his possessing omnipotence, they'll have a possible counter to the argument in §6. In most cases, being as F as you are is not a *guarantee* of your being 'top dog' with respect to F . In these cases, your being top dog with respect to F depends upon what your surroundings are like (it depends upon how things stand with regards to other things in the class of F s.) However, if being as F as you are *is* a guarantee of your being top dog with respect to F , then, arguably, being top dog with respect to F is not a matter of what your surroundings are like.

There are three problems with this reply. First, for it to be viable, theists must be able to name a property of God that is a good candidate for serving as the subvenient base of omnipotence. What could it be? Leftow suggests that '[t]he underlying categorical is deity. It is not clear or at all intuitive that any other underlying nature could support omnipotence.' (2009: 173). But this makes little sense if omnipotence partly constitutes deity; and the traditional view is that omnipotence *does* partly constitute deity, not vice-versa.⁶¹ Suppose, then, that the traditional view is wrong. We could then say deity subvenes omnipotence. But what grounds could theists then have for maintaining that deity is intrinsic?⁶² Once the traditional view is abandoned, the predicate '...is divine' will need to ascribe some character to God other than the various perfections; but when we ask what this could be, we draw a blank. What other quality *deity* could confer is entirely mysterious.⁶³ In that case, the claim

⁶¹ One plausible way of viewing deity is as something like a conjunctive property that includes all God's perfections. But as Leftow (2012a: 204-5) says, it would be a contradiction to say that deity is a conjunction including omnipotence, if deity is a base-property for omnipotence.

⁶² Leftow provides no such reasons. He merely assumes that it is, when he says 'being made omnipotent would mean being granted a new *intrinsic* property in virtue of which one henceforth has that much power... In God's case, the underlying categorical is deity.' (2009:173) (Also, he's assuming Categorical Realism without argument.)

⁶³ John Hick (2006: 75) makes a similar point when addressing the suggestion that the only property essential to God is *being divine*. Hick says divinity can't consist merely in being divine, since this flies in the face of the traditional Christian view and robs divinity of its content.

that deity is intrinsic lacks grounds: one cannot claim that F-ness is intrinsic unless one has at least some grip on what F-ness *is*.

What categorical property besides divinity could subvene omnipotence is also, as Leftow suggests, completely mysterious. Theists might want to simply insist that there must be *some* categorical property subvening omnipotence – we just don't know what it is. But without some independent motivation for positing such a property, this dialectical move is extremely weak. An argument that omnipotence is intrinsic to God that ultimately relies on an *ad hoc* stipulation that there is some – we know not what – intrinsic property in virtue of which God is omnipotent would not really be an argument at all; it would simply be begging the question.⁶⁴

The second problem with this reply is that the transitivity principle it relies on is unmotivated. As is often said, one person's modus ponens is another's modus tollens, and in this case, modus tollens wins. If the transitivity principle is true, God can fulfil (i) - (iv) in an intrinsic manner. The objector claims that the transitivity principle *is* true and God can, therefore, fulfil (i) - (iv) in an intrinsic manner. However, it cuts against all sensible intuition to admit that (i) - (iv) could be satisfied in an intrinsic manner, and so, we have reason to deny the transitivity principle: (i) - (iv) are counterexamples to it. Now, if we could think of other (preferably, non-theistic) cases where we would be willing to accept, *simply because of the transitivity principle* that an otherwise seemingly pure extrinsic property is, after all, not that, then we'd have independent reason to accept it. However, no such cases are forthcoming. At the least then, the argument is not strong enough to get past people's intuitions. (Perhaps we can imagine cases where a property that we otherwise think of as pure *intrinsic* turns out not to be that (recall, e.g., Sider's argument concerning maximal properties); but it's very hard to imagine cases where a property that we otherwise think of as pure *extrinsic* turns out not to be that.)

Third, and finally, the claim that 'if possession of C is, *by itself*, enough to guarantee possession of P, then there could be nothing (in terms of possessing C) for anything besides C to do' that partly underlies the transitivity principle itself seems misguided. There are some properties things possess in all worlds where they exist and yet are nonetheless pure extrinsic (think, e.g., of *being such that God exists*). Thus, that a condition is fulfilled (or a property is possessed) necessarily is no guarantee that it is fulfilled in an intrinsic manner.

⁶⁴ As a consequence of this discussion one may doubt whether omnipotence could be a based power property. Prior et al. (1982) deny that any power could lack a causal base. For a defence of baseless powers see McKittrick (2003b). This issue's tangential to my discussion, so I don't address it here.

8. Extending the Argument

The arguments given in §3 and §4 show that any property that constitutes the divine essence must be possessed in an intrinsic manner. Theists therefore have a problem if any such properties cannot be intrinsic to God. §6 argued that omnipotence presents such a problem since it could not be intrinsic to *anything*. This section points to some other divine-making properties that are globally extrinsic, thus showing the paradoxical results to extend beyond the case of omnipotence.

8.1. Omni-benevolence & Creatorship

It's central to traditional theistic orthodoxy that God is perfectly good and loving (exhibits omni-benevolence). But what is it to be perfectly good and loving? Giving a comprehensive answer to this question might seem near impossible given that an omni-benevolent being will, of course, be morally perfect and so impeccable (free from sin), and just what moral perfection amounts to depends at least in part upon what particular moral theory is endorsed. However, one feature about goodness (or at least, about the goodness of agents) that is to a fair degree less controversial is that it is essentially communicative of itself, meaning that a perfectly good and loving being cannot – or cannot for all eternity at least – be a solitary being; love must have an object, and goodness must be expressed. A perfectly good god then, must create in order to manifest their love. Such a view has a strong pedigree: Aquinas makes many appeals to the Dionysian⁶⁵ principle that *goodness is by its very nature diffusive of itself and (thereby) of being* in order to support some key aspects of his theology; and this, in Norman Kretzmann's view, is evidence for the fact that Aquinas must have endorsed this principle (1983: 633-4).⁶⁶ For example, Aquinas says:

The sharing of being and goodness proceeds from goodness. This is of course evident, both from the nature of the good and from its definition...It is for this reason that the good is said to be diffusive of itself and of being. Now this diffusion is attributable to God, for it was shown above [I.13] that he is the cause of being for other things. (1264/1995: I, 37.307)

And Kretzmann himself thinks that

this Dionysian principle expresses an important truth about goodness, one that distinguishes it from other divine attributes...which are not essentially diffusive of themselves. (There is no obvious inconsistency in the notion of knowledge that is

⁶⁵ Dionysius (or 'pseudo-Dionysius') is a sixth century author of four Christian Neo-Platonist treatises.

⁶⁶ Aquinas explicitly denies that producing things other than himself is a necessary consequence of God's nature. However, Kretzmann (1997: 223-5) and Rowe (2004: 49-50) argue convincingly that despite his explicit opposition to this view, Aquinas is mistaken in thinking that this is a commitment he can avoid.

never expressed, even though united with omnipotence, as there is in the notion of goodness that is never shared although united with omnipotence.) (*ibid.*: 633)

Omni-benevolence will also then bear a structural dissimilarity to omnipotence considered on its own, for there's likewise nothing problematic in supposing that an omnipotent being fails to ever utilise its power (in the way that it does seem problematic to suppose that an omni-benevolent being fails to ever express its love).

However, might the perfect goodness of God be adequately expressed in the continual mutual sustenance of the three 'consubstantial'⁶⁷ divine persons who make up the Holy Trinity? Although this suggestion has had advocates, including, *inter alia*, Swinburne (1994: 178-9), I think we should take issue with it. If there really is only one divine essence, then that divine essence, being triune, should be compelled to communicate its goodness beyond itself. Kretzmann seems to be in agreement with this when he argues that the 'Trinitarian application' of the Dionysian principle can't by itself dispel the principle's tendency to require a necessitarian view of creation:

even if the Son's being begotten and the Holy Spirit's proceeding can be considered an essential intrinsic diffusion of goodness and being, in Aquinas's system it is the *triune* God whose essence is goodness itself. Unless there is some further intrinsic diffusion, beyond the pluralizing of persons, the essential self-diffusiveness of goodness remains intact and calls for *extrinsic* diffusion. And in that case creating something or other besides himself is essential to God's diffusion of his goodness. (*ibid.*: 634)⁶⁸

To be clear, I'm not suggesting that goodness *is* communicative of itself,⁶⁹ but that, for the many who do hold this view, it follows that part of what omni-benevolence consists in is an *outwardly expressive* and creative act; and so, another aspect of God's nature will turn out to be globally extrinsic.⁷⁰ The following would be a necessary condition on omni-benevolence:

- (v) Necessarily, if x is omni-benevolent, then it's impossible for x to exist unaccompanied by some non-divine existent.

⁶⁷ This term is used to express the idea that each of these persons share one substance or essence.

⁶⁸ See also Kretzmann (1991: 219-20).

⁶⁹ To do so would require argumentation I haven't the space for. Note also that this view is not uncontroversial. There are some (e.g., Aquinas) who take a much more libertarian view of creation and deny that God is essentially productive, citing Biblical texts as support for their view. One such text could be James 1: 18, which contains the line: 'Of his own will [God] begat us...'

⁷⁰ Indeed, some such as Rogers (1996) and (2000), hold that all there is to God's nature is one single act of creation.

8.2. Omnipresence & Omniscience

A *prima facie* more obvious candidate for an extrinsic essential divine attribute is omnipresence. For, '[p]resumably', says Hud Hudson, for God to be omnipresent 'is for God to bear a certain relation – the 'being present at' relation – to every place.' (2009: 198). And it certainly seems undeniable that nothing could bear the *being present at* relation to any place purely by virtue of the way it is in and of itself. (Not, that is, unless *à la* Spinoza, we endorse some kind of pantheism according to which God is identified with the most inclusive spatial region.)

But how does God bear the *being present at* relation to every place? This is an important question to ask since the conclusion drawn above would have been too quick if there is cause to say that what makes God present at every place is something that turns out to be intrinsic to him. However, while not all agree on the answer to this question, many medieval and modern philosophers have understood omnipresence not as something which *explains* God's power and knowledge, but as something which *just is* that power and knowledge (Everitt, 2010: 86). It's easy to see why: since God is incorporeal, divine omnipresence cannot be grounded in the familiar external occupation relation that holds between material objects and locations. (See, e.g., Mawson (2005: 26); Swinburne (1994: 150) and (1977: 99-105).)⁷¹ Importantly, though, as we've already seen, certain conditions on omnipotence are extrinsic, so it's of no help to point out that God's omnipresence consists in his knowledge *and* power to act. Further, it's commonly accepted that 'to be omniscient is to know all there is to know.' (Webb, 2010: 231). So, an omniscient being, x , is such that, for any knowable fact f , x knows that f , and knowledge is of course, *factive*.⁷² It would probably be best to add to this that an omniscient being is also one who has no false beliefs (see, e.g., Plantinga (1980: 142)). Hence, part of what it is to be omniscient is to have an appropriate range of beliefs correspond with the facts – and this is quite obviously an *extrinsic* matter:

- (vi) Necessarily, if x is omniscient, then for all knowable facts, φ , x has the belief that φ , and if x has the belief that φ then it is a fact that φ .

⁷¹ To this list we could add the names of Anselm (1948), and Hartshorne (1941). Aquinas (1264/1995) offers an understanding of God's omnipresence only in terms of his power.

⁷² Patrick Grim (2007) argues that it is contradictory to suppose that something could know all knowable truths. To avoid this complication, a different phrasing would be preferable. However, in the absence of an easy way to specify the relevant range of knowledge, and to keep things simple, I stick to the somewhat cruder characterisation. I don't think anything hangs on this point.

In short, if this commonly accepted view of divine omnipresence is accepted, then it's sufficient to show that divine omnipresence is globally extrinsic that omnipotence and omniscience be shown to be globally extrinsic.⁷³

8.3. Divine Eternity

Talk of God's relation to place inevitably prompts consideration of God's relation to time. I noted in the introduction to this thesis that traditionally, God is supposed to be *in some sense* eternal. This is because what it means to be eternal has been variously understood. Broadly, opinion divides into two camps. There are those who maintain that God's eternality consists in his existing at all times (being 'sempiternal' or 'everlasting'); and there are those who maintain that God's eternality consists in his existing outside of time (being timeless).⁷⁴ On the latter construal, although God does not exist in time, there is no time at which it's false to say that God exists.

It should be clear that the property of being *sempiternal* could not be intrinsic to a thing. If time is a substance in its own right, eternity will consist in bearing the *being present at* relation to each part of it; if time is nothing over and above the changes in things (events), eternity will consist in bearing the *being present at* relation to each event. Just how God manages to bear such a relation may be expressed in terms similar to above – with reference to God's knowledge and/or power. If so, God's eternity will turn out to be an extrinsic part of his nature.

- (vii) Necessarily, if x is sempiternal, then for all times (and/or all events) x bears the *is present at* relation to that time (and/or event).

If we are inclined towards divine *timelessness*, something different will need to be said. In virtue of what is it true to say at each time that God (timelessly) exists? Hoffman and Rosenkrantz offer the following plausible account: 'a substantial being, x , has atemporal eternity if and only if (i) x does not exist in time, and (ii) x is a necessary being.' (2002: 98). In saying that God transcends time, theists might mean that God literally bears some transcendence relation to time. If so, then it's clear that being eternal is an extrinsic matter. For being eternal consists in meeting the following condition:

⁷³ Hudson (2009) proposes an account whereby God is omnipresent in virtue of bearing the external relation of *being wholly located* at every sub-region of the maximally inclusive region (by *entending*). Hudson accepts that since spacetime might not have existed, this relational attribute is only a contingent one and is not part of God's nature.

⁷⁴ For alternative accounts see Stump and Kretzmann (1981), and Craig (1978).

- (viii) Necessarily, if x is timeless, then x bears the *transcends* relation to time.

However, divine eternity turns out to be an extrinsic part of God's nature even in the case where theists want to avoid reifying God's transcendence. For, God's being eternal in this case depends upon his bearing no temporal relations:

- (ix) Necessarily, if x is timeless, then it's impossible for there to be a temporal relation, φ , such that x bears φ to any time or event.

9. Conclusion

There are at least two compelling reasons to think that the divine perfections must be intrinsic to God (and an additional reason to think that omnipotence must be intrinsic to God). First, the very notion of essence suggests that the properties individuals possess as part of their nature are intrinsic to them, and God possesses the divine perfections as part of his nature. Second, properties individuals possess in an intrinsic manner are ones they possess independently of their surroundings, and God is entirely independent. However, at least four (relevant) necessary conditions on being omnipotent are extrinsic conditions, meaning that God could not possess omnipotence in an intrinsic manner (indeed, no being could). In addition, a number of other divine perfections could not be possessed in an intrinsic manner. Three attempts to resolve this conflict have been found wanting, so where does this leave us? I've said it would be something of a contradiction to deny that something could fail to satisfy (i) - (iv) and yet be omnipotent; likewise, it would be something of a contradiction to deny that something could satisfy (v) - (ix) and yet possess omnibenevolence, omniscience, or omnipresence. (An eternal being must satisfy either (vii) or (ix).) Hence, as I claimed in the introduction, any attempt to escape this paradox by making revisions in these concepts would be futile. If there is a way out here, it will dissent from the route commonly taken to avoid the existing theistic paradoxes. Consequently, a different kind of solution is needed. In the next chapter, we encounter a distinctively theistic account of modality – divine idealism concerning possible worlds. One of the virtues of this theory, as we will see, is that it offers one such route out of the paradox.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ To show just how little attention has been paid to the kind of issues here discussed, I'll note that some have even defined divine-making properties such as omnipotence in purely extrinsic terms. See, e.g., Taliaferro (1983: 99) and Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002: 16-8).

2

The Nature of Possible Worlds

1. Introduction

We've seen that the framework of possible worlds provides an extremely useful tool for understanding the nature of modality and a number of other philosophical notions. However, in the previous chapter we saw that, under classical theism, one philosophical notion this framework cannot be used to provide a satisfactory analysis for is metaphysical dependence. Nonetheless, theists may still want to adopt this framework on account of its ability to provide a model for understanding, e.g., possibility, necessity, and non-counterpossible conditionals. If so, then theists, like anyone else, owe us a theory of its worlds. Such a theory will tell us something about the nature of these worlds and will tell us how to understand the notion of 'truth at a world'. This chapter assesses the motivations for adopting – and for rejecting – two particular accounts of possible worlds and the nature of possible worlds discourse. The first view, *divine idealism* ('DI') places possible worlds in the mind of God. The second, *genuine realism* ('GR'), as we've already seen, takes worlds to be the same kind of thing as our concrete universe. While this chapter focusses primarily on DI, some conclusions will be made about GR towards the end.

§2 begins by characterising DI and explaining some of its potential virtues. One such virtue is that it offers a solution to the paradox advanced in Chapter One. However, in subsequent sections, we'll see that, despite what can be said in favour of the view, theists who want to endorse a possible worlds account of modality and who wish to hold on to a common sense opinion about what modal facts there are should endorse GR instead. This result means that the paradox remains unresolved. §6 thus offers what I take to be its correct solution (one which is available to GRists). Prior to that, I first evaluate a similar line of argument in in §5.

2. Divine Idealism & its Virtues

2.1. Sovereignty

As mentioned, the classical Western monotheistic religions take sovereignty to be one of the necessary conditions on maximal perfection. To say that God is sovereign, recall, is just to say that everything distinct from God is in some sense dependent upon God. There is a strong and venerable tradition amongst theists and philosophers of religion for taking the quantification involved in this characterisation to be entirely unrestricted. One such proponent is Descartes, who, in his replies to the sixth objections of his *Meditations* states that '[it] is evident to those who consider the immensity of God that there cannot be anything at all that does not depend on him, not only anything that subsists but even any order or law, or any reason for what is good or true.' (2003: 101) The many who do take the quantification to be entirely unrestricted usually cite passages from biblical and pre-modern theological texts as support. Consider, for example, Colossians I: 17, where, speaking of God, Paul says 'He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.' One of the most ardent supporters of the widest-possible-scope reading of the sovereignty thesis – William Lane Craig – claims that '[t]he biblical witness to God's unique aseity is both abundant and clear' (2014: 113). For Craig, the following texts are amongst those which 'carry the weighty metaphysical implication that only God and His Logos exist *a se*; everything else exists *ab alio*, namely, through the divine Logos... God is...the ground of being of everything else...' (*ibid.*): 'There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist' (1 Cor. 8.6 NRSV); 'For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God (1 Cor. 11.12 NRSV).

If we are to take such passages at face value, then indeed we can be in no doubt that there is much exegetical support for this 'widest-possible-scope' interpretation. However, it's worth noting that opinions diverge on the question of whether we should be taking these passages at face value. Some question what types of objects the authors of these texts had in mind when they made these claims: they almost certainly didn't have in mind abstruse metaphysical entities (e.g., sets, numbers, propositions, and possible worlds). But some, such as Craig, do not think this is sufficient for us to conclude that these authors would have been happy to restrict their quantifiers, should they have got around to thinking about the existence of such things. As Craig points out, 'neither did [these authors] have in mind quarks, galaxies, and automobiles; yet they would take such things and countless other things, were they informed about them, to lie within the domain of their quantifiers.' (*ibid.*: 114). But this reasoning is far from persuasive. In contrast to abstracta and the like, these

kinds of entities – being physical and concrete – have far much more in common with the objects these authors would have been familiar with. Hence, others such as Keith Yandell have expressed support for restricting the scope of the quantifiers. In Yandell’s view, ‘Paul’s point seems to be that God is sovereign over “thrones or powers or rulers or authorities” that might pose a threat; abstract objects have no such possible role.’ (2014: 24). And one would not be hard-pressed to find many biblical passages where we’d be cautioned against taking too literal a reading (for otherwise, the texts would be saying something either patently absurd, or else plain false). And to those who would point to the writings of premodern theologians for support, it seems equally sensible to caution against staying true to the letter of their writings at all costs, as Scott Shalkowski notes: ‘We are entitled to wonder whether Augustine or Aquinas were correct on matters of neo-Platonic or Aristotelian metaphysics, so we may wonder whether the theological claims they or their predecessors made against the backgrounds of those metaphysics stand up to sustained scrutiny.’ (2014: 133). Nonetheless, despite the fact that there is a debate to be had here, we can at least say that for the many who *do* adhere to the orthodox view (and so take themselves as entitled to the wide-scope reading) possible worlds (if they exist) will need to be viewed as depending upon God in some way.

2.2. Divine Idealism

One way for possible worlds to depend upon God would be for them to be *ontologically* dependent upon God. Such ontological dependence could consist in their being essentially housed within the divine mind. Hence, theists who are committed to the existence of possible worlds could respect the unrestricted sovereignty thesis by embracing DI. Leibniz most famously adopts such a conception when he argues in his *Monadology* that God is the ‘source’ of modal truth:

43. ...God is not only the source of existences, but also that of essences insofar as they are real, that is, or the source of that which is real in possibility. This is because God’s understanding is the realm of eternal truths or that of the ideas on which they depend; without him there would be nothing real in possibles, and not only would nothing exist, but also nothing would be possible. (1991: 74)⁷⁶

Indeed, Leibniz took the existence of modal truth itself to require the existence of God. In his view, necessities must be grounded by a part of reality that is itself necessary, and since God exists necessarily, God’s mind was perhaps the only suitable home for

⁷⁶ Leibniz (*ibid.*) calls this a proof of the existence of God ‘by the reality of eternal truths’.

them.⁷⁷ But as we can see from the above passage, not only did Leibniz take necessary truths to be God's thoughts, or ideas, but (maximal) possibilities (possible worlds) were taken to be divine-mind-dependent entities too: mental representations of universes.^{78,79} The reason for this, as Pruss notes (2011: 31-2), is that Leibniz appears to accept the S5 principle of modal logic, according to which $\Diamond p \rightarrow \Box \Diamond p$. Possibility, then, as well as necessity, *ontologically* depends upon God's understanding. However, it was not Leibniz's view that possibility is also dependent upon God's *will*; God does not *decide* what the possibilities are. So we should not see Leibniz as endorsing the Cartesian view (referred to by Plantinga (1980) as 'universal possibilism') that anything is possible because God could have made it so.⁸⁰

The DIist could begin by giving an account of the ontology of propositions: identifying them with divine ideas. Then, an ontology of possible worlds could be constructed out of these propositions: the DIist could define worlds as maximally specific, consistent thoughts (or sets of concepts or ideas) in the mind of God of ways for the world to be. Now, if God were to make a *decision* about what the possibilities should be, the theory would preclude S5. This is why it may be easiest to picture God not as *bringing into being* any possible world. It may also be why, as noted above, Leibniz pictured worlds as being ontologically dependent upon God, but not God's will. What God definitely *does* create, however, is our cosmos. By creating our cosmos, one world (alone) is *actualised* – that is, gets to be *concretely instantiated* – by means of God's activity (see Plantinga (1974a: 39) and (1974b: 169)). The actualized world is the world that represents our cosmos entirely accurately.

The ability DI has of doing justice to the sovereignty thesis has meant that, in relatively recent times, the theory has had something of a revival. As a sample: Alvin Plantinga (1980: 140-6) suggests the possibility of (and highlights motivations for) building such a view. Robert M. Adams (1983: 751) notes Plantinga's suggestion and explains that a view such as DI could yield an 'attractive' account of the ontological status of the objects

⁷⁷ Although I won't examine this argument, I will note that some criticisms have been raised by Leftow (1989), and ably defended against by Adams (1994: 177-83).

⁷⁸ Though I've called Leibniz's view 'Divine Idealism', Nicholas Rescher (1973: 180) refers to it as 'Conceptualist Realism'.

⁷⁹ Leibniz wasn't the first to identify possibilities and necessities with divine ideas. Stump and Kretzmann (2001: 181) quote Augustine as taking such a view towards not only these things, but to the rest of the Platonic horde) in Question 46: 'concerning ideas' (*de ideis*) of his *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, and there has been a theological tradition of doing so ever since. See also Augustine (1982: 79-81).

⁸⁰ Descartes can be seen as expressing this view in many places. See again, e.g., his replies to the sixth objections of his *Meditations*: '[God didn't] will that the three angles of a triangle should be equal to two right angles because he knew that it was impossible to have it otherwise...On the contrary...it was because he willed that the three angles of a triangle should be equal to two right angles that...it is impossible for it to be otherwise.' (2003: 100).

of logic and mathematics. Leftow (2012) argues for something akin to DI, but advocates substituting possible worlds for divine *mental events*, rather than divine ideas.⁸¹ Greg Welty (2014) argues that all putative abstract objects, including possible worlds, can be constituted by divine ideas. And Pruss (2011) develops a hybrid such account, combining Aristotelian views about the powers of substances with the Leibnizian view of worlds.

2.3. Actualism

DI bears some structural similarity to, e.g., the Platonic accounts of Adams (1974) and Plantinga (1974b); ‘Platonic’, since their accounts take worlds to be abstract in kind. Adams defines worlds as maximally consistent sets of propositions; Plantinga defines them as maximally consistent states of affairs.⁸² The structural similarities stem from the fact that the accounts are actualist in kind: each takes possible worlds to be parts of the actual world, and exactly one of these worlds is actualised by representing our universe entirely accurately. (On Adams’ account, the actualized world is the one whose propositions are all *true*; on Plantinga’s account, the actualized world is the one whose state of affairs *obtains*.) Since, under theism, God actually exists, God’s *thoughts* actually exist; hence, DI is also a form of actualism. According to this theory, the truth-conditions for modal truths are fulfilled by some part of the actual world.

For some, e.g. Plantinga (1976: 256-7)⁸³ and Lycan (1979: 287-92), actualist accounts of possible worlds are the only viable option: the person who believes that there *are* things (possible worlds) that *do not actually exist* is contradicting themselves, or, in Lycan’s words, is saying something ‘crazy’ (1979: 288). *Being actual*, some say, is part of the very *meaning* of existence; as such, the concept of something that exists but does not *actually* exist plainly

⁸¹ Leftow’s *God and Necessity* (2012) offers us a 500 page treatment of the topic of theism and modality. Since I will not be engaging with the view Leftow advances there, I should say something about why; here would be a good place to do so. Leftow’s view is what he calls ‘a thin partial deity theory’ (*ibid.*: 247). In terming his view this way, Leftow is making it clear that his is a *disjunctive* account of modality. A deity theory of modality grounds modality entirely in God’s nature. Hence, Leftow’s view counts as a *thin partial* deity theory because according to it, God’s nature only grounds the modal facts which count as what Leftow calls ‘non-secular’ (see chapter 9). Non-secular modal truths are modal truths about God. By contrast, a secular modal truth ‘is roughly one whose content when used assertively in normal circumstances, on its own, on the surface, take at face value, provides no information about God.’ (*ibid.*: 248). In Cartesian spirit, Leftow proposes (chapter 10) that secular necessary truths – ones which concern non-divine individuals – are ‘fixed’ by God’s unconstrained imagination and choice. Since there’s overlap between the side of Leftow’s account which accounts for non-secular truths and the theistic approach to modality I will be considering in this chapter, to offer a separate treatment of Leftow’s view would to some extent be overkill. This isn’t to say that I don’t think there are interesting things to say about Leftow’s account; just that there’s only space in to consider a handful of sufficiently dissimilar views.

⁸² States of affairs are things like *Sarah’s feeling hungry*, and *the laptop’s being low in battery*.

⁸³ Page references refer to the reprint in Loux (1979).

makes no sense. Not all will share these sentiments, but for those who do, DI and its conspecifics are at a significant advantage over possibilist accounts.⁸⁴

Additionally, there's a case for thinking that actualist accounts fare more favourably than possibilist ones in terms of their ability to do justice to the original grounding problem. What drives the original grounding problem for modality is our inability to find something *here in the actual world* that grounds possibility and necessity. If the thought is that truth is grounded in parts of the actual world, then DI and its Platonic counterparts give us the kind of answer that, pre-theoretically at least, we wanted. Modality's grounds, we're told, *are* in this world. The grounding problem arose because we failed to see that actuality comprises more than we originally thought.

2.4. A 'Safe & Sane' Ontology

While DI shares with its rivals the advantage of being actualist, there are features its rivals do not share, and some of these give DI significant advantages. Firstly, unlike its rivals, DI doesn't posit any kind of abstract entity; according to it, worlds are *concrete*.

Why do they count as such? After all, concreteness is another notion which has been variously understood, and under some understandings, a lack of spatiotemporal location is not only necessary, but is also *sufficient* for abstractness. If God is not spatiotemporal, then neither, presumably, are his thoughts; doesn't that mean that, by some lights at least, DI's worlds count as abstract? In Chapter Four (§4) I discuss the abstract/concrete distinction in more detail and provide reasons for taking a lack of spatiotemporal location to be *insufficient* for abstractness. I ask, therefore, that the reader bear with me until then. I will simply note here that there *are* good reasons (later to be advanced) to think of God and his thoughts as concrete, and that, as such, DI is more ontologically parsimonious than its Platonistic rivals in the sense that it can make do without abstracta. Indeed, from the theist's perspective at least, DI is also more ontologically parsimonious than its *possibilist* rivals. Theists already believe in God and his cognitions. If there are possible worlds of any kind, God will have thoughts about them. So theists, if they believe in possible worlds at all, are already committed to the existence of divine thoughts which have as their subject those worlds. DI makes do with *just* these thoughts; for it *identifies* them with worlds. DI does not require, then, that theists expand their ontology in *any* way. Further, since thoughts are something we already have at least some pre-theoretical understanding of (unlike abstracta), for theists at least, this account eliminates at least one

⁸⁴ More on this in §4.3.

source of metaphysical weirdness. (Of course, as Pruss notes, we have to admit that ‘mystery is introduced by the fact that these are the ideas of a *divine* mind...But at least we do not have the dark mystery of the Platonic propositions, whose ontological status is almost completely opaque – for what indeed are “abstract” things?’ (2011: 32).)⁸⁵

2.5. Representation & Reduction

This last point immediately leads to another serious consideration in favour of DI. We’ve seen that representation is a key notion for any account of modality which invokes possible worlds. Such accounts analyse the *de dicto* necessity of some proposition, *p*, in terms of every world’s representing that *p*, and the *de dicto* possibility of *p* in terms of *p*’s being represented as true by some world. Indeed, for actualist accounts, worlds ‘represent in a double sense. (1) They are representations, so that it somehow makes sense to speak of what is the case *according to* them; and thereby (2) they are representatives, taking the place of what they purport to represent.’ (Lewis, 1986a: 137). They take the place of what they purport to represent, of course, because the concrete universes they purport to represent don’t exist.⁸⁶ Further, each actualist world, whether actualized or not, is actualised *according to* itself (but not according to others); that is, each world represents itself *as* being the unique actualised world. As Lewis explains, each actualist world, *w*, represents the cosmos ‘to be a certain way such that, if it were that way, then [*w*] would be the [actualist] world that represents correctly; and thereby [*w*] implicitly represents itself as actualised’ (*ibid.*: 138).) Any account that can be deemed adequate then, owes us at least *some* explanation of how its worlds represent something as being the case.

Lewis takes the question of how worlds represent to be a crucial one, and is highly critical of authors such as Plantinga, Stalnaker, and Adams for remaining silent on just this point. There are three ways, Lewis says, that actualist (ersatzist) worlds might represent (or *mis*represent, but for ease, I will speak in terms of representation), and so there are three possible answers authors ersatzists might give, if they were to answer this question. One is that worlds represent by means of *linguistic* representation – a world represents that *p* by *saying* ‘*p*’. A second is that worlds represent by means of idealised *pictorial* representation – a world represents that *p* by containing a part that is *isomorphic* to *p*. In these cases, what worlds represent (what is true *at* them) is a function of what is true *of* them (what their internal structure is like). The third answer completely eschews talk of inner-world structure and

⁸⁵ Pruss himself takes worlds on DI to be concrete (2011: 127).

⁸⁶ Hence, merely possible actualist worlds don’t, strictly speaking, represent anything. Rather, they *mis*represent our cosmos in various ways, and in so doing, they represent other possibilities for it.

simply says that worlds represent in a primitive and so inexplicable way: a world, w , represents that p iff, necessarily, if w is actualized, then p is the case.

Lewis is critical of each type of answer. In reverse order, and in condensed form, his criticisms are as follows. The third of these answers, which involves adopting what Lewis terms *magical ersatzism*, is not really an answer at all. The magical ersatzist is one who limits herself to saying only this: her worlds represent what they do simply because it's their nature to do so. There's no informative explanation, then, of why the actualized world is the actualized world (i.e., of why one of the other worlds does not represent our cosmos with perfect accuracy). Nonetheless, we are entitled to ask of this relation that holds between the actualized world and our cosmos whether it is an *internal* one, so that its holding between the relata depends upon the intrinsic nature of the relata, or not (i.e. is it *external*)? If *external*, then, says Lewis, we are left with an 'especially repugnant' primitive modality (1986a: 179). We want it to be *necessary* that if the cosmos (as it actually is) exists, then a particular world, w_1 , is actualised. But if the 'actualizes' relation is *external*, then just why there should be such a necessary connection is left entirely unexplained. To illustrate by way of analogy, Lewis says:

[i]t cannot be, for instance, that there is an absolutely necessary connection... whereby every charged particle must be exactly a certain distance from another particle. It's one thing for the particle to be charged, another thing for two particles to be at a certain distance – the common involvement of the same particle is not enough to make the alleged connection intelligible... No matter what novel external relations there may be, it remains unintelligible that the intrinsic nature of a thing should constrain the external relations in which it stands. (*ibid.*: 181)

However, if the relation is *internal*, then since, by hypothesis, the worlds are devoid of any internal structure, it will be equally mysterious why the relation somehow depends upon the intrinsic natures of the relata. If w_1 has no internal structure, then what internal nature *does* it have, such that, if our universe exists, w_1 is actualised? We aren't offered an explanation. So the relation looks like a 'magical' one; hence the name (see Lewis, *ibid.*: 182).

The second, what we might call *pictorial ersatzism*, says Lewis, cannot really be *ersatzism*. For, if its worlds are to provide fully adequate representations of possible universes, then they would have to be *perfectly* isomorphic to such universes, and in that case, there would in effect *be no* qualitative differences between them and the universes they represent. Of course, because the universes these worlds are supposed to represent do not in fact exist, these worlds aren't isomorphic to *anything*. Rather, Lewis says, they are only isomorphic in a counterfactual sense: they *would* have been isomorphic to certain universes,

had those universes existed. However, this leads to a second point of objection: we now have a failed analysis. For what is supposed to make it true that there could have been a tap-dancing turtle is not that there *is* some part of a world which *is* isomorphic to a tap-dancing turtle, but rather, that there *could have been* a tap-dancing turtle isomorphic to some part of a world. But that there could have been a tap-dancing turtle is exactly what we wanted to explain! (See Lewis, 1986a: 165-74.)

The first, *linguistic ersatzism*, views worlds as constructed out of the words of some actual language.⁸⁷ The words of this language have meanings and thus, so too do the sentences built up out of them. Each world is a certain maximal and consistent set of such sentences, and each world represents whatever its constituent sentences mean or describe. Such a language would have to be a sufficiently rich one; it would, e.g., need a name for every possible individual, property, and relation. It would also have to be very precise; allowing for no vagueness, indeterminacy, or ambiguity. Lewis' objection to this account of worldly representation is twofold. First, if this is how worlds represent, then primitive modality is needed because not just any collection of sentences make for a world; worlds are collections of sentences which are both *maximal* and *consistent*, and these are modal properties. The other objection is that the relevant 'worldmaking' language would be expressively inadequate. It wouldn't, e.g., have names for *alien* properties (i.e., properties neither instantiated in the actual world nor constructible out of properties so instantiated). So, at most, the linguistic ersatzist can account for the *de dicto* possibility that there could have been a property not identical to any of those which are instantiated in the actual world; there will be no way for the linguistic ersatzist's worlds to represent *de re* of *different* alien properties that they could have been instantiated. Now, the linguistic ersatzist could simply *stipulate* that the language contains predicates for alien properties, but, says Lewis, just *how* each such predicate refers to one alien property rather than another will again be left mysterious. Thus, in allowing herself this stipulation, the linguistic ersatzist succumbs to the position (and so inherits faults) of *magical ersatzism* (see Lewis, *ibid.*: 142-65).⁸⁸

However, if it's imperative that whatever entities an ersatz account postulates as its worlds are capable of representation, then it seems DI *can* meet this challenge. DI can appeal to the fact that cognitions (whether divine or otherwise) are mental objects with certain semantic properties: DI's worlds represent because they are *thoughts*, and hence have *intentionality*: a certain content, directedness, or aboutness. Of course, as Pruss notes (2011:

⁸⁷ An actual language is needed to maintain actualism.

⁸⁸ There's a further worry that if the sentences of some language provide the truth-conditions for modal claims then any particular such language we chose would seem objectionably *arbitrary*.

208-11), philosophers of mind have a difficult time answering *how* a thinker's mental states can manage to be about things; but we at least do know that they *can* be about things, since they *are*. So, DI has at least a gesture towards an explanation here, which makes for another advantage over its actualist rivals.

We've seen, though, that DI's rival actualist accounts do not claim to be (indeed, *cannot* claim to be) offering us the resources to reduce the modal to the non-modal. Possibility (or consistency) is (must be) taken as a primitive. For example, Plantinga's worlds are not just states of affairs which *can* co-obtain, but *maximal* ones; and maximality too is explicated in modal terms. A state of affairs is maximal just when it is *as complete as possible*. Plantinga explains it thus:

Let us say that a state of affairs *S* includes a state of affairs *S** if it is not possible that *S* obtain and *S** fail to obtain; and let us say that *S* precludes *S** if it is not possible that both obtain. A maximal state of affairs, then, is one that for every state of affairs *S*, [it] either includes or precludes *S*. And a possible world is a state of affairs that is both possible and maximal. (1974b: 258)⁸⁹

(Likewise, under Adams' view, worlds are maximally compossible sets of propositions, which is just to say, maximal sets of propositions which *can* be true together.) So, won't DI have to offer a similar explanation? We've said that worlds are *mental representations* of universes; composites of divine thoughts. But not just any collection of divine thoughts will do. The thoughts need to be both maximal and consistent; but these are *modal* features.

There are two ways the proponent of DI might try to meet this challenge. One would be to say that worlds are *simple non-structured* divine ideas. However, this way we lose the neat explanation that propositions are divine thoughts, and worlds are more complex constructions thereof. Another, and I think *better*, way would be to say that worlds are thoughts God *collects*. There are some groups of thoughts God collects; there are others he does not. The reason primitive modality must be introduced to explain worldmaking under, e.g., Plantinga and Adams's accounts is that there *are* (if there are propositions at all) sets of propositions which are non-maximal and inconsistent, and there *are* (if there are abstract states of affairs at all), sets of states of affairs which are non-maximal and non-compossible. However, if the proponent of DI simply denies that there is a divine mental collection of thoughts corresponding with every set of Plantingan state of affairs (or with every set of Adamsonian propositions) and goes on to identify worlds with the divine thoughts which

⁸⁹ Hence, '[i]nclusion among states of affairs is like entailment among propositions; and where a state of affairs A includes a state of affairs B, the proposition corresponding to A entails the one corresponding to B.' (Plantinga, 1974a: 35).

do constitute divine mental collections, then no such primitive modality need be invoked. Worlds are a certain type of divine mental collection, and these collections need not correspond to the axioms of set theory.

Of course, the objection will almost certainly be raised here that something must explain *why* God collects the thought he does (why *these* and not others?), and that whatever explanation is given here will ultimately be modal. Pruss expresses such sentiments when he says:

The Leibnizian account [that is, DI] does not help there at all, since those divine ideas that are singled out for being dubbed “worlds” are singled out in virtue of being *consistent* – that is, possible. Their possibility is prior in the order of explanation to their being known by God to be possible... And so this approach is not relevantly different from [Platonic accounts] in singling out some collections of propositions for being dubbed “worlds” on the grounds of their being consistent. (2002: 331)⁹⁰

However, the proponent of DI should simply dig their heels in here and reiterate that it’s precisely their view that the direction of explanation is reversed. The objection is belied by a failure to grasp how this reductive programme is supposed to work. God collects some thoughts and not others. *That’s* where explanation stops. It’s not that God collects some thoughts *because* they’re the compossible ones, and God, being omniscient, grasps this. Rather, certain thoughts get to be the compossible ones just because *they’re the ones God collects*. That modal facts are something external to God for God to apprehend is precisely what the DIist denies: modality is grounded in facts about God’s mind; not vice-versa. (This is one advantage DI has over an account which grounds possibility in *conceivability by mere mortals*. God does *in fact* conceive everything he can conceive, so the modal-looking phrasing ‘conceivability’ gets replaced with God’s *actual* conceivings.)

It’s strange that Pruss should raise this objection, since, if it works, it counts equally against his own view, which grounds modality in God’s powers. On Pruss’ (2002) account, it’s *de dicto* possible that *p* iff it’s in God’s power to actualise a world in which *p*. ‘*Tu quoque*’, DIlists might say, ‘to say that God is omnipotent is to say that God has the power to do what’s possible. So shouldn’t possibility explain God’s powers, not vice-versa?’ Pruss will insist that this is precisely what his view denies (and rightly so). However, Cameron notes that, in pushing this line, Pruss seems to be taking a particular horn in what might seem to be a dilemma analogous to that raised by Socrates in Plato’s Euthyphro dialogue. The dilemma is one concerning the order of explanation: does God command the actions he

⁹⁰ See also Pruss (2011: 32): ‘in virtue of what is the idea that is identical with a possible world consistent?’

does because they are the good actions, or does the goodness of the actions God commands consist solely in the fact that they are commanded by God? Cameron explains that

Pruss's position regarding possibility is analogous to the divine command theorist's position regarding goodness. The divine command theorist holds that an action is good because God commands it (as opposed to God commanding it because it is good). This immediately leads to the following worries: (i) if God had commanded us to rape, the divine command theorist has us believe, it would have been good for us to commit rape. But this is counter-intuitive, (ii) the theist asserts that God's law is good, but if the divine command theorist is right, this is simply a trivial truth: it doesn't say anything substantial about God's law, because what it is to be good just is to be God's law. (2008a: 274)

Analogously, someone might argue that, if Pruss' view is right then the modal facts would have been different, had God had different powers. But (unless we are Descartes) we won't want to accept that, e.g., 6 squared could have equalled 0, and so would deny that it is (or could have been) in God's power to make it so. Further, if what's possible is just what God has it in his power to do, then the truth that God is omnipotent becomes an entirely trivial one. Likewise, if we adopt DI as our account of modality, don't we get the consequence that God could have collected different thoughts? If so, *they* would have been the compossible ones, meaning we (again) forfeit S5 as modal facts are rendered contingent. An analogous triviality objection concerning God's ability to conceive also arises: intuitively, it's a praiseworthy feature of God that he can conceive everything that it's possible to conceive. But that God can conceive everything it's possible to conceive is trivial, given that possibility is grounded in God's conceivings.

However, the worry that if God had commanded rape, rape would have been good only has bite if what God commands is a contingent matter.⁹¹ As Cameron goes on to note: 'Who cares that rape would have been good had God, *per impossibile*, commanded us to rape?' (*ibid.*). Perhaps God's *commands* are contingent; that's up for debate. But, what's important for us to consider here is that on Pruss' account, and likewise, on DI, modality itself is (respectively) grounded in divine powers, and collections of divine ideas (or a specific class of them). So we only get the result that the modal facts could have been different if God could have had different powers, or if God could have collected different thoughts. Yet, on Pruss' account, there's a determinate fact about what powers God

⁹¹ This needs some qualification. The divine command theorist could respond that this worry misrepresents their position. The nature of the relevant moral characteristic, the divine command theorist might say, is that it is what God *has* commanded/permitted/prohibited. That's what, say, the good is; *that* is its nature. Its nature isn't what God *would* have (or could have) commanded; it's what God *actually* did. Hence, even if God had commanded rape, rape still would have been impermissible.

unrestrictedly has; whatever powers God has is fixed. So God's powers are essential to him, and modal facts are *non*-contingent. Likewise, what ideas are gathered into divine mental collections is fixed. So, what ideas God collects is essential to him; meaning, again, that modal facts are *non*-contingent. So who cares that the modal facts would have been different if, *per impossibile*, Go had collected different thoughts? When we apply a Euthyphro-style dilemma to this modal context, what we might call the 'contingency horn' fails to get a grip. All this is to say, then, that the DIist should brush off the question of why God collects some thoughts and not others as ill-conceived. The question only makes sense in a context where God has the option of collecting together some other combinations of thoughts. But it's in God's collecting together the thoughts he does that the possibility of such contexts is precluded.⁹²

Nonetheless, it might be objected that the more ideas God has, the better God would be; a god who collected (and so could collect) together combinations of his thoughts in such a way so as to provide for common sense modal truth, but in addition, had an idea of a universe where say, it doesn't exist (i.e., collected together its idea of itself as not existing with an appropriate range of other ideas to make for a world) would be better than a god who didn't (and so couldn't). If so, God should have an idea of a world which fails to include himself. Otherwise, he experiences some sort of imaginative failing. After all, *we* are capable of imagining a world where God doesn't exist. In reply, the proponent of DI should say this: God *does* have an idea of himself as non-existent. (This provides an ontology for the proposition *God doesn't exist*.) It's just that, God does not collect together this idea to make for the possibility of his not existing. Perhaps we can have an idea of God's not existing at our world, but that's an imaginative error on our part: we are conceiving of an impossibility. (Conceivability is, after all, only a fallible guide to possibility.) In any case, it's wrong to think that all of what's possible for us to do is a subset of what it's possible for God to do. There are plenty of other things we can do – lie, forget, commit adultery, etc. – which God cannot, and we don't consider these to make for a diminution in God's perfection. So, the DIist should not be moved by this line of thought.

⁹² To take an analogy, suppose we ask the person who, like Lewis, adopts a GRist view of worlds "Why *those* worlds, not others?" The GRist will no doubt be confused. "There *was no* other option", they will reply. "What worlds there are is fixed; I take what concrete spacetimes there are as brute." The DIist answer is no different: what divine-mental-collections exist is also taken as brute. (If there is any objection to be made here, it will have to take the form of that advanced by Shalkowski (1994) and Lycan (1988). However, this objection, if it works at all, is no more serious under DI than it is under, say, Lewisian GR. For a compelling response to Shalkowski and Lycan see Cameron (2012).)

What can be said to address the concern that it's supposed to be a *substantive* matter that God can conceive all conceivable thoughts? Cameron suggests that Pruss respond to this triviality worry in the following way:⁹³

it doesn't follow from the fact that to be possible is to be within God's power that 'being within God's power' *means* 'is possible' – we are concerned with the *metaphysical grounding* of the modal, not with giving an analysis of modal language – and so Pruss is not committed to the claim that 'God is omnipotent' is an analytic truth. (*ibid.*: 275, emphasis added)

Cameron seems right about this. If successful, the objection would count against all proposed reductions. As Cameron notes (*ibid.*), it doesn't follow from the fact that, say, goodness turns out to be φ -ness that *Is goodness φ -ness?* is a closed question. A similar response could be given by DIist. It doesn't follow from the fact that God can conceive everything it's possible to conceive that *God can conceive everything it's possible to conceive* is analytic, simply because DI tells us that the part of reality which *grounds* what God can conceive is God's conceivings. *God can conceive of everything it's possible to conceive* is still an informative and substantial truth.

However, Cameron argues that a more substantive worry about triviality remains:

When the theist says that God could not make a square circle [etc.]...she does not tend to think of this as being any serious limitation on God's powers precisely because such things are impossible, whereas on Pruss's account they are impossible because they are beyond the limits of God's powers. (*ibid.*)

An analogous worry faces DIists. When we say God can't conceive of a world where he doesn't exist (can't collect his thoughts together so as to represent this state of affairs obtaining), we don't think that a serious limitation on God's imaginative capabilities, precisely because such a thing is impossible. However, on DI, it's impossible precisely because it's beyond the scope of God's cognition.

Here I think we should take issue with what Cameron says. The spirit of the theistic response to worries that might be raised by someone's pointing out that it's beyond the scope of God's power to make a male vixen, or to make a pie too big for him to eat, doesn't depend on the scope of possibility being ontologically independent of God. What matters – indeed, *all* that matters – is just that such things be outside the scope of possibility. But it

⁹³ And Pruss does in fact make such a response (2011: 267-9).

doesn't follow from DI (or from Pruss' account) that certain actions are no longer outside the scope of possibility. So there really is no problem here.

Recall that alien properties pose a problem for some of DI's rivals. For example, since there's no *actual* language which contains predicates for properties not instantiated in the actual world, the representational resources of the linguistic ersatzist (who think that worlds represent by saying) will be inadequate. However, now we have divine cognitions on the scene, this worry is alleviated. God, with his superior mind, conceives of properties not instantiated in the actual world. This makes for the *de re* possibility that each of the different alien properties could have been instantiated; and this is a significant advantage DI has in its favour.

However, even if the nature of representation can be better explained (and make for a more adequate modal ontology), the worry still remains that the worlds DI posits only represent in a counterfactual sense. Mirroring Lewis' objection against other actualist accounts: the universes DI's worlds purport to represent don't exist; so, strictly speaking, DI's worlds don't represent *anything*. Rather, they *would* represent such universes, *were* such universes brought into being. A primitive modality thus lurks in the background of the account.

The assumption that representation only works in cases where the thing represented exists should be questioned. When, for example, I conceive of a unicorn and a mental image of a unicorn is thus present to me, would we say that my mental image represents a unicorn? I think we can take as a datum that most of us *would*. Of course, a philosophical account will be required to explain *how*, exactly, it manages to represent a unicorn, in the absence of any unicorns, but that's a question for philosophers of mind to answer independently of this account. So, to alleviate the worry that their worlds only represent in a counterfactual sense, the proponent of DI should appeal to the fact that we already accept that ideas have intentionality and can represent something even in the absence of that thing. God's ideas have certain representational properties; *that* they do seems uncontroversial given platitudes we otherwise accept about mental phenomena, and it's in virtue of those representational properties that certain ideas (and/or collections thereof) would be actualised, were the universes they represent to exist; not vice-versa.

In summary of this subsection: DI has a fair claim on its ability to offer a reductive account of possibility and necessity. What's true at a world is a matter of what God's ideas represent, and we needn't think of this representation as modal. Further, worlds themselves are defined in non-modal terms – as sums of divine thoughts collected together in the mind of God. Any thoughts that bear the *collected together with* relation to each other are parts of

the same world, and no thoughts that fail to bear this relation to each other are parts of the same world. This, coupled with the fact that DI can account for the full range of alien possibilities, puts DI at a significant advantage over rival actualist accounts.

2.6. The Intrinsicness Paradox: A Resolution

In Chapter One we saw that theists often think of God's nature as intrinsic to him. If the arguments from essence and aseity are sound, then they are correct to do so. However, we saw that a paradox arises. For, there are equally good reasons for thinking that at least some of the attributes constitutive of God's nature *cannot* be intrinsic to him. Viewing possible worlds as ideas (or collections of ideas) in the mind of God has another significant virtue in its favour: it can offer theists a solution to this paradox, which for ease, I'll refer to as 'the intrinsicness paradox'.

To see why, recall how we saw that possession of certain divine attributes involves the absence of certain kinds of *impossible* entities. For example, God's omnipotence depends upon there being an absence of defeaters to God's will (as specified in condition (i)), an absence of peers (as specified in conditions (iii) and (iv)), and so on; such entities are strictly impossible under theism. Now, suppose that we adopt DI. The truth-conditions for modal claims then involve possible worlds, which, this account tells us, are divine cognitions. In that case, what it is, say, for God to be such that there are no (possible) defeaters to his will is for each of the divine mental collections which make for worlds to be such that they do not represent God's will as defeated; what it is for God to be such that it is not possible for there to be another omnipotent being is for each of the relevant divine mental collections to be such that they do not represent another omnipotent being as existing, and so on. God's meeting these conditions, then, involves facts *only* about him. Hence, by (7), the conditions turn out to be *intrinsic* ones, avoiding the result that omnipotence is globally extrinsic.

Analogous results apply *mutatis mutandis* to the other divine-making properties discussed as problematic. Consider, for example, divine eternity. We saw that there are a number of ways this property can be understood: in terms of sempiternity, and thus, in terms of satisfying condition (vii); or, in terms of timelessness, and thus, in terms of satisfying either condition (viii) or condition (ix). Now, it's sufficient for God's satisfying (vii) that there be an absence of any times God fails to bear the *is present at* relation to. Likewise, it's sufficient for God's satisfying (viii) that there be an absence of times God fails to bear the *transcends* relation to; and it's sufficient for God's satisfying (ix) there be an absence of times or events which bear any kind of temporal relation to God. These entities

– i.e., those whose absence is required for God to be eternal – are not possible ones. Hence, what makes for the fact that God is eternal is, again, the absence of certain kinds of impossibilia (e.g., times God’s not present at, or times and events God bears a temporal relation to); and since, under DI, facts about impossibilia are grounded in divine cognitions, divine eternity – whether it amounts to being timelessness or being sempiternal – turns out to be a property God possesses in an intrinsic manner. As a final example: it’s sufficient for God’s satisfying condition (vi) on omniscience that there be an absence of knowable facts not known about by God; since these entities (whose absence is required for God to be omniscient) are impossible, their non-existence is, under DI, grounded in God’s cognitions. Hence, there’s no more pressure to think that omniscience cannot be intrinsic to God.⁹⁴

3. An Argument Against Divine Idealism

DI is, then, not without its virtues. However, in this section, we will see that a dilemma can be levelled against it which renders the view untenable. It runs as follows. The theist should accept the principle of the best – ‘PB’, hereafter. PB is the principle that God only and always acts for the best (it will be argued for in §3.1). DI has as a component the claim that God actualizes (i.e. concretely instantiates) *just one* world. For, under DI, all merely possible worlds are simply uninstantiated ideas in the mind of God.⁹⁵ For ease, call this thesis ‘AO’ (to stand for *actualizes one* world). The first half of the argument will show that PB together with DI and its component claim AO require theists who hold a common sense opinion about what modal facts there are to accept there is no single best actualizable world – ‘NSBAW’, for short. However, the second half of the argument shows that there are only three ways NSBAW can be true, and each of these is equally untenable for theists who hold a common sense opinion about what modal facts there are given PB, DI, and its component claim AO. Yet, it cannot be that both NSBAW *and* its negation are false: this is contrary to the law of excluded middle. Therefore, DI should be rejected.

Why isn’t it an option, in light of this argument, for theists to simply accept that their common sense opinion about what modal facts there are is mistaken? Well, theists *could* do this. However, to do so would be counterproductive. For, as I will reiterate throughout the discussion, if the modal theory we adopt requires us to reject a significant

⁹⁴ It’s false then that these properties are extrinsic to each of their possible bearers. A property like omniscience might be extrinsic to some of its possible bearers, but it is not necessarily extrinsic to God. For here is a model according to which it is not. These divine-making properties are therefore impure extrinsic ones.

⁹⁵ The claim that DI is wedded to AO will be further bolstered in §4.1.

portion of the very same truths we are seeking a metaphysical account of, then that undermines the very reason we had for adopting that modal theory in the first place.

3.1. The Principle of the Best

We've seen that it is a central tenet of classical theism that God is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect. Theists should accept PB because if they do not, then at least one of these claims must be rejected. To see why, suppose that there is an objectively best course of action for God to take in a certain situation and that God fails to take it (suppose, that is, that God fails to act in accordance with PB). In that case, at minimum, one of the following scenarios must hold:

Scenario one: God discerns the morally relevant differences between the different available courses of action and is capable of undertaking any one of them. However, God ignores the morally relevant differences and chooses to undertake a less-than-best course of action.

Scenario two: God discerns the morally relevant differences between different courses of action and doesn't choose to ignore them. However, God is incapable of undertaking the best course of action and, hence, does not undertake the best course of action.

Scenario three: God is capable of undertaking any one of the available courses of action, and does not wilfully ignore any of the morally relevant differences between them. However, there are some morally relevant differences between the courses of action God fails to discern. So, unwittingly, God does not undertake the best course of action.⁹⁶

It should be obvious that not one of these scenarios is theologically acceptable. Wilfully ignoring morally relevant differences between different available courses of action constitutes a moral imperfection. So, under scenario one, God is not morally perfect. Failing to discern any facts which are there to be known constitutes an imperfection in knowledge. Thus, under scenario two, God is not omniscient. Lacking the ability to undertake a possible course of action constitutes an imperfection in power, or ability. Hence, under scenario three, God is not omnipotent. Yet, classical theism has it that omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection are *essential* properties of God; so it's impossible that one of these three scenarios should hold. Therefore, God must act in accordance with PB.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ I said that 'at minimum' one of these holds since God could, e.g., discern the relevant differences *and* choose to ignore them, and it still be the case that were God not to choose to ignore them, God would lack the ability to act upon them.

⁹⁷ Later, in §5.3 I will deal with one attempt to deny PB made by Adams (1972).

Under DI, God surveys an incredibly vast number of worlds (atemporally contemplates his own ideas) and chooses to actualize just one. So, why, we might reasonably ask, did God actualize the particular world he in fact did? Well, if, as we've just established, God always acts in accordance with PB, then the answer (if, indeed, there is best actualizable world) should be that God actualized the particular world he did because it was the best world he could actualize. Leibniz, perhaps most famously, affirmed exactly this: that there *is* a best possible world, and that God, being constrained by PB, actualized it because, after comparing it to all others, he considered that it was the best:

53. Now, since there is an infinity of possible universes in God's ideas, and since only one of them can exist, there must be a sufficient reason for God's choice, a reason which determines him towards one thing rather than another.

54. And this reason can only be found in *fitness*, or in the degree of perfection that these worlds contain, each possible world having the right to claim existence in proportion to the perfection it contains.

55. And this is the cause of the existence of the best, which wisdom makes known to God, which his goodness makes him choose, and which his power makes him produce (Leibniz, 1991: 75)

3.2. DI, PB, & Modal Collapse

Leibnizian DI – that is, DI coupled with PB and the thesis that there is a best possible world – has not been accepted without opposition. One of the most frequent objections raised against it is that it forces upon us a claim that seems plainly false: that our universe, with all of its suffering, disorder, and other kinds of natural and moral evils, really is the best of all universes creatable by a perfect personal being. One can easily imagine God making this world such that, somewhere in it, one isolated instance of suffering occurred for a fraction of a second less than it in fact did, without thereby forfeiting some greater good.

However, an objection such as this would only be decisive against Leibniz's view if we were in possession of conclusive reasons for thinking that the 'bestness' of a world consists in its being the one most abundant in happiness. Leibniz himself did not hold the view that this is what the bestness of a world would consist in. He thought, rather, that the most perfect world would be the one most abundant in *variety*, concurrently governed by the simplest laws capable of producing such variety. He was of the view that '[God] chooses...to create men as happy *as it is possible to be in this system* [of variety and simplicity].' (Leibniz, 1985: 431).⁹⁸

⁹⁸ For a discussion of this see Blumenfeld (1995).

Fortunately though, we needn't digress into an examination of the various notions of 'bestness', nor need we consider which of these notions the actual world might fit with. For, there is a more decisive line of objection against the Leibnizian picture. The objection is that Leibnizian DI entails modal collapse: the thesis that there is really only *one* possible world. The argument runs as follows. Under DI, one world alone is actualized. Under theism, a world, *w*, is actualized if, and *only* if, God actualizes *w*. For, a world, *w*, is actualised when the cosmos represented by *w* comes into being, and, on theism, no cosmos could have come into being but for the creative activity of God. Now, if *just one* world is actualized, and it is actualized because it is the *best*, then, given that God's nature makes it strictly *necessary* that he actualizes the best world, it won't be the case that any other world could have been actualized.

However, if a world *w* is not possibly actualised, then it is not a *genuinely possible* world. Consider a world, *w*, which represents our cosmos (concrete universe), *u*, and suppose that *w* is not possibly actualised. In that case, *u* could not possibly exist. In such a case, to say that *u* is possible, even though *u* could not possibly exist would be straightforwardly contradictory. On an actualist possible world theory, *being possibly actualised* looks to be a necessary condition on – indeed, seems to be partly constitutive of – a world's counting as a *possible* one. So it's simply false to say that *w* is a *genuinely possible* world. (Likewise, on a possibilist theory, it's a necessary condition on a world's counting as a possible one that it be *possibly actual*.)⁹⁹ Yet, here we have a denial of that principle. For, less-than-best worlds are being considered here (by those who accept Leibnizian DI) as possible, even though they are not possibly actualized. With this in mind, we can form the following argument against the view (where I take '@' to serve as the predicate 'is actualized'):

- P1. $\forall w [\Diamond w \rightarrow \Diamond @w]$. (Premise)¹⁰⁰
- P2. Merely possible worlds (less-than-best worlds) are not possibly actualized.
(Premise, DI with PB and the assumption that there's a best actualizable world.)
- C1. Therefore, merely possible worlds are not possible.

Merely possible worlds (i.e., less-than-best ones) are not *really* deserving of the name. A world that could not possibly be actualized is not a genuine way the world might have been;

⁹⁹ I've subsequently found that Adams (1974: 222) and Resnick (1973) also explicitly endorse the intuition that underlies P1.

¹⁰⁰ The diamond is usually taken to be a propositional operator. Here I'm instead taking it to serve as a predicate ascribing the property of *being possible* to worlds.

rather, it only appears to be so. This is disastrous. According to possible world theorists of all types, worlds are supposed to represent the different ways things might have been. Since putatively possible worlds on Leibnizian DI do not do so, their existence is entirely redundant from a modal perspective; unactualizable worlds are ones which serve no modal purpose at all. We get the result, then, that there is only *one* genuinely possible world, and that world is the actual world.

Now, if the actual world is the only possible world, then a significant portion of our firm intuitions about what might have been will turn out false; possibilities unrepresented in the actual world will turn out not to be possibilities at all. For, the possible world analysis tells us that it's possible that p iff p is represented at some world. Hence, dragons turn out to be impossible because the actual world (and so reality) fails to contain them; backwards causation turns out to be impossible because there is (if the actual world is the only possible world) no world at which there is backwards causation, and so on. Further, since it's contingent that p iff p is not represented at some world and represented at some other, a significant portion of our beliefs about what must be the case also turn out false. It's necessary that the world contains as many individuals as it actually does; it's necessary that there are actually squirrels but none that smoke cigars, and so on. So we can see then, that if one (and only one) world is actualized, and that world is actualized of necessity; much of what is ordinarily deemed as possible disappears, leading to a severe kind of modal collapse.

However, given Counterpart Theory (Lewis' theory of representation *de re*), it won't be the case that *absolutely no* modal truth is contingently true. Counterpart Theory will be outlined and discussed in greater depth in Chapter Four; briefly, however, this theory says that 'a world represents (de re) of x that it is F by having a part which is a counterpart of x and is F .' (Divers, 2004: 674); and some thing, y , is a counterpart of some x if it is sufficiently similar to x in certain relevant respects. Hence, even if there is no *non-actual* world containing counterparts of me who are geniuses (who can thus represent the possibility of my being a genius), the possibility that I'm a genius is not left unrepresented in modal space. For it's true of the *actual world* that it contains counterparts of me who are geniuses. Thus, even if there is only one world in reality, it still doesn't follow that my failing to be a genius is necessary: alternative possibilities for actual world individuals will be represented by other individuals located within the actual world (see, e.g., Divers (2004: §5)).

Nonetheless, even if we are not left with *total* modal collapse given the existence of just one world, the large number of intuitively true *de dicto* modal claims concerning possibility and contingency which turn out false given DI (with PB) is sufficient for pushing us into rejecting the theory. If a particular modal theory has the result that a very large

number of our thoughts about what truly might have been turn out false, then the primary motivation we could have had for adopting that theory – accounting for grounds of those modal *truths* – is undermined. In other words, Leibnizian DI is, to this end, self-defeating.

3.3. No Moral Obligation to Actualize the Best World

Adams argues that even if there is a best world, God has no moral obligation to actualize it: ‘God could [actualize] another instead of it, and still be perfectly good.’ (1972: 317) If Adams is right, we could endorse DI without accepting that God’s creative choice is based on considerations of merit, and modal collapse could then be avoided; so let’s examine his reasoning. Adams claims that one would only suppose that, if there is a best world, God must actualize it, if one also thought that either of the claims stated below were true, but both of these claims are false:

- (A) God would wrong some individuals if he didn’t actualize the best world.

Or, that:

- (B) Even if God didn’t wrong some individuals by failing to actualize the best world, failing to actualize the best would entail an imperfection in the divine nature.

In response to (A), Adams asks us to consider who God might wrong, were he to actualize a less-than-best world. It cannot, says Adams, be the merely possible creatures, since merely possible creatures are not part of the moral community. Nor, does it *necessarily* follow that actualizing a less-than-best world, *w*, involves God wronging any creatures in *w*. For, there’s a possible scenario in which God actualizes *w* and doesn’t thereby wrong any creatures. That scenario would be one in which *w* meets the following criteria: none of *w*’s inhabitants exists in the best possible world; none of *w*’s inhabitants is so unhappy that, overall, it would’ve been better for them not to have existed; and every inhabitant of *w* is, overall, at least as happy as it is in any other world in which it exists (*ibid.*: 320). For in such a scenario, even if there is a best world, things wouldn’t have been better for the inhabitants of *w* if God had actualized it.

Let’s grant, for the sake of argument, that (A) is false and turn to (B), since defending its truth will be sufficient for my purposes. Earlier, when arguing for PB, I gave reasons in support of it. However, quite the opposite of concluding that God’s choice of a less-than-best world could only be accounted for by an *imperfection* in God’s nature, Adams claims it’s accounted for by a *perfection* in God’s nature; namely, God’s graciousness. Adams

takes grace to be a virtue and an important part of perfect goodness.¹⁰¹ He defines it as ‘a disposition to love that is not dependent on the merit of the person loved’ (*ibid.*: 324). A gracious god will love all of his creatures equally, irrespective of their value or degree of moral character. Now suppose one world, *w*, is better than another, *w**, because the beings in *w* are morally better than those in *w**. God can’t choose to actualize *w* because he loves morally better beings more than the less morally good beings. Since God loves all of his potential creations equally, he isn’t obliged to actualize the best ones.

Yet, we should find Adams’ reasoning here to be quite beside the point. First, given that many theists maintain that free will and having the chance to develop one’s moral character are intrinsic goods, it’s unlikely that theists would consider that the best world would contain the best (i.e. most moral) creatures. Second, even supposing that the best world *would* contain the best creatures, Adams doesn’t show that God isn’t obliged to create it. Adams says: ‘God’s graciousness implies that there is nothing in God’s nature or character which would require Him to act on the principle of choosing the best possible creatures to be the object of His creative powers.’ (*ibid.*: 324). But this claim is unwarranted. Divine graciousness doesn’t imply that there’s *nothing* in God’s character that *would* require him to create the best universe. It only implies that *one* aspect of God’s character *wouldn’t* require him to create the best universe, namely, his gracious love towards all creatures irrespective of merit. So although we know God can’t choose to actualize the best world *because he loves its inhabitants more* than the inhabitants of other possible creations, this doesn’t rule out God’s having some *other* reason for selecting the best world for actualization.¹⁰² And there *is* another reason: God’s desire to do *his* best. Now, if there’s an objectively best thing to be done in a certain scenario, and you are capable of doing it, then doing it would be to do *your* best. And, as I have argued, God, *qua* perfect being, *will* always do his best. So, it still follows that God would actualize the best world even if he *did* love its inhabitants more than the inhabitants of his other possible creations. And, as I’ve suggested, it’s unlikely that the best world will be best by virtue of containing the best creatures.¹⁰³ Hence, Adams’ argument is a *non sequitur*.

3.4. Sub-Conclusion

Where have we got to so far? I’ve explained why if DI and PB are true – if God selects a single world for actualization based on merit – and if there is a best actualizable world, then

¹⁰¹ To be precise, this is what he thinks the Judeo-Christian tradition asserts.

¹⁰² This point has also been made by Rowe (2004: 84-5).

¹⁰³ Steven Grover argues that the notion of a best non-divine creature is *incoherent*, and that *this* is the ‘deepest’ problem with Adams’ argument (2003: 155).

there is only *one* creative option, meaning that modal collapse ensues. This is because the following conditional holds true:

MAB: If there is a best possible world, God must actualize it.

In light of the above, I preliminarily conclude that if theists accept PB (as I have suggested they should) and wish to preserve the intuition that the actual world isn't the *best* and *only* world God could have created, they should deny the antecedent of MAB. Partisans of PB and DI (and its associated claim AO)¹⁰⁴ should reject Leibniz's claim that there is a best possible world and endorse NSBAW (the thesis that there is no single best actualizable world) instead.

There are three ways NSBAW could be true:¹⁰⁵

- (1) There's more than one best actualizable world. (Hence, no single best course of action for God to take.)
- (2) There's an infinite hierarchy of increasingly better worlds. (Hence, for every actualizable world, there is at least one actualizable world which is better.)
- (3) Worlds contain incommensurable goods. (Hence, worlds aren't comparable because there is no single value scale on which one could be ranked above all others.)

I will address each option in turn.

3.5. More than One Best World?

If there's more than one best actualizable world then there will be some number greater than one of worlds which are all on par in terms of goodness: call this group of worlds *G*. There will be no world better than any in *G*. God could actualize any world in *G*, and it would constitute no diminution of his perfect goodness, power, or rationality if he were to actualize one world rather than another, since there are no morally relevant differences between such worlds, and hence none to be discerned nor acted upon.

¹⁰⁴ Later I explain why theists need only endorse NSBAW if they believe AO.

¹⁰⁵ Obviously NSBAW would be trivially true if there were *no* actualizable worlds. However, on theism that thesis is false, since there's at least one universe God created, and, under DI, a world is actualized when a universe gets created.

At least two serious problems face this view. First, since worlds are equally good, God lacks a reason to actualize one world rather than another, since it's hard to see what feature of a world (that did not have a bearing on its goodness) could guide God's choice. Yet, that God's choice was brute and reasonless would surely be anathema to theists, according to whom God is the paradigm rational agent.

What do we mean, though, when we say that God is the paradigm rational agent? Would it be enough to understand perfect rationality in purely negative terms, as *never being irrational*, never acting illogically, *contrary* to reason? If so, then that would enable a perfectly rational being to sometimes act *arationally*. And, since on (1) God acts *arationally* rather than *irrationally*, that would be fine. However, I don't think theists would accept that this is what *perfect* rationality consists in. This weaker condition is one a non-divine creature could fulfil. Theists, rather, seem to mean something stronger in mind: they mean to say that there's a *positively* rational basis for all God's actions.

Even supposing that some theists are happy to accept the weaker condition of perfect rationality, theists (who venerate God for his act of creation) should at least be resistant to the suggestion that the stronger condition doesn't at least apply to God's *creative* act. For, if God's decision to actualize this world rather than another was entirely arbitrary, it would be strange to be especially thankful for God's *particular* creative act; it's an *arational* choice which yielded a result as good as any other would have.

Second, that all worlds must be on a par in terms of goodness is going to leave the plurality of worlds ('pluriverse') so severely impoverished that many of our modal claims (concerning what is, intuitively, possible) are going to come out false. As with the Leibnizian picture, any world not in G is not actualizable by God, and so is not genuinely possible; nor does anything that occurs in a world not in G and in no world in G count as possible.¹⁰⁶ Again, this is problematic because it undermines the primary motivation for adopting a possible world theory. Since (1) forces theists to deny the very same truths they were seeking an account of, they should not accept that NSBAW is true in virtue of it.

3.6. Improving Worlds?

Let's see if NSBAW is better accounted for in virtue of (2): the claim that there are infinitely many worlds arranged into a hierarchy with no upper bound according to their value, and that for any world, w_n , in the sequence, there is another, w_{n+1} , which is overall

¹⁰⁶ I thank an anonymous referee for *American Philosophical Quarterly* for pointing out the need for this qualification.

better in value.¹⁰⁷ Following Michael Almeida (2008: 13), we could call such a series a series of ‘improving worlds’. Under the improving worlds view, there’s no single best world, nor is there a number greater than one of best actualizable worlds for God to choose from. Hence, it can’t be expected of God that he actualize the best world. God *must* actualize a world inferior to some other. (2) might seem quite plausible once one considers that any upper bound there might be on the amount of goodness a world can contain would seem entirely arbitrary. It’s at least conceivable that for any world, *w*, one cares to imagine, *w* could either have contained one more good action, one more sentient being, or a type of sentient being that was one degree (be there such a thing) closer in likeness to God than the beings already contained in *w*. In fact, since theists believe the goodness of God to be infinite, they already accept that it’s possible for a thing to manifest an unbounded level of goodness. Now, expecting God to actualize a best world in a scenario where *for any world, there is one better*, amounts to expecting God to do the strictly impossible. And no-one can be culpable for failing to do the strictly impossible.

However, William Rowe (2004) advances an argument to the effect that those endorsing AO and (2) will not be able to maintain that God is the greatest possible being.¹⁰⁸ For, on (2) it will always be true that, for any world God creates, God could have created one better. And, if one’s goodness is a function of one’s actions, then, since God could have created a better world, God could have been a morally better being. Yet, if God could have been a morally better being, he isn’t *unsurpassable* in his moral goodness, and God is supposed to be *essentially* morally unsurpassable. Therefore, since on AO and (2) God necessarily lacks this property, on (2), God cannot exist.

Rowe’s argument depends on the following assumptions:

- (C) If an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world that it could have created, then it is possible that there exists a being morally better than it.

And:

- (D) If a being is essentially perfectly good then it is not possible that there exist a being morally better than it. (Rowe, 2004: 91)

¹⁰⁷ Aquinas expresses support for this view in his *Summa Theologica*.

¹⁰⁸ Rowe himself does not *explicitly* mention AO, but, that he accepts it is at least implicit in his argument. In any case, if he were not willing to accept it, his argument would be invalid. Why this is the case will become clear in subsequent parts of this chapter.

I take it as non-negotiable for theists that God is an unsurpassable being. Therefore, I will assume that (D) is true. What about (C)? It clearly depends upon the assumption that if a being's *act* is surpassable, then the *being* who performs that act is surpassable. Immanuel Kant would certainly have accepted this assumption as true; he takes it that

indisputably that will is better which chooses what is better. But if a better will is possible, then so is a being who could express this better will. And therefore this being would be more perfect and better than God. But this is a contradiction. (1978: 137)

However, Daniel Howard-Snyder and Frances Howard-Snyder (1994) argue that we have cause to deny assumption (C). Their argument is as follows. Suppose there are three gods and each of them must actualize just one world. Because there's an infinite series of increasingly better worlds, each god *must* actualize a surpassable world. Subsequently, the gods each stipulate a cut-off point among the worlds to separate the ones they deem good enough for actualization from the ones they don't. The first god, Jove, uses a randomizing machine to select a world among those he has deemed acceptable for creation. It selects the world of value '777', which consequently gets created. The second god, Juno, adopts the same procedure as Jove, but her device selects the world of value '999'. Juno creates a world better than Jove's, but, say the Howard-Snyders, Juno is not morally better than Jove, because individuals can't be deemed to be more or less good on the basis of factors outside of their control. A third god, Thor, doesn't select a world using a randomising device, but instead straightforwardly chooses to actualize the world of value '888'. Thor, they say, can't be morally better than Jove solely by virtue of the fact that his world surpasses Jove's. Why? Because Thor is not better than Juno, and Juno and Jove are 'morally equivalent'. If Thor *were* better than Jove, then since Jove is just as good as Juno, Thor would be better than Juno. But Thor can't be better than Juno if the world Juno creates is better than Thor's. This is taken to show that even if God's creative *act* is surpassable, that does not entail that God is a surpassable *being*.

For the Howard-Snyder's scenario to present a possible counter-example to (C), it must be one in which *all* of the deciding factors are outside of each god's control. Only if God has *no* control over which world he selects can he create a surpassable world without himself being morally surpassable. But how plausible is it that a scenario such as this could exist? A line indicating a level of acceptability *must* be drawn somewhere, otherwise, it will be possible for a god to select a very bad world. Now, either there's an objective minimum standard of goodness for a world, or there isn't. Recall, though, that one of the motivations for accepting (2) was that there being an upper bound on the level of goodness a world can

contain seems entirely arbitrary. Likewise, there being a lower bound on the acceptable amount of goodness a world can contain also appears arbitrary. But suppose for the sake of argument it isn't arbitrary. In that case, on (2) we're supposed to accept that God, being omnipotent and benevolent, is happy to settle for a *minimally* good world, and that the act of creating a minimally good world is *just as good* as the act of creating one far above the minimum, and these assumptions seem to be plainly false.

It appears much more likely that one of the following two scenarios will hold. Either each god draws the line of acceptability somewhere above the minimum standard, or there is no objective minimum standard. In either of these cases, it's going to be up to each god to decide which world is 'minimally acceptable'. Suppose that Juno decides only worlds above 10,000 are acceptable, and Thor decides only worlds above 10,500 are acceptable. Clearly, Thor is better than Juno by virtue of having higher standards. So, we can see that even if a god selects a world at random, not all of the deciding factors are ever going to be out of their control: any god will need to draw some level of acceptability. Therefore, if (2) is true, there *is* a way to pass moral judgement on God's creative act (namely, by appealing to where God drew the line of acceptability). Further, since for any way of drawing a minimum level of acceptability there will be a better, a response akin to the one made by the Howard-Snyders will only succeed in pushing back the problem. Option (2) is not, then, an attractive picture for theists to accept. If an alternative picture concerning God's creative choice is available that does not leave us able to criticise God for not having done better – for not having higher standards – theists should accept that picture instead. And we will see below that one such alternative *is* available.

3.7. Incommensurable Worldly Goods?

Our last option to consider is whether NSBAW is better accounted for by (3): the claim that worlds contain incommensurable goods. If (3) were true, there could not be a *single* best world. For, one world, w , may be better than another, w^* , in one respect, R , and w^* may be better than w in a different respect, R^* , but there would be no fact of the matter concerning whether w is better than w^* , or vice-versa, because there is no value scale according to which the features which are good in respect of R can be pitched against those which are good in respect to R^* .

In such a scenario, God couldn't be held wanting from either a moral or rational perspective, for the same reasons he couldn't be held wanting under (1) or (2). Further, (3) is plausible for two reasons. Firstly, it's hard to see how there could be any kind of value-scale on which worlds could be ranked against one another in terms of their *overall* goodness.

Secondly, it's unclear precisely what superlative adjectives such as 'best', 'greatest', and 'most perfect' mean when applied to worlds; they appear to be semantically incomplete. So there's good reason to say NSBAW is true in virtue of (3).

However, in this scenario, just as in scenario (1), God lacks a reason to actualize one world rather than another, since his choice couldn't be based on the degree of overall goodness of a world, and, again, it's hard to see what merit-independent-feature of a world could guide God's choice. Theists accepting (3) must deny that God's most important act – his act of creation – has a positively rational basis, and it's hard to see how theists could be praiseworthy of that act in particular. More importantly though, under (3), only worlds at the top of each value scale will be actualizable. Modal collapse therefore ensues on each value scale. The only genuine possibilities will be ones which occur in worlds displaying some feature of merit to the maximum degree, meaning that modal space is once again left severely impoverished. As with (1), (3) leaves modal space so severely impoverished that it could not be deemed acceptable. Theists should not, then, accept that NSBAW is true in virtue of it.¹⁰⁹

4. A Way Out of the Dilemma

4.1. Rejecting AO

There are, then, only three ways for NSBAW to be true. Since each is untenable under DI, theists endorsing DI should deny NSBAW. However, the conclusion stated in §3.4 was that theists should *endorse* NSBAW. They can't do both, so where does this leave them?

Theists can prevent this dilemma from ever arising. The dilemma arises *only* when one accepts AO, and it's possible to reject that assumption. As I hope will be visible from the foregoing discussion, the dilemma only arises under the assumption that AO is true because NSBAW and its denial are untenable (for the reasons discussed) *only* when they are coupled with it. This can be made clearer by examining how theists, if they accept instead that God actualizes *all* worlds (AA, for short), are free to endorse either NSBAW or its denial without any problem.

Let's start with its denial. Suppose there *is* a best actualizable world and AA is true. Does God's actualizing the best world entail modal collapse? No. For, while it's true that, if there is a best actualizable world, then, necessarily, God will actualize it, it's also true that, necessarily, God actualizes *all* other worlds in addition. So, this model allows us not only to preserve some contingency, it also allows us to preserve the full range of the modal claims

¹⁰⁹ See Almeida (2008) for a book-length treatment of the problems discussed in this section.

we pre-theoretically took to be true. The reason? If all worlds are *actualized*, all worlds must be *actualizable*, and hence can count as genuinely possible. If there is a best actualizable world, need it be our world? If someone asks “why did God create our world?” does the answer *have* to be that our world is the *best*? No. Perhaps our world is the best of all worlds, perhaps it isn’t. If it is, there’s no problem metaphysically speaking, for its being so wouldn’t entail modal collapse (see above). If it isn’t, there’s no problem theologically speaking, for it would not imply any moral, rational, or competence failing on God’s part. God couldn’t be guilty of failing to create a universe better than ours, nor for failing to actualize the best possible world, if he *does*, in fact, do so.

Suppose there *isn’t* a best actualizable world and AA is true. In that case, theists will need to find some way of accounting for NSBAW. Can NSBAW be true in virtue of (3): the claim that worlds contain incommensurable goods? Yes. The problems discussed with this scenario only arose when we held AO as true. Modal space will not be depleted if (3) and AA are true, because God doesn’t *only* (and of necessity) have to ‘choose’ to actualize the world at the top of a single arbitrarily chosen value scale, nor does God (have to) choose to actualize the world at the top of every value scale. Can NSBAW be true in virtue of (2): the claim that there is an infinite hierarchy of increasingly better worlds? Yes. For, in such a scenario – (2) and AA – God needn’t make a choice regarding which world to actualize, and hence, cannot *arbitrarily* select a world. Can NSBAW be true in virtue of (1): the claim that there’s more than one best actualizable world? Yes. The problems encountering this scenario only arose when we held AO as true.¹¹⁰ Modal space is not left impoverished if (1) is true and AA is true, because God doesn’t actualize (or have to actualize) *only one* member of this group of equally best worlds. God actualizes all, but not only, members of *G*.

In summary: if theists adopt AA, they are free to endorse either NSBAW or its denial. If they wish to endorse NSBAW, they are able to account for its truth in terms of either (1), (2), or (3). For, (1), (2), and (3) are all viable on AA. Therefore, theists should replace AO with AA.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ There may of course be other reasons for rejecting these positions which have not had a bearing on our discussion.

¹¹¹ Some authors have recently advocated something similar in spirit to AA in response to the (related) ‘less-than-best problem’ – the problem that PB entails our world is as good as any other actualizable by God). See, e.g., McHarry (1978) and Almeida (2011). This chapter provides a different and significantly more detailed argument for the claim that theists should accept GR than the one Almeida gives. Almeida’s paper is mainly a *defence* of that thesis, rather than a positive argument *for* it. Also see Hudson (2006), whose response is similar in spirit, if not in letter. The argument offered here is stronger than the ones these authors offer because (unlike theirs) it is buttressed against the response that we could simply deny there’s a best actualizable world. Mine shows that problems ensue even if we deny this, given AO. Also, mine differs in that it’s presented as an argument against DI. My argument also bears some similarities to that made by Kraay (2010; 2011). §5 explains why I take his to be invalid and how it differs from mine.

Could it be said, though, that the move from the conclusion that AO is untenable to the further conclusion that AA is true was too quick? Perhaps there's a third, yet unconsidered, option on the table: that God actualizes *more than one, but not all* worlds. I think we can dismiss this option quite swiftly. If God actualizes some worlds and not others, then either there is some principled reason underlying God's decision to actualize the worlds he does, or there isn't. If there *isn't*, then there will be an intolerable arbitrariness in God's choice. However, if there *is*, then although contingency doesn't disappear completely, we will again leave modal space significantly depleted, which isn't what we want from a modal theory.

4.2. From DI to GR

The preceding argument was presented as one against DI. However, the main dilemma that NSBAW and its negation are both untenable result from AO. Couldn't partisans of DI embrace my argument and reject AO without giving up on their view? At the beginning of §4 I said that AO is a commitment of DI since, according to this view, merely possible worlds are uninstantiated divine ideas. But, the argument only goes through if the proponent of DI *has* to think this. Why can't the proponent of DI just say that, after all, the collections of divine ideas that make for worlds are not, in the main, uninstantiated? Why not say that *all* worlds are concretely instantiated? Well, if the proponent of DI *does* say this, then they have the worlds (collections of divine cognitions) actualized by God in addition to their actualizations: the concrete universes they accurately represent. Only one (sufficiently abundant) set of entities is needed to fulfil the truth-conditions for modal statements: we need there to be *a* representation of the way the world could be for every way the world could be. Here though we have *two* sets of entities suitable to play this role. If DI *and* AA are true, then either one of these sets of entities is entirely modally redundant, or the truth-conditions for modal statements are doubly met. However, since, in the imagined scenario, the universes are explanatorily posterior to the divine cognitions which represent them (the divine cognitions explain why the universes are as they are) the right thing to say is that the former is true: from a modal perspective at least, God has no reason to create universes besides our own. Given this, theists should give up a picture whereby universes are concrete instantiations of some sort of prior models and worlds *qua* divine ideas should be rejected.

Now, of course, *modal semantics* doesn't give us reason to postulate divine mental representations of universes, but isn't there another reason to posit them: so that God's creative intention has content? Plausibly, God's creation must have been made to instantiate

a model, because any genuinely creative and purposive act is the outcome of some (logically) prior idea the creator had. If so, these entities are not an unnecessary posit.

Is the claim that any genuinely creative and purposive act must be the instantiation of some prior idea the creator had fully general? It seems not. Consider some of the artwork produced by abstract expressionists. Such artworks are often described as ‘spontaneous’, ‘unplanned’ and ‘subconscious’ – but creations nonetheless; and while it may be retorted that even though some abstract expressionist art *is* in fact carefully planned, there do appear to be at least some counterexamples to the claim, suggesting that it can’t be a *necessary* condition of something’s counting as a creation that it be the realization of some fully determinate prior intent. So perhaps God spontaneously created the universes which make up modal space and never looked to anything as the archetype of his act.

However, while realization of some prior intent needn’t be a necessary condition of human creative acts, it is more plausibly a necessary condition of *divine* creative acts. For, as we said in §3, God is the paradigm rational agent; it just makes no sense to speak of him acting without intention and purpose: ‘[d]ivine ideas ensure the full rationality of creation – [they ensure that] God knows what he is doing when he creates’ (Robson, 2008: 13).¹¹² Nor would it make sense for us to view God as morally impeccable, or to praise him for his creative act, if it was ‘spontaneous’ and not wholly intentional. We saw above that such intuitions motivate the Euthyphro dilemma: it’s pointless to praise God if it’s trivially true that he chose the good. One who agrees with this may well find the claim that the source of any value attributed to God’s choices lay in their according with some *reason* compelling.¹¹³

The following should be accommodated by this view. First, while it’s often the case that for lesser beings, such as humans, intentions and the results thereof come apart, this is not so for God. God is omnipotent and independent. As such, God doesn’t depend on there being an absence of defeaters to his intentions for their coming to fruition (we saw this in Chapter One). Anything God wills is so, and will be *exactly* (qualitatively) as he wills it to be. Further, if God is timelessly eternal as the classical model has him be, then there could be no *temporal* priority of God’s intentions to their results – God’s creative act is timeless. So there are two good reasons to deny that God’s creative act is *subsequent* to antecedent knowledge of a prior model.

¹¹² This assumption is implicit in a dilemma raised by Sheehy (2006). See below.

¹¹³ If one thinks that the moral value of action lies in the intentions of the perpetrator, then one would have to think that if God is to be praised for his creation then he must have intended for those consequences to come about. If one is a consequentialist on the other hand, and thinks that the value of any action lies entirely in its consequences, then it’s hard to see why we should praise God at all.

There is another line of argument that we can use to counter the thought that God must look to some exemplar to know what to create. That is to appeal to the classical theological doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, according to which, God created out of sheer nothingness. Now, we mere mortals may be able to create things *in some ways* novel, we are rarely able to create anything *wholly* novel, and we do not ever create *wholly from nothing*. Aside from requiring tools to create with, we mere mortals rely heavily on the world around us for inspiration. Even the abstract expressionist who lacks a fully determinate prior idea of what they create will be influenced by, e.g., certain colours or emotions. God however, is able to create *ex nihilo*, and needn't rely on anything to aid his creation, including any kind of prior inspiration. So, it would be wrong to impose constraints on human creative action onto a being who can create *ex nihilo*. Once we see that God is, what Mark Ian Thomas Robson describes, 'the radical artist *par excellence*' (2008: 187), and recognise the 'full glory' of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, we realise we have positive reason to believe that God needn't look to an exemplar to know what to create. 'Creation is amazing, not because God is a good copier, but because creation arose entirely from God's love and power without exemplars and mental mediative material.' (*ibid.*: 207). If God were

simply copying from His mind[,] He would be giving external extra-mental reality to something that was previously entirely mental. Under this conception of creation, God copies out what is in His mind and by doing so gives it an external extra-mental reality it once lacked...this account of creation [is] deeply unsatisfying. The notion that creation is simply the replication of ideas in actuality seems to reduce God merely to a species of photocopier...Where is the novelty or serendipity in that? One wonders why God would want to create anything at all, its determinate reality...is already there in the region of His understanding...[Hence while] human creativity squeezes newness from so much, God pours novelty out of nothing. (Robson, *ibid.*: 11-14.)¹¹⁴

We've said that God should be seen as actualizing all worlds, *and* that divine mental representations of worlds should be dispensed with. Strictly speaking, these two claims are inconsistent. If there are no mental (nor abstract) representations of worlds, then there is no such thing as world *actualization*: we do not have many universes *and* a set of separate entities which accurately represented them. So, under the proposed model, we shouldn't say that God *actualizes* any world. Rather, God just creates a set of universes; these are all the possible ones; and they play exactly the same role divine cognitions play under DI. We can see, then, that for theists looking to adopt a possible world theory, GR looks well-suited to take the place of DI. For, recall that GR (whose canonical presentation is given by Lewis

¹¹⁴ Some working in aesthetics have even advanced *a priori* arguments to the effect that in a genuinely creative process, the end cannot be known by the creator; for in knowing the end, creativity is precluded. See, e.g., Tomas (1958), and Beardsley (1965).

(1986a)) is a view according to which there is no ontological difference between the cosmos we inhabit and those that are merely possible: *all* possible universes really exist; not just this one; and worlds represent different universes by *being* those universes. This allows theists to respect the important result gained from the argument of §3: that God should be seen as creating universes besides this one. It just made sense to frame the conclusion in terms of multiple worlds being actualized under DI simply because, under DI, by actualizing a world, God makes it the case that a particular universe exists.¹¹⁵

4.3. Actuality

Usually – outside the philosophy room at least – we don’t distinguish between actuality and existence. If I say, for example, “no tap-dancing turtle actually exists”, most would take me to mean that no such things exist *simpliciter*. Actualist accounts of worlds make no such distinction: according to them, *all* worlds are parts of actuality. However, unlike actualist accounts, possibilist accounts, such as GR, deny that what actually exists and what exists *simpliciter* coincide. Hence, in accepting that multiple universes *really* exist, the proponent of GR is not committed to the claim that more than one universe *actually* exists. To see this, we need to explain that GR takes the term ‘actual’ to be an indexical one: the world which is actual to some individual, *x*, is merely the one *x* inhabits. Just as the place which is *here* for me is the one I happen to be at, the world which is *actual* to me is the one which I happen to be at. All worlds are ontologically on par, so by saying (truly) that this one is actual, one is not saying something which singles out one world (our world) as ontologically privileged; one is simply signifying that *this* is their place in modal space. To say e.g., of a tap-dancing turtle that it’s possible but not actual is just to say that a tap-dancing turtle exists *elsewhere* – in some other universe. It’s akin to saying that there *is* such a thing, but it just happens not to be *here*.

¹¹⁵ In making the above points we undercut a dilemma advanced by Sheehy (2006), which he believes shows that theists cannot consistently say of God that he is creator of all worlds whilst adopting GR. His dilemma hangs on the assumption that God must create the worlds with some knowledge of their histories; and such knowledge requires God to look to some exemplar as archetype of his act – one which is either internal to God or external to God. If *external*, then, says Sheehy, ‘[d]ivine knowledge is dependent on worlds independent of the creative role and action of God, thereby suggesting a limitation on the nature of divine knowledge and on the nature of God’s creative role.’ (*ibid.*: 315). That is, since the possibilities are already represented by the external model, *contra* GR, the worlds are (or rather, their existing concretely is) entirely superfluous from a modal perspective. God is creating something that is (for want of a better phrase) *already there*. Further, *contra* theism, something – modality – is independent of God. If *internal*, then ‘[d]ivine knowledge is not knowledge of worlds as they stand independently before God; the worlds do not determine the content of what God knows’ (*ibid.*: 320). By undercutting the thought that God need look to an exemplar for his creative act, the dilemma doesn’t get off the ground.

Lewis disagrees that the claim that there *are* things that are *not actual* renders his view incoherent. According to him, the common sense usage of actuality can be sufficiently captured by the following three claims:

- (4) Everything is actual.
- (5) Actuality consists of everything that is spatio-temporally related to us, and nothing more (give or take some ‘abstract entities’). It is not vastly bigger, or less unified, than we are accustomed to think.
- (6) Possibilities are not parts of actuality, they are alternatives to it. (1986a: 99)

Lewis takes each of these to be on an ‘equal footing’. We saw in §2.3 that some take it to be analytic that existence implies actuality. Lewis disagrees. In his view, the above three claims taken together ‘fix the meaning of ‘actual’, but they go far beyond just fixing meanings. [And Lewis does not] see any evidence that the analyticity is concentrated more in some of them than in others.’ (*ibid.*: 100). If these ‘theses of common sense’ are on an equal footing, then the possibilist is no worse off than the actualist in terms of doing violence to our ordinary ways of thinking. For, while the possibilist, such as Lewis denies (4), they do not deny (6). The actualist, on the other hand, does not deny (4), but they do deny (6). And Lewis certainly seems right in saying that our intuition that everything is actual is at least no more secure than our intuition that what *might* have happened doesn’t concern how some part of the actual world *is*.

4.4. GR: Some Further Details

I’ve said that theists who want to adopt a possible world theory of modality should accept GR. I’ve also said that GR is a possibilist account: it takes merely possible worlds to be entities that aren’t part of actuality; and which are exactly the same kind of thing as our universe. But this far from tells us all we need to know about the account. Here, then, are some more details.

Following Lewis (1986), GR defines its worlds using two key notions: that of *being an individual*, and that of *being spatiotemporally related*. Suppose that for any collection of objects, there is a sum composed of those objects. Further, suppose that any sum of individuals is itself an individual. A possible world (universe) is a particular kind of individual, and a particular kind of *sum* of individuals at that. Under GR, an individual, *w*, is a world iff every part of *w* is spatiotemporally related to every other part of *w*, and nothing spatiotemporally related to *w* fails to be a part of *w* (Lewis, *ibid.*: 1-3). An individual, *x*, is,

then, part of a world, w , iff each part of x is spatiotemporally related to each part of w (*ibid.*: 69-81). Anything not spatiotemporally related to x is not part of the same world as x (*ibid.*). Putting this together with the points made in §4.3, any utterance of the form “this world is actual” therefore signifies that the world in which the utterance occurs is the one spatiotemporally related to the performer of that utterance; what is actual for an individual is just whatever is spatiotemporally related to them (*ibid.*: 92-6). Defining worlds in this way is supposed to give us a completely non-modal account of what it is to be a possible world. The fact that the word ‘possible’ appears in the name ‘possible world’ does not undermine this; as Cameron explains: ‘[t]he fact that the string of letters ‘possible’ appears here is no more significant than the fact that the string ‘ham’ appears in ‘hamburger’” (2012: 2). The point is that the key world-defining notions – *individual*, *is spatiotemporally related to*, *sum*, and *part* – are not in any way modal. An individual which is itself a sum of individuals all of whom are spatiotemporally related to each other may be labelled with the name ‘possible world’, but this is just a matter of stipulation.¹¹⁶

How do GR’s worlds represent? *De dicto* representation is simple. A world w represents that p (i.e., p is true *at* or *according to* w) iff p is the case at w (*ibid.*: 5-8).¹¹⁷ For example, a world represents that tap-dancing turtles exist by having turtles tap-dance exist there: it has them as a part. So, to see what’s true *at* a world, we just look at a world, and see what exists and goes on there. There will, then, be some world at which *there are tap-dancing turtles* is true, even though there are some worlds, such as our own, where such things fail to exist. This is because in ordinary cases, our quantifiers are restricted to a particular portion of reality. However, sometimes we might want our quantifiers to range over *everything*; that is, over *all* worlds, rather than one. We might do so when we want to talk about reality as a whole. Hence, depending upon context, *there are tap-dancing turtles* may

¹¹⁶ It’s important to note, however, that Lewis (*ibid.*: 71-8) recognises that, since this spatiotemporality criterion has some ‘unwelcome consequences’, it might need to be improved upon. For example, it rules out the existence of worlds at which there are disunified spacetimes, or nothing at all. However, the biggest problem with the spatiotemporality criterion as it stands, says Lewis (*ibid.*: 74-5), is that it depends upon there being one such thing as *the* spatiotemporal relation; and perhaps there is no such thing. For example, it could be that our world (along with certain others) is relativistic while others are Newtonian. In that case, if this means that the spatiotemporal relations we refer to in this world are different to those which exist in the Newtonian worlds, then those ‘Newtonian imposters are not to be called ‘spatiotemporal relations’, because that is the name we gave to the different relations which hold between the parts of our world.’ (*ibid.*: 75). Generally, then, what we call ‘spatiotemporal relations’ might not be what unifies *all* worlds; some worlds might be unified by analogous, yet different, external relations. In this case, Lewis may instead say that each world is *analogically* spatiotemporally unified – i.e., is unified by some set relations which are analogous to the spatiotemporal relations which hold in this world (and each other) in being natural, pervasive, discriminating, and external (*ibid.*: 75-6). A second option would involve saying that worlds are unified by *some* not strictly or analogously spatiotemporal natural external relation. This is simpler than the first option, but in being skeptical about the existence of the kind of relation it requires, Lewis (*ibid.*: 77-8), nonetheless finds the first more favourable. (More on this issue in Chapter Four.)

¹¹⁷ *De re* representation is not so straightforward, but this will be discussed at length in later chapters.

express a truth, even when uttered in this world. It may do so when the ‘there are’ is taken to range over everything *simpliciter*, for, there will, of course, be some portion of reality where there *are* such things. The nature of representation, then, also appears to be non-modal: a world represents that *p* by having a part at which *p*; no obvious modality here. There is, of course, much more detail we could give to the theory, and more will be added across the next few chapters, but this much will suffice for now.

Now, there are good reasons to think that theism is incompatible with GR; some such reasons are moral, others are metaphysical. However, since theists (who wish to adopt a possible world theory) have been given a compelling reason to prefer GR to DI, there is good reason for them to seek to reconcile the two positions. I turn, then, to deal with some of the most serious of these issues in the chapters that follow. Prior to that, I pause, in §4.6 below, to flag up one worry with the above argumentative strategy, before assessing an argument in some ways similar to it in §5.

4.5. A *Tu Quoque?*

I’ve argued that PB is true and considered at length what theists should say in light of PB if they accept AO. However, in the interests of fairness, I should likewise consider what theists should say in light of the PB if they accept AA. Indeed, it’s important that I should do so, for it’s not at all obvious that AA is consistent with PB. Plausibly, the claim that God only and always acts for the best is compromised when we suppose (as we do on AA) that God creates universes (actualizes worlds) that contain little to no happiness, unimaginably high levels of suffering, and other horrendous evils. If PB is true, then shouldn’t it be impermissible for God, *qua* morally perfect and omnipotent being, to actualize worlds that don’t meet some minimum standard of goodness? If so, God could not actualize *all* worlds. So modal space will be at least partially depleted after all.¹¹⁸ Some work needs to be done, then, to show that it’s possible for both AA and PB to hold. This is one of the problems I alluded to above, and it deserves a discussion in its own right. I’ll just note then, that it needs to be addressed, and will delay discussion of it until Chapter Five, where some of the moral issues facing theists adopting GR will be discussed in more detail.

4.6. Summary of the Argument Against DI

I’ll sum up the argument. Theists should accept PB. Because of PB, if there is a best actualizable world, God *must* actualize it. This, when – and *only* when – coupled with AO,

¹¹⁸ I thank an anonymous referee for *American Philosophical Quarterly* for raising this objection.

entails that there's only really one possible world, and this conclusion will be unacceptable to anyone who holds a common sense opinion about what modal facts there are. However, each of the three ways it might be false that there's a best actualizable world are also untenable when – and *only* when¹¹⁹ – coupled with AO: (2) is theologically unacceptable, and (1) and (3) are philosophically unacceptable (since they deplete modal space). To avoid this dilemma, I recommend that theists favour AA over AO. Since AA sits much more favourably with GR than DI, I consequently urge theists to favour GR over DI.

5. Kraay's Argument for Modal Collapse

Klaas J. Kraay (2010 and 2011) argues that if there is a best possible world then theism entails modal collapse – the thesis that the actual world is the only possible world. He also argues that if theism is true, there *will* be a best possible world, but such a world will be a *theistic multiverse* – a world 'featuring all and only universes worthy of being created and sustained by God' (2011: 361). The first part of Kraay's argument thus bears some similarities to the one given above. This section explains how Kraay's argument differs from mine. It shows that (i) Kraay's argument for modal collapse is invalid because it is missing a crucial premise; that (ii) Kraay is committed to denying that missing premise, and hence cannot supplement his argument with it; and that (iii) Kraay's argument for the existence of the theistic multiverse is no stronger than the arguments against it. The discussion will reveal that what I advocate above is an easier and much less controversial route out of the problem myself and Kraay are engaging with than the one Kraay offers.¹²⁰

5.1. Kraay's Argument

Below is Kraay's argument for his first claim – that theists should embrace modal collapse:

If there is a unique unsurpassable world, it is reasonable for the theist to expect that...it would be morally unacceptable for God to allow any other world to be actual...But if it is morally unacceptable for God to permit any world other than the unique best to be actual, it seems that this is the only world that could be actual – which is just to say that it is the only possible world. And this means that (if theism is true) nothing could possibly be otherwise than it is: *total modal collapse* ensues. (*ibid*: 364)

¹¹⁹ To be precise, these positions are untenable *for the reasons discussed*.

¹²⁰ Turner (2003) offers a position which is similar to Kraay's in several relevant respects. I take the points here to apply equally to him. For a detailed critique of Turner see Almeida (2008: 146-53).

Kraay (*ibid.*) suggests that we should take the following set of propositions to be inconsistent, and that their inconsistency helps to elucidate his argument:

- A1. Necessarily, there exists a being (God) who is essentially unsurpassable in power, knowledge, and goodness.
- A2. Every possible world is actual at itself.
- A3. Necessarily, if w is a possible world, then it is true at w that God permits w to be actual.
- A4. Necessarily, if it is true at w that God permits w to be actual, it is morally acceptable for God to do so.
- A5. There is a unique best of all possible worlds.
- A6. It is not morally acceptable for God to permit a worse world to be actual when a better alternative is available.
- A7. There are possible worlds other than the unique best.

Some clarification is in order. To begin with, A2 is ambiguous. It might mean to express that ‘actual’ is an indexical term: that *from the standpoint of each possible world, that world (and that world alone) is actual*. If GR as presented by Lewis (1986a), this reading of A2 is correct; otherwise, it is false. Under any version of actualism, A2 will mean something different since, as we’ve seen, under these theories ‘actual’ does not function as an indexical. Since these theories identify all worlds with certain constituents of the actual world, all worlds are actual (actually exist). However, one world alone is *actualized*: this is the world that represents our concrete universe entirely accurately. All worlds – whether actualised or not – do, however, *represent themselves as actualised*.¹²¹ A second possible reading of A2 then, one compatible with actualist realism, is that *every possible world represents itself as actualised*. Now, as it turns out, both possible interpretations of A2 – when taken together with the right kind of possible world theory – are true. However, since actualist realists do not accept the indexical theory of actuality, and since advocates of GR do not employ the predicate ‘is actualised’, there is no univocal meaning of A2. That is, there is no possible interpretation of A2 that could be accepted by possible world theorists of all types. We will, then, have to pick one interpretation and move on. Let’s go with the second reading and construe A2 as B2, stated below:

¹²¹ Indeed this turns out to be a theorem of actualist realist theories such as Plantingian actualist realism.

B2. Every possible world *represents itself as* actualised.

Since that which some world represents as being the case is possibly the case, what B2 tells us – and this, I take it, is what Kraay’s B2 is meant to tell us – is that every possible world is possibly actualised.

If B2 is the taken reading of A2 then some form of actualist realism will need to be accepted. Now, as noted, under actualist realism, all worlds (abstract representations) actually exist, and what actually exists exists *simpliciter*. Thus, saying that God permits worlds to be actual is equivalent to saying that God permits worlds to exist. The worlds (abstract representations) do exist, so it can’t be God’s ability to permit worlds to be *actual* that is at issue here, but his ability to permit them to be *actualised*. What is of concern is what kind of *concrete universe* God could create; and by permitting a certain concrete universe to exist, God permits a certain world (abstract representation) to be actualised. Thus, in A3, A4 and A6, we must read Kraay as saying *actualised* where he says ‘actual’:

- B3. Necessarily, if *w* is a possible world, then it is true at *w* that God permits *w* to be actualised.
- B4. Necessarily, if it is true at *w* that God permits *w* to be actualised, it is morally acceptable for God to do so.
- B6. It is not morally acceptable for God to permit a worse world to be actualised when a better alternative is available.

I will refer to the new set of clarified statements as B1 - B7 (B1, B5, and B7 remain unchanged from A1, A5 and A7, respectively). Kraay doesn’t offer an explanation as to why A1 - A7 are inconsistent, so we can’t reconstruct his reasoning to explain why B1 - B7 should be taken as such. However, Kraay must have had in mind something along the following lines: by B5 there is a unique best possible world *w**; by B7 there are possible worlds other than *w**; by B3 it’s true at these worlds that God permits them to be actualised; and by B4 it’s morally *acceptable* for him to do so. Yet, by B6 (which, presumably, is supported by B1), it’s morally *unacceptable* for him to do so.¹²²

B2 didn’t feature in the above explanation and it’s far from clear how it could have possibly done so. B2 tells us that all possible worlds represent themselves as actualised and hence tells us that all possible worlds are possibly actualised. Yet, ‘...is possibly actualised’

¹²² To be more precise, I’m assuming that Kraay would have reasoned through A1 - A7 in a parallel fashion.

is a *monadic* predicate and the predicate ‘...permits...to be actualised’ which features in B3, B4, and B6 is *dyadic*. Since it is the dyadic predicate that does all the work in this argument, we should ignore B2 as irrelevant.¹²³

Since B1 - B7 are jointly inconsistent, theists who accept B5 face a dilemma: reject B6, or reject B7.¹²⁴ Rejecting B7 requires a dramatic revision in modal intuitions, since it follows from the denial of B7 that everything that is the case is necessarily the case – *total modal collapse* (2011: 364). Rejecting B6 either requires a dramatic revision in the traditional conception of God, or it requires the theist to ‘give up compelling moral intuitions’ (*ibid.*). For, if B6 is false, then it is acceptable for God to do less than best. On the face of it, both of these options have consequences theists would want to resist. However, Kraay later makes the case that ‘modal collapse may well be less serious than might initially be supposed’ (2011: 365), and therefore urges theists to accept the second horn and reject B7. Theists who believe B5 and B6, says Kraay, should accept that the unique best world is the *only* possible world.

The argument takes a conditional form: *if* B5 and B6 are true, *then* B7 is false (modal collapse). To get us to accept the consequent, then, Kraay must get us to accept B5 which features in the antecedent. Kraay (2011: 365-6) offers the following support for B5. First, multiverses – worlds that comprise more than one universe – are logically possible;¹²⁵ second, God, being unsurpassable in knowledge, power and goodness, will ‘create and sustain all and only those universes worth creating and sustaining’ (2011: 365); third, there’s one possible world at which God does do so – call such a world a *theistic* multiverse; fourth, by the identity of indiscernibles, at most one world is a theistic multiverse; lastly, the theistic multiverse is an unsurpassable world. For, any world distinct from it must fail to comprise all and only universes worth creating and sustaining.

Since Kraay has argued that the theistic multiverse is the best possible world and that, under theism, if there is a best possible world, it is the only possible world, it therefore follows that the only possible world is the theistic multiverse.

¹²³ If B2 *did* have a role to play, the argument would be invalid.

¹²⁴ For, Kraay is of the opinion that theists are committed to B1, and that B2, B3 and B4 ‘seem unimpeachable’ (2011: 363).

¹²⁵ Multiverses are not to be viewed as *containers* for universes (2011: 365). Rather, each multiverse comprises a collection of God-created universes together with whatever uncreated entities there may be (e.g., numbers, and, of course, God himself); and no multiverse is anything *over and above* those entities it comprises.

5.2. How Does Kraay Propose to Recover Contingency?

Kraay suggests that the fact that the only possible world turns out to be a theistic multiverse provides the theist with a way of avoiding the dissolution of contingency modal collapse initially appears to require. For, the universes the theistic multiverse comprises can be utilised to provide a semantics for modality:

[T]o say that things could be otherwise is just to say that there is another spatiotemporally distinct universe in which things *are* otherwise. Universes...can vary in all sorts of ways...and these variances can perhaps anchor many of the familiar modal claims whose intelligibility seemed threatened by the claim that there is only one possible world. In fact, this picture of modality – on which modal claims are understood to refer to concrete, spatiotemporally isolated universes – is strikingly similar to a well-known theory of modality: David Lewis’s *modal realism*. (2011: 366-7)

Now, Kraay maintains from the outset that possible worlds are *multiverses* (collections of universes). He cannot, then, be meaning to suggest that *universes* now be understood to be possible worlds: to say that possible worlds are *both* multiverses *and* the universes they comprise would be incoherent.¹²⁶ Kraay is telling us that modal truth should now be evaluated in terms of what concrete spatiotemporally isolated universes there are, even though those universes aren’t possible worlds.

It’s hard to know what to make of this suggestion, especially since it’s not developed in any detail in either of Kraay’s papers. A possible world theory of modality usually tells us that *possible worlds* represent the different ways things might have been and thereby provide a grounding for modal truth. Kraay’s way of recovering contingency forces him to part ways with this: *universes*, not possible worlds, are doing the work here.¹²⁷ Firstly, then, since possibility and contingency have nothing to do with what possible worlds exist, but with what *universes* exist, one may well wonder in what sense Kraay’s ‘possible worlds’ are really deserving of that name. Kraay began speaking as if possible worlds represent ways things might have been, but now he’s telling us that universes do. Perhaps Kraay has in mind that possible worlds represent possibilities for *modal space itself* (though, if this is his view, he doesn’t make it clear that it is). If that *is* what Kraay intends, however, we should be reluctant to accept that the position he claims to have reached is really *modal* collapse. At best, the position reached would be best described as *meta-modal* collapse: the thesis that *total modal space* could not have been otherwise. But this would not be a *new* position to have reached;

¹²⁶ Consider: any proposition would then be possibly true iff it’s the case according to a universe *or* a multiverse, thereby leading us to contradictions.

¹²⁷ For Lewis worlds are universes, but not so for Kraay.

indeed, this thesis has already been advocated (see, e.g., Divers (1999)). Perhaps Kraay would respond that there really is no problem here: that there being only one possible world no longer requires modal collapse is precisely the line he's advocating. However, the point remains that, if it's universes, not worlds, that do the modal work, then Kraay is wrong to describe the position as modal collapse; at the very least, this is false advertising.¹²⁸

A further quandary arises when we consider what is supposed to be 'actual' on Kraay's view. Kraay has said that the actual world consists of many universes. The universe of which we are a part, then, is not (as we normally suppose it *is*) the full extent of actuality: actuality includes universes besides our own. This has unacceptable consequences. When I say, e.g., "I'm actually writing this sentence", my utterance will be both true and false: true according to this part of actuality (our universe); false according to another. To avoid this, two different notions of actuality could be admitted: universe-relative-actuality (what's actual from the perspective of the *universe* of which one is a part), and actuality-*simpliciter* (what's actual from the perspective of the *world* one's a part of). Again, it's hard to tell whether this is what Kraay in fact intends, since he says nothing about this issue; but it certainly seems Kraay *should* say this, if contradictions are to be avoided. Is there a problem, then, if Kraay can make this kind of move? Perhaps not. But it should be noted that here we have another way in which Kraay's theory will be much more revisionary than he would have us believe. Put more generally, the second point is this: if Kraay's multiverse view is to be shown to be a coherent and viable option for theists, much more needs to be done to spell out, *inter alia*, precisely what role worlds are supposed to play; whether a two-tier system of modality is what is intended; to what the 'actuality' operator applies, etc.

I will momentarily postpone further assessment of Kraay's attempt to recover contingency; other critical points I wish to raise tie in with my assessment of his argument for modal collapse, which I now turn to discuss.

5.3. Objections to Kraay's Argument

Has Kraay successfully shown that theism entails modal collapse? I suggest not. Firstly, there is not a relation of entailment between the antecedent and the consequent of Kraay's conditional claim that 'if B5 and B6 are true, then B7 is false'. Suppose there *is* a unique best world, w^* . Can there be possible worlds other than w^* even if it's morally impermissible for God to permit a worse world to be actualised when a better alternative is available? In

¹²⁸ Perhaps, if all we mean by 'modal collapse' is that there's only one possible world, and a possible world is allowed to be anything we bestow with that name, regardless of whether it is identified with a most inclusive way things might have been, then we may concede that it's *true to the letter* that what we have here is modal collapse; but it will certainly not *be true to the spirit* of the phrase that that's what we have.

other words, can it be that – *contra* what Kraay says – B7 could be true, even when B5 and B6 (and B1 - B4) are? Well, yes. As we saw in §3 and §4, if God can permit *at most one* world to be actualised, then, if B5 (there is a unique best world), and B6 (it's morally impermissible for God to permit a worse world to be actualised when a better alternative is available), it certainly *would* follow that there are no possible worlds other than the unique best (B7 would be false). For, if God can permit only one world to be actualised, then, if there is an objectively best possible world, w^* , God could not permit any world distinct from w^* to be actualised *on pain of failing to do the best thing*. (And God as characterised by B1 can't fail to act for the best.) Now, since God can't permit worlds distinct from w^* to be actualised, then since – by B3 – a world is only possible if God permits it to be actualised, worlds distinct from w^* are not possible.

However, if God can permit *more than one* world to be actualised, then, even though B6 and B5 are true, God can permit worlds distinct from w^* to be actualised without contravening B6 because such worlds are not *alternatives* to w^* : such worlds may be actualized *in addition to* w^* . Less-than-best does not *supplant* the best in such a scenario, meaning that God's permitting worlds distinct from w^* to be actualised (B7) is not inconsistent with B6. Therefore, B1 - B7 are *only* incompatible when coupled with the further assumption that:

B8. God can permit at most one world to be actualised.

Since Kraay's argument doesn't include B8, it's invalid.

Put another way, what modal collapse (MC) requires is that:

MC: There is a world w^* such that God must actualise w^* , *and* there is no world, w , distinct from w^* such that God could actualise w .

Yet, as we can see, MC is true (when and) *only* when, not only is there a world such that God must actualize it, but B8 is also true.

Kraay's argument could be made valid by inserting B8. However, Kraay makes assertions that are at odds with B8. Recall that Kraay said God will 'create and sustain all and only those universes worth creating and sustaining'. Any reason for thinking that God would create all *universes* worth creating would count equally in favour of God creating all *multiverses* worth creating. On the one hand then, Kraay's attempt to recover contingency puts B8 off limits. On the other hand, if Kraay *does* accept B8, he won't be able to recover

ordinary modal distinctions in the way he suggests. B8 tells us that God can permit at most one world (multiverse) to be actualised. If God can permit at most one *multiverse* to be actualized, then we should equally expect that God can permit at most one *universe* to be actualized. Yet, absent a principled reason for thinking that the principle won't apply when Kraay identifies ways things might have been with universes, the very problem Kraay was seeking to resolve will re-arise: we'll get modal collapse at the level of universes. Since no such reason is forthcoming, Kraay is left with a dilemma: accept B8 as a premise and have a valid argument, but then ordinary modal distinctions can't be recovered (leaving Kraay unable to avoid the problem he initially introduced); or, don't accept B8, in which case, the argument is invalid and so doesn't give theists reason to accept modal collapse. (Further, although the above shows that Kraay has (*by his own lights*) reason to deny B8, in Chapter Five we'll examine a separate argument to the effect that theists have reason to deny this assumption Kraay needs.)

5.4. B5 is Unmotivated

The second objection is that theists have no more reason to accept B5 which occurs in the antecedent of Kraay's conditional premise than to reject it. Kraay's only reason for thinking that such a theistic multiverse is possible is that such a multiverse is *conceivable*. However, it's equally conceivable that there is no such multiverse. To begin with, it's conceivable that disconnected spacetimes are impossible.¹²⁹ Further, Kraay has simply stipulated that it's possible that there's a multiverse that contains all and only universes worth creating. But it's epistemically possible that no multiverse does so. It's conceivable that for every multiverse that comprises universes worth creating, there's another multiverse that comprises one more universe worth creating; so that there's no single best multiverse (world); rather, there is an infinite sequence of improving worlds. Kraay has failed to rule out these epistemic possibilities, so the case for thinking a theistic multiverse is possible is at least no stronger than the case for thinking a theistic multiverse is *impossible*; theists have been given no compelling reason to accept the antecedent of Kraay's conditional premise.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ See Almeida (2008: 146-64) for some doubts concerning the possibility of a multiverse and the possibility of a theistic multiverse.

¹³⁰ Further, although Kraay has given us one necessary condition on something's counting as a possible world (he says its contents (constituent universes) must be logically compossible), he has failed to specify what the world-making relation is on the view that worlds are multiverses. What could it be? By hypothesis, spatiotemporal-relatedness won't do. Further, since multiverses are comprised of spatiotemporally disjoint universes, what principled reason could there be for taking one particular combination of spatiotemporally disjoint universes to make for a multiverse, and another not?

5.5. Another *Tu Quoque*

Suppose Kraay's arguments *were* successful. In that case, Kraay would not be able to provide theists with a way out of the problem he initially introduced. For (and this relates back to a point made in §4.1), the arguments Kraay gives could be run again to give us the conclusion that there is only one universe. Any reason the theist could have for thinking there is a best possible *multiverse* would be an equally good reason for thinking that there is a best possible *universe*; and if it's morally unacceptable for God to permit any possible multiverse other than the unique best to be actualised, then equally again, it should be morally unacceptable for God to permit any possible *universe* other than the unique best to be actualized, meaning that modal collapse ensues once more. Conversely, if theists have reason to think that there's a multiplicity of possible universes worthy of creation by God, then they should have equal reason to think that there's a multiplicity of possible multiverses worthy of actualization by God. Unless, of course, there's a principled reason for thinking that the cases are relevantly disanalogous. But Kraay has provided us with no such reason; and it's hard to see what reason there could be.

5.6. A Better Solution

Theists who believe there is a best possible world are not thereby left without a solution to the initial problem (that, since it's not morally acceptable for God to permit a worse world to be actualised when a better alternative is available, we get modal collapse). The solution was outlined in §4: deny B8. Once theists take exception to B8, then, even supposing that there is a best possible world and God must actualise it, since God may actualise other worlds in addition, modal collapse needn't ensue. That way of resolving the problem is much simpler, and much less controversial, than Kraay's.

6. The Intrinsicness Paradox Revisited

Having argued that theists should reject DI in favour of GR, something now needs to be said to redress the paradox of intrinsicness advanced in Chapter One. There we saw that there are two general reasons to think that the various divine perfections must be intrinsic to God; but, as it turns out, many divine perfections could not be intrinsic to anything. DI was advanced as a way of circumventing this problem: if modal truths are grounded in divine cognitions, then possession of the divine-making properties no longer depends upon fulfilment of certain *extrinsic* conditions. However, if theists cannot accept DI (given PB), then the intrinsicness paradox remains unresolved. In this section, I advance a different solution, one which is available to those who don't accept DI.

6.1. Aseity Again

Since the doctrine of divine aseity is part of what drives the intrinsicness paradox, we should subject it to some scrutiny. It's important to ask: just what does it take for a thing to be absolutely independent?

Surprisingly, this question's received little by way of detailed investigation in the contemporary literature.¹³¹ While it's a commonplace that aseity is, as Leftow puts it, the property of being '*in some sense* independent of all else' (2003: 270, emphasis added), this is not particularly informative. A little more helpfully we might characterise the doctrine of aseity as the conjunction of the claims that 'God does not depend on anything distinct from Himself for his existing' (Gould 2014: 2) and that God is 'independent from all other things for his being the being he is', (Mann 1983: 268). Still, though, detail is lacking. In order to have a genuine understanding of aseity we require, at a minimum, an understanding of precisely what kind(s) of independence is (or are) relevant here. Certainly, God must be causally independent, but this is clearly insufficient for genuine aseity. After all, it's consistent with an individual's being uncaused (or self-caused) that it later be destroyed by something outside of itself, or be the subject of some non-causal dependence relations.

While most of those discussing aseity happily stop at the general outline offered above, a small number of authors have recently attempted to clarify precisely what it is for God to be independent in the relevant sense(s). Walter Matthews Grant (2015), Jeffrey Brower (2009) and Alexander Pruss (2008) all say that it's sufficient for God to be *a se* that he does not depend on anything else for what he is intrinsically. Again though, more needs to be said here. As seen previously, it's a commonly accepted platitude about intrinsic

¹³¹ We should be surprised since the aseity doctrine has played such a central role in the development of classical theism. The idea that a perfect being must be maximally independent is often employed as a justification for postulating numerous other divine attributes. An *a se* being, it has been claimed, must not only be eternal, uncreated, and self-sufficient, but also necessary, omnipotent, simple, immutable, and free. The following reasons are often cited. Created entities depend causally on their creators; and facts concerning the existence of contingent beings must be explained; this means contingent beings depend for their existence upon whatever it is that explains them. Further, since God exists in a non-contingent manner, it follows that he is eternal; and so God's eternity too is explained by his aseity. Think also of God's being incorporeal. Leaving aside the complications of the trinity, God is without physical form because – unlike less perfect individuals – whose existence, presence, and ability to act in the world relies on their material bodies – God's does not. Perhaps even the more familiar divine properties can be thought to follow from aseity. Plausibly, what makes God free is that he exists independently of any constraints; and what makes God omniscient is that he exists independently of any possible barriers to possible types of knowledge. A second reason we should be surprised is that aseity is also a key component in many of the problems discussed within philosophy of religion: as we've seen, it underlies one half of the Euthyphro dilemma (we don't want to say that God depends on The Good); it's also, as noted, the chief motivation for simplicity, and therefore for all the problems that go with it. To this list we could add the problems associated with divine immutability and timelessness; Platonism; and so on. Most discussions associated with aseity tend to focus on *these* issues – i.e., its relation to other divine attributes and theistic paradoxes, rather than on how to analyse the term.

properties that they are possessed independently of an object's surroundings. Hence, if this is all these authors intend, their claim is a mere truism insufficient for characterising aseity.

Beyond these remarks, most other characterisations have included the claim that for God to be *a se* is for God to bear *absolutely no dependence relations*.¹³² For example, Brower reports Aquinas as being of the view that '[i]f God exists entirely *a se*, he cannot depend on *anything in any way at all*.' (2009: 107); Brian Davies says that something is *a se* if 'it does not depend for its existence on *anything* else...[I]f anything is God, it owes its existence to *nothing*...' (1985: 111); Leftow says that for God to be *a se* is for *nothing* outside God to explain God's existence (2010: 27); and Plantinga also takes it that an *a se* being possesses 'uncreatedness, self-sufficiency, and *independence of everything else*...' According to him, '[m]ost Christians claim that... God...depends upon *nothing at all*.' (1980: 1-2); most strongly, Douglas Pratt claims that '[a]seity denies *any form* of dependence' (1989: 14), 'God exists in a unique way – *not because anything else exists or because any conditions are met*, but *absolutely independently of any other thing or state of affairs*...' There are *no causes or conditions for God's existence*' (1984: 42). Why might these authors have made these claims? Brower notes that 'both Augustine and Anselm defend divine aseity on the grounds that *dependency on another* is always an imperfection, and hence must be excluded from our conception of God' (2009: 107). For example, in his *Proslogion*, Anselm reasons that a thing is more perfect to the extent that it is self-sufficient. So it's taken as something of an axiom, then that *any dependence relation confers an imperfection on the dependee*, and this is supposed to explain why God – being maximally perfect – must be in *absolutely no way* dependent.

Is the property of bearing absolutely no dependence relations one that could possibly be instantiated, though? A simple argument by *reductio ad absurdum* shows that it is not; this way understanding of aseity renders it an incoherent attribute:

- P3. An *a se* being bears absolutely no dependence relations; it is *unqualifiedly independent*. (Supposition for *reductio*)
- P4. *Being unqualifiedly independent* is an extrinsic property.
- P5. Properties possessed in an extrinsic manner are possessed in a dependent manner.
- P6. Any individual who possesses the property *being unqualifiedly independent* bears at least one dependence relation.
- C2. An *a se* being is not unqualifiedly independent.

¹³² Emphasis added to the quotes that follow.

To remove the contradiction, one of the initial assumptions must be rejected. P5, being something of an analytic truth, is definitely safe. P4 is also undeniable: some x 's bearing absolutely no dependence relations is at least partially grounded in how things stand in x 's surroundings. So the only remaining option is to deny P3. This premise is motivated by the thought that for any individual, x , and for any way of being dependent, D, x 's bearing D constitutes an imperfection in x . However, if it's necessarily true that nothing could bear absolutely no dependence relations, then it's false that any way of being dependent constitutes an imperfection in the dependee; otherwise, absolute perfection would be incoherent. So aseity should not be characterised in terms of something's bearing absolutely no dependence relations; and we shouldn't consider it incompatible with God's perfection were he to feature as a dependee in at least some dependence relation(s). Indeed, the above argument shows that God *must* stand in at least *some* such relation(s). Most importantly, though, it shows that aseity itself is a globally extrinsic attribute: it at least partly consists in its bearer's lacking some kinds of dependence relations to things outside of itself. To see why this is important in addressing the intrinsicness paradox, recall that the following was a key assumption in the argument from aseity which partly motivated it:

IA:¹³³ Any individual who possesses aseity possesses the properties that constitute its nature in an independent (and so intrinsic) manner.

Since aseity is part of God's nature (indeed many view it as the *very cornerstone* of God's nature), and since aseity is itself globally extrinsic, IA must be false. It cannot be that for any x , x possesses aseity only if x possesses the properties that constitute its nature in an intrinsic manner if aseity is also part of that x 's nature! Hence, the argument from aseity must be unsound.

In his discussion of divine aseity, Mann writes that '[r]easonable theists can wrangle philosophically about some of [the] dimensions of aseity. Some of these quarrels will, I suspect, begin with the question, Do we really need to think of God as independent in *that* respect?' (2005: 57-8). I suggest that here is an appropriate place to *end* by asking that question. We've identified some dependence relations God must bear in order to be maximally perfect. But, certainly, we should not prefer that God does not bear them. As we've seen, these kinds of dependencies just are what makes for *perfection*, not *imperfection*.

¹³³ 'IA' stands for 'Independence Assumption'.

6.2. Essence Again

The argument from aseity wasn't the only argument advanced for the claim that the divine-making properties must be intrinsic, though. The argument from essence was also given in support of this claim. This argument had the following as its key premise:

EA:¹³⁴ If any F is essential to some x (is part of x 's nature), then F is intrinsic to x .

§6.1 shows that aseity is another part of God's nature which turns out not to be intrinsic to him. Given EA, this result could be viewed as adding to the problems for theism. However, another way to view the result would be to say that it provides additional evidence against EA. Again: one person's modus ponens is another's modus tollens, and this may simply be a case where theists have overwhelming reason to think that modus tollens wins. If EA is true, then aseity, omnipotence, etc., must be intrinsic to God (hence: paradox). However, since aseity, omnipotence, etc., are not intrinsic to God, EA must be false (paradox dissolved). EA might seem well motivated before we examine the various divine perfections, but since it flies in the face of some of the most central theistic commitments, theists have good reason to think it false. The argument in §6.1 showed not only that the additional reason for taking God's nature-making properties to be intrinsic to him must be misguided, it also showed that it's strictly impossible for aseity etc., to be intrinsic to God. Hence, since EA is now the only reason theists have for thinking that God's nature-making properties are intrinsic to him, and, since that God possesses these properties is absolutely unassailable for theists, EA has to go.

6.3. Powers Again

Finally, something needs to be said to address the argument from power-possession. I argued that omnipotence must be intrinsic because if it weren't, God wouldn't be as powerful as he could possibly be. However, since the argument shows that omnipotence *must* be intrinsic to its bearers (and since the notions of essence and aseity no longer give us any reason to think otherwise), the most powerful that anything could possibly be is *extrinsically omnipotent*. Therefore, since there's no possibility of being more powerful than extrinsically omnipotent, there's no reason to think that God can't possess omnipotence extrinsically.

¹³⁴ 'EA' stands for 'essence assumption'.

6.4. How Should We View God's Nature?

There's significant philosophical reason for theists to abandon the commonplace assumption that God's nature is intrinsic to him. The orthodox view should be replaced with one whereby God's nature is seen as deeply and importantly bound up with the world that surrounds him. Part of what it is for something to be God is for it to stand in certain relations to its surroundings, so it's wrong to think that God's nature can be properly understood without taking into consideration how the world is apart from him. Aseity, then, should rather be seen as the property of being free from *certain kinds* of dependence relations.

This type of strategy – restricting the scope of a divine property in the face of certain paradoxes – should not be unfamiliar to theists. Consider omnipotence. I said in the previous chapter that almost no-one accepts that possession of this property amounts to having the power to do anything *simpliciter*, for otherwise, problems loom. Similarly, others deny that divine omniscience must be taken to be the property of knowing everything *simpliciter* (see, e.g., Leftow (1990b: 314-5)). It's surprising that analogous moves haven't been made in the face of the difficulties which arise out of taking divine independence to be unrestricted. On the contrary, theologians and philosophers of religion have been keen to uphold the unrestricted independence thesis at all costs. However, we've seen that it's wrong to do so. Considering God to be independent without qualification is at least as incoherent as supposing that God can do anything without restriction.¹³⁵ For some kinds of dependence relations, then, the bearing of them no more constitutes an imperfection than does the inability to perform certain specifiable tasks.

The question of which types of dependencies maximal perfection *does* preclude thus remains unanswered. Although it's beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a comprehensive answer that question, there will later be discussions where the notion of divine aseity will have a bearing. For the purposes of those discussions, then, we should say at least something positive about what aseity might require.

One thing we could usefully note here is that the divine-making properties have been shown to be extrinsic in the following sense: possession of them depends upon (is at least partly grounded in) an *absence of* certain kinds of *impossibilia*. So we might be tempted to say that God's nature is independent in the following sense: possession of it is independent of the *presence of* any particular kinds of *possibilia*. However, the impossibility

¹³⁵ Perhaps it's even more incoherent than that. There's an easy answer to the 'can God create a task he cannot do?' type of question, and that's to say that if God can do *anything*, including the impossible, then of course he can create a task he cannot do and yet still be omnipotent!

(and so absence) of any particular impossibilia depends on what modal space is like most globally: something is impossible iff it doesn't appear in any possible world. (This is precisely what enabled the Dlist response to the intrinsicness paradox described in §2.6.) So, given that the impossibility (and hence absence) of any particular impossibilia depends on what possibilia are possible, we can't drive a wedge between the two and say that God is dependent upon the absence (impossibility) of certain kinds of impossibilia but not upon the presence (possibility) of possibilia.

Nonetheless, my contention is that aseity can sensibly be seen as demanding that God's nature be intrinsic in the following respect: it doesn't depend on the *actuality* or *non-actuality* of any *possibilia*. This *does* drive a wedge, and filters out the dependencies which we have described God as having to bear, for those required the *actual* absence of certain *impossibilia* (and the absence of certain impossibilia from non-actual worlds). Further, this captures what is surely (at least one of) the key senses in which God is more independent than non-divine things. What separates God from non-divine things in terms of independence is that non-divine things are, *by their very nature*, ontologically dependent upon God: so any non-divine thing, *x*, is by nature such that God is actually present. God, however, is not by his very nature, ontologically dependent on any non-divine thing, and so, is not by his nature such that any particular non-divine thing is present.

If I'm right that this is, after all, what was really important for us to capture, then since we have, thus far, not had any reason to think that God's nature isn't independent in this respect, we could just introduce a new term – call it **-intrinsicness* defined thus:

- (8) F is **-intrinsic* to *x* iff neither the actual presence of something(s), nor the actual absence of any *possible* thing(s) distinct from *x* partially grounds the fact that *x* is F.

Given this, whilst it's strictly-speaking false to say that the divine-making properties are *intrinsic* to God (and so, wrong to think that aseity demands this), we can speak truly when we say that aseity requires God's nature-comprising properties to be possessed **-intrinsically* as defined by (8).

7. Conclusion

§2 showed that DI has a number of virtues in its favour which make it look *prima facie* more amenable to theism: in addition to giving theists wanting to adopt a possible world theory of modality a way to respect the sovereignty thesis; it also offers theists a solution to the

paradox of intrinsicness advanced in Chapter One. DI also has certain theoretical advantages over other ersatz accounts of possible worlds: its worlds are concrete, rather than abstract; and there's less mystery surrounding the question of how its worlds represent. Most importantly though, it looks to have an at least not implausible claim on being able to reduce the modal to the non-modal. However, §3 showed that theists should accept PB, and this makes DI untenable: PB requires that, if there is a best actualizable world, God *must* actualize it; and this, when – and *only* when – coupled with AO, gives rise to modal collapse. However, each of the three ways it might be false that there's a best actualizable world are also untenable when – and *only* when – coupled with AO. §4 argued that to avoid this dilemma, theists should replace AO with AA. Since AA fits better with GR than DI, theists should accept GR over DI. §5 evaluated a similar line of argument from Kraay and found it wanting. This discussion highlighted that the 'multiverse' solution to the 'less-than-best' problem is not preferable to the proposal that theists adopt GR; it also showed precisely what would be needed to reach the conclusion that theism entails modal collapse.

Theists adopting GR cannot respond to the intrinsicness paradox in the same way as proponents of DI. However, §6 showed that the paradox can nonetheless be dissolved in a different way: by restricting divine independence. Nonetheless, a number of issues must be worked through before we can conclude that GR is viable under theism. We turn then, to address some of these in the next three chapters.

3

Transworld Divinity

1. Introduction

If theists subscribe to a GRist theory of worlds of the kind Lewis advocates, then they must decide what God's relation is to the worlds it posits. There are at least two types of relation we might be interested in. One, given classical theism's commitment to the thesis of divine sovereignty, we might wonder whether God can be in any sense causally responsible for the existence of these worlds; if not, might there be some form of non-causal dependency of the worlds upon God? Two, we might ask where God is located in respect to these worlds.¹³⁶ There are three available answers to this second question: (i) God exists in – that is, literally inhabits – all worlds, (ii) God exists only in some worlds, and (iii) God exists in no worlds. How can theists decide which is true? At least two factors will bear on the answer given. First, since it's a central tenet of classical theism that God exists necessarily, the answer given must allow for the truth of the following proposition:

N: God necessarily exists.

It must also, of course, allow that God (necessarily) possesses the other divine perfections. Second, what answer can be given might be constrained by the theist's prior commitment (should they have one) to the question of God's spatiotemporality. For, as we've seen, GR defines worlds as maximal mereological sums of spatiotemporally related individuals; these spatiotemporally related individuals are its parts. Hence, an individual, x , exists *in* a world, w , iff x is a *part* of w ; and x is a *part* of w iff x is a *spatiotemporally related individual* – one who has all of its parts spatiotemporally related to other parts of w and none of its parts spatiotemporally related to anything not in w . As such, if the theists takes God to be non-spatiotemporal, only option (iii) is available to them; if the theist takes God to be spatiotemporal then they must maintain either (i) or (ii).

¹³⁶ I use the term 'where' loosely, since if God is non-spatiotemporal, he'll have no location in the ordinary sense of the word.

What are theists to do, though, if these two guiding factors come into conflict? What if, for example, they take God to be spatiotemporal, but neither (i) nor (ii) is compatible with N; and what if they take God to be non-spatiotemporal, but (iii) is incompatible with N? I think that, in such scenarios, accommodating the truth of N should take precedence over any prior commitments to the question of God's spatiotemporality. For, while there have been some (e.g., J.N. Findlay (1948)) who've found the concept of a necessarily existing being absurd, necessary existence is traditionally thought to be contained in the very concept of an absolutely perfect being,¹³⁷ and this fact plays an important role in natural theology.¹³⁸ The question of God's spatiotemporality, however, is not so easily decidable. For, while divine timelessness has a strong pedigree: Boethius, Augustine, Aquinas, and Anselm all advocated the view; as have a number of prominent contemporary philosophers of religion – such as, Leftow (1991), and Stump and Kretzmann (1981); and while such authors take it that being non-spatiotemporal follows from perfection just as divine necessity does (see, e.g., McCann (1993) for some unwelcome features of divine temporality),¹³⁹ if God *is* non-spatiotemporal, then one faces significant difficulties in explaining how God can be related to the world, act within it, cause anything, respond to free creaturely action, or perhaps even experience thought.¹⁴⁰ For this reason, in advocating divine atemporality, Leftow, Stump, and Kretzmann have made sure to insist that God's timeless eternity possesses some of the features of temporal duration. However, despite their efforts, the idea of a *timeless duration* looks plainly contradictory.¹⁴¹ So, we can say that, in comparison to necessary existence, if divine timelessness *does* follow from absolute perfection, it is at the least not so obvious and uncontroversial that it does. With this in mind, I submit that N is not – and divine spatiotemporality is – negotiable for the theist.

Over the next two chapters, I examine what the theist's answer to the question of what God's relation to the worlds GR posits should be solely by considering which of (i), (ii) or (iii) best accounts for N and the other divine perfections. I will leave aside the debate concerning divine spatiotemporality. Across these chapters, we will witness that whether

¹³⁷ See Leftow (2009a: 23-25) for arguments for God's necessity.

¹³⁸ That necessary existence is contained in the very concept of perfection underlies all versions of the ontological argument, and that God exists necessarily underlies some versions of the cosmological argument.

¹³⁹ Briefly: a perfect being exists *a se*, and by some accounts, is immutable. If temporal, God persists through time either by perduring (having different temporal parts located at different times), or by enduring. If God *endures*, he will be subject not only to time's passage but also to change and, hence, will not be immutable; if God *perdures*, he will not be independent if wholes depend ontologically on their parts.

¹⁴⁰ An additional worry is this: once God is accepted as atemporal, it's hard to resist the thought that temporal reality comprises a four-dimensional block. On such a view it's hard to see how any actions can be free: God eternally observes all times and hence eternally knows what goes on at those times; since knowledge is factive, what happens at all times is eternally fixed. See Rogers (2007) for a response to this.

¹⁴¹ See Rogers (1994) for an excellent critique along these lines.

one agrees with (i), (ii) or (iii) depends upon what account of *de re* representation is adopted. I will also examine in what sense (if any) GR's worlds can be said to depend upon God.

2. Interpreting N

Assuming GR, how should we interpret N? N is a *de re* modal claim, since it concerns a particular individual. So we should start our enquiry by considering what the neutral possible world analyses of *de re* modal assertions are. Then, we can proceed and determine what the appropriate GR interpretation of the neutral analysis is. The neutral possible world analyses are as follows: an individual, x , is possibly F, iff there is a world, w , according to which x is F; x is necessarily F iff for any world, w , x is F according to w ; x necessarily exists iff for all worlds, w , x exists according to w ; and x contingently exists iff there exist two distinct worlds, w and w^* , such that x exists according to w and x does not exist according to w^* . Hence, the neutral possible world analysis of N is:

N1: According to every possible world, God exists.

Recall that GR tells us that there are worlds that don't actually exist. GR will tell us, then, that N1 is true iff for every world, w , actual or not, w represents God – the divine individual existing in our world – as existing at w . So how, on GR, does a world, w , actual or not, represent *de re* of an individual that it exists at w ?

Let's start by considering how the actual world represents. On GR, what's true *according to* our world is a direct function of what is true *of* our world: our world represents exactly what is true of it; and what is true *of* a world, w , is a matter of what w 's parts are (since worlds just are maximal mereological sums of their parts). Thus, our world represents, e.g., me as existing at it by containing *me* (and the whole of me) as a part. What we might reasonably expect then, is that for *any* world, w , to represent, *de re*, of me that I exist at w , w must contain *me* as a part. If that thought's right, GR would say that an individual, x , exists at (at least) one world iff the whole of x is identical to a part of some world, and that x exists at more than one world iff there are at least two worlds, w_1 and w_2 , such that whole of x is identical to a part of w_1 and the whole of x is identical to a part of w_2 . Let's call this view – that an individual exists according to more than one world by virtue of being *numerically identical* to parts of more than one world (which are thus, by transitivity of identity, identical to each other) *transworld identity* ("TI"). Under TI, *de re* modal claims concerning an individual, x , are analysed in terms of what happens to x (*numerically the same* x) in other worlds. If

representation *de re* does work by means of TI, then the GR interpretation of N1 is: $\forall x[Wx \rightarrow \exists y[Pxy \ \& \ x=God]]$.¹⁴² Or, in ordinary terms:

N2: God is a part of every world.

If N2 is the correct way for those who subscribe to GR to interpret N1, then (i) will be true: God's existing necessarily will be grounded in God's being a part of every world; and this in turn will mean that God is wholly present and wholly located *in* each and every world. To use Lewis' phrasing (1986a: 198), God will lead many different lives. This theory (of what it means to exist according to multiple worlds) is the modal analogue of the temporal theory of endurance and of the spatial theory of entention. Under endurance theory, objects persist through time by being wholly present at each moment at which they exist. Under the theory of entention, at least some things extend across space by being wholly located at every spatial region at which they are located. Here, things exist across modal space by being wholly present at multiple worlds.

The above reasoning shows why TI has *prima facie* plausibility; it seems to be the simplest, most uniform way of interpreting a claim like N1. Indeed, Lewis himself notes (*ibid.*: 198) that this would be the simplest way for representation *de re* to work. However, in its present form, Lewisian GR does not dictate that in order for a *non*-actual world, *w*, to represent that an actual-world inhabitant, *x*, exists, at *w*, *w* needs to contain numerically the same *x* as a part;¹⁴³ in fact, as Lewis presents it, GR explicitly precludes one and the same (possible) individual being (wholly) in (*part of*) more than one world.¹⁴⁴ Lewis states 'there are no spatiotemporal relations at all between things that belong to different worlds... Nor do they overlap; they have no parts in common' (*ibid.*: 2). But *why should* GR preclude TI?

3. TI & Accidental Intrinsic

Here's one reason why GRists might want to deny TI. If individuals with intrinsic accidental (contingent) properties (or parts) *did* have transworld identity, they would contravene Leibniz's principle of the Indiscernibility of Identicals, according to which, if two things are

¹⁴² Where 'W' denotes the property *being a world* and 'P' denotes the parthood relation.

¹⁴³ Rather, what the theory *does* maintain is that in order for a non-actual world, *w*, to represent that one of the inhabitants of our world, *x*, exists, *w* must contain a counterpart of *x* as a part. What is meant by this will be explained in the next chapter, where we'll explore counterpart theory more fully.

¹⁴⁴ It follows from Lewis' acceptance of unrestricted mereological composition that there are individuals which are *partly* in more than one world but are not *wholly* in any. However, while these individuals can rightly be referred to as transworld individuals, they are not *possible* ones, since, as Lewis notes (1986a: 211), an individual is possible iff it exists *wholly* in some world.

numerically identical, they have all of their intrinsic properties in common. Suppose that in world w_1 Pegasus exists and has the intrinsic accidental property *having four legs*. The TI theory of representation *de re* analyses this as follows: there is a world, w_2 , which is not identical to w_1 , in which Pegasus (numerically the same individual as exists in w_1) is wholly present and has three legs. By the Indiscernibility of Identicals, Pegasus in w_1 can't be the numerically same individual as the Pegasus who we're referring to in w_2 , call them Pegasus*, since Pegasus and Pegasus* don't have all of their intrinsic properties in common. Therefore, TI conflicts with the Indiscernibility of Identicals.^{145, 146}

Nonetheless, Cameron suggests that '[s]ince God plausibly has His intrinsic properties essentially [that is, non-contingently], there is thus no barrier to even the [GRist] claiming that He literally exists in more than one world – indeed, that He exists in every world.' (2009a: 100). For, there's no reason to think that God's existing *in* every world would contravene the Indiscernibility of Identicals. If Cameron's right, the Indiscernibility of Identicals gives theists adopting GR no reason not to interpret N1 with N2. Indeed, this point might well be one that Lewis would agree with. For, Lewis appeals to the same reasoning in the case of universals:

If indeed there are no accidental intrinsics to raise a problem, then overlap confined to the sharing of universals seems entirely innocent. And also it seems inevitable, if there are universals at all. So my rejection of overlap must be qualified: whatever the universals may do, at any rate no two worlds have any particular as a common part...[Hence,] what is true of a universal according to a world is what is true of it, when we restrict quantifiers to that world.¹⁴⁷ (1986a: 205)

It seems entirely plausible that *universals* have no intrinsic accidental properties. But is it true that *God* has none? Pre-modern theologians, such as Augustine and Aquinas, would certainly take this as true.¹⁴⁸ However, one potential reason to think it false comes from God's beliefs. Plausibly, for any proposition, p , such that God believes that p , God possesses the property *believing that p* in an intrinsic manner. Since each world varies, some of God's beliefs will vary between different worlds. Problematically, then, God's mind will exemplify

¹⁴⁵ TI is compatible with the Indiscernibility of Identicals so long as one adopts the hyper-essentialist theses that (a) every individual has its intrinsic properties essentially and (b) every individual has all of its parts essentially. However, endorsing TI was invoked to provide us with an analysis of the claims that particular individuals could have had *different* properties or parts. Lewis discusses these points (1986a: 198-209), as does McDaniel (2004: 139).

¹⁴⁶ Responses have been offered to this problem, I postpone discussion of them until later.

¹⁴⁷ In that case, worlds would need to be unified by the spatiotemporal interrelation of their particular parts only (Lewis, 1986a: 209).

¹⁴⁸ Aquinas (1264/1995: Chapter XXIII, Book 1) gives several arguments in support of the claim that there is no accident in God.

a very large number of contingent belief-related properties. In w_1 , for example, God will have the intrinsic property *believing that Pegasus has four legs*; but since Pegasus might not have had four legs, there's a world in which God lacks this property.

Nonetheless, so long as theists are willing to maintain that whenever God has a belief about an individual, x 's, possessing a certain property, F, that belief always involves a further qualifying belief about where in the pluriverse x exemplifies F, the contention that some of God's beliefs must be possessed in a contingent manner can be resisted (and thus, any conflict with the Indiscernibility of Identicals can be avoided). For example, theists can say that God doesn't just believe that Pegasus is four-legged; God believes that Pegasus is *four-legged at w_1* . In *all* worlds, God can (and will) have this property; including those at which Pegasus exists and is not four-legged. So, in world, w_2 , where Pegasus has three legs, God will believe that Pegasus is four-legged at w_1 , even though he will also believe that Pegasus is three-legged at w_2 , and so on.

There's no reason to think that this kind of move would be *ad hoc*. Theists who take it that God has no intrinsic accidental properties must already accept that some of God's belief-related properties are similarly qualified, for otherwise God would have contradictory beliefs about the *temporary* properties of individuals. God doesn't plain believe both that Sarah is awake and that she's asleep. God believes that Sarah's awake at such and such times on such and such days, asleep at others.

4. GR, TI, & Modal Collapse

There are, however, bigger worries. We've seen that 'actuality' functions as an indexical under GR – it simply signifies one's place amongst the worlds. If God is literally present in (is spatiotemporally related to) all worlds, then all worlds are actual from God's viewpoint. This means that God will have contradictory beliefs about what is *actually* the case. God will believe, e.g., both that Pegasus is, and that Pegasus is not actually four-legged because God will be present in world w_1 where Pegasus is four-legged, and he will be present in w_2 where Pegasus is not four-legged: *both* worlds are actual from God's viewpoint.¹⁴⁹ But if there's anyone we can be sure of as not having contradictory beliefs, it most certainly would be

¹⁴⁹ Suppose the theist preferred an actualist view about worlds, and wanted to adopt the transworld identity account of representation *de re*. Would the same problem arise? Well, since, for actualist realists, all worlds are actual (actually exist), we should rephrase the question: would God have contradictory beliefs about what is the case *at the actualized world*? The actualist would have to say that he does: it will be true according to every world that God believes that what goes on at that world is what goes on at the actualized world, because every world, w , *represents itself as* actualized, even if is *de facto* false that that w is actualized. Otherwise, it would turn out as possible that God believes he doesn't exist at the actualized world.

God! Further, since God's beliefs are factive, it follows that for God, nothing is *merely* possible. Of course, these problems aren't limited to God. For any transworld individual, everything that exists and occurs in any world in which it exists will be actual from its viewpoint. For example, from my perspective, I will actually be both a professional footballer and not a professional footballer, since in one part of modal space I'll be wholly present and a professional footballer, and in another I'll be wholly present and not. Football, then, won't be a *merely possible* career path I could have chosen.

To avoid these contradictions, beliefs and facts about actuality could be world-relativised. For example, we could say that I am, rather, actually a professional footballer in w_1 and actually not a professional footballer in w_2 . Likewise, we could say that God believes that Pegasus is actually four-legged in w_1 , is actually three-legged in w_2 , and so on. However, this avenue is blocked off. For, these problems associated with actuality are really but a consequence of the fact that, in its current form, GR together with TI entails a loss of a distinction between worlds. We've seen that GR stipulates that, '[a]n individual x is a world iff any parts of x are spatiotemporally related to each other, and anything spatiotemporally related to any part of x is itself a part of x ' (Divers, 2002: 46). Given that the Lewisian GRist defines their worlds in this way, if any individual, whether it has intrinsic accidental properties or not, is (wholly) present at more than world by virtue of being part of more than one world, then both of those worlds will be spatiotemporally related; but GR dictates that distinct worlds are spatiotemporally (and causally) *isolated*. Hence, the particular individual in question does not exist at *distinct* worlds after all, meaning that there will be no distinct worlds to which facts about actuality could be relativised.

That Lewisian GR precludes TI can be shown more clearly by putting this reasoning into a formal argument from *reductio ad absurdum*:

- P1. Worlds are maximal mereological sums of spatiotemporally related individuals. (Premise, Lewisian GR)
- P2. Worlds are not spatiotemporally related. (Premise, Lewisian GR)
- P3. The spatiotemporal relatedness relation is transitive.
- P4. There exists an individual, x , such that there exists a world w_1 and there exists a world w_2 ; $w_1 \neq w_2$; x is part of w_1 and x is part of w_2 . (TI, assumption for *reductio*)
- P5. x is spatiotemporally related to the parts of w_1 , and x is spatiotemporally related to the parts of w_2 .

- P6. w_1 and w_2 are spatiotemporally related.
- C1. Lewisian GR is incompatible with TI. (Contradiction derived from P2 and P6)

In short, because GR identifies the worldmate relation with the spatiotemporal relatedness relation, no possible individual can be part of more than one world.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, if theism and TI were held together in conjunction with the GR analysis of a world, then it straightforwardly follows that there is only really *one* world: all individuals across all worlds (otherwise presumed distinct) will be spatiotemporally related to each other through God.¹⁵¹ But, to be sure, it seems GR with TI entails total modal collapse even if God doesn't exist; it will just be the case that the spatiotemporal relatedness of all worlds will come about in a less simplistic way.

For these reasons, Cameron is wrong to say that since the Indiscernibility of Identicals poses no barrier to the theist's acceptance of N2 (God is a part of every world), there is therefore *no* barrier to it. If N2 is to viable, one of the following (incompatible) theses must be rejected:

- (a) TI;
- (b) For at least one individual, x , x , inhabits more than one possible world;
- (c) Possible worlds are maximal mereological sums of spatiotemporally related individuals;
- (d) The spatiotemporal relatedness relation is transitive.

Theists who want to account for God's necessity in a way consistent with TI cannot reject (a) or (b). (d) seems *prima facie* compelling,¹⁵² so that just leaves (c). Could theists reject it? Well, there's no obvious reason why *all* who take possible worlds to be concrete entities no different in kind from the actual world must accept Lewis's precise definition of a world. Perhaps, then, theists can try make a TI analysis of N viable by redefining this term.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Lewis (1986: 208-9) makes a similar argument when he dismisses the possibility of there being branching worlds (worlds that share a common initial segment).

¹⁵¹ It is, though, hard to picture how certain individuals would be related: how far away would I be from a merely possible individual like Pegasus, and in what direction?!

¹⁵² Though there may well be reasons to deny that it is a necessary truth, as we shall see in §5.

¹⁵³ Indeed, Lewis (1986a: 209) himself notes that overlap could easily be accepted if a different, though less straightforward, account of how worlds are unified were endorsed.

5. Redefining the Notion of a World

Kris McDaniel (2004) advocates abandoning Lewis's definition of 'world' in order to make sense of GR with overlap (i.e., GR involving transworld individuals, and so worlds with overlapping parts – GRO, hereafter). It will be useful, then, to consider whether McDaniel's strategy is consistent with theism. If it is, there will be a way to make N2 viable.

On McDaniel's proposal, worlds are defined as isolated maximal regions of spacetime; they are not the maximal mereological sums of objects those spacetimes contain:

w is a possible world if and only if (i) *w* is a region of spacetime, (ii) every part of *w* is spatiotemporally related to every other part of *w*, (iii) no part of *w* is spatiotemporally related to anything that is not part of *w*. (*ibid.*: 147)

This means that spacetimes (worlds) are spatiotemporally isolated substantialist Newtonian containers; spacetimes don't ontologically depend on the existence of objects and events. Since spacetime regions *alone* are parts of worlds, unlike on Lewisian GR, material objects are not *parts* of worlds. Instead,

[a]n object *x* exists at a world *w* iff there is some region *R* such that (i) *x* is wholly present at *R* and (ii) *R* is a part of *w*; a region *R* exists at a world iff it is a part of that world (*ibid.*).

GRO invokes *compositional pluralism*: the thesis that there are two different fundamental part-whole relations. The first part-whole relation is a two-place relation for spacetime regions: a region of spacetime, *x*, can be part of a region of spacetime, *y*, *simpliciter* (not relative to anything). The second part-whole relation is a three-place relation for material objects. Part-whole relations for material objects are indexed to spacetime regions 'such that, for any region of spacetime *R*, it makes sense to ask of two objects *x* and *y* whether *x* is a part of *y* relative to *R*' (*ibid.*: 141). Property possession for material objects is also indexed to spatiotemporal regions: an object *x* has a property, *F*, iff there is a region of spacetime, *R*, such that *x* is wholly present at *R*, *R* is part of *w*, and *x* is *F* relative to *R*. For world occupants, then, but not for world-parts, there is no such thing as having a part or having a property *simpliciter*. There is only such a thing as having a part or having a property *relative to a spatiotemporal region*.

McDaniel explains that compositional pluralism needs to be invoked for two reasons. First, the part-whole relation (and property possession) for material objects (world occupants) needs to be world-indexed in order to overcome the problem of accidental

intrinsic discussed in §3. Suppose again that numerically the same Pegasus literally inhabits two distinct worlds, w_1 and w_2 , and that Pegasus has four legs and in w_1 , and three legs in w_2 . Since parts (and properties) are had relative to worlds, Pegasus does not have the incompatible properties *being three-legged simpliciter* and *being four-legged simpliciter*. Rather, Pegasus has the entirely compatible properties *being three-legged at w_1* and *being four-legged at w_2* . Formal contradiction is removed because properties are world-relativised. Second, the part-whole relation (and property possession) for spacetime regions (world parts) must be *non-world-indexed* in order that a non-circular definition of the term ‘worldmate’ can be given. For, suppose that the part-whole relation for space-time regions *were* world-indexed. In that case, says McDaniel, the GR analysis of ‘possible world’ is as follows:

w is a possible world if and only if (i) there are some x s such that each one of the x s is spatiotemporally related **at w** to every object that is one of the x s, (ii) none of the x s is spatiotemporally related **at w** to any object that is not one of the x s, and (iii) w is the fusion **at w** of the x s. (*ibid.*: 140)

And, if the GR analysis of a possible world is as expressed above, then GR can’t afford us with a *reductive* modal analysis. For, now an object, x , will be possibly F iff there exists a world w such that x exists at w and has the property *being F-at- w* . But, says McDaniel, the property *being-F-at- w* is *modal*, since it involves a possible world. Moreover, ‘endorsing [the above definition] is no better than saying that the x s belong to the same world if they are worldmates of each other.’ (*ibid.*).¹⁵⁴

With these aspects of the account in place, GRO proceeds to analyse *de re* modal claims as follows. Individual, x , is possibly F iff there is a world, w , such that x exists at w and is F at w ; x exists at w iff x is wholly present at a region R that is itself a part of w . x is necessarily F iff for every world, w , x itself exists at w ; x exists at w iff x is wholly present at a region R that is itself a part of w .¹⁵⁵ GRO thus interprets N1 in the following way:

N3: For every world, w , there is a region of spacetime, R, such that God is wholly present at R, and R is part of w .

¹⁵⁴ Issue could definitely be taken with this last claim, but I won’t digress to consider it. I’ll note, though, that McDaniel does accept (2004: 140, fn 6) that the analysis may well be not *wholly* uninformative – but that it cannot offer a proper *reduction* of modality even so; and that was supposed to be one of GR’s main selling points.

¹⁵⁵ McDaniel has to invoke a different account of *de re* representation for spacetime regions since these definitions imply that these entities – being worldbound – have all their properties essentially. McDaniel suggests using counterpart theory.

Crucially, N3 departs from N2 in denying that *God himself* is a part of every world. Under GRO, only spacetime regions are parts of worlds and spacetime regions are worldbound. (Hence, no two worlds have *any* parts in common on this view.) So we can accommodate (i) and have God literally inhabiting every world whilst avoiding modal collapse.

To fully assess whether N3 is a viable interpretation of N1, however, we must first clear up some of the immediate problems facing GRO – the theory which supports it. Before doing so, it should first be noted that theists who adopt GRO will have to accept as necessarily true the following claims: that (a) God is a material object, and (b) God occupies regions of spacetime. (a) must be true because only material objects (on this view) can occupy regions of spacetime; (b) must be true because it's necessarily true on this view – given how existence at a world is defined – that *every* material object occupies a region of spacetime. It should also be noted that since 'TI was earlier defined as the thesis that individuals exists according to more than one world by virtue of being numerically identical to *parts* of more than one world, McDaniel's view cannot, strictly speaking, accommodate TI. However, since McDaniel's view embodies the spirit of TI, I will stick with calling it a TI thesis. We can instead redefine TI as the thesis that individuals exists according to more than one world by virtue of being numerically identical to *inhabitants* of more than one world. This allows McDaniel's view to count as a TI thesis. It's just that, on Lewis' view, world inhabitants are parts of worlds; on McDaniel's view, they're not.

6. Modal Collapse Again?

One of the initial worries with GRO is that even the appeal to compositional pluralism will not avoid modal collapse. Consider: material object *O* exists at w_1 by occupying region r_1 which is itself a part of w_1 . *O* also exists at w_2 by occupying region r_2 which is itself a part of w_2 . *O* may not itself be a *part* of w_1 or w_2 , but the fact still remains that, by virtue of bearing different occupation relations, *O* is spatiotemporally related to w_1 , *and* is spatiotemporally related to w_2 ; since spatiotemporal relatedness is transitive, w_1 and w_2 (in addition to any other world *O* occupies) will be spatiotemporally related to each other.

There are two different responses McDaniel could make here. The first is to nuance the definition of a world. We can see from the above that there are two ways in which two things, x and y , might be spatiotemporally related. One way is for x to be a material object, for y to be a spatiotemporal region and for x to bear the *occupies* relation to y . Another is for x to bear an external distance relation to y which is unmediated by any material object. Suppose two spatiotemporal regions, r_1 and r_3 , are one metre apart at their closest point,

and that spatiotemporal region r_2 is the most inclusive spatiotemporal region existing between them (suppose r_2 is immediately to the left of r_3 and immediately to the right of r_1). Further suppose that material object O occupies r_2 . r_1 and r_3 are thus spatiotemporally related to each other through both O and r_2 . That is, it could be seen that both O and r_2 mediate spatiotemporal relations between these two regions.

Now, instead of using plain spatiotemporal relatedness to unify worlds, worlds could be unified by the transitive closure of distance relations which are *unmediated by material objects* occupying certain regions (in personal correspondence, McDaniel refers to such relations as ‘perfectly natural external distance relations’). Thus, while O might wholly occupy r_1 and r_2 , unless r_1 and r_2 instantiate an external distance relation *unmediated* by a material object (or are elements of a *chain* of such unmediated distance relations), they won’t be parts of the same world, even if they are (by virtue of being occupied by O) in *some sense* spatiotemporally related.¹⁵⁶ This way, parts of what are putatively distinct worlds won’t collapse into a single world.

The second option is to deny that spatiotemporal relatedness is transitive. In §4 I noted that the transitivity of spatiotemporal relatedness is *prima facie* compelling, but it cannot be an *a priori* truth; if it *were*, then the possibility of branching time would be ruled out, but many would have it that branching time *is* possible, or at least, is not ruled out *a priori*. On models of branching time, time has a fork-like structure or topology, meaning that time is partially temporally disunified. There will be times t_1 and t_2 such that t_1 and t_2 lie on distinct branches of a tree-like structure, and there will be a third time t_0 such that it bears a temporal relation to both t_1 and t_2 : t_0 will be past with respect to both t_1 and t_2 , and so t_1 and t_2 will both be future with respect to t_0 . However, since t_0 is the point of branching that connects t_1 and t_2 , t_1 and t_2 will bear no temporal relation to each other (neither is past, nor present, nor future with respect to the other). So, while at t_1 it was the case that it will be the case that t_2 , this is just to say that an earlier time – t_0 – is (or was) temporally related to t_2 ; it’s not to say that t_1 is temporally related to t_2 . In the case of branching then, *temporal relatedness* is linearly transitive but non-linearly non-transitive.

With this in mind, what McDaniel could say is that (a) material objects have spatiotemporal properties and relations only in a derivative sense, and that as such, (b) they’re incapable of mediating spatiotemporal relations. That is, material objects can be spatiotemporally related to regions, but they play no part in mediating spatiotemporal relations between regions. Hence, spatiotemporal relatedness is only sometimes transitive:

¹⁵⁶ Thanks to McDaniel for this suggestion.

transitivity holds when the relata are entities of the kind *spatiotemporal region*, but does not hold when at least one of the relata is of the kind *material object*.¹⁵⁷ To take the above example, we are now imagining that *O* fails to mediate any distance relation between r_1 and r_3 : all the work is done by r_2 . Thus, since material objects are deemed incapable of mediating spatiotemporal relations, even if some *O* occupies two different regions which form parts of two distinct worlds, *O* will fail to relate those worlds.

Just to be clear how the two responses differ, then: under the first, world-collapse is avoided because worlds are defined in such a way that only a particular kind of spatiotemporal relation unifies worlds. Under the second, world-collapse is avoided because spatiotemporal relatedness is taken to be intransitive. Both responses seem adequate. However, it seems that the second is the one McDaniel *should* take because *it's the very essence of the substantivalist view* GRO posits that material objects cannot mediate spatiotemporal relations. If substantivalists *did* think of material objects as being capable of supporting spatiotemporal relations, then spacetime considered as an entity in its own right would be an unnecessary posit.¹⁵⁸

7. Analysing *De Re* Modal Claims

A second immediate worry with McDaniel's account concerns its analysis of *de re* modal claims. Suppose Fred has transworld identity, occupies w_1 and w_2 and is a father relative to w_1 and is childless relative to w_2 . From the perspective of w_1 we want to say that Fred could have failed to be a father *at* w_1 (on this view it makes no sense to say Fred could have been childless *simpliciter* because, on this view, there is no such property). Under GRO, Fred's being childless relative to w_2 is supposed to make this true. But we might reasonably wonder whether it can: Fred's being childless relative to w_2 only makes it true that Fred could have been childless at w_2 – not that he could have been childless *at* w_1 . If the only relevant property in play is *being childless at* w_2 (at no world does Fred possess *being childless at* w_1), then there's nothing to make true that Fred could have possessed *being childless at* w_1 . So by *relativising* properties, many *de re* modal claims will come out false.

McDaniel does not anticipate this objection to his theory in either of his papers, but perhaps that's because there's a simple enough response: in virtue of being childless relative

¹⁵⁷ Hence, there's a principled way of dividing the transitive from the intransitive spatiotemporal relatedness relations: transitive such relations hold (and only hold) between entities of one particular fundamental ontological category. It might look suspect if spatiotemporal relatedness were supposed to be only sometimes transitive between entities within the *same* fundamental kind, but that's not what is being proposed here.

¹⁵⁸ More on this in §8.

to w_2 , Fred is childless relative to *some* world, and in virtue of being childless relative to some world, Fred is possibly childless at w_1 . Although this isn't the neatest way of doing things, there's no obvious reason why McDaniel should be forbidden from employing this strategy.

8. Dualistic vs. Monistic Substantivalism

I noted that on McDaniel's view, worlds are ontologically independent Newtonian containers. The reason this view is otherwise known as *substantivalism* is because, according to it, spacetime is an entity (substance) in its own right: it is *fundamental*; not reducible to any other kind of entity, or derivative from relations holding between other kinds of entities. However, substantivalism comes in different forms. One thing distinguishing different forms of substantivalism is their particular stance on what the relation between material objects and spacetime is. On *dualistic* substantivalism, material objects are a substance (fundamental entity) distinct from spacetime regions; the relation between material objects and spacetime is one of occupation, or containment, and this relation too is fundamental. On *monistic* (or *supersubstantival*) views, the relation between spatiotemporal regions and material objects is one either of identity, or of constitution; otherwise, the monist maintains that there's no real relation between spacetime and material objects at all because the existence of material objects is denied. Jonathan Schaffer (2009) makes the case that, if we have reason to believe that substantivalism is true, then the monistic view – in particular the monistic view according to which material objects are *identical* to spacetime regions – the 'identity view' – is preferable to the dualistic one. If Schaffer's arguments stand up to scrutiny, then GRO is in trouble, for the dualistic version of substantivalism is built into its very fabric (this is what avoids world collapse).

To show that what he calls the 'identity' view is the preferable version of substantivalism, Schaffer offers no less than seven different arguments, which can be briefly summarised as follows. First, the primary role for material objects is to serve as a 'pin cushion' for properties. However, if substantivalism is true, spacetime can support properties on its own; 'spacetime is pincushion enough to support a propertied world.' (*ibid.*: 138). (This is the argument from *parsimony*.) Second, material objects possess exactly the same geometrical and mereological properties as the spacetime regions that support them. Under dualism, this seems an 'amazing' or perhaps even 'miraculous' coincidence; and it won't do to dissolve the mystery by denying that material objects have shapes in themselves because (a) shapes are paradigm cases of intrinsic properties, and (b), once we start relocating the properties of material objects in spacetime regions, material objects begin to look more and more superfluous (*ibid.*: 139). (This is the argument from *harmony*.) Third,

fourth, and fifth, respectively: each spacetime region contains at most one material object (the argument from *monopolization*); material objects must occupy spacetime regions (the argument from *materialization*); and material objects occupy at most one spatiotemporal region (the argument from *exhaustion*): the dualist, but not the identity theorist, must accept that these facts impose brute necessary connections on the world' (*ibid.*: 141). The final two arguments appeal to fundamental physics. Schaffer explains that the 'distribution of matter in General Relativity is not given via a list of material objects in occupation relations to regions. Rather the distribution is given by the stress energy tensor, which is a field, and thus naturally interpreted as a property of the spacetime.' (*ibid.*: 142). It's also the case in Quantum Field Theory that what we might call material occupants are in fact idealisations: really, all there is are excitation properties of spacetime (*ibid.*: 142-3).

If one is going to adopt GRO, one will need to have something to say by way of response to these arguments. One response to the argument from parsimony is this. Parsimony is a theoretical virtue *other things being equal*; we should prefer the simpler theory if we can. But parsimony can be trumped by other considerations. Considered on its own, dualistic substantivalism might look to be making unnecessary additions to our ontology. We might think that there's no need to posit material objects in addition to spatiotemporal regions in order to explain property instantiation. However, if GRO did prove to be the best modal theory, then since dualistic substantivalism is a commitment of it, its extra posits wouldn't count so much against it.

What to say about the other arguments? Schaffer notes that

[t]he [first] five arguments...are interconnected. Monopolization, materialization, and exhaustion are really just further aspects of the harmony between material objects and spacetime regions—each object gets a region, and no region gets more than one object. All of this harmony is suggestive of a unified phenomenon at root. It is the dualist's lack of parsimony, in doubling the substances, which forces her to impose all manner of brute necessities, so that her two sorts of substances can act as if they were one. (*ibid.*: 42)

So the real source of the complaints here is just that the dualist takes the relation between spatiotemporal regions and material objects as fundamental. Again, this makes monistic dualism the more ideologically parsimonious theory: it can make do with fewer primitives. But this is a *ceteris paribus* concern. That GRO requires us to accept a theory that invokes more primitive necessary facts concerning the nature of spacetime counts as a mark against it, but it's no decisive objection.

The final thing to say is that the final two of Schaffer's arguments, in appealing to fundamental physics, are hostage to empirical fortune. In so far as we have reason to believe these physical theories, we have reason not to adopt GRO. However, simply because the hypotheses they employ are open to falsification by empirical evidence, they cannot count *decisively* against GRO. Of course, it may well seem a bad feature of GRO that it fails to be neutral with regards to the nature of spacetime and the relation it bears to material objects. But, again, whether we want to accept the theory despite its lack of neutrality here will depend on how attractive it otherwise is.

9. GRO, Transworld Identification, & the Transitivity of Identity

Roderick Chisholm (1967) argues that the fact that identity is a transitive relation leads to absurd consequences when coupled with TI. His argument is as follows. Suppose that two inhabitants of our world, x and y , gradually exchange their properties with one another as we move from our world, w_1 , to the next, w_2 ; from w_2 to w_3 , and so on. Eventually, we'll reach a world, w_{200} , say, where x plays exactly the same role that y plays in our world and y plays exactly the same role that x plays in our world. Because identity is transitive, and because there's much pressure to say that x and y retain their identity through the very slight changes they undergo as we move from world to world, we should conclude that in w_{200} , the individual playing the y role (i.e. the one which we would name ' y ' in w_{200}) is one and the same individual as the entity named ' x ' in our world. Likewise, it follows that the individual we would call ' x ' in w_{200} is the y of our world. But for this fact, w_{200} will be indiscernible from our world.¹⁵⁹ Problematically, however, it also seems that the individual playing the x role in w_{200} has just as much claim to being one and the same individual as the individual playing the x role in our world. For, these two individuals have all of their properties in common (and likewise for the individual playing the y role in w_{200} and the individual playing the y role in our world). Yet, it's absurd to suppose that x could have all of y 's properties and nonetheless not *be* (identical to) y . Chisholm says:

There is a certain ambiguity in "discernible" and in "indiscernible." The two [x] s could be called "discernible" in that one has the property of being [x] and the other does not, and similarly for the two [y] s . But in the sense of "indiscernible" that allows us to say that "Indiscernibles are identical" tells us more than merely "Identicals are identical," aren't the two [x] s , the two [y] s and the two worlds indiscernible? (*ibid.*: 4)

¹⁵⁹ In addition to any changes that result from this switching of roles.

So, by the Identity of Indiscernibles, it seems we should say that the individual we call 'x' in our world and the individual we are now referring to as 'x' in w_{200} are identical. Yet, by the transitivity of identity, we should also say that the individual called x in this world and the individual called x in w_{200} are *not* identical. TI coupled with the transitivity of identity thus leads to paradox.

The fact that GRO requires property possession (for material objects) to be indexed to parts of worlds means that, under this view, Chisholm's role-switching paradox can't get started. As we move from imagining x in w_1 to imagining x in w_2 – where, in the original paradox, x lacks one of the properties it possesses in w_1 and gains one of the properties y possesses in w_1 – x is not really losing one of the properties it possesses in w_1 and gaining one of the properties y possesses in w_1 at all. In w_1 , x possesses, say, the property *being F at r_1* and y possesses the property *being G at r_1* . As we move to w_2 , x and y can be *imagined* to switch the more basic properties *being F* and *being G* but x and y *do not* really switch these properties, since, under GRO, they do not have them: there is no such thing as world occupant's plain having a property. Rather, in w_2 , x possesses *being G at r_2* and y possesses *being F at r_2* . However, it's also the case that, in w_2 , x possesses *being F at r_1* , and y possesses *being G at r_1* . Likewise, in w_1 , x possesses *being G at r_2* and y possesses *being F at r_1* . Hence, x and y do not really switch properties as we move from world to world at all: there is no role switching paradox because there is no role switching. The properties *being F at r_1* and *being G at R_1* are not switched since these are possessed by each individual in each world; the properties *being F* and *being G* are not switched because they do not exist. So, the individual we call 'x' in w_{200} and the individual we call 'x' in our world do not have all of their properties in common under GRO. x has one set of properties indexed to a region of w_1 and another set of properties indexed to a region of w_2 and it has the set containing all of these sets of properties at every world. So there's no longer strong pressure to deny that the entity called 'y' in w_{200} really is the x of our world.

There's an additional reason to think that the paradox presents no problem for *divine* transworld identity. For, there are properties God possesses in the actual world that he does not lack even in the most remote and distant (dissimilar) worlds, and that no other individual possesses, even in very distant worlds. God has some properties such that he alone can possess them and cannot fail to possess them. So, if we were to imagine God being involved in some role-switching, we would soon reach a world where the role switching would have to stop before all the properties had been switched. Even if Chisholm's paradox presents a barrier to the possibility of *things in general* having transworld identity, it would not, then, present a barrier to the possibility of *God's* having transworld identity.

Another worry sometimes raised is epistemic, since it concerns transworld *identification*: how can we identify a single individual across worlds, given that individuals may vary in numerous and significant ways across them? Sarah may differ between w_1 and w_2 by having a different eye colour, but in a world much less close (that is, similar) to the actual world, say w_{996} , Sarah may resemble the Sarah in the actual world in no obvious way at all. There may be no ‘empirically manifest’ property which could allow us to identify Sarah in w_{996} .¹⁶⁰

Yet, as with Chisholm’s paradox, this problem doesn’t arise on GRO. No transworld individual changes in its spatiotemporally relativized properties from world to world. True, each individual bears different properties to different spacetime regions from world to world, but no individual is such that *which particular properties it bears to which particular spacetime regions* varies. So we can identify individuals across worlds by focussing on their total set of spatiotemporal region-indexed properties. And again, since there are many properties God *alone* has in *every* world, *God* will be easily identifiable from world to world, even if other individuals are not. So transworld identification in the least will not turn out to be a problem in God’s case.

10. GRO, Aseity, & the Intrinsic/Extrinsic Distinction

While Chisholm’s Paradox, accidental intrinsics, and transworld identification pose no barrier to GRO and so N3, one might find GRO objectionable on the grounds that by relativising properties to spatiotemporal regions, the theory entails that no individual can any longer truly be said to possess a property in an intrinsic manner. In Chapter One I settled on the following account of what it is for a property to be intrinsic to a thing:

- (7) F is intrinsic to x iff neither the presence, nor the absence of some thing or some things distinct from x partially grounds the fact that x is F. (Where y is distinct from x iff y has no part in common with x .)

Given this characterisation, what one may intuitively class as an intrinsic property, will, under McDaniel’s view, turn out to be an *extrinsic* one. For if, e.g., any x ’s being awake is partly grounded in the way the way x is *relative to a spacetime region*, then something distinct from x (namely, the spatiotemporal region x happens to be present at) partially grounds x ’s

¹⁶⁰ Kripke (1972: 49-53) takes the view that the problem of transworld of identification is something of a ‘pseudo-problem’. He thinks we can simply stipulate that we’re referring to a certain individual in another possible world.

being awake. Hence, the fact that x is awake does not solely depend on the way x itself is.¹⁶¹ In a later paper, McDaniel notes that this might be an ‘unpleasant’ feature of his theory (2006: 308). For, whether one endorses my characterisation given in (7) above, or some other, the fact still remains that if an individual can only possess a certain property in relation to a spatiotemporal region, property possession can never be a purely internal matter.

Lewis takes this the point to be more than unpleasant. For him, this way of dealing with the problem of accidental intrinsics construes intrinsic *properties* as *relations* (to worlds), and this is so unsatisfactory that the problem of accidental intrinsics is a decisive reason for rejecting GRO, or the ‘leading of double lives’:

So Humphrey, who is part of this world and here has five fingers on the left hand, is also part of some other world and there has six fingers on his left hand. *Qua* part of this world he has five fingers, *qua* part of that world he has six. He himself – one and the same and altogether self-identical – has five fingers on the left hand, and he has not five but six... That is double-talk and contradiction. Here is the hand. Never mind what else it is part of. How many fingers does it have? What shape is it?... If you say that a shape... is just what we always thought it was, except that it is a relation which something may bear to some but not all of the wholes of which it is part, that will not do. What would it be to five-finger one thing while six-fingering another? How can these supposed relations be the shape of something? They cannot be; and so there is no solution. (1986a: 199-201)

This consequence is especially problematic under theism. For, although I argued in §6 of Chapter Two that – *contra* the argument of Chapter One – the doctrine of divine aseity does *not* require that God’s nature-making properties are intrinsic to him, we should, nonetheless, do our best to preserve the idea that God’s nature-making properties are **-intrinsic* to him. To recap:

- (8) F is **-intrinsic* to x iff neither the actual presence, nor the actual absence of some thing or some possible things distinct from x partially grounds the fact that x is F.

On GRO, however, none of God’s properties is **-intrinsic* to him because at no world does God have any property independent of a spatiotemporal region. The actual presence of some possible things distinct from God (the spatiotemporal regions) partially ground God’s possession of his properties. *In and of himself* – viewed independently of all of the relations he bears – God is not omnipotent, not omniscient, and so on. (Though of course, God does not thereby have the complements of these properties either.) Moreover,

¹⁶¹ Lewis (1986a: 204) raises exactly the same objection against endurantism.

since some of God's properties are *essential* to him, it follows that God depends upon the spacetime regions not only for his nature, but for his *very being*. It seems then, that GRO is ruled out by even a pared down doctrine of divine aseity.

McDaniel has told us that, for world occupants, there is no such thing as plain possessing a property: property possession is a three place relation holding between world occupants, properties, and spatiotemporal regions. But do we have to agree with McDaniel on that? Following suggestions made by E. J. Lowe (1988: 73) in response to Lewis's raising of parallel arguments against endurantism, there are other ways we might view things. One option is to deny that there are, under GRO, any such properties as *being F simpliciter* for world occupants (where 'F' includes no information about which spatiotemporal region F is possessed at) – or that if there are, they are not the kinds of properties that could possibly be instantiated by world occupants. Instead, properties are relational, and always include information about the particular spatiotemporal regions they are had in relation to. On this way of viewing things, I do not possess *being awake* in relation to a particular spacetime region, *r* (there is no such property), rather, I plain possess the relational property *being awake at (or relative to) r*.

A second option – *adverbialism* – is to retain the familiar properties (e.g., plain *being awake*) but instead say that there are different ways to possess them. Here, there *is*, e.g., such a thing as plain being awake, but nothing has it *simpliciter*, a thing may have it *r-ly* or *r*-ly* (where *r* and *r** denote different spatiotemporal regions). Under the first alternative, rather than possessing one single property such as *being awake* relative to those regions (parts of worlds) where I'm wholly present, I possess a very large number of being-awake-related properties: *being awake relative to r*, *being awake relative to r₁*...etc. Under the second alternative (adverbialism) I possess a property such as being awake in a number of different ways. I am *r-ly awake*, *r₁-ly awake*, and so on. Do either of these alternatives help to avoid the intrinsicness issue? It seems not. Really, we have only fiddled with the semantics. It's still the case that a world occupant, *O*, can't possess *being awake relative to r* or be *r-ly awake* if *r* does not exist and *O* doesn't bear the occupation relation to it: the spirit of the problem remains. This worry could be circumvented if we were willing to identify every spatiotemporal region, *r*, with, e.g., the set of all *r-ly* instantiated (or *r*-relativised) properties; but this avenue is blocked off for those who accept McDaniel's characterisation of GRO. The reason for this is that GRO takes a *substantival* view of spatiotemporal regions, and the strategy just suggested takes an inherently *relational* stance on these matters.

It's not open to theists to respond to the intrinsicness worry that God's identity and existence *are* independent of all that exists apart from him on the grounds that God *is* (one

and the same entity as) the spacetime regions. For, (amongst other reasons) on the view under discussion, spacetime regions *are* and God *is not*, world-bound. Could the proposal work, though, if we deny that God is a transworld individual and instead say that God is partly at w_1 by having a part of himself that is identical to the region comprising w_1 , is partly at w_2 by having a part of himself that is identical to the region comprising w_2 and so on? It could not, for then God would not *possibly* exist for the reason that, under GR, an individual possibly exists iff that individual is *wholly* present in at least one world and on this proposal, God is wholly present in none; he is only *partly* present in many.¹⁶²

All is not lost, however, for there are two ways the worry can be successfully allayed. First, we should note that, in cases where a property is always possessed as a matter of necessity, there is just no need for its possession to be spatiotemporally indexed. So, we could say that the only properties whose possession must, for world occupants, be spatiotemporally indexed are those which can be possessed contingently. McDaniel hints at making such a distinction when he explains:

There are two ways that an object might have a property relative to a world. First, the object might just plain have the property and be wholly present at some region that is part of that world. So, for example, every object is just plain self-identical. Objects are not self-identical relative to regions of spacetime, even though some self-identical objects occupy regions of spacetime. Some of the essential properties of objects are had in this fashion. Second, the object might have the property *relative* to some region that is part of that world. (2004: 148)

Following this, since God's nature-making properties are essential to him, they needn't be spatiotemporally indexed. GRO does not, then, rule out that God's nature making properties are *-intrinsic to him.

Presumably, though, we still want to allow that *some* non-essential properties be intrinsic to their bearers. Fortunately, there is something we can say to speak to this concern. For, we can make the more general point that it needn't follow from the fact that world occupants possess their properties relative to spacetime regions that they thereby don't possess them in an intrinsic manner if we re-characterise what it is for a property to be intrinsic to a world occupant under GRO:

¹⁶² A different strategy is available if theists want to identify God with the spacetime regions. Theists could admit that God is wholly present in just one world by being identical to that world, but nonetheless exists according to many in virtue of having counterparts existing at other worlds by being identical to them, but then this would be to abandon TI as our account of divine *de re* representation.

- (9) For any individual, x , which is F according to a spatiotemporal region R , F is intrinsic to x (i.e., x 's being F does not depend even in part upon x 's surroundings) iff neither the presence, nor the absence of something or some things distinct from x partially grounds the fact that x is F relative to R .

(9) allows that, under GRO, what are intuitively pure intrinsic properties such as *being awake* can indeed be possessed in an intrinsic manner, and that what are intuitively pure extrinsic properties such as *being more clever than Sarah* cannot.¹⁶³ I suggest that there's no compelling reason not to accept (9) if we are looking to endorse GRO. For, as Fraser MacBride notes: '[w]hat our knowledge of intrinsic properties, like shape, clearly bans is intrinsic properties being relations to other things *located*.' (2001: 84).¹⁶⁴ And if *that's* right – if what the notion of an intrinsic property is intended to capture is that of an individual possessing a property independently of its relation to other *things located*, and independently of what other *things located* are *like*, then (9) is perfectly adequate. What's intuitive is that my being awake does not depend on my bearing relations to other *material objects* in my surroundings – to other world occupants. What's less intuitive (or obvious) is that my being awake does not depend on my bearing relations to certain times and locations: can I really be awake if I'm not located at a region of spacetime? To answer 'yes' to any of this type of question seems crazy. Now, if material objects can only *exist* in relation to spacetime regions – a thesis GRO not only requires, but which also seems entirely plausible independently of it – why should it be any less plausible that material objects can only *possess properties* in relation to spacetime regions? I can't see any good reason why it should. In fact, what would look weird, is if material objects could not exist independently of spacetime regions and yet could possess properties independently of them.

Further, consider why it is that we draw a distinction between types of property possession. It's characteristic of a pure intrinsic property – but not of a pure extrinsic property – that its 'effects' are experienced in the immediate vicinity of its bearer. (Here 'effects' should be understood non-causally, just a term for characterising what's involved in possessing a certain property.) For example, it is only me who experiences any effects of my being awake: there are no necessary connections between my being awake and anything located outside of the spatiotemporal region I occupy. In contrast, there is a necessary connection between my being less clever than Mike, and something outside of me:

¹⁶³ I've subsequently found that Paul Teller (2001) makes a similar line of response.

¹⁶⁴ I've also found that Katherine Hawley (2001: 17) takes this line of response against Lewis's attack on three-dimensionalism.

something's required to be true of Mike. One of the main reasons for drawing a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic properties is to signify this contrast; and endorsing (9) does not fail to do justice to it. In any case, while it's true that some x 's ability to possess *any properties at all* is explained by his bearing certain relations to spatiotemporal regions, *that x has the very character it does* is not explained by its bearing those relations.

11. What Does God Create?

11.1. A Dilemma

On GRO, worlds are empty containers. A second problem, which takes the form of a dilemma, arises when we ask: is God responsible for creating just the (non-divine) material objects which inhabit those containers (the world occupants), or is he responsible for creating the containers which house those objects in addition? If, in each world, God is causally responsible for the occupants of that world, but not for the world itself, then we seemingly contravene another classical theistic doctrine of traditional theism: *divine sovereignty*, which has it that everything existing external to God depends upon God for its existence. As explained previously, theists normally understand this dependence claim in terms of God's creative and sustaining activity. As Mann notes, '[i]f asked to articulate the sense in which things depend on God for their existence, theists are apt to respond that God *created* things. Cashed in this way, dependence as being created is a causal notion.' (2005: 37). Further, much divine aseity, divine sovereignty is traditionally understood to be completely unrestricted: (widest possible quantification) *all* things distinct from God depend upon God because God creates and sustains *all* things distinct from him. As Leftow, explains, '[t]heists believe that...necessarily, for any x , if x is God, x creates and maintains in existence whatever is not identical with x .' (1990a: 582). However, if God *does* create each world in addition to its occupants, then we have an objectionably circular chain of existential dependence: God depends upon each spacetime region he exists at for his existence (on this view, he is necessarily a temporal being); yet, each region likewise depends upon God for *its* being, because it (we are now supposing) would not exist but for his creative and sustaining activity. (God also depends upon the spacetime regions for some of his properties (i.e., his non-essential ones, see above).)

The complaint here is not that a mutual existential dependence relation holds between two distinct relata. For, although the philosophical orthodoxy does seem to have it that ontological dependence is an asymmetric relation, this asymmetry is often taken for

granted,¹⁶⁵ and, as Elizabeth Barnes argues in her recent paper entitled ‘Symmetric Dependence’ (in draft), there’s good reason to call this assumption into question. Firstly, mutual existential dependence relations often *do* hold between distinct relata; consider, e.g., the dependence relations that hold between Socrates and Socrates’s life.¹⁶⁶ Further, if theists believe that there are such things as particularised properties, then they must already accept that a symmetrical existential dependence relation holds between God and *God’s essential goodness*.¹⁶⁷ Nor can the complaint be that there’s an objectionably circular chain of *causal* dependence: we’re supposing the regions depend causally on God; we’re not supposing God depends causally upon them. The absurdity lies here: since God is only possible if he wholly occupies some world, then his possessing the attribute *being at a spatiotemporal region* is a necessary condition of his creating the spatiotemporal regions. Thus, the existence of each region is a *necessary condition of its being brought into existence*, which seems plainly absurd. Further, since this view has God be necessarily temporal, it follows that, by creating each region, God creates some of the entities which are preconditions for his own existence.

This problem is not, of course, particular to GRO. It is a problem for anyone who thinks that God is temporal. As Hugh McCann notes:

Both in Scripture and in cosmological proofs for the existence of God, [God] is portrayed as the creator of everything but himself and as ruling the universe with complete power and authority. But if God is in time, his sovereignty is restricted: There is something other than himself that he did not create – namely – time itself... Better, then, if possible, to have a God who in creating the world creates time, but whose own being lies beyond it. (1993: 92)¹⁶⁸

However, there’s an additional problem which does turn out to be more particular to the theory at hand. In the thesis introduction I noted that causation seems to be a modal notion: usually, we think of a cause as being something that *necessitates* an effect – it ‘makes it happen’ (Loux, 2002: 188). Further, we typically associate causal claims with certain counterfactual conditionals: most often we take it that if *c* caused *e* (*c* for *cause*, and *e* for *effect*), then, had *c* not occurred, *e* would not have occurred. (And, on the fact of it, these counterfactuals appear modal too.) Part of the theoretical utility of the possible worlds framework is that it provides us with the means of using these counterfactuals to *analyse* causation: we begin by understanding causal dependence in counterfactual terms, and then

¹⁶⁵ See, e.g., Cameron (2008a), Schaffer (2010), and Rosen (2010).

¹⁶⁶ Example from Lowe (2005).

¹⁶⁷ I’m taking it that particularised properties don’t exist uninstantiated.

¹⁶⁸ See also Everitt (2010: 85).

we proceed to specify truth-conditions for those counterfactuals in terms of similarity relations between worlds. The best known account of precisely this kind is that given by Lewis' (1973a). Indeed, because of the way the GRist – like Lewis – defines possible worlds, when these counterfactual truth-conditions get put together with the GRist take on worlds, counterfactual (and so causal) dependence ultimately turns out to be non-modal.

To understand Lewis' account, we first need to grasp the relation of *comparative over-all similarity* which holds between different worlds: a world, w_1 , can resemble another world, w_2 , more than some other. Hence, 'one world is closer to actuality than another if the first resembles our actual world more than the second does, taking account of all the respects of similarity and difference and balancing them off one against another.' (1973a: 559). Since Lewis takes this relation as primitive, he doesn't give a formal definition of it. However, he does say that relations of comparative over-all similarity depend on what laws hold in different worlds, as well as what events and individuals exist and take place there. Further, he stipulates (*ibid.*: 560) that the relation of comparative over-all similarity meets two formal constraints: one, it enforces a weak ordering on the worlds: any two worlds are comparable, but there may be cases where there are ties in closeness; two, any world resembles itself more closely than it does any other. (Further, it may be that there is (or are) no world(s) which *most* closely resembles (or resemble) a certain world, w : there may be an infinite sequence of worlds such that for any world, w_n , in the sequence, there is a world distinct from w_n which resembles w more closely.) Given this relation, counterfactual conditionals of the form 'if A were true, then C would also be true' (symbolised: ' $A \square \rightarrow C$ ') are given the following truth-condition:

$A \square \rightarrow C$ is true (at a world w) iff either (1) there are no possible A -worlds (in which case $A \square \rightarrow C$ is vacuous), or (2) some A -world where C holds is closer (to w) than is any A -world where C does not hold. In other words, a counterfactual is nonvacuously true iff it takes less of a departure from actuality to make the consequent true along with the antecedent than it does to make the antecedent true without the consequent. (*ibid.*)¹⁶⁹

As described above, causal dependence is often understood in terms of a counterfactual relation between *events*. Roughly, the truth-condition for ' e causally depends upon c ' specifies that whether event e occurs or not depends on whether event c occurs or not. (*ibid.*: 563). However, since each event can be paired with a proposition – '[t]o any possible event e , there corresponds the proposition $O(e)$ that holds at all and only those

¹⁶⁹ In cases where there is more than one closest A -worlds, $A \square \rightarrow C$ is non-vacuously true when (and only when) C holds at all the closest A -worlds (*ibid.*).

worlds where e occurs.’ (*ibid.*: 562) – causal dependence can be defined in terms of a counterfactual relation holding between *propositions* as above. Lewis (*ibid.*) states that e causally depends upon c iff the following counterfactuals are both true: (1) $O(c) \Box \rightarrow O(e)$, and (2) $\sim O(c) \Box \rightarrow \sim O(e)$. The truth-conditions for those counterfactuals are then given in terms of possible worlds: $O(c) \Box \rightarrow O(e)$ iff in the closest world where c occurs ($O(c)$ is true), e occurs ($O(e)$ is true); and $\sim O(c) \Box \rightarrow \sim O(e)$ iff in the closest world where c does not occur ($O(c)$ is false), e does not occur ($O(e)$ is false). In cases where c and e are events which occur in the actual world, condition (1) is, of course, automatically true; hence, the truth of ‘ e causally depends upon c ’ in these cases then hinges on whether ‘if c had never occurred, e would never have occurred’ is true.

Now, suppose that, in a bid to stay true to the sovereignty thesis, we say that in each world, w , God creates the spatiotemporal region w ’s comprised by (in addition to w ’s contents): we want to say that each spacetime depends *causally* on God. The possible world analysis tells us that there should be two counterfactual truths associated with each spacetime (at least, there should be if causation has a uniform nature): ‘if God had willed that spacetime exists, then spacetime would have existed’, and ‘if God had not willed the existence of spacetime, then spacetime would not have existed’. The first of these is automatically true since (a) the actual world is the world closest to the actual world and (b) it’s true at the actual world that God will the existence of spacetime and that spacetime exists. What about the second? Its truth-condition will be met only if at the closest worlds where God does not will spacetime to exist, no spacetime exists. But there *is no* world at which God does not will spacetime to exist; nor is there any world at which no spacetime exists: *ipso facto*, there no *closest* worlds where such things hold. For the worlds *just are* the spacetimes on this view.

This gives the dilemma an additional bite: if the sovereignty thesis is true in its unrestricted form, then each world, in addition to its non-divine material occupants should depend causally upon God. However, one of the very reasons for adopting a GRist theory of worlds is that it can provide us with a non-modal reduction of the causal facts; and by the very reductive analysis of causal dependence those worlds can provide, it turns out that the claim that each world depends causally upon God is trivially or vacuously true at best. (For, recall that under this semantics, any counterfactual with an impossible antecedent is trivially true, and here we have a counterfactual with an impossible antecedent since there are no worlds where the antecedent holds.) What to do?

11.2. Blunting the Dilemma

Let's reconsider divine sovereignty. Why should it so commonly be understood in terms of absolute creatorship as McCann, Mann, and Leftow describe? The 'absolute creatorship' interpretation, as I will call it, has – as we've seen – much biblical support. In Colossians 1:16, for example, Paul says: 'For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.' And in 17: 'He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.' It is scriptures such as these which have given many contemporary philosophers of religion reason to adopt the interpretation. In arguing that Platonism about abstracta is incompatible with classical theism, Craig says:

A theism according to which God is not the creator of all reality apart from Himself but is just one uncreated being amidst an incomprehensible multitude of uncreated, independently existing beings is both unbiblical and far too weak to be a plausible conception of maximal greatness. (2014: 161)

Central to biblical theism is the conception of God as the only self-existent being, the creator of all reality apart from Himself...everything else has been created by God and is therefore contingent and temporarily finite...[T]he unrestrictedness of the domain of the quantifiers [in the 'God created all things' type claims] is rooted, not in the type of objects thought to be in the domain, but in...who or what God is[.] (*ibid.*: 113)

But why should the Church Fathers have been so concerned with making these absolute creatorship claims? I noted above that divine sovereignty *in itself* – i.e., in its simplest form – is just the doctrine that everything that exists distinct from God depends upon God. Given that being the cause of something is one way to have something depend on you, perhaps it's just that the Church Fathers were (a) looking for a way to characterise the thought – which they took to be of high importance – that everything depends upon God in *some* way, and (b) saw the language of causality as providing the only means of doing this. Since, however, being causally dependent is only one way to be dependent – since we recognise types of *non-causal* dependence – the second horn of the dilemma could be blunted: divine sovereignty – even if its quantifiers should be taken as having widest possible scope – needn't demand that in each world, that world is *caused* by God, so long as each world is still dependent upon God in *some* way.

Of course, in making this move, the sovereignty thesis is being reinterpreted in order to make GRO acceptable; it's otherwise thought that God is *creator of all things external to him*. However, we shouldn't think that this makes the move ad hoc. That the move from divine sovereignty to absolute creatorship might be unwarranted is a point which could

have been made outside the context of the present discussion. Indeed, we can bolster this line of thought by asking another question which could quite justifiably be raised outside of the present context: we've said that, quite plausibly, the Church Fathers were keen to say that everything is caused by God in order to ensure that everything distinct from God is independent upon God in some way, but should it have been important for the Church Fathers to ensure *that*? Most plausibly, it was to ensure that God is the *ultimate stopping point for explanation*. For, when we have a relation of dependency – when some x depends in some way upon some y – y provides us with some kind of explanation for x . My contention, then, is that by claiming that God creates all things external to him, the Church Fathers were not only ensuring that nothing's existence was left unexplained, they were also ensuring that *God* is the point at which explanation stops.

Nicholas Everitt, after noting the various problems associated with the concept of divine causation *per se* (i.e., rather than those associated with the concept of God causing a particular set of entities, as we are considering here), makes a similar suggestion:

Perhaps a better way for theism to explain the idea of divine creation is to avoid analogies with human creation, and to focus instead on explanation. To say that God created the universe would mean only that God provides the ultimate explanation of why there is a universe. Theism could then accept the claim (which, construed in normal temporal terms, is self-contradictory) that God caused himself. This would mean not (absurdly) that God did something as a consequence of which he came into existence, but rather that he is his own explanation: to understand what he is, is to understand why he exists (the thought that underlies the ontological argument). (2010: 81)

And, even Leftow (who treats the claim that God creates literally everything with such seriousness) takes it that one way of clarifying this claim is by means of the further claims that 'there is no going past this level [i.e. that of God] in any explanation of other things' existence: explanations that reach here, stop here, and [so]...God is the ultimate explainer of all explained existence...*there is no digging deeper than God?* (2012: 5-6, emphasis added). Given this, we shouldn't take the above described dilemma to be an unsurpassable one: once we see more accurately what divine sovereignty demands, the first horn loses its bite.

The additional problem was that the possible worlds analysis of causal dependence is at odds with the thought that God creates the world (and so everything). However, given what's been said above, this also loses its bite. Indeed, we might even turn it to our advantage: the person who wants to insist that causal dependence *is* the right relation to characterise how spacetime is related to God owes us an explanation of why it is that this

relation counts as causal, given that it does not meet the characterisation other causal relations are uniformly given.¹⁷⁰

So what other dependence might be in play? We've already seen, from Chapter One, that metaphysical dependence cannot be analysed in terms of similarity relations between possible worlds if theism is true, so perhaps the relation is one of metaphysical dependence, and this explains why it can't be so reduced. Of course, the fact the relation can't be understood in counterfactual terms shouldn't force us to think that it can't be one of dependence. There are other, non-theistic cases where we would want to accept that a relation of metaphysical dependence holds, and yet, are unable to explain in terms of the possible worlds counterfactual analysis. Think, e.g., of the relation between the modal facts and the worldly facts; of one necessary thing upon another. Better, then, to keep the possible world analysis of causal dependence, and accept that the relation between God and spacetime is not causal, but of another kind, one which must either be accepted as a primitive, or else explainable in terms of some other kind of theory.

Before leaving this section, I will deal with one possible line of resistance, which will come from those who would take issue with my recommended interpretation of the sovereignty thesis – or at least, with what I identify as the core motivation for it. I have said that the core motivation is just the idea that God should in some way (ultimately) *explain* all that exists apart from him. However, some will say that the core motivation is rather the idea that everything should be under God's ultimate *control*. Plantinga (1980) is one advocate of this. Indeed, he takes it that the primary reason for taking God to be entirely independent is that otherwise, some things would be outside of God's control (that aseity is a condition on sovereignty thus considered), and that would in some way limit God.

Having some things outside of God's control should not, though, be considered problematic in this way – should not, that is – be considered as limiting or constraining God. For, as Shalkowski (2014) convincingly argues, in cases where a supposed 'limit' is imposed by something that is *necessary*, that 'limit' is no *real* limit at all. In responding to the in some ways similar question of whether theists should worry that the existence of abstracta would impugn God's aseity by making him dependent upon something distinct from him, or somehow impugn God's sovereignty by limiting what he can do, Shalkowski writes:

¹⁷⁰ Gould and Davis (2014) give an account of how God can be understood to create abstracta. However it is not particularly illuminating since it's 'anti-reductionist': it does not explain causation in non-causal terms. They simply say that God causes an abstract – here we might just say *necessary* – object if that object is brought about by an act of divine willing.

It is...mistaken to think that the limits of possibility are akin to chains that bind anyone, even God. If it is not possible for things to be or have been otherwise; there is *nothing* God could have done otherwise...[So] how is it any failing of any divine attribute that God is unable to do it?

It makes sense to worry that God might be inappropriately limited by the existence and character of abstracta, if there were something on the other side of the limit, but there is nothing metaphysical that is like a fence that prohibits God from exploring some territory. There is nothing on the other side of the fence. (*ibid.*: 151-2)

And that seems exactly right. If God's lacking the ability to control something implied that there was a possible thing to do that God could not do, then that might be a problem. However, things like spacetime regions and abstracta – being necessary – are not the types of things it is possible to control. So there is just no cause for concern if God can't control them: of course God is constrained by the realm of possibility; but – and this is the crux of Shalkowski's point – that is no real constraint at all. (Compare: should the theist worry that God can't divide by zero? Seemingly not, since it's not a possible thing to do.)¹⁷¹ Likewise, the ways God is supposed to be dependent here don't make God's existence or nature contingent, or *im*impervious; which, presumably, is one of the things we're aiming to preserve. After all, these are some of the key differences between God and mere creatures. This mirrors exactly the line of thought I advocated in Chapter Two §6: there are some kinds of dependencies God can bear which shouldn't be taken to compromise his perfection. In summary then: theists who accept GRO should not admit that God creates spatiotemporal regions; God creates world occupants, and that's enough to do justice to the doctrine of divine sovereignty.

12. Actuality Again

Let us reconsider the actuality objection raised in §4. Lewisian GR together with TI implied that everything is actual from God's viewpoint (or, to put it another way, implied that to say that anything is actual from God's viewpoint would involve a misuse of the word

¹⁷¹ Moreover, the widest possible scope reading – if it means that God must explain the existence of even necessary things – entails that God's necessity is no longer sufficient for his being an appropriate stopping point when it comes to explaining the existence of things. So perhaps there's good reason not to think that it especially problematic if some things were unexplained by God, so long as those things were necessary, as Shalkowski explains: 'When it is recognized that something exists necessarily or is necessarily thus-and-so, it is not a deeply insightful question to ask about its cause or explanation. It is to invite properly the return question, "What part of 'necessary' don't you understand?" Necessity really is the ultimate stopping place... If it is not possible for things to be or have been otherwise; there is *nothing* God could have done otherwise.' (*ibid.*: 151-2). However, since further revising the sovereignty thesis would require further departure from the theistic orthodoxy, and since it's not necessary for our purposes here to do so, I simply flag the issue up as one for possible discussion.

‘actuality’). Does GRO have such a consequence? It seems it does. Supposing we again said that actuality is an indexical and that what is actual to a world occupant, x , is just what is related to x by means of external distance relations. In that case, if God is present at every region *simpliciter*, all worlds and all world occupants *simpliciter* will be actual to God. So for God, again, nothing will be merely possible. Likewise, for any non-divine world occupant, many worlds will be actual from their viewpoint (just those worlds at which they exist). Everything that is possible for them will be actual for them. We want to say ‘Sarah, the individual in w_1 could have been a footballer, but is not’. So in some other world, w_2 , Sarah is wholly present and is a footballer at w_2 . But then, since Sarah *is* in w_2 , Sarah is spatiotemporally related to the occupants of w_2 and so, is actually a footballer. This is a problem. If nothing is merely possible for any world occupant, contingency for world occupants will be lost.

To avoid this problem, we will have to say that individuals have world-relative thoughts and experiences, and that these are worldbound. From the perspective of any world, w , an individual x occupies, x has certain thoughts about what goes on at w , but no individual has at any world experiences of being at more than one world, or is conscious of being at more than one world. So, at w_1 , individual, x is conscious of being at w_1 , and is not conscious of being at any world other than w_1 . What is merely possible for x consists in what x undergoes at the worlds which it is not, at w_1 , conscious of being at.

13. GRO & Class Nominalism

A final worry with GRO concerns the thesis of class nominalism: the thesis that properties are sets¹⁷² of (possible) individuals; redness, for example, is identified as the cross-world set of red objects. One of the motivations for Lewisian GR is this ability to reduce properties to the set of (widest possible quantification) all their instances (see Lewis 1986a: 50-69). But can properties still be identified with sets of possible individuals, if individuals don’t have properties *simpliciter*, but relative to spatiotemporal regions? Lewis makes some comments which suggest they could not be:

Often it is said that things have some of their properties relative to this or that... Relative to the number 18, the number 6 has the property of being a divisor; but not relative to 17...A property that is instantiated in this relative way could not be the set of its instances. For when something has it relative to this but not to that, is the thing to be included in the set or not? (*ibid.*: 50)

¹⁷²Lewis prefers to use the term ‘set’ rather than ‘class’ so that properties (sets) themselves may have properties by being members of other sets (1986a: 50, fn 37).

If we rephrase Lewis's words to reflect the case at hand: "Relative to region r , Fred has the property of being a father, but relative to spacetime region r^* , Fred has the property of being childless. Is Fred to be included in the set of fathers or not?"

How to answer the question? Well, on the view we are considering, although Fred is a transworld individual, this does not mean that Fred is both a member of the father set and also a member of the non-father set. GRO says that properties are world-relativised. So Fred rather has the properties *being a father relative-to- r* and *being childless relative-to- r^** , and is thus a member of the father-relative-to- r set and the father-relative-to- r^* set.

Yet, once we make these qualifications, there is no longer any (easy) way for class nominalism to work. We no longer have one single set of fathers (no set of things which possess *being a father simpliciter*) with which to identify the property *being a father*. We instead have numerous non-identical father-relative-to- r_n sets. But, with only property-relative-to-region sets, we can no longer use the theory of class nominalism to do what it was intended to do: explain how *many* things have *one* thing in common. This is, after all the primary purpose of a theory of predication: it is, in David Armstrong's words, to explain *sameness of type* (1980: 441).

Perhaps we can make an adjustment to rescue class nominalism. Rather than identifying, say, the property *redness* with the set of red things (i.e. *red-relative-to-a-world* world occupants), we could instead identify the property *redness* with the property *redness at a world*, i.e., with the set of things *red-relative-to-a-spatiotemporal-region*. So, now we have the property *being red-relative-to-a-spatiotemporal-region* which many things across worlds may bear, and which may thereby be used to account for sameness of type. But how are we to deal with that property on GRO? GRO stipulates that any property instantiated by a world occupant is a property instantiated relative to a spacetime region. So, anything, x , which instantiates *being red-relative-to-a-spacetime-region* must bear this property relative to a spacetime region. But to what spacetime region will x bear this property? It won't help to say that x bears it relative to a spacetime region which is part of the world x inhabits, for if it does, then the property will no longer be one x has in common with other individuals, and we'll be back to where we started. The problem is, there is *no* common spacetime region to which all red things could bear the property.

It seems, then, that GRO must abandon class nominalism. Just how much this counts against the view will depend upon how much one values the reduction of properties to sets of individuals. Some other theory of predication will be needed: Platonism or austere

nominalism, for example. Perhaps, though, trope theory is the one that might sit most easily with the view. Indeed, McDaniel himself seems to agree with this, since in his (2006) paper he goes to the effort of outlining how some more sophisticated versions of the view can make use of tropes. (Indeed, these views identify *worlds* with sets of tropes!) Objects could be said to have particularised properties (particularised because they are spatiotemporally-indexed), and these particularised properties may resemble one another to certain degrees.

14. Conclusion

This chapter has examined whether, under GR, God's necessity could be understood in terms of TI. We saw that TI is incompatible with GR as Lewis presents it, but the version of GR McDaniel presents (GRO) makes overlap possible. As well as defending against some more general objections to the theory, we saw how God's modal properties would be analysed under GRO and determined that this analysis is not inconsistent with divine aseity. The discussion also showed that GRO is also compatible with divine sovereignty. Since classical theism does not require God to create everything *simpliciter* in order to be sovereign *simpliciter*, a purported dilemma concerning what God can be said to create is avoided: God creates world occupants but not the regions that contain them. In the next chapter, we will consider how other accounts of *de re* representation fare under theism.

4

Counterpart Theory & the Standpoint View

1. Introduction

In Chapter Three I noted that Lewis rejects TI and claims instead that '[t]hings that do inhabit worlds – people, flames, buildings, puddles, concrete particulars generally – inhabit one world each, no more.' (1968: 126). So how, if individuals are worldbound, can GR make sense of there being worlds such that they represent *de re* of an individual, x , that it exists and has a certain property, F , even though they are not literally inhabited by x ? According to Lewis, a world may do so by containing a *counterpart* of x – that is, an individual, y , numerically distinct from x , that bears sufficient similarities (resemblances) to x and is F . For Lewis, it is the existence of such counterpart (not *identity*) relations that make for the truth of *de re* modal statements. In his view, '[t]he realm of essence and accident is the realm of the vicarious.' (*ibid.*: 127). In §2, I explain this counterpart-theoretic framework ("CT") as characterised by Lewis (1968 and 1986a) in a little more detail. Through §3 to §6, I examine whether its treatment of *de re* modal claims involving God is consistent with the central tenets of classical theism. In §7, I examine a different view – ("SV") one according to which God exists according to every world by virtue of existing *from the standpoint of every world*, and is neither a part of any world (as CT says he is), nor a material occupant of every (or indeed *any*) world (as TI says he is). Finally, §8 sums up the discussion from this and the previous chapter and draws some final conclusions about how theist GRists should view God's relation(s) to the worlds GR posits.

2. Counterpart Theory

Under CT – as is the case under transworld identity theory – *de re* modal truth is analysed by quantification over possible individuals. However, what makes it true that certain things must be, might have been, and can't have been true of x is not the existence and character of x in other worlds, but the existence and character of x 's *counterparts* in other worlds. What makes something the counterpart of something else? Put roughly: your counterparts 'resemble you more closely than do other things in their worlds' (Lewis, 1968: 114); put more precisely: the counterpart relation is context-dependent, since it is a matter of *being*

most similar in certain respects – respects that have been *deemed important* – that determines which individual(s) count as the (relevant) counterpart(s) of another.¹⁷³ Thus, some x is a possible individual iff there exists some world, w , such that every part of x is a part of w and no part of x is a part of any world besides w . An individual, x , exists *according to* a world, w , iff w contains a counterpart of x .¹⁷⁴ *De re* modal claims are thus analysed as follows: x is possibly F iff in some world, x has a counterpart that is F; x is contingently F iff x exists in w , x is F, and there is at least one world distinct from w that contains a counterpart of x that is not F; x is necessarily F iff x exists in w , x is F, and for every world distinct from w where x has a counterpart, that counterpart is F; x exists contingently iff x exists in w , and there is at least one world distinct from w which fails to contain a counterpart of x ; finally, x exists necessarily iff there is no world that fails to contain a counterpart of x .

Unlike the identity relation, the counterpart relation is not transitive. Take three worlds: w_1 , w_2 , and w_3 ; and take three individuals: x_1 , x_2 , and x_3 . Suppose x_1 exists in w_1 , x_2 exists in w_2 , and x_3 exists in w_3 . Of all the individuals existing in w_2 , x_2 may be the one who resembles x_1 most closely, and of all the individuals existing in w_3 , x_3 may be the one who resembles x_2 most closely, but it does not follow from this that of all the individuals existing in w_3 , x_3 is the one who resembles x_1 most closely (*ibid.*: 115). (Nor is there any guarantee that it resembles you closely enough to be your counterpart even if it is the individual which resembles you most closely.) Likewise, the counterpart relation is not symmetric (*ibid.*: 116); there is no guarantee that every individual will have a counterpart in every world, and there is no guarantee that every individual will have a unique counterpart in every world. It may be, for example, that there are worlds where nothing resembles you closely enough to count as your counterpart, and it may be that there are worlds where two distinct individuals both resemble you equally as much, and yet both resemble you more than anything else in their world (*ibid.*).¹⁷⁵

Following the above, under GR with CT, N1 (the claim that God exists according to every possible world) thus becomes:

N4: In every possible world, God has an (appropriate) counterpart.

¹⁷³ More on this in §4.

¹⁷⁴ In Lewis's words: two individuals are worldmates only 'if *every* particular part of one is spatiotemporally related to every particular part of the other that is wholly distinct from it...This formulation avoids difficult[ie]s that might be raised concerning partial spatiotemporal relatedness of trans-world mereological sums' (1968: 70, emphasis added).

¹⁷⁵ Lewis thinks this is necessary if we are to account for the full range of standard modal intuitions.

Where does N4 leave us with regards to an answer to the question of where God exists in relation to the worlds GR posits? Clearly, since GR with CT (a) does not allow that individuals are part of more than one world, and (b) states that an individual is a possible individual *only* if the whole of it is part of one world, on this option, God exists *in* some worlds, but not in others (i.e., what we identified in Chapter Three as option (ii) is true). Further, since an individual is a part of a world iff it is spatiotemporally related to that world (and no other), under N4, God is, just as he is under N3, necessarily spatiotemporal.¹⁷⁶

3. Unsuitable Counterparts?

What troubles might face this account? Paul Sheehy raises the worry that God's closest counterpart – that is, the individual most similar to God – in some possible worlds might not possess just the same great-making properties as God (2006: 319). Presumably Sheehy's reason for taking this as problematic is that it would entail that God possess such putatively essential attributes only accidentally. Yet, no explanation is forthcoming from Sheehy as to why some of God's counterparts might lack his great-making properties. Indeed, it's strange that Sheehy should raise this objection, given that he himself grants that one great-making property – necessary existence – is non-negotiable (this is precisely what motivates him to investigate whether God's possessing it can be accommodated within the GR framework), and there is no telling reason as to why any other traditionally considered great-making properties should not be equally non-negotiable for theists. Theistic commitments demand that there be a necessary being in every world: equally, they demand that there be an omniscient, omnipotent, etc., being in every world. We aren't able to view each world and discover one in which a God counterpart is, e.g., less-than-omniscient, so is there any *theoretical* reason to think that some of God's closest counterparts might lack some of his great-making properties? That is, is there any reason to think that GR with CT somehow rules out God's possessing his great-making properties necessarily?

Perhaps one thing does force us to accept that there will be worlds such that, in those worlds, the individual most similar to God fails to possess the required range of great-making properties. Recall that if GR is to offer an adequate (accurate and non-circular)

¹⁷⁶ Here it is important to recall the observance made in note 116 – that – as recognised by Lewis – there is a probable need to improve on the spatiotemporality criterion. If analogical spatiotemporal relatedness is the best way to go, then God need only be *analogically* spatiotemporally related to the world in order for CT to work as a theory of divine *de re* representation. This may be helpful to those who take God to be spatiotemporal, since even if there are difficulties with accepting that God is spatiotemporally related to the world in the same way that non-divine individuals are, CT could still be adopted. If not, then provided some non-spatiotemporal natural external relation is available, CT could work as a theory of divine *de re* representation even in the case that God is *non*-spatiotemporal. As interesting and potentially helpful as these considerations may be, I leave them aside for reasons of space.

reduction of modal facts, it must have enough objects in its reductive base to represent each and every possibility. Therefore, Lewis asserts the *Principle of Plenitude*. This principle says that there are no gaps in logical space: it says that ‘(1) absolutely every way that a world could possibly be is a way that some world is, and (2) absolutely every way that a part of a world could possibly be is a way that some part of some world is.’ (1986a: 86). Though, as Lewis himself notes, this statement is trivial, given his analysis of possibility. Worlds are identified with these ‘ways’, meaning that the principle would be true no matter how many worlds there are (*ibid.*). So, to give some proper content to the claim that modal space is complete, Lewis asserts a *Principle of Recombination*. ‘Roughly speaking, the principle is that anything can coexist with anything else, at least provided they occupy distinct spatiotemporal positions. Likewise, anything can fail to coexist with anything else.’ (*ibid.*: 88). Further, any number of possible individuals should admit of combination, and any one possible individual should admit of combination with itself (*ibid.*: 89). However, because Lewis rejects transworld identity, the principle of recombination would be more accurately stated in terms of *duplicates*. Duplication is defined in terms of the sharing of perfectly natural intrinsic properties: two individuals are duplicates iff they are perfectly alike in terms of their perfectly natural, intrinsic character.¹⁷⁷ §4 will contain further discussion about the nature of ‘perfectly natural’ properties. Here though, I will limit myself to noting just that natural properties are supposed to be those such that sharing of them makes for qualitative resemblance ‘they carve at the joints...they are highly specific, the sets of their instances are *ipso facto* not entirely miscellaneous, there are only just enough of them to characterise things completely and without redundancy.’ (1986a: 60). Thus, Lewis’ principle of recombination can be stated as follows:¹⁷⁸

PR: For any individuals, wholly existing in any worlds, there is a world containing any number of duplicates of each (so long as there is a spacetime big enough to hold them all)^{179, 180}

¹⁷⁷ More specifically, Lewis suggests that x and y are duplicates ‘iff (1) they have exactly the same perfectly natural properties, and (2) their parts can be put into correspondence in such a way that corresponding parts have exactly the same perfectly natural properties, and stand in the same perfectly natural relations.’ (1986a: 61). Lewis also finds it plausible that all perfectly natural properties are intrinsic to their bearers. (In fact, Lewis defines intrinsic properties as those that never vary between duplicates (individuals exactly alike in terms of their perfectly natural properties.) Hence, For Lewis, the ‘intrinsic’ in the definition of ‘duplicates’ is redundant.

¹⁷⁸ The characterisation below is similar to that given by Divers and Melia (2002). I’m using the statement given by these authors because it’s more precise and succinct than the one Lewis (1986a) provides.

¹⁷⁹ PR only quantifies over individuals who are wholly in worlds to avoid duplication of cross-world sums. The ‘space and time permitting’ proviso is necessary due to an argument given by Forest and Armstrong (1984). More on this below.

¹⁸⁰ For those accepting the GRO outlined in the previous chapter, the principle will instead need to be phrased along the following lines: (PR*) For any individual, x , wholly present at any region of spacetime, r , such that r

At first glance, it appears that PR has the implications that there will be worlds where God lacks counterparts, others where he has more than one counterpart, and others still where his counterparts are less than omniscient, less than omnipotent, and so on. For, PR entails that there's worlds that contain more than one duplicate of God, that there are worlds containing no duplicates of God,¹⁸¹ and that there are worlds containing God-duplicates who are less than omniscient, less than omnipotent, and so on. The trouble is, PR is designed to express the idea that any kind of thing could coexist with (or without) anything of any other kind, and also with many other things of the same kind. PR 'stands or falls with that of the Humean denial of necessary connections between distinct existences' (Divers and Melia, 2002: 19), and yet, theism admits a number of necessary connections. For example, there is supposed to be a necessary connection between all non-divine things and God, and, as we've seen, an omnipotent thing could not coexist with others of that kind. So PR and theism look straight-forwardly incompatible.

However, to see why the worry here may only be superficial, we need to bear in mind that, as noted above, PR is expressed in terms of duplication, and duplication is a matter of sharing of *intrinsic* character. Now, PR will certainly require that there be worlds at which there is more than one duplicate of God and worlds at which there are no duplicates of God etc., but it doesn't follow from this that there are worlds containing more than one thing worthy of the title 'God', or worthy as counting as his counterpart. For, if what matters to something's counting as *God* – that is, as counting as *divine* – is that certain *extrinsic* conditions be fulfilled (that is, if God's perfections turn out not to be intrinsic, as I have argued), then it does not matter if PR requires that there exist worlds in which there are multiple (or no) individuals exactly like God in terms of their *intrinsic* character. What matters is that there not exist worlds in which there are multiple (or no) individuals worthy of being *divine*. Indeed, the principle must be expressed so that it is only (perfectly natural) *intrinsic* properties which get recombined *precisely because* it would otherwise duplicate individuals individuated by extrinsic properties such as *being the sole divine being* and thereby yield contradictory states of affairs in modal space (see Nolan (1996: 240)).¹⁸²

is part of some world, w , there is another region of spacetime, r^* , such that r^* is part of some world w^* , x is wholly present at r^* , any number of duplicates of x are also wholly present at r^* (so long as there is a spacetime region (world) big enough to hold them all), and $w \neq w^*$.

¹⁸¹ For those adopting GRO, there will be worlds failing to contain God himself.

¹⁸² This adds support to my arguments in Chapter One: Lewis' thought is that intrinsic properties are ones that could be duplicated any number of times; the theist takes it that the divine-making properties could not be duplicated – that they are (or at least some of them are) *unique* to God – so, theists should not think of these properties as intrinsic.

Nonetheless, we're not out of the woods yet. Firstly, PR does not, as it stands, allow that God has any intrinsic essential property, F. By PR, there will be worlds where *nothing* has F (that is, there will be worlds at which there are zero intrinsic duplicates of God). Two, PR does not ensure that God has his extrinsic properties essentially unless the divine-making properties supervene on the intrinsic properties of any world, and it's hard to see how they could do. Go to a world where all that exists is a tap-dancing turtle, an ice cream cone, and two intrinsic duplicates of God. What is there to ensure that at least one – and that at most one – of these intrinsic duplicates possesses the divine-making properties? Nothing, it seems. Hence, from the perspective of classical theism, PR is still extensionally inaccurate. The only way to ensure that PR does capture the requisite modal truths (and meets its reductive ambitions) is to build their non-modal descriptions into it. Thus, we have below a theistic principle of recombination (TPR):

TPR: Excluding God, for any individuals wholly existing in any worlds, there is a world containing any number of duplicates of each, (so long as there is a spacetime big enough to hold them all), and at each one of those worlds there is any number ≥ 1 duplicates of God, and exactly one of those duplicates is divine.

But should these restrictions be permitted? On first appearances, one might think they shouldn't. We are simply redefining PR in order to preserve certain pieces of modal data we took to be true about God; but PR is supposed to delimit the modal facts. Here, some modal facts are restricting the scope of PR. So one might think that this type of move, aside from being ad hoc, compromises GR's reductive ambitions. As Shalkowski puts it: '[p]ossible worlds must constrain facts of modality; facts of modality must not restrict the number and nature of possible worlds.' (1994: 675). However, such a worry is misguided. What the GRist wants, or, rather, *needs*, is a principle that is extensionally accurate. Of course, one can only judge whether a principle, P, which is proposed to account for the reductive base of a modal theory, is extensionally accurate by considering whether P accords with a significant enough portion of the modal claims which, pre-theoretically, we took to be true. If P didn't accord with a wide enough portion of our strongest modal commitments, we wouldn't be epistemically justified in accepting it. Lewis himself says that we should accept PR because it accords with a wide enough range of our pre-theoretic modal beliefs about the extent of possibility. For Lewis, justification for PR amounts to prior modal beliefs coupled with theoretical benefits. However, no theist will concur with Lewis that PR (without the theistic clause) is extensionally accurate since it doesn't allow for their pre-

theoretic modal beliefs about the extent of possibility and necessity.¹⁸³ So what makes Lewis justified in accepting PR, but the theist unjustified in accepting TPR? Nothing does. All that matters to the success of GR's reductive project is that there be a way to state PR in non-modal terms, so the addition of the theistic clause seems harmless.

Further, recall that PR already contains a proviso: it says there's a world containing any number of duplicates of individuals *size and shape permitting*. Lewis (1986a: 101-4) is forced to include this proviso in order to avoid a paradox forwarded by Peter Forrest and David Armstrong (1984), which, they claim, faces an otherwise unqualified version of the principle. According to them, PR entails that there are (unrestrictedly) more individuals than there are. Daniel Nolan (1996) argues that Forrest and Armstrong's argument is invalid, but suggests that there is a similar, valid argument in the vicinity that can give us the same conclusion. Nolan's statement of the argument (*ibid.*: 246-7) is as follows:

- P1. There is a set, S, of all the possible individuals. (Assumption for *reductio*)
- P2. S must have a cardinality (number of members), C. (From the definition of cardinality)
- P3. If S has a cardinality, then there must be a greater cardinality than it, e.g. the cardinality of its power-set, call this C*.
- P4. For any individual, there is a world that contains C* duplicates of that individual. (The unrestricted principle of recombination)
- P5. There are at least C* objects to be found in worlds.
- P6. The set of all the possible individuals must have at least C* members.
- P7. The set of all the possible individuals has cardinality is larger than itself (because, by set theory, C* is larger than C).
- C. There's no set of all possible individuals. (Contradiction in P7 derived from P1)

To avoid the conclusion of this argument, the 'size and shape permitting' clause 'if spelled out, would have to put some restriction on the possible size of a spacetime' (Lewis, 1986a: 103). Of course, the phrasing 'there is some *maximal* size of spacetime' is modal, but, as Divers (2002: 102) explains, the proponent of GR could easily offer a non-modal characterisation such as this:

¹⁸³ The theist isn't the only one though. The essentialist, for example, will also disagree.

There is some number N such that no spacetime is larger than N , and for all individuals, x , y , and for all numbers, n , m such that $(n + m) < N$, there is a world in which there are at least n duplicates of x and at least y duplicates of m .

Nolan suggests that the correct response to the argument is not to restrict PR, but to deny that there is a *set* of everything and to admit instead that there is a maximal sum of individuals, but that these form a *proper class*. '[A] proper class usually being construed as a set-like entity that has members but is not itself a member of anything.' (Divers, 2002: 102).¹⁸⁴ However, Divers (*ibid.*: 103) shows that this response threatens to undermine the coherence and utility of GR, and it is clear that Lewis (1986a: 101-4) would prefer to impose a restriction on the principle.¹⁸⁵ Now, if we outline the reasons Lewis and Divers have for thinking that the 'size and shape permitting' clause is permissible, we might be able to see more clearly why the theistic clause would likewise be permissible.

Forrest and Armstrong object that any particular size supposed to be the maximum size of worlds would be arbitrary and ad hoc. However, Lewis (1986a: 103) replies that any restriction to a principle is going to seem ad hoc, but some restrictions are more ad hoc than others. There will be *some* natural break, says Lewis, in the mathematical models we might offer as representations of possible spacetimes, and that break, wherever it lies, can be used to demarcate the maximum spacetime size (and therefore to give us a non-modal principle of maximality). What would look arbitrary, is if the restriction were 'to four-dimensional, or to seventeen-dimensional, manifolds...a restriction to finite-dimensional manifolds looks much more tolerable.' (*ibid.*). And Lewis does appear justified in claiming that his is the least arbitrary restriction that could be made.¹⁸⁶ Likewise, to avoid the charge that *their* restriction is ad hoc, theists can appeal to the 'natural break' between divine and non-divine individuals. Paraphrasing Lewis: what would look arbitrary, is if the restriction were to bananas, or beach balls, or bubble-gum; a restriction to omnipotent, independent, divine beings looks much more tolerable. Consider also that on *theistic* GR, God is supposed to be in some sense responsible for each world, or at least, each such thing is supposed to depend on him in some sense. A being on whom the truth of PR would thus somehow depend could hardly be expected to be subject to *it*.

¹⁸⁴ Efrid and Stoneham (2008) also recommend against restricting PR. They argue that PR can be formulated more precisely so that such restrictions are unnecessary.

¹⁸⁵ For example, he says 'we have no notion what could stop any class of individuals...from comprising a set' (1986a: 104).

¹⁸⁶ Nolan, (1996: 257) expresses doubts that there is such a natural break. However, says Nolan, 'if the [maximal spacetime size] thesis is restricted to the claim that there is *some* maximum size, and that for all we know that size would seem arbitrary to us should be consider it, I do not see what theoretical failing the theory would have suffered.'

What of the threat to the reductive ambitions? Does the size-and-shape-permitting clause impose a modal restriction on PR? We can see from above that it needn't. Although the clause says there's a point where duplication *must* stop, this is no cause for concern since there's a non-modal way of stating this. Likewise, it's no concern that the theistic clause has a modal translation (i.e. that there's some divine individual such that duplication of it is impossible). All that matters is that *some* statement of PR be non-modal. As Divers explains:

An analysis cannot be considered objectionably circular just because its construction is guided by prior modal opinion about its analysanda. Unless a theorist is in the business of stipulating, from scratch as it were, the meaning of a term 'F', then in order to be warranted in asserting a biconditional that purported to articulate an analysis of the concept F, she would have to have some prior beliefs that involved the concept F...[I]n constructing GR, a theorist will be guided in her choice of postulates by her legitimate desire to have [the GR analysis of modal claims], and other explanatory principles, come out true. For example a prior belief that there are no necessary connections between existences may guide GR choice of one... principle of recombination rather than another. (2002: 110-11)¹⁸⁷

Further, given that the principle needs to be extensionally accurate, and given that our only way of judging whether it is, is to see whether it matches up with pre-theoretic modal opinion, it looks very much like the addition of the theistic clause is considerably less objectionable than the addition of the 'size and shape permitting' one. The theistic clause ensures that PR accords with the theist's pre-theoretic modal beliefs. However, for anyone who was inclined to believe, prior to adopting GR, that there is no maximum possible size of a spacetime, PR forces a *revision* in modal commitments.¹⁸⁸ Alternatively, for those who were pre-theoretically agnostic on this question, PR forces a belief to be formed where previously one was not had. For theists, then, the theistic clause comes at no cost. But the same cannot be said for the maximal spacetime clause.¹⁸⁹

4. Flexibility in Judgements about Essences

4.1. The Problem

The above section addressed worries that centred on the content of GR's worlds. A related concern centres on the nature of the counterpart relations which hold between the contents of GR's worlds: it asks whether the nature of *de re* modal truth under CT is acceptable from

¹⁸⁷ See also Lewis (1986a: 154).

¹⁸⁸ And this isn't the only one. PR likewise entails that (a) there couldn't have been nothing, and (b) that there couldn't have been disjoint spacetimes.

¹⁸⁹ This isn't to say that the cost of admitting the maximal size of spacetime clause is so bad as to not be permitted. Lewis does accept that there's a cost here, but he tries to explain (1986a) why it isn't so bad.

a theistic standpoint. We've seen that under CT, what it's true to say about the essential nature of an individual depends upon what sort of similarity is relevant to the context at hand. To see why this is, recall that one advantage of the GR ontology of possibilia is that it enables us to identify properties with sets (classes) of individuals. Redness, for instance, is just the class of all red things across modal space. For Lewis, though, there are no constraints on class membership: '[a]ny class of things, be it ever so gerrymandered and miscellaneous and indescribable in thought and language, and be it ever so superfluous in characterizing the world, is nevertheless a property.' (1983b: 346).¹⁹⁰ Hence, properties are in immense abundance (*ibid.*).

For someone accepting the GR theory of modality together with Lewis' theory of properties, there will, then, be innumerable many ways in which any two objects are similar (and also dissimilar). Now, since any two individuals will have infinitely many properties in common, just which individual in another possible world gets to count as the individual overall most similar to a particular individual located here in the actual world is going to be metaphysically indeterminate. For, '[p]roperties do nothing to capture facts of resemblance...[they] carve reality at the joints – and everywhere else as well.' (*ibid.*). Imagine two different individuals existing in possible world, w^* , distinct from the actual world. Suppose that one of these is a tap-dancing turtle and that the other is a human being who looks, talks, and acts very much like me, and who has an origin quite similar to the one I have here in our world. There is nothing in the *ontology* that can determine whether it is the human, rather than the turtle, who is the individual in w^* overall most similar to me: I have infinitely many properties in common with the turtle, as well as the human. Hence, which of these counts as my counterpart in w^* will depend upon which respects of similarity we decide to take into consideration. As such, any fact of most overall similarity – and therefore *de re* modal truth – is going to be flexible and context-dependent.

Lewis, (1986a: 248-63) discusses the advantages to be gained by this feature of the counterpart relation, one of which is neatly summarised by Nolan as follows:

One general reason to adopt [CT], independent of the details of [GR], is that it permits flexibility in our judgements about essences. In some contexts we are inclined to think different sorts of things are essential to a given object. Some people are strongly inclined to think that, for example, ducks such as Amanda are essentially ducks; others think that it is possible, in the broadest sense, for Amanda to have been some other sort of bird, or a robot, or something else very different. Perhaps there is a deep disagreement here, or maybe what is going on is that different sorts of similarity are relevant in different contexts. Set up a context where much similarity is needed and some strong statement of essence seems appropriate; be

¹⁹⁰ For an argument against restricted composition see Lewis (1986a: 211-3)

more lax, and a duck-shaped robot that acts and thinks like Amanda seems good enough to be a possibility for her. This would at least explain why people have such different intuitions about what is essential, and why the arguments between different sides so often get nowhere. (2005: 68)

The point is that our modal judgements often tend to be what Lewis calls ‘inconstant’, and the context dependence of the counterpart relation neatly accounts for this.¹⁹¹ In addition, CT can offer a solution to the paradoxes of coincidence. A statue can survive changes the clay that constitutes it cannot, and likewise the clay that constitutes the statue can survive changes the statue cannot. Does this mean that, to preserve Leibniz’ Law, we have to accept that we have here not one object but *two* – a statue, and the clay out of which it is made – and that the two are spatially coincident? Lewis thinks not. Utilising CT, we can say that there is one object here, but viewed in one way (e.g., considered as a statue) certain properties (e.g., similarity of shape and form) are most important, and viewed in another way (e.g., considered as a lump of clay), other properties are (e.g., having certain material parts as constituents). Accordingly, different *de re* properties are attributed in accordance with what aspects of similarity we deem to be important. ‘[D]ifferent ways of referring to this single thing tend to evoke different counterpart relations.’ (Lewis, 1986a: 257)

However, while *in general* these appear to be good features of CT, *prima facie* at least, they do not seem amenable to theism. The classical picture holds that God has an essence independently of the way he is conceived, described, or referred to, by us; and this is precisely what is now being denied: by this theory, facts about God’s essence are flexible and context-dependent. Indeed, one may even be forgiven for thinking that they are, for this reason, *mind-dependent*. For, God’s essential goodness, for example, is owed, in part, to *our deeming* the respect of goodness to be one of primary importance. And *that’s* certainly not something that comports well with classical theism.

4.2. A Potential Solution

In a number of places (1983b, 1984, and 1986a: 59-69), Lewis insists that any adequate systematic philosophy must allow for a distinction between more and less natural properties and so accepts that an ‘élite’ number of sparse properties must be distinguished amongst his abundant horde. I noted above that natural properties are such that the ‘[s]haring of

¹⁹¹ However, as Woodward (2012: §2.1) points out, context-dependence only gives rise to inconstancy given that there *are* different contexts to deliver different verdicts. Even if the truth-conditions for modal judgements *are* context dependent, modal judgements may nonetheless not be inconstant if it turns out that we *always* happen to be in a context which determines that a relevant *de re* modal judgement is true (or false).

them makes for qualitative similarity, they carve at the joints, they are intrinsic, they are highly specific, the sets of their instances are *ipso facto* not entirely miscellaneous, there are only just enough of them to characterise things completely and without redundancy.’ (1986a: 60). ‘Natural properties would be the ones whose sharing makes for resemblance, and the ones relevant to causal powers.’ (1983b: 347). Now, although naturalness would come in degrees, some properties would be *perfectly* natural (1986a: 61). *Perfectly natural* properties, Lewis suggests (1983b, 1986a), could be defined in terms of a primitive relation of resemblance. Perfectly natural properties would be those classes, C, such that every member of C primitively resembles every other member of C, and nothing, x, that is not a member of C primitively resembles every member of C and every member of C primitively resembles x.¹⁹² Less-than-perfectly-natural properties, or what we might call ‘imperfectly natural’ properties, ‘may be somewhat disjunctive or extrinsic, [but] are at least somewhat natural in a derivative way, to the extent that they can be reached by not-too-complicated chains of definability from the perfectly natural properties.’ (1986a: 61). An example of a property quite far up the naturalness scale is *being an electron*; an example of a property that quite low down the naturalness scale is *being yellow or once having been smiled at by a cigar-smoking squirrel while stood within three feet of a jar of quince jelly*.

This notion of primitive resemblance, and hence of perfectly natural properties, can be added to the picture to allay the worry outlined above in §4.1. The presence of perfectly natural properties ensures that at least some individuals bear *objective, metaphysically determinate*, relations of perfectly natural – and therefore of *most overall perfectly natural* – similarity. Precisely this line of thought it pursued by Todd Buras (2006), who contends that CT with an ontology containing natural properties ensures essentialism; that is, the thesis that some things possess modal properties determinately and independently of the way they are conceived, described, or referred to (*ibid.*: 29-30). Buras defines a relation of overall perfectly natural similarity as follows:

x is overall perfectly naturally similar to y =_{df} *x* is perfectly naturally similar to *y*, and there is no thing, *z*, distinct from *x* and *y*, such that *z* is perfectly naturally similar to *y*, and *z* shares more perfectly natural properties with *y* than *x*. (*ibid.*: 36)

Buras then uses this relation to define the further relation of being a maximally natural counterpart:

¹⁹² He also suggests (1983b, 1986a: 63-9) that perfectly natural properties (natural classes) could be defined in terms of their members’ bearing instantiation relations to sparse immanent universals, or in terms of their members possessing certain tropes.

x is a *maximally natural counterpart* of *y* \equiv_{df} *x* and *y* inhabit different possible worlds and compared to everything else in *y*'s world *x* is overall perfectly naturally similar to *y*. (*ibid.*: 37)

Given this, if those endorsing GR together with CT accept with Lewis that some properties are perfectly natural, then at least some individuals – those which possess at least some perfectly natural properties – will enter into maximally natural counterpart relations. Importantly, such relations will not be context dependent – will not hold in virtue of our taking certain respects of similarity to be more important than others.

[O]verall perfectly natural similarity heeds the differences in properties which primitive resemblances introduce. Consequently, it is not indeterminate in any of the ways Lewis lists: only perfectly natural similarities count, all perfectly natural similarities count equally, no less-than-perfectly natural similarities count at all, and a candidate is eliminated only when it shares fewer perfectly natural properties than another. Of course, overall perfectly natural similarity admits of ties – as in a case where *y* has exactly three perfectly natural properties, and both *x* and *z* share all three. In such cases I prefer to say that both *x* and *z* are overall perfectly naturally similar to *y*. The important point is that ties do not amount to indeterminacy. Both or neither *x* and *z* are overall perfectly naturally similar to *y* independently of how we conceive the relata. (Buras, *ibid.*: 36-7)

Since perfectly natural properties entail an objective, determinate, specification-independent relation of overall (and hence *most* overall) perfectly natural similarity, if it could be shown that God possesses at least some perfectly natural properties, God could then be seen as bearing determinate, objective, mind-independent, overall most perfectly natural similarity relations to certain individuals in other possible worlds. Further, if there's good reason to think that the *divine-making* properties are perfectly natural, then this would allow for God's having an essence in an ontologically robust sense: given TPR, God would bear determinate objective relations of *maximally natural similarity* to at least one (and at most one) individual in each possible world; and, importantly, each one of these individuals would possess the full set of required divine perfections.

This way of making CT comport better with theism thus hangs on the answer to the question of whether God's essential properties (i.e., the divine perfections) are perfectly natural. To answer this question, we first need to know what naturalness is: what makes a property natural? Above I noted some of the ways Lewis characterises the natural properties: he says, e.g., that sharing of them makes for qualitative similarity, they are joint-carving, and that they provide the most concise tools out of which to characterise things without redundancy. But one salient thing I omitted is that Lewis also says that the perfectly

natural properties are *intrinsic*. In fact, Lewis takes intrinsic properties to be those that are invariant between duplicates (and duplicates to be those individuals that alike in terms of natural similarity).¹⁹³ This is significant. If, as I've argued, certain of God's essential properties are *extrinsic*, then given the correctness of Lewis's judgement, such properties *cannot* count as perfectly natural. For this strategy to work, then, theists must find some grounds to deny that all perfectly natural properties are intrinsic.¹⁹⁴

So, why might it be reasonable (independent of our present theistic concerns) to deny that all perfectly natural properties are intrinsic? One reason is that, plausibly, the most natural properties in our world are the fundamental physical properties, things like mass, spin, and charge (see Lewis, 1986a: 60). However, these properties of the ultimate constituents of matter are good candidates for being dispositional. Indeed, a number of prominent philosophers such as Simon Blackburn (1990), Peter Strawson (1980), Richard Holton (1999), and George Molnar (2003) have defended this view; and it wouldn't be entirely unreasonable to think that dispositions are extrinsic. They are, after all, *hypothetical* properties, implying certain facts about what goes on in their bearers' surroundings.

However, that dispositions are extrinsic goes much against the philosophical orthodoxy: David Armstrong (1973), Hugh Mellor (1974), John Mackie (1977a), Alexander Bird (1998), Molnar (2003), and many more, view dispositional properties as intrinsic to their bearers. Now, in Chapter One I noted that, at least in most cases, whether an object possesses a disposition (at a world) usually depends at least in part on what laws of nature hold at that world. Hence, the authors just cited take the view that dispositions are *intrinsic* usually because they are in agreement with Lewis' claim that 'if two things (actual or merely possible) are exact intrinsic duplicates (and if they are subject to the same laws of nature) then they are disposed alike' (1977: 147). In other words, they (a) take intrinsic properties to be those that are invariant between duplicates and (b) take dependence on laws of nature to be irrelevant in determining whether a property is intrinsic. This might give no cause for concern though. As argued in Chapter One, invariance between duplicates is not a good test for intrinsicity; furthermore, since whether all perfectly natural properties are intrinsic is the very thing at issue here, to defend against the claim that dispositions are extrinsic by pointing out that they are invariant between duplicates (i.e. individuals perfectly alike in terms of their natural properties) presupposes the point at hand. Nonetheless, since whether dispositions are extrinsic is contentious, theists looking to invoke CT would be on stronger

¹⁹³ To link this back to the discussion of intrinsicness in Chapter One: for Lewis, loneliness won't count as an intrinsic property since a duplicate of a lonely thing might itself fail to be lonely.

¹⁹⁴ I leave aside the worry that there might not be such things as *perfectly* natural properties. But for discussion of this see Handfield (2009) and Cameron (2008b).

ground if they could find some other reason to support the claim that not all perfectly natural properties are intrinsic.

Kerry McKenzie and Stephen French (forthcoming) also argue that not all of the fundamental physics properties of the actual world are intrinsic, but their basis for this claim is not that some such properties are dispositional, but that some such properties are not *freely recombinable* – that they cannot be subject to a principle of recombination, and intrinsic properties should be. They explain that

[o]ur [current] most fundamental framework for physics...is quantum field theory (QFT). In this framework, the magnitudes of physical properties, such as mass and electric charge, can change with the energy scale in a way that is described by the renormalization group equation...[and] there is no limit to how high these energy scales can grow. It follows that properties can be regarded as fundamental...only if they stay...finite in magnitude, in the infinite-energy limit. [It] turns out, however...[that this requirement] is satisfied only if the property occurs in a *local gauge theory containing only a small number of fermion types*. For example...the colour charge on a quark will behave as a fundamental property if, but only if, (1) there exist gluons in addition to quarks, and (2) there are at most 16 distinct types, or ‘flavours’, of quarks in the theory. Should there be more flavours present, the colour charge will diverge in the limit so that it can no longer be regarded as fundamental after all. [Hence,]...the fundamental physics properties cannot in general be regarded as intrinsic, at least not *qua fundamental properties*; for the very fundamentality of such properties can be sensitive to what exists in addition to any given bearer of them, in any world in which they occur...But that each free recombination takes us from one manifold of fundamental properties to another...is the central postulate of Lewis’ world-building system. (*ibid.*: 21-22)

If McKenzie and French are right about this, then theists have independent grounds for thinking that not all perfectly natural properties are intrinsic. However, it doesn’t seem that the argument can establish its purported conclusion. The relevant modality in play in the argument seems to be *physical* not *metaphysical*. If so, it wouldn’t violate the letter of PR.¹⁹⁵ In any case, supposing that the requisite modality were in play, what is, arguably, the right conclusion to draw from this is, is not that some fundamental (perfectly natural) properties are extrinsic, but rather that what we otherwise thought of as perfectly natural properties turn out not to be perfectly natural. Suppose *being a father* were a perfectly natural property. By recombination, we could take a man who is a father out of his actual surroundings, place him into a void, and he would no longer be a father. Hence, *contra* the initial supposition, *being a father* can’t be fundamental. In any case, regardless of what we say here, this discussion at least shows that these two theses are deeply at odds with each other.

¹⁹⁵ Additionally, one might resist the micro-reductionist picture the point seems to hang on and instead hold that fundamental dispositional properties can be had by *systems*.

If some fundamental properties are extrinsic, and if fundamental properties are good candidates for being perfectly natural in kind, then that threatens to undermine the Lewisian project of generating worlds by recombination.¹⁹⁶

In light of this, it would be much to the theist's advantage if there was a way to deal with the original concern that avoided our needing to take a stance on the thorny issues surrounding naturalness and the intrinsicness of dispositions.

4.3. A Better Reply

Fortunately, there is a way to do so. The original worry can be shown to be based on a mistaken piece of reasoning. The original worry was that, under CT, context determines which counterpart relations hold (because context settles which respects of similarity are most important) and that, as a consequence, *de re* modal truth is going to be at least partially *mind-dependent*. However, the mind-dependence of *de re* modal truth is not such a consequence. To see why, we should draw a distinction between the *truth-maker* for a particular utterance, *u*, and the *truth-conditions* for *u*. Now, context invariably helps determine what we mean by *u*, and therefore determines what the *truth-conditions* for *u* are, but its doing so does not make it the case that the *truth-maker* for *u* – that in virtue of which the *truth-conditions* for *u* are met – is mind-dependent. As Lewis explains:

[this] is how it is in general with dependence on complex features of context. There is a rule of accommodation: what you say makes itself true, if at all possible, by creating a context that selects the relevant features so as to make it true. Say that France is hexagonal, and you thereby set the standards of precision low, and you speak the truth; say that France is not hexagonal...and you set the standards high, and again you speak the truth. (1986a: 251-2)

As Lewis says, when it comes to an ordinary statement like *France is hexagonal*, the context in which it's made will help to fix its *truth-condition*. But that which fixes its *truth-value* is something objective and mind-*independent* – something 'out there' in reality; namely, *the shape of France itself*. This is precisely how it is with context when it comes to statements of *de re* modality under CT. Context makes salient *which* relation of similarity we're most

¹⁹⁶ The Lewisian project would, though, only be *profoundly* undermined if we had serious reason to think that *all* perfectly natural properties are extrinsic, or that so many of them were that recombination could no longer give us a large enough modal space to represent each and every possibility. Suppose McKenzie and French are right that, e.g., there is a necessary connection between quarks having a certain property and the existence of gluons. Then it will not matter so much that we cannot recombine the two. Indeed, we shouldn't want to: in such a case we'd be mistaken that such a possibility would need to be represented (it wouldn't *be* a possibility). All that matters is that there be other perfectly natural properties that *are* intrinsic, that can thus be recombined, and that the worlds made up of such recombinations gives us a large enough modal space.

interested in, but *whether there is* such a relation has nothing to do with context (is not subjective); it is, rather, a matter of what possibilities exist and of what character they have. Hence, since it's the individuals themselves that make for the holding (or not) of a certain relation of similarity, R , between them, the fact that context determines that it's R (rather than R_1 or R_2 , or...) which is salient is by the by as far as the mind-dependence of *de re truth* itself is concerned.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, since the original worry was motivated partly by a confusion as to what role context plays under CT, and partly by a failure to notice the extent to which context already does play precisely this role elsewhere in our language, we needn't worry that CT is at odds with the objectivity of God's essence.

5. Irrelevance

5.1. What the Problem Isn't

Aside from concerns about the way counterpart relations are determined, theists may also be troubled by the relevance of the counterpart relations themselves. According to this view, *what it is* for God to have (and, likewise, what it is for each God-counterpart to have) modal properties (such as necessary existence and essential moral perfection) is for God to stand in certain relations to other things in other worlds. It's the presence of morally impeccable God-counterparts (and the absence of morally imperfect God-counterparts) in other worlds, which, e.g., make for the truth of the claim that God is essentially good. Yet, so the objection might run, what deeds *other* beings do should be neither here nor there with regards to whether *God* is essentially morally good. Likewise, facts about what it's possible for God to do should owe directly to him, not his counterparts and the deeds that they do.

This may bring to mind the charge of irrelevance which, in one of contemporary philosophy's most discussed footnotes, Kripke famously raises against CT. Kripke objects that, under this theory,

if we say 'Humphrey might have won the election...' we are not talking about something that might have happened to *Humphrey* but to someone else, a "counterpart". Probably, however, Humphrey does not care whether someone else, no matter how much resembling him, would have been victorious in another possible world. (1972: 45).

However, as many have since responded to the first component of this objection, CT does not say that when we say 'Humphrey might have won', we are talking about something that

¹⁹⁷ That it is crucial to emphasise the distinction between truth conditions and truth making in order to fully understand CT has precedence in the literature; see Divers (2007).

might have happened to *Humphrey's counterpart*. It tells us that when we say 'Humphrey might have won', we are talking about something that might have happened to *Humphrey*: *he* is the subject matter of the claim. It's just that 'Humphrey might have won' owes its truth Humphrey's counterpart *winning* in some other world.¹⁹⁸

Equally, there's an easy response to the second component of the objection. As I explained in the thesis introduction, it's simply not at all obvious what the ontological ground for modality is. Hence, as Lewis (1986a: 196-7) points out, this objection, if it has any bite at all, will count just as much against any other account of what modal truth is grounded in. For whatever some theory specifies as the ontological ground for modality, the answer at least is not going to be something obvious; were it not, the grounding problem would never have arisen! So, *of course* it will go against pre-theoretical intuition to suppose that what we could have done, or what might have befallen us, is a matter of whatever that theory tells us. As Lewis explains, it's equally surprising that some 'abstract whatnot' makes true, e.g., *Sarah could have been a genius*. Further, *contra* what Kripke suggests, it seems that, once we learn that some *x* consists in some *y*; we *do* then have reason to care about *y*, given that we care about *x*. Suppose I come to learn that my feeling anxious consists in there being such and such chemical reaction in my brain. It seems that, rather than taking my prior indifference towards whether such and such chemical reaction occurs in some part of my brain to be evidence against its constituting my anxious feeling, once I learn of the equivalence, I certainly *would* care whether such a chemical reaction is going to occur, given that I care about whether I'm subject to such a feeling.

5.2. What the Problem Is

If the theistic complaint does mirror the first part of Kripke's objection, then it isn't a good one. However, the objection isn't that the modal properties of God depend on the *modal* properties of his counterparts; it's rather that, under CT, the modal properties of God depend on the *non-modal* properties of his counterparts. We're saying that God has his modal properties *in virtue of the way some other individuals are*, and we shouldn't be: what individuals besides God get up to should be neither here nor there with regards to whether *God* is, e.g., essentially morally good.

It will be of no use to reply that these are, after all, *God's* counterparts; that it's in virtue of the deeds *God* does that he's essentially morally perfect, and that it's because of

¹⁹⁸ However two authors sympathetic to Kripke's objection are Blackburn (1984: 214-5), and Jubien (2009: 63-7, 73-4), who offers some additional reasons for taking counterparts relations to be inadequate for serving their proposed modal purpose.

the way *God actually is* (and acts) that certain morally impeccable beings resemble him closely enough to be his counterparts (and less-than-impeccable beings in other worlds do not). For, to suppose that what matters here is merely that no-one else crowd out God himself from explanations concerning his possession of his modal properties misses the point.¹⁹⁹ Again, the point's that no other beings should be 'getting in on the act': *only God himself* should be featuring in such explanations. It seems intuitively obvious that the claim '*God can destroy Jupiter*' is grounded in *someone else's destroying Jupiter*' is one which specifies a state of affairs that would be deeply at odds with divine aseity.

5.3. Dissolving the Problem

We saw in Chapter Two §6.2 that what divine aseity can sensibly be seen as involving is this: (8) God's possession of his nature depends on (is grounded in) neither the actual presence of any actual thing(s), nor the actual absence of any possible thing(s) distinct from God. So, to assess the correctness of the intuition that CT is at odds with theism in the respect of divine aseity, we must consider whether CT really violates the requirement in (8).

Now, there's a case for thinking that it *does*. After all, God's counterparts are *possible* entities; and they need to be present in other worlds in order that they can bear similarity relations to God, since this is what grounds God's nature. Yet, the thought might go, precisely because these counterparts are required to be present *elsewhere*, they are required to be *absent from actuality*, since it is exactly the counterpart theorist's view that individuals cannot be present in more than one world,²⁰⁰ and this conflicts with (8), which stipulates that the nature of an *a se* being shouldn't be grounded in the actual absence of any possibilia distinct from it. If this line of thought is right, then theists would have here a good reason to resist CT: (8) provides some much needed content to the doctrine of divine aseity; given the central role this doctrine has to play in the development of classical theism, (8)'s loss comes at a significant cost.²⁰¹

However, the move from the claim that *y's being F depends on x's existing in a non-actual world* to the further claim that *y's being F depends on x's being absent from the actual world* is illegitimate. Take an analogous case. Does the fact that I'm in Leeds depend on the fact that I'm not in Reading? Most of us would agree that it doesn't. My absence from Reading is grounded in my presence in Leeds, not vice-versa. Likewise, the GRist who admits CT can

¹⁹⁹ This mirrors some of the discussion in Lewis (1979: 127 and 1986a: 196).

²⁰⁰ Though, of course, individuals may be present *at many*.

²⁰¹ Unless some other way to characterise the independence of the divine nature can be found – one which sets it apart from the natures of non-divine individuals whilst not making too-high demands.

just take where individuals are in modal space as prior to – and as un-grounded in – their absences elsewhere. So, it's wrong to think that CT involves a conflict with (8). It doesn't say that God's nature is grounded in the *actual absence* of certain possible entities distinct from God, it just says that it's grounded in the *non-actual presence* of possible entities distinct from God. Hence, GR's counterpart-theoretic treatment of *de re* truths involving God does not conflict with aseity. This certainly seems a surprising result, but surprising results are not something the philosopher should be unused to.

6. The Real Issues with N4

Above we have seen that some *prima facie* obvious reasons not to accept N4 as the interpretation of N1 – the claim that God exists according to all worlds – can be rebutted. In this section, we will see that some more significant objections to N4 can be advanced, ones that cannot be so easily dealt with.

6.1. Too Much Luck

The first real problem for theism under CT is this. Each world depends – in some sense left unexplicated – on a different divine being: there is some kind of explanatory relation between each divine being and the world it inhabits. By hypothesis, there are no causal relations between the parts of different worlds; causal relations are partly what makes for world unification, so no divine individual has any causal interaction with any of its other-worldly counterparts. Yet, somehow, there are no gaps in modal space: for every way our world could be, some world, (and exactly one world), really is that way. This just seems to be far too much of a coincidence to accept.

Now, it might be thought that this is a problem for GR independently of theism. Isn't it equally miraculous that, even under *atheistic* GR, for every way our world could be, some world really is that way; that no two worlds are alike;²⁰² and that no world contains impossible events such as Sarah's successfully dividing by zero, nor impossible objects such as round squares? The GRist has to accept the existence and natures of the worlds as a brute, primitive, feature of reality; otherwise, they'd forfeit their reductive explanation: '[t]o admit constraints on the number and nature of worlds is to contradict the reductive [GR] hypothesis that the existence of worlds is the prior, or more basic, feature of reality and modality the posterior, or less basic, feature.' (Shalkowski, 1994: 675-6). Yet, again, taking

²⁰² While Lewis (1986a: 87) expressed agnosticism about the existence of qualitatively identical worlds, such things are an unnecessary posit the theory could do without.

what worlds exist and what natures they have as brute leaves us with a state of affairs which seems to hold as too big a matter of luck: these worlds whose existence is brute, in a miraculous stroke of good fortune, satisfy the principle of re-combination.

However, even if one does find something objectionable about this aspect of the atheistic GR picture, there is certainly something much *more* unacceptable in the theistic case. In the *atheistic* case, as we've seen, the existence and the natures of the worlds is brute – *unexplained*. In the theistic case, though, something *explains* each corner of modal space. But *nothing* explains why those corners work so well together as they do. It is as if we are being asked to imagine a giant super-cosmic jigsaw – a picture divided into many different interlocking pieces – with a different divine individual in some way explaining each piece. These beings (think of them as independent manufacturers) never interact but, *somehow*, the resultant jigsaw forms not only a *coherent* picture – each part of it representing just what it needs to in order to contribute towards some larger representation – but a *complete* one too (i.e., it has no missing pieces)! This is a story anyone could be forgiven for failing to find at all plausible.

The mysterious good fortune could only be dissolved if we were either able to appeal to some modal explanation, which would compromise the reductive project, or if we were otherwise able to appeal to some causal explanation, which would also compromise the reductive project. For again, it is causal (and spatiotemporal) relatedness which provide the non-modal definition of 'world'.

Now it is, of course, always open to theists to make an appeal to what we might call 'the inevitable mystery of the divine nature'. Maybe some other *sui generis* metaphysical connection guarantees the completeness and coherence of modal reality: how God does what he does is bound to be mysterious, isn't it? Perhaps there's just no getting away from that. If so, then this connection between God and his counterparts may just be one that lies, expectedly, beyond the realms of human comprehension. If we did allow for this, then putting GR in a theistic context could do the theory a favour: we have here at least a gesture towards a solution for what otherwise seems a real problem for GR.

Should we find this satisfactory though? Insofar as we are invoking one mystery to respond to another, we don't really appear to be *dealing* with the original mystery at all; we seem, rather, to simply be *deferring* it. Moreover, as a more general point against these kinds of responses: we may well wonder why, if we permit the theist to take this line, we are engaging with theistic metaphysics at all. If we're prepared to hold our hands up and plead ignorance at any moment, why not do so earlier on, or even from the outset? Given that

what we we're looking for here is a theory which can dispel the mystery surrounding modality, this response is one we ought to shy away from.

Nonetheless, the point isn't decisive. Consider other cases where *sui generis* metaphysical (non-causal) connections are posited; the notion of instantiation which links some universal, *F*, with some particular, *a*, being one such example. In the face of Bradley's regress (Bradley, 1930) – which asks *if F is related by instantiation to a, then what links F, a, and instantiation?*; and then asks *if some further thing, G, links F, a, and instantiation, then what links those things (i.e., F, a, instantiation, and G)?*; and so on – some maintain that instantiation is a 'non-relational tie' (Strawson, 1959). That is, they take it to be a *sui generis* link – which binds universals and particulars without relating them. C. D. Broad (1933), who calls this tie a 'metaphysical glue', is able to make an analogy with more ordinary adhesives. Just as glue *just does* bind two pieces of paper together – meaning we don't have to go searching for another kind of adhesive to bind the glue and the paper – instantiation *just does* bind universals to particulars (*ibid.*: 85). Now, this kind of metaphysical glue, insofar as it is *sui generis*, is certainly mysterious. Undoubtedly, we don't know *how* it does what it does, but we do at least have some grip on this thing, since we at least know *what* it's supposed to do. Likewise, the *sui generis* metaphysical connection which is being proposed to hold between God and his counterparts is one we can neither fully nor easily understand, but if such connections are allowed in other cases (given that we have some grip on the role they are supposed to play), shouldn't this one be permitted too? Perhaps so, but even if we *do* posit this connection, it seems we do so only at a further cost to theism. For, if, as we're now supposing, it is this connection which ensures the completeness and consistency of modal space, then the role each God-counterpart has to play is somewhat diminished. Each divine being does what it does because that is what the connection demands. In that case, why have the divine beings at all? We could just as well make do with the mysterious metaphysical connection all on its own.

6.2. Not Enough Knowledge

That CT requires God and his other-worldly counterparts to reside in isolated worlds presents a second significant problem, one which relates to divine omniscience. As omniscient, any of these beings can be expected to have knowledge of what goes on in other worlds. For each omniscient being can be expected to have modal knowledge, and the truth-conditions for modal claims involve (this and) other worlds. However, because each world is isolated, God cannot know what other worlds there are – and hence, cannot know whether the truth-conditions for modal claims are met – if knowing what worlds

there are would require him to have some kind of causal acquaintance with them. Tom Richards (1975) raises exactly this objection against Lewisian GR: that if modal truth is what this theory says it is, then modal knowledge is ruled out since ‘direct inspection’ of other worlds is impossible.

But why should we accept that anyone’s knowing what worlds there are would require them to have causal acquaintance with them? There are those, such as Lewis, who would deny that someone can know that p only if there is some causal connection between the knower and the subject matter of p . In Lewis’ view, ‘[c]ausal accounts of knowledge are all very well in their place, but if they are put forward as *general* theories, then mathematics refutes them.’ (1986a: 109). His point is that since it’s undeniable that we have mathematical knowledge, if it turns out that numbers – the subject matter of our mathematical knowledge – are abstract mathematical objects, then it cannot be that mathematical knowledge requires causal acquaintance with numbers. Likewise, Lewis takes it that ‘[w]e do not find out by observation what possibilities there are...What we do find out by observation is what possibilities *we* are: which worlds may be ours, which of their inhabitants may be ourselves.’ (*ibid.*: 112).

Lewis (*ibid.*: 110) anticipates the potential reply that the mathematical and the modal cases are sufficiently dissimilar – mathematical objects are *abstract*, whereas other worlds are *concrete* – and this has consequences for their epistemology. Given that what it takes for us to know that some concrete things exist in this world is that we somehow observe them, doesn’t it follow that we should likewise have to perceive the concrete denizens of other worlds to know that *they* exist?

Lewis thinks not. For him, the modal and the mathematical cases are, rather, relevantly *similar* since the facts about possibility, just like the mathematical facts, are *necessary*. We need causal acquaintance with the objects in this world not because they are *concrete*, but because they are *contingent*. To know whether some objects such as turtles exist in *this* world is just to know whether turtles are spatiotemporally related to us. But it’s *contingent* that turtles are spatiotemporally related to us. Hence, a belief that turtles are actual could be wrong. A belief that turtles are *possible*, by contrast, could not be wrong, because it’s *necessary* that turtles are possible. So, given that the former type of belief could be false, a causal link is needed between the object of the belief and the believer to rule out the belief’s being true by sheer luck. However, since the latter type of belief could not be false, no such causal link is needed. Lewis thinks that we likely form the majority of our modal beliefs through imaginative experiments, and by making use of a principle of recombination.

The true beliefs formed in this manner suffice for knowledge just because their truth *cannot* be a matter of luck (*ibid.*: 113-5).

However, as Pruss objects, the impossibility of being wrong about something does not suffice for knowledge. ‘Otherwise, the mathematical cranks who believed that they had proofs of Fermat’s Last Theorem would necessarily count as knowing that Fermat’s Last Theorem, is true, which is absurd.’ (2011: 121). Further, since conceivability is only a fallible guide to possibility, even if we did concur with Lewis that true modal beliefs suffice for knowledge, there’s still no guarantee that we aren’t in possession of false modal beliefs. The point of having some causal constraint on knowledge is not so much that it ensures that the truth of the belief isn’t lucky, but that it ensures that the *belief itself* is not lucky.

Supposing that Lewis is right to say that what grounds modal truth need not feature in *our* modal knowledge, we should nonetheless resist the thought that what grounds modal truth need not feature as a component of *God’s* modal knowledge. For, the classical view, advocated by Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas has it that divine knowledge has the feature of being *immediate*. These authors took it that the knowledge of a perfect intellect cannot be *subsequent* to anything else it knows: ‘God sees all things together and not successively’ (Aquinas, 1273/1947: book I, q. 14, a. 7), and God’s knowledge is not derived through a discursive rational, or mediative, process. The idea is that cognitive perfection rules out the need to perform deductions (see, e.g., Wierenga (2010) and Mann (2005: 51)). Further, God’s knowledge – his knowledge of the *world*, or of facts about concrete things – is traditionally thought to be obtained through some sort of perfect *perceptive* faculty (one that must differ from the perceptive faculties of bodily beings, since God (at least *qua* non-incarnate²⁰³) is without physical form.²⁰⁴ The God of the Bible is described as one who *hears* our prayers and *witnesses* our actions. And this empirical knowledge is likewise supposed to be immediate: God just *directly apprehends* reality. The reason for this is that it ensures the clearness and distinctness of divine perceptions, which, in turn, ensures divine infallibility. One contemporary author advocating this line is William Alston (1986). In Alston’s view, ‘[i]mmediate awareness of facts is the highest form of knowledge just because it is a direct and foolproof way of mirroring the reality to be known...[Hence] [t]he state of [God’s] knowledge is constituted by the presence of the fact known.’ (*ibid.*: 297). Under CT, knowledge of other worlds cannot be immediate to the divine intellect in this way.

Alston considers his position to be neutral on the question of divine spatio-temporality. He writes that God ‘could be directly aware of all facts at every moment, or

²⁰³ I say this to leave aside complications concerning the trinity.

²⁰⁴ See, e.g., Borland (2015: §ii.1).

aware of all facts timelessly if that is the mode of His existence.’ (*ibid.*). And he is quoted by Gregory Ganssle as asking the following in his response to William Hasker (who argues that Alston’s position is not neutral with regards to divine spatiotemporality) in the APA Symposium on Alston’s *Divine Nature and Human Language*: ‘Why suppose that an object of direct awareness must be ‘where’ the subject is? Why suppose, more generally, that direct awareness requires that subject and object be similar in respect to temporality or lack thereof?’ (Ganssle, 1993: 174). Likewise, the counterpart theorist might reply that God could have a different kind of awareness of what goes on in other worlds: perhaps God manages to directly perceive what goes on in merely possible worlds despite not being located there. However, this would be extremely odd, and not to mention ad hoc, under a view which construes God as necessarily *spatiotemporal*. That a God necessarily related to spacetime can somehow have direct apprehension – and so knowledge – of the concrete goings on it lacks any spatiotemporal relations to, is in the least somewhat incongruous.²⁰⁵

Might it not be, though, that God could have immediate, pure *a priori* apprehension of, or insight into, the other-worldly facts? Perhaps God knows what other worlds are like in the same way that he knows what the product of 6 squared is. There’s good reason to resist this suggestion. For, God as omniscient superior intellect can be expected to know *p* by knowing what grounds *p* for any *p* that he knows. However, under CT, if God has no epistemic access to that which grounds the truth of his belief that *p* when *p* reflects some other-worldly knowledge, then this is false. Alternatively, if we say that ideal knowledge does consist in immediate apprehension of some facts, and that God does know *a priori* what the worldly facts are, then there must *be* some modal facts independent of the worlds to be apprehended *a priori*; God may then have epistemic access to what grounds the truth of *p* when *p* is other worldly knowledge, but only at the cost of accepting something which is exactly at odds with the GR picture.

²⁰⁵ It merits mention that there’s also a strong tradition – of which Aquinas is one of the forefathers – of denying that God’s knowledge is causally dependent upon anything distinct from him in this way. Aquinas claimed that God rather knows about the world by a kind of introspection of his own essence. ‘[God] sees himself through His essence; and He sees other things *not in themselves, but in Himself*: inasmuch as His essence contains the similitude of things other than Himself. (1273/1947: book I, q. 14, a. 6, emphasis added). The main motivation for claiming that God’s knowledge of the world cannot even be causally dependent on, e.g., the free actions of creatures, is that it’s been thought that this is a prerequisite of maximal independence. An *a se* being’s knowledge that I’m now freely doing A, supposedly, can’t be dependent on my freely doing A. However, as argued previously, such a tremendously strong notion of aseity is implausible (and un-motivated). Further, not only does such a view ‘[leave] too great a distance between God as he is affirmed theologically and God as he is known through Scripture and experience.’ (Hasker, 1988: 391), it also seems that in saying that God has *immediate* knowledge of the world, *and* that God knows other things *through* knowing himself, one contradicts oneself.

6.3. Motivation Undercut

Third, and this is perhaps one of the most significant worries, N4 undercuts the primary reason theists had for adopting GR in the first place. If we cast our minds back to Chapter Two, we'll remember that GR was proposed as a way of remedying a particular problem levelled against DI. If God is pictured as Leibniz supposed – actualizing a single world after surveying a plethora of possibilities represented in the divine understanding – then regardless of whether there is a single best actualizable world or not, problems arise. A view whereby all worlds are actualized, rather than mental representations which are for the most part uninstantiated, was preferable because this is what enabled the theist to escape through its horns. Here though, we're back to a view whereby God (and each God-counterpart) only actualizes only *one* world. In this respect, adopting N4 seems to leave the theist GRist at least in no better position than their DIist rival.

There's a related problem here that some worlds will be axiologically better than others. Should one God-counterpart, x , produce (or be in some other sense responsible for) an axiologically better world than another such counterpart, y , then y will not be as morally perfect as x . Indeed, if even one world differs from the others by having a lower axiological status, it results that God is not (and no God-counterpart is) *essentially* morally perfect; according to at least one world, God exhibits a moral defect. This appears to give us reason to think that God could not have other-worldly counterparts: how can God be essentially good when he has counterparts who will the existence of worlds of a much lower axiological status than our own?

Now, this problem (if it is a problem), is not particular to CT. The problem, more generally put, is essentially the same as that mentioned in the Chapter Three: there appear to be worlds, w , at which a divine being exists and wills the existence of w even though w has a low axiological status. Explaining how this scenario is theistically respectable is a task that must be undertaken regardless of how N1 – the claim that God exists at all worlds – is interpreted. I said previously that precisely this issue will be dealt with in Chapter Five; so I won't pursue it here. I will note, though, that while I believe a satisfactory answer can be given, it cannot be given by those who interpret N1 in terms of N4. How this general problem might be dealt with is thus not neutral with regards to how N1 is interpreted.

6.4. Ultimacy Flouted

In his paper addressing theism's compatibility with GR, Sheehy argues that CT 'seems to violate too much the sense in which God is unique' (2006: 319).

Certainly, God as traditionally understood is supposed to be unique, for God's uniqueness is explicitly and repeatedly stated in Holy Scriptures. Here are some biblical examples: *Isaiah* 46:5 'To whom will you compare me or count me equal?'; *Isaiah* 46:9: 'I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is no one like me'; *Deuteronomy* 32:39: 'See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me.' Is Sheehy is also right, though, that theism together with N4 is in direct tension with the classical theistic doctrine that God is unique? That depends. We need to know whether what the scriptural texts such as the above point to, and thus require, is a monotheism whereby only one god *actually* exists, or whether it is one whereby only one god is *real*. Lewis took himself to be speaking truly when he said that he didn't believe theism to be true, even though he was confident in saying that divine beings exist *somewhere* in modal space. But then again, Lewis was no theist. What would *committed monotheists* be likely to say about monotheism's compatibility with GR plus N4? Would they take God's merely being unique in the actual world as sufficient for the truth of monotheism?²⁰⁶

To answer this, we first need to ask ourselves why it should matter that God be unique. In Chapter One I argued that God must at least be unique in his omnipotence, for absurdities arise on the assumption that more than one omnipotent being exists. For obvious reasons though, this reasoning shouldn't tell against the standard CT view. CT does not require that multiple omnipotent beings inhabit the same world; so it doesn't lead to the problem that any combination of these beings could have a conflict of will, resulting in at least one of them having their intentions thwarted. We have here no reason, then, to find the existence of multiple divine beings across modal space objectionable.

However, one divine attribute which, Sheehy argues, could not be multiply instanced is *being ultimately responsible for what exists*. As Sheehy explains, '[w]ithin the tradition of classical theism God is [supposed to be] the ultimate source or ground for what there is...a single entity is ultimately responsible for what exists.' (2006: 318). Now, I argued in the previous chapter that what should be of primary importance to our conception of the divine is not so much that God be the *creator* of literally all that exists distinct from him, but rather that God be the *ultimate stopping point for explanation*. To reiterate Leftow's words, what matters is that 'there is no going past this level [i.e. that of God] in any explanation of other things' existence: explanations that reach here, stop here, and [so]...God is the ultimate

²⁰⁶ Aquinas' denial that God belongs to any genus might is not relevant to the question of God's uniqueness here. For, Aquinas claim derives from his view that (a) God is immaterial, and that (b) individuals within a certain genus are individuated, or differentiated, by their material differences (see e.g., Aquinas (1273/1947: Book Ia, 3, 5) and Davies (1985: 120-1)). Additionally, even though, under CT, no God-counterpart transcends spacetime (each is at least temporally related to some world), there's no worry about how to distinguish them since each one has unique temporal relations.

explainer of all explained existence...there is no digging deeper than God.' (2012: 5-6). Under CT, God is not the ultimate explainer of all explained existence if we are quantifying over unrestrictedly everything. God is, rather, only the ultimate explainer of all explained existence if we are quantifying over *actuality*. Likewise, each God-counterpart is only the ultimate stopping point for explanation when we are restricting our attention to the world that it inhabits. To say that this lessens our conception of the divine would be something of an understatement: far from being something with *fundamental explanatory power*, God, on this view, is merely the ultimate explainer of an infinitesimal portion of concrete reality. So here we have a fourth reason N4 is at odds with theism. On the basis of this and the above considerations, I conclude that counterpart relations do not make for a suitable mode of divine *de re* representation.

7. The Standpoint View

§6 shows there's good reason to rule out what was initially identified as option (ii) of the possible answers to the question of where God is located with respect to the worlds GR posits: *God inhabits some worlds but not others*. In the previous chapter we saw that what was initially identified as option (i): *God inhabits all worlds* is, despite first appearances, a viable option. Option (iii) thus remains to be considered: *God inhabits no worlds*. This final section will examine this remaining alternative. Since Sheehy (2006) contends that it is untenable, we'll begin by assessing the correctness of his estimation.

7.1. Sheehy's Argument

Sheehy's argument that God cannot be said to not exist *in* (to not be a part of) any world, relies on the assumption that if this *were* maintained, theists would be unable to give an analysis of God's necessity compatible with GR. For, since, under GR, possible individuals are all and only those who are such that the whole of them is part of some world, if God is not a part of any world, then God will not be a possible individual.

However, as Cameron has highlighted, Sheehy has been too quick in dismissing this option, for there *is* a way to account for God's necessity that doesn't involve God's being *a part of* any world. Cameron says:

isn't the natural thing to say simply that [existence *in*, or being *part of* a world is] only what it is for a spatio-temporal entity to exist at a world? Isn't it just obvious that the [GRist] will need to say something different about entities that simply aren't located in space and time? (2009: 96)

And, as Cameron goes on to note, Lewis does in fact say something different in the case of such entities. According to Lewis, there are things – such as pure sets (i.e., sets with no non-sets as members) – that aren't spatiotemporally located.²⁰⁷ However, even though such entities do not exist *in* any world, they nonetheless exist *according to* every world, because there is such a thing as existing *from the standpoint of every world*. Being a part of a world is thus not the only way to exist at a world, as Lewis explains:

[Some] entities...inhabit no particular world but exist alike from the standpoint of all worlds, just as they have no location in time and space but exist alike from the standpoint of all times and places. (1968: 126)

Provisionally, my ontology consists of iterative set theory with individuals [and]... the part-whole relation applies to individuals, not sets. Then no set is in any world in the sense of being a part of it. Numbers, properties, propositions, events – all these are sets, and not in any world...Even a sequence of possible individuals all from the same world is not, strictly speaking, itself in that world.

When we evaluate the truth of a quantified sentence, we usually restrict the domain and quantify over less than all there is...we will normally omit many things not in that world. But we will not omit the numbers, or some of the other sets. Let us say that an individual exists *from the standpoint of a world* iff it belongs to the least restricted domain that is normally – modal metaphysics being deemed abnormal – appropriate in evaluating the truth at that world of quantifications...[T]his domain will include all the individuals in that world; none of the other individuals; and some, but not all, of the sets...

Thus we have three relations: being *in* a world, i.e. being part of a world; being *partly in* a world...and existing *from the standpoint of* a world...[T]he principle that nothing is in two worlds, applies only to the first of these. (1983c: 40)

So Lewis explicitly accepts that his postulate that no possible individual can be *in* more than one world does not apply to entities which exist from the standpoint of a world. There are then *two* ways for an entity to exist necessarily: one, by being wholly located at one world and being counterpart related to an individual in each non-actual world, and two, by existing from the standpoint of every world. Theists adopting GR can then say that God's necessity is grounded in the fact that – from whichever world one is at – it is true 'in the least restricted domain of quantification' that God exists. If so, N1 is interpreted in terms of N5 below:

N5: God exists from the standpoint of every world.

²⁰⁷ It's not always obvious that Lewis does admit these entities though since he also says, e.g., that a pure set is 'one of the most dispensable and suspect of sets' (1986a: 83).

While God (and any other non-spatiotemporal entity) exists from the standpoint of all worlds, any spatiotemporal entity will be worldbound, and hence, will be represented as existing at other worlds vicariously, by their counterparts.

7.2. Virtues

N5 has a number of points in its favour. First, unlike N4, it stays true to the original motivations for adopting GR. God, numerically the same individual, actualizes all worlds as the proposed solution to the dilemma against DI claims. Second, and because of this, N5 doesn't give rise to the problem of luck, and there is there no conflict with divine ultimacy: God is not the mere stopping point for explanation in an infinitesimal portion of reality; he is something with *fundamental explanatory power*: all worlds will bear explanatory relations to God, and this dissolves the mystery as to how modal space, though disjoint, fits together so neatly. Third, it respects the classical theistic view that God's mode of existence is entirely other to that of creatures; it can provide some sense to the claims made by theologians such as Aquinas (2008: 206) that 'by his very own existing' God differs from other, lesser, beings. Certainly, these are considerable reasons to prefer N5 to N4.

7.3. Worldly Knowledge

What about the problem of divine modal knowledge, though? Just as God cannot have direct awareness of what goes on in each world under N4, he likewise can't have direct awareness of what goes on in each world under N5; at least, he cannot do so if his doing so would require his *literally being present* in those worlds (and therefore, his being spatiotemporally related to them). Indeed, the problem looks even worse under N5: under this interpretation, God does not even literally inhabit the actual world!

The following should be accommodated. Since we are already taking it here that God is not spatiotemporally located, it would not, as it would be under N4, be an ad hoc move to pick up on Alston's suggestion that divine direct perception of worldly facts might take another mode. The point is that one who believes in an aspatiotemporal God must *already* accept that God has access to what goes on in the world without bearing any spatiotemporal relations to it. And since those accepting the classical position of divine aspatiotemporality already face the problem of explaining how God knows what goes on in the world despite not being located *in* it, this problem – if it is a problem – is at least not an additional one SV forces them to contend with.

7.4. Causal Connections

However, there's a further problem about causal connections. If the God of N5, though existing outside of spacetime, is supposed to bear causal relations to different worlds, then, should it turn out that causes must – as is typically supposed – be spatiotemporally related to their effects, N5 collapses back into N4. Further, regardless of whether causes must be spatiotemporally related to their effects, if God bears causal relations to multiple worlds, then since, under GR, causal relations are partly what unifies worlds, N5 is susceptible to modal collapse: any two worlds God is causally related to will, after all, not be distinct.

A quick fix can be made to remedy the latter issue by nuancing the causal isolation component. Instead of saying that an individual, w , is a world iff w is a maximal mereological sum of spatiotemporally or causally related individuals, we could instead say that w is a world iff x is a maximal mereological sum of individuals related by spatiotemporal or spatiotemporally dependent relations. Then, we can say that not all causal relations are spatiotemporal: some causal relations are such that they can hold between two individuals, x and y , only if x and y are spatiotemporally related; some, however, are not. If so, then some x 's being causally related to w only suffices to make x a part of w if the causal relation linking x to w is of a kind that requires its relata to be spatiotemporally related. Since SV denies that God is spatiotemporal, the causal relations God bears will not be of the kind that can hold only between spatiotemporally related individuals. Hence, the causal relations God bears to different worlds will not give rise to modal collapse.

Still, this proposal obviously depends on the falsity of the assumption that causal relations are necessarily spatiotemporal. This being so, the response to the latter issue (of world collapse) will depend on the viability of the response to the former (the possibility of non-spatiotemporal causal relations). Although it's beyond the scope of this thesis to examine whether causation between non-spatiotemporally related individuals might be possible,²⁰⁸ the important thing to point out here is that theists with prior commitment to the classical position – i.e., to the one whereby God is atemporal – must already accept that such a thing is possible. Just as such theists must already take it that God can know what goes on in the world without being located *in* it, they must also already take it that God can bear causal relations to the world without being spatiotemporally related to it. In essence then, since belief in a non-spatiotemporal God already requires belief in atemporal causation, a theist taking this view appears to be well within their rights to make this

²⁰⁸ Little work has been done to make sense of atemporal causation. However, see Jonathan Tallant (2008) and Sam Baron and Kristie Miller (2015) for two recent attempts to show that time is not necessary for causation given a counterfactual theory of causation.

response to the world-collapse problem; those adopting this view would simply be putting an existing commitment to good use.²⁰⁹

7.5. Analysing Creatorship Claims

In the previous chapter we saw that theistic adherents to GRO face a dilemma about what to say about God's causal responsibility to the spatiotemporal regions he exists at. One side of the dilemma was that if we do want to say that God is causally responsible for any such regions, then these causal claims cannot come out as non-trivially true under the counterfactual analysis the theory provides. The same problem did not arise when we asked whether God is causally responsible for any of the material objects inhabiting those regions because none of those inhabitants exist necessarily. However, now suppose that we want to analyse the claim that the God of N5 is causally responsible for each world. An analogous problem arises. For there is no world – and *ipso facto* no *closest* world – where God does not will the existence of any world. Thus, for any claim of the form 'God is causally responsible for such and such world', its truth will be vacuous too.

This worry can be met. Under this version of GR, a world just is a maximal mereological sum of its parts. Hence, if we consider the world, *w*, which has as parts only a toad and a toadstool (and the various mereological sums of the parts of these things), there is no problem with saying that God is causally responsible for *w* when we consider that it's sufficient for God's being causally responsible for *w* that God be causally responsible for the toad and that God be causally responsible for the toadstool. But there is no problem with saying that God is causally responsible for the toad, and there is no problem with saying that God is causally responsible for the toadstool; for these things are contingent. As such, the counterfactual analysis of these claims invoking possible worlds will not have it that these claims are only true in a trivial manner. So, since God can be causally responsible for any part of any world, and since worlds are nothing over and above the sums of their parts, God can be causally responsible for each world: we just need to be careful about how the truth of these claims gets cashed out.

7.6. Abstractness

Despite its potential virtues, Sheehy (2006: 319) finds N5 objectionable for the reason that it conflicts with a primary motivation for adopting GR: its ability to enable us to make do with one fundamental ontological category. Sheehy's thought is that, if God is non-

²⁰⁹ However, one cost of this view is that it precludes the possibility of reducing the temporal order to the causal order; a proposal defended by, e.g., Mellor (1998).

spatiotemporal, God will be abstract; but one of the benefits of GR is that it enables us to do away with any kind of abstracta; it provides us with the resources to make do solely with the category *concrete particular*. So it would be absurd for theists to countenance an abstract entity and at the same time adopt GR.

GR does indeed replace many forms of abstracta with an ontology of concrete possibilia. As we saw in the previous chapter, the theory identifies properties with classes of individuals; but it can also identify propositions with classes of worlds (Lewis, 1986a: 57-59); and laws of nature with patterns of regularity across worlds (Lewis, 1994). However, doing away with *all* abstracta was never an ambition for Lewisian GR (something Sheehy himself later concedes (2009: 102)). Indeed, it could not have been, since, for one, Lewis explicitly denies that there is any clear distinction between the concrete and the abstract. In his view, ‘the supposed distinction between abstract and concrete is in disarray’ (Lewis, 1986a: 171).

Yet, even if relinquishing abstracta *were* an ambition of Lewisian GR, Sheehy’s reasoning is still too quick. For, as Lewis says, the abstract/concrete distinction is not a very well understood one, and there’s very little agreement amongst the philosophical community about how the distinction should be drawn. Susan Hale (1988: 86-87), provides a list containing no less than twelve different definitions on offer in the literature. Sheehy is only right to assume that God’s being non-spatiotemporal renders God abstract if it’s true that all non-spatiotemporal entities are abstract. However, there’s good reason to think that this way of understanding, or defining abstractness – what Hale calls the ‘spacetime criterion’ is unsatisfactory. Hale argues (*ibid.*) that the reason this spacetime criterion should be rejected is that it commits us to controversial claims about the nature of spacetime.

Hale’s argument, in extremely condensed form, begins by asking what we mean by *in* when we say an entity is *in* spacetime. One thing we might mean, says Hale, is that the thing is to be *located* in spacetime. However, most of us would want to say that spacetime points are not abstract, and yet, spacetime points are not themselves spatiotemporally located: ‘they are *locations*, not *located*.’ (*ibid.*: 89). Another thing we might mean is that the thing is *spatiotemporally extended*. However, spacetime points, being the fundamental event locations (if substantivalism is true), are the locations of idealized mass points, and idealized mass points are unextended. This means that their locations are unextended, and therefore not concrete. Yet, most of us would want to say that spacetime points *are* concrete. A third thing we might mean is that the thing is a *part of* spacetime. However, unless we are advocates of supersubstantivalism (or *monistic* substantivalism), this would mean that, *contra* our ordinary beliefs, material objects such as dogs, dishes, and dandelions are not, after all,

concrete. One final thing we might mean is that an entity is in spacetime just when it is either *located in* spacetime, or is else *a part of* spacetime; this would avoid the problems with the previous characterisations. However, it brings a problem of its own: it commits us to *dualistic* substantivalism. The reason being that this definition classes spacetime regions as concrete entities in their own right, and yet, '[q]uestions about the nature of spacetime are matters of nontrivial debate in the philosophy of physics and ought not to be decided on the grounds of obstinate insistence on a particular version of the abstract/concrete distinction.' (*ibid.*: 99).

Now, even if we find fault with Hale's reasoning, the following nonetheless remains true. While being non-spatiotemporal may well be a *necessary* condition for something's counting as abstract, it's not obviously a *sufficient* one. Abstracta, as traditionally understood, are non-personal beings and don't enter into causal relations; but God, as traditionally understood, *is* a person and *does* enter into causal relations. Unlike abstracta, God has a range of causal and mental powers: he knows, wills, creates, and loves. Under *this* construal of concreteness, theists who take God as non-spatiotemporal may still claim to have an abstracta free ontology.

Nonetheless, perhaps Sheehy's complaint when he says (2009: 103) that allowing an abstract God into our ontology undermines GR's nominalistic spirit is not so much with God's being abstract, but with his being *non-spatiotemporal*. If so, his complaint is better put as follows: admitting a non-spatiotemporal God into our ontology undermines the GR ambition of doing away with non-spatiotemporal entities. If that is Sheehy's complaint though, then again, it's misguided. Relinquishing all non-spatiotemporal entities was no more an ambition for Lewisian GR than was relinquishing all abstracta. As we've seen, Lewis already admits some non-spatiotemporal entities, such as pure sets, into his ontology, and also appears to be 'neutral' about the existence of universals (see Lewis (1983a) and (1986a: 69, 82, 189, and 205)). The primary motivation for GR was, rather, to afford us with a non-modal analysis of modal terms, and with an analysis of properties, numbers, and propositions. But regardless of whether God is a spatiotemporal being, GR can provide us with such analyses.

In his reply to Cameron, Sheehy complains that the difficulty with SV is in explaining

the motivation for including *another* kind of [non-spatiotemporal] entity. There is nothing incoherent in the claim that God exists...from the standpoint of every world. Yet it is not clear why the [GRist] would need to appeal to divine existence in quantifying over a world or worlds. Of course, this is just what the theist must

do if God is to be understood as necessary. Now, though, it is the prior commitment to divine existence which is determining the ontological inventory. (2009: 103)

What should we make of this? Sheehy thinks that there will be trouble explaining the motivation for including *another* kind of non-spatiotemporal (in his words, ‘abstract’) entity. Why should there be any difficulty? Because, says Sheehy, *the GRist would not need to appeal to divine existence in quantifying over worlds*. So the complaint seems to be that the only non-spatiotemporal entities the GRist should admit are those needed in order for them to do their philosophical theorising. Since a non-spatiotemporal God is not needed for such purposes, admitting a non-spatiotemporal God is under-motivated.

Now, the sole reason the adherent of GR (or, anyone, for that matter) could have for believing in *non-divine* non-spatiotemporal entities might be their philosophical utility (that is, their usefulness in serving up explanations in metaphysics, other areas of philosophy, or mathematics).²¹⁰ However, philosophical utility is not the *sole* reason one could have for positing *divine* non-spatiotemporal entities.²¹¹ As we’ve seen previously, theists may have independent theological reasons to accept God as non-spatiotemporal. If those reasons are found to be compelling, and if theist GRists thus wish to stay true to the classical conception of God, then they will have reason to accept SV; admitting a non-spatiotemporal God would not be unmotivated.

Here’s a second reason why Sheehy’s wrong to criticise those adopting N5 for letting prior commitment to divine existence determine the ontological inventory: prior beliefs *already do* determine the GRist’s ontological inventory. It’s the GRist’s pre-theoretical commitment to the existence of objects, persons, events, and to certain modal facts concerning them that leads the GRist to posit such things as other concrete worlds. Now, if no sense can be made of God’s being non-spatiotemporal then Sheehy might reply that a GR ontology with an aspatiotemporal God stacks up worse against a GR ontology with a spatiotemporal God. To do so, however, he’d need to show that the position of divine aspatiotemporality is more problematic than its rival.

²¹⁰ A claim that may seem plausible given that (a) such entities are not empirically detectable, and (b) certain theories recommend renouncing them if other entities can play the very same explanatory role and play it *better* (due to their explanatory power or ontological economy).

²¹¹ Also, there may well be other reasons for thinking belief in God does have philosophical utility.

8. Conclusion

This chapter and its predecessor have questioned what theistic proponents of GR should say about God's relation to the worlds it posits. We've seen that the account of *de re* representation GR standardly employs – CT – is not theistically acceptable since N4 – its analysis of N1 – is not theistically acceptable. However, *contra* first appearances, N4 does not conflict with divine aseity by grounding God's nature in his relations to other beings; nor does the context-dependence of the counterpart relation render facts about God's nature mind-dependent. However, N4 does undermine one significant advantage GR otherwise has over DI; it doesn't respect the thesis of divine ultimacy; its failure to do gives rise to the problem of luck; and lastly, it seems to preclude God from possessing the full range of knowledge he can be expected to have. Theists who are willing to accept that God exists outside of spacetime can, however, accept CT if they limit the CT analysis to *de re* modal claims involving only *spatiotemporal* beings. That way, God, being non-spatiotemporal, can exist from the standpoint of every world as N5 specifies. As well as failing to be problematic for the reasons Sheehy cites, N5 also avoids N4's failings.

Chapter Three showed that the TI view of *de re* representation – which Lewis rejects – can be made consistent with GR, resulting in a view called GRO. Possible challenges to N3 – GRO's interpretation of N1 – were rebutted; *inter alia*, it was shown that N3 does in fact respect the aseity thesis, and we can see that, like N5, N3 avoids the problems associated with luck, ultimacy, and knowledge of worlds. For here again, we have in reality only *one* divine being, one who is present at every world, but, we should note, who is required to be spatiotemporally located.

I began Chapter Three by noting that since much debate surrounds the question of divine spatiotemporality, I'd examine the matter of God's relation to the worlds GR posits without taking a stance on this issue. However, we are now in a position to say this: regardless of what commitment one has to the question of divine spatiotemporality, there is a theistically acceptable view of how divine *de re* representation works under GR. Theists committed to divine *as* spatiotemporality can think of God as existing from the standpoint of all worlds; theists committed to divine spatiotemporality can think of God as having transworld identity. In this case, should it turn out that divine spatiotemporality is indefensible, then so much the worse for N3; should it turn out that divine *as* spatiotemporality is indefensible, then so much the worse for N5; but we'll not pursue those matters here. The next chapter will instead consider what moral challenges face theistic GR. Which responses are available might depend on which account of *de re* representation is adopted. If so, a cumulative case could be made in favour of one of these two views.

5

Moral Challenges to Theistic GR

1. Introduction

It's not often in philosophy that one finds moral objections to metaphysical theories. GR is somewhat anomalous in this respect since three different authors have argued that if we accept GR, then we no longer have any reason not to be indifferent about the ethical quality of our actions: call this *the problem of moral indifference*. The first half of this chapter assesses each of these arguments and considers whether they prove any more troubling in the context of theism. The second half of this chapter examines a moral objection to GR which arises *only* in the context of theism: *the modal problem of evil*. The aim of this chapter, then, is to determine whether theists should reject GR on (these) moral grounds.²¹²

2. Beedle's Indifference Objection

2.1. Advanced Modal Claims

Lewis (1986a: 126) accepts that 'the character of the totality of all the worlds is not a contingent matter.' In doing so, he makes what Divers (1999) calls an *advanced* modal claim. Advanced modal claims predicate modal properties of things that are not individuals in any ordinary sense. A thing is an individual in an 'ordinary sense' if it's wholly spatiotemporally located at some world (hence the totality of worlds not being an individual in this sense). While Lewis does not himself tell us how to analyse advanced modal claims, Divers (*ibid.*) proposes a way to interpret such claims such that they can be analysed as true (and this proposal doesn't utilise any more resources than those Lewis provides). Divers calls his proposal a 'redundancy interpretation' since it tells us that when some proposition, p , expresses a transworld state of affairs – a quantificational sentence whose quantifiers are not world-restricted – 'the possibility operator has no semantic effect on the content of $[p]$...It is a semantically vacuous expression on a par with "It is the case that".' (*ibid.*: 229). Hence, ' $\Diamond p$ ' is true iff p , and from this we can derive truth-conditions for other types of

²¹² There may, of course, be moral objections to (theistic) GR besides those discussed here.

advanced modal claims: ' $\sim\Diamond p$ ' is true iff $\sim p$; and ' $p \ \& \ \Diamond\sim p$ ' is true iff p and $\sim p$. 'Further, ' $\Box p$ ' is true iff p (essentially because, for any transworld state of affairs, p , there is no truth-maker for $\sim p$, and therefore, no truth-maker for ' $\Diamond\sim p$ '), thus underwriting Lewis' contention that what is true of logical space could not be otherwise (*ibid.*: 230). (Hence, when p expresses a transworld state of affairs, the truth-conditions for ' $\Diamond p$ ' and ' $\Box p$ ' are identical, and the truth-conditions for ' $p \ \& \ \Diamond\sim p$ ' are never met.)

2.2. Beedle's Argument

Andrew Beedle (1996) argues that if it's true that the character of the GR pluriverse could not have been otherwise, then GR implies *fatalism*. This is the thesis that *strictly nothing could have been otherwise*: so the entire history of our world, including what is future as of now, is fixed. It may be opaque to us which world we are part of, but which world we are part of, says Beedle, is 'already decided'. In his view, this is not just metaphysically problematic, but *morally* problematic. If our entire world-history is fixed, then any 'concern about the ethical quality of our actions is futile.' (*ibid.*: 492). What reason could there be to try and act for the good in a fatalistic world?

Concern over a moral decision involves consideration of what action would be most virtuous and whether I should choose to perform that action. [But under GR] I do not choose a course of action, but wonder which course of action I shall take... There is no way in which I can avoid a certain outcome by devoting sufficient thought to any decision I make. (*ibid.*: 493).

The argument below represents Beedle's reasoning (*ibid.*: 491-2):

- P1. What conditions the plurality of GR's worlds satisfies is non-contingent.
- P2. If P1, then what conditions each particular GRist world satisfies is non-contingent.
- P3. The being of every particular GRist world is absolutely necessary.
- P4. It's futile to want something that couldn't be otherwise to be a certain way.
- P5. Wanting to act for good rather than bad involves wanting our world, or ourselves, to be a certain way.
- C1. If GR is true, then it's futile to want to act for good rather than bad.

The conclusion of this argument seems especially problematic in the context of theism. It's extremely hard to see what reason God could have for creating fatalistic worlds

in which it's futile to act for good rather than bad. God as traditionally considered creates us so that we can *freely* relate to him, and to each other, so that we can make morally significant choices. On the basis of our God-given freedom, God is supposed to hold us accountable for the ethical quality of our actions.²¹³ Heaven and Hell exist in order that the scales of justice can be re-balanced post-mortem, ensuring that we're eventually compensated for the kind of earthly life we lead.²¹⁴ But if Beedle is right and GR makes the world fatalistic, then human life cannot have the significance theism supposes it to have (nor can Heaven and Hell serve their purported purpose).²¹⁵ So not only would GR make ethical concerns seem futile, it would make the theistic world-view look false. For it's a key part of that world-view that ethical concerns are *not* futile.

2.3. Beedle's Mistake

There are no extant replies to Beedle's argument. Perhaps this is because those who've encountered it have seen all too clearly that it's unsound. P2 is false, and to suppose otherwise is to neglect GR's counterpart-theoretic treatment of *de re* modal claims involving ordinary individuals. As we've seen, the redundancy interpretation is appropriate for modal claims involving the *system* of worlds because the system of worlds is not an ordinary individual; but individual worlds, and things which are wholly located in individual worlds, *are* ordinary individuals, and this means that the way in which we analyse modal claims involving them differs. Under the CT analysis, the character of each *particular* world is contingent simply because each particular world (and its 'ordinary' contents) is counterpart-related to other worlds (and their ordinary contents) which differ from them in various respects. A similar response is appropriate under GRO: we can, as McDaniel suggests, give a similar CT analysis of the *de re* modal properties of each world (spacetime), and under a TI analysis of the *de re* modal properties of each world occupant, *x*, it will turn out that while

²¹³ It's important to note that some theists have been happy to accept a kind of theological fatalism: this is the position that God's knowledge of the future entails that our future is strictly fixed, and therefore that free will is impossible. However, this is a minority position since most theists resist these kinds of arguments. For a critical discussion of arguments for theological fatalism see Talbott (1993). For some responses which appeal to the claim that God's past beliefs depend on what happens in the future see, e.g., Merricks (2009; 2011) and Westphal (2011). (Though see Fischer and Tognazzini (2014) for a response to Merricks and Westphal.) See Rhoda et al. (2006) for a response which denies that there are any future facts for God to know; see Hasker (1989) and van Inwagen (2008) for a denial of the claim that God knows any true propositions about future free actions.

²¹⁴ Within Christianity at least there is some debate over Hell – the possibility of ever-lasting damnation – and universalism – the view that *everyone* is eventually saved by God's love. However, Hebblethwaite (2005: 121-5) notes that while Hell does not feature in Christian creeds, it has been the 'dominant view in Christian doctrine down the ages that salvation in and through Christ is effective only for those who...accept God's forgiveness, and open themselves up, in faith, to the Spirit's work of sanctification.' However, two notable philosophers of religion who do endorse universalism include Hick (1985) and McCord Adams (1993).

²¹⁵ Here I'm supposing that morally significant freedom presupposes libertarianism. More on this in §5.

the sum-total of x 's world-relativised properties (the way x is relative to *all* worlds it exists at) is non-contingent, relative to a *particular* world, what is true of x will *not* be non-contingent, given that x is different relative to each world.

3. Adams' Indifference Objection

3.1. Adams' Argument

A better-known argument for the conclusion that GR permits us to be indifferent about our moral decisions (which doesn't rely on Beedle's faulty premise) comes from Adams (1974). Adams contends that GR can provide no ethically satisfying answer to the question of what might be wrong with our actualizing evils. This is so, thinks Adams, since everything that could happen *really does* happen under GR. Any evil that doesn't occur here 'will [thus] occur in some other possible world anyway' (*ibid.*: 195). Put differently: since the sum-total of reality could be no different, the *sum-total of evil* across reality could be no different. Hence, *we can make no difference* to the sum-total of evil that exists; and if this is so, then we've got no reason not to be indifferent about the ethical quality of our actions. We can represent Adams' reasoning as follows:

- P6. If GR is true, nothing anyone can do can make a difference to the sum-total of evil in reality.
- P7. If no-one can make any difference to the sum-total of evil in reality, then we should be indifferent about the ethical quality of our actions.
- C2. Therefore, if GR is true, we should not be concerned with trying to do good and not evil.

3.2. Egocentricity & Deontology

Here we should question P7. Adams takes 'our very strong disapproval' of evil-doings to depend on our seeing them as deliberate *actualizations of evil*; that is, as actions which bring about evil states of affairs which would otherwise have never existed (*ibid.*: 195). It's wrong for me to kick Delilah because, if I do, Delilah suffers some pain she otherwise wouldn't have to endure. Lewis thinks this gets things wrong. For most of us, desires and moral aims are *egocentric*. The nice amongst us don't want to be a *causal source* of evil. We care about our own virtues: this can also stop us doing evil things (1986a: 127). Certainly, Lewis seems right about this. If someone told me that if I didn't kick Delilah, *they would* (and suppose there was nothing I could do to stop them), my reaction would definitely not be "well I

might as well do it then!” More likely (I hope), I’d insist that if someone had to do it, I’d rather it not be me! So my disapproval of kicking poor Delilah doesn’t just stem from the fact that I don’t want her to suffer, but also from the fact that I don’t want to be the kind of person who does that kind of thing. The mere fact that some evil thing is bound to happen is far from sufficient for making me indifferent about whether *I* am its causal source.

When considered in the context of theism, Lewis’ response seems particularly persuasive. As Lewis points out, P7 presupposes a crude or extreme sort of utilitarianism whereby the *only* reason to aspire to do good and not evil is to *increase goodness* and *minimise evil* (*wherever it occurs*). But it’s unlikely that any *theist* will subscribe to an ethical system of this kind. Sure, theists will want to minimise evil to the extent they can; but they will also not want any evils to be *their* evils. Those who are religiously inclined will want to refrain from performing actions God would disapprove of, ones which would go against God’s will, alienate them from him, or make them less virtuous. As Pruss notes (2011: 99), under theism, moral obligations are addressed towards the individual: ‘*Thou* shall not kill’; ‘Honour *thy* father, and *thy* mother’, etc., and so, Adams’ argument will not hold much sway.

3.3. Egocentric or Not So Egocentric Concerns?

Beedle’s (1996) paper contains a second argument, one which attempts to show that Lewis contradicts himself in maintaining that our desires and moral concerns are egocentric. Lewis claims that what we desire is not that the *plurality of worlds* satisfy a certain condition, but that *we ourselves* satisfy a certain condition: we want to be a *causal source* of good and not evil. But what is it for a person to be a causal source of something under GR? As we saw in Chapter Three §11, GR gives us the resources to analyse causal claims in terms of counterfactuals; counterfactuals whose truth-conditions involve states of affairs at other possible worlds. Therefore, if we *do* care about being a causal source of good and not evil, then we *should* care about what conditions the plurality of worlds satisfies. ‘According to [GR], causation is a counterfactual and hence ‘multi-world’ affair’ (Beedle, 1996: 491). Unavoidably, in wanting *ourselves* to satisfy a (causal) condition, we are wanting *the plurality of worlds* to satisfy a condition. Yet, as we’ve seen, what conditions the worlds satisfy is non-contingent, and as Lewis himself admits, to want something non-contingent to be a certain way is an irrational – at best idle – want. ‘It is futile to want the entire system of worlds to satisfy a condition...You might as well want the number seventeen to be prime, or to be even – satisfiable or not satisfiable, your wish is idle either way.’ (1986a: 125). Beedle’s argument (1996: 494-5) can be represented like this:

- P8. We care about being a causal source of good and not evil.
- P9. Whether we are a causal source of good and not evil depends upon what conditions the plurality of worlds satisfies.
- P10. What conditions the plurality of worlds satisfies is non-contingent.
- P11. It's futile to want something non-contingent to be a certain way.
- P12. It's futile to want the set of worlds to satisfy a condition.
- C3. It's futile to care about being a causal source of good and not evil.

Beedle is right that causation is a multi-world affair if causal dependence is analysed in terms of what conditions other worlds satisfy. However, while it *is* non-contingent what conditions the plurality of worlds satisfies, it is *not* non-contingent *what worlds are closest to us*.²¹⁶ If our world had been different – if we'd acted differently, or if different events had unfolded – a different world would have been actual, and so a different set of worlds would have been our closest worlds. And since what conditions *our closest worlds* satisfy is what matters for a relation of causal dependence holding at our world, P9 is inaccurate, or at least, it over-simplifies matters; so C3 can be resisted. While it's futile to care what conditions the plurality of worlds satisfies, it's not futile to care what conditions the worlds closest to us satisfy. And since whether we are a causal source of good and not evil depends on what conditions the worlds closest to us satisfy, it is not futile to care about being a causal source of good and not evil.

4. Heller's Indifference Objection

4.1. Three Cases of Drowning Children

Mark Heller (2003) doesn't think that Lewis' response satisfactorily addresses the real *spirit* of Adams' complaint, and so attempts to revive Adams' worry. The *real* source of the complaint, says Heller – what he calls 'the point' – is not just that we can't make a difference to the total amount of good and evil unrestrictedly in existence, but that GR forces us 'to consider more people in moral decision making than we ordinarily do consider.' (*ibid.*: 3). While having to factor more people into one's moral decision making is not objectionable *per se*, Heller thinks that the way in which GR has us factor more people into our moral decisions forces us to deny many 'obvious' moral truths, truths which are obvious, not only to the (extreme) utilitarian, but also to the deontologist. Indeed, says Heller, there are 'very

²¹⁶ Nor is it non-contingent what each world in the set of closest worlds is like; see above.

few moral theories for which [this] point will have no consequences', although the severity of the consequences may well vary between different theories (*ibid.*).

To illustrate what consequences he has in mind, Heller asks us to consider three different cases featuring drowning children. In the third case Heller discusses, you notice that a child is drowning in a nearby lake. You're capable of saving the child and you do not see that any harm would come of you, were you to do so. Would you save the child in such a scenario? Of course you would, says Heller. And it's an 'obvious moral truth' that you'd be *obligated* to do so. However, Heller continues, if you know that GR is true, then *no* moral decision will ever be as straightforward as this, and, more importantly, it will no longer be the case that you're obligated to save the child, forcing us to deny the obvious moral truth.

We can see why Heller thinks this by considering his first and second cases. In these cases, just as in the third, you again notice a child drowning in a nearby lake and you realise that you could save them without incurring any harm to yourself. However, in the first case, you see that a second child is drowning on the opposite side of the lake, and you are aware that (a) an adult is stood close enough to that child to save them; that (b) if you do save the child nearby to you, you will, by some rigged *causal* connection, render the adult on the opposite side of the lake incapable of saving the child closest to them; that (c) if the adult on the opposite side of the lake does succeed in saving the child who is drowning there, they will causally inhibit you from saving the child closest to you; and that (d) the other adult *will* save the child closest to them, provided they can do so before you can rescue the child closest to you. Neither you, nor the other adult, has any special relation to either child, and neither of you can save the child located on the opposite side of the lake.

In the second case, you're aware of a second human child drowning in a lake many light-years away from you on a planet called 'Faarov', and you know that (e) the child on Faarov can be saved by an adult stood nearby, but only if (f) you don't save the child here on Earth. You also know that (g) if the child drowning on Faarov is saved, you cannot save the child on Earth; that (h) if the child on Earth is not saved, the one on Faarov will be, and that (i) if the one on Faarov isn't saved, the one on Earth will be. You further know that (e) - (i) hold as a matter of *non-causal nomological necessity*. Again, neither you, nor the other adult has any special relation to either child.

Heller thinks it's an 'obvious truth' that in both the first and second cases you are not morally obliged to save the nearby child; you'd be doing absolutely nothing wrong if you were simply indifferent between saving them and not. For, in both of these cases, you know that, no matter which action you take, one child is guaranteed to be saved, and another is guaranteed to drown. Since you've no special relationship to either child, you have no

objective, morally significant reason to think that the situation in which you save the child closest to you is any better than the situation in which the other child is saved instead. Any reasons for preferring to save the child closest to you must be purely *selfish* or *subjective* ones, such as the desire to feel good about yourself for doing so, or the desire to receive praise from others (*ibid.*: 6).

Heller's reason for giving us both of these cases, then, is to demonstrate that the differences between them have absolutely no bearing on whether we judge you as having an obligation to save the drowning child. The fact that in the second case you can't *see* the second drowning child, and the fact that you aren't in any way *causing* them to not be saved through any of your possible courses of action is irrelevant, as Heller explains:

there is no more moral significance to knowing that one's action will be the *cause* of an event E than knowing that one's action will *guarantee* E's inevitability...What is morally relevant to the indifference is the *known inevitability* of one survival and one death no matter which choice is made, not the causal relation...(*ibid.*: 8-9, emphasis added.)

It's your knowing that each course of action available to you is *certain* to have exactly the same kind of outcome as any other which defeats your moral obligation to pursue any particular one of these options (and thus permits you to be indifferent about which one to take). What *makes* this certain is by the by. Once we recognise this, says Heller, we'll see that knowledge of GR's truth will likewise defeat the moral obligations we otherwise suppose ourselves to have. Suppose you're in a situation like case three and you know that GR is true. In this case, you will know that, as a matter of *logical* or *metaphysical* necessity – the strongest kind of necessity there is – if you *do* save the drowning child, then another child drowning in a different possible world – one who could be saved by one of your counterparts – is guaranteed to drown. You also know that, if you don't save the child nearby to you, some child in a different possible world is guaranteed to be saved by one of your counterparts. So, just as in cases two and three, you can't be morally obligated to save the child closest to you. The *known inevitability* of the link between the different outcomes means that the choice can never just be whether to save one child or not; it must be whether to let one child drown, or to let another child drown (*ibid.*: 12).²¹⁷ Further, Heller has picked the

²¹⁷ How are we to analyse the counterfactuals we've been discussing in relation to the moral indifference objections? We can't analyse them in the standard way since standard counterfactual claims involve reference only to a single world. For example, under GR plus CT, the counterfactual *if my name had been Penelope Periwinkles, I would have played a purple pulalu* is true iff at the closest world where my closest counterpart is called Penelope Periwinkles, that counterpart plays a purple pulalu. Here, we needed only look at *one* world to see whether the antecedent and consequent hold. The counterfactuals we've been discussing in relation to the moral indifference objections however, require us to look at *more than one* world, since their antecedents hold in a different world to the consequent. Let's call them, then, *transworld counterfactuals*. Generally, to determine

example he does – whether to intervene to help someone who is *already* drowning – for a particular reason: to demonstrate that if you know GR is true, then (*contra* ordinary moral opinion) you are permitted to *allow an evil you are not causing*. This sidesteps Lewis’ argument that even when some evil is guaranteed to happen somewhere, that doesn’t permit you to perform it because you might still be morally obligated not to be that evil’s *causal source*.²¹⁸

4.2. The ‘Obvious’ Truth

It’s important to get clear about what the ‘obvious truth’ is that Heller can be claiming GR forces us to deny. Heller describes the truth as a ‘moral’ one. However, this seems to get things wrong. In cases one and two you’re considered not to have an obligation to save the drowning child because you know that there’s an inevitable link between your action and that of another. In case three, you aren’t lacking that moral obligation, but that’s because, *in this plainly-described situation*, you *aren’t* aware that if you do save them, another child is certain to drown. To generalise: these cases show that someone is morally obliged to save a drowning child *unless they know that their doing so would prevent some equal (or greater) good from occurring or guarantee some equal (or greater) evil*. But the proponent of GR might well accept this claim as true. At least, Heller has given us no reason to think that they couldn’t. What Heller’s cases *do* show is this: if you know GR is true, then you cannot *be* in a case like case three. With knowledge of GR, the situation is transformed into a case more like case two. (Hence Heller’s remark that the GRist ‘must count Case Three as being in all relevant respects like Case Two, which, in all relevant respects is like Case One’ (*ibid.*: 11).) Your moral obligation to save the drowning child is defeated not because the *moral* facts are different, but because the *metaphysical* facts are different; because any good deed you do

the truth of a counterfactual claim, we need to see if the closest world where the antecedent holds is one where the consequent holds. In the case of transworld counterfactuals, though, we need to go to the closest world where the antecedent holds and see what’s true *from the standpoint of that world*. Take the claim *if I were to refrain from saving the drowning child, my counterpart would rescue that child’s counterpart*. Suppose that I do save the drowning child so that the antecedent expresses a genuinely counterfactual state of affairs. We need, then, to go to the closest world where I refrain from saving the drowning child. Since under CT I’m in this world and no other, the closest possible world, call it w_2 , where I refrain from saving the drowning child is really one where I’m represented as doing so vicariously. Let’s use the name ‘Dani’ as a rigid designator for the counterpart in w_2 who represents me as doing so. At w_2 , it’s true that my counterpart would rescue the drowning child. For, from the standpoint of w_2 , the relevant counterpart to Dani is *me*, who here in the actual world, gallantly *does* rescue the drowning child. So we have a truth-condition for this transworld counterfactual that is met. See Pruss (2011: 101-5) for a similar explanation.

²¹⁸ Heller (2003: 21, fn. 4) remarks that we might think the choice in case two is between letting one child drown and *killing* another, since, arguably, in preventing someone else from saving a child who they otherwise would have saved is to actively interfere with a chain of events that would have saved someone’s life. If so, we might consider that in case two, you’d be morally obligated to let the nearby child drown. However, if preventing someone from saving a drowning child counts as killing a child, then letting the child closest to you drown will also count as killing a child since *you yourself* can count as someone you’ve prevented from saving a drowning child.

ensures that another equally good deed will not occur, which prevents the antecedent condition of the conditional obligation from holding.

The real crux of the problem then is that with knowledge of GR's truth, we know we are only ever 'shifting' bumps in the rug; never getting rid of them completely. And since we know that at best we are merely *relocating* evil, we cannot be under a moral obligation to ensure that it doesn't occur near us: if it has to happen somewhere, then there's no objective, *morally significant* reason why it shouldn't be allowed to occur *here*, rather than some place else. Hence, in Heller's view, what GR 'gets wrong' is that we shouldn't '*have* to consider non-actual drowning children as well... The only other drowning child in the story is non-actual, and non-actual children [shouldn't] count' (*ibid.*: 12, emphasis added).

4.3. Self-Sacrifice & Self-Torture

Most of us (if we aren't sadists), don't actively seek out pain (at least, we don't seek out things that cause us pain for the sake of them causing us pain), and we do whatever we can to alleviate pain, should we ever be unfortunate enough to suffer any. However, there's a case for thinking that deliberately suffering pain (self-torture) will actually be quite a heroic and praiseworthy thing to do, if we know GR is true.²¹⁹ The fact that GR forces us to factor non-actual sentient beings into our moral decision making means that what might otherwise seem not at all like a moral dilemma – whether to try and get pecked in the face by an emu, say – will actually turn out to be one, if we know GR is true. For, in such a situation, we will know that, if we endure the pain it causes, someone else (one of our other-worldly counterparts) is guaranteed to be saved that same suffering. Far from being a crazy thing to do then, attempting to get pecked in the face by an emu to now looks quite virtuous.

As well as transforming our opinions about otherwise-considered *morally insignificant* actions, we may also consider that knowledge of GR will transform our opinions about actions which are otherwise consider to be *morally impermissible*. Take the act of murdering someone. From an impersonal perspective, as Pruss explains, this

seems to be a very good thing to do, since by doing [it] I am saving another human being – my counterpart – from decay of moral character at great personal cost, and I am not increasing the total amount of evil in any way since, although [that person] dies, still [their] counterpart would have died had I not murdered [them]. To avoid this unsavoury conclusion, Lewis needs to insist that it is not *virtue* that should be my primary moral aim, but *my* virtue, just as on deontological theories it is *my own* moral duties that it is impermissible for me to violate. (2011: 99)

²¹⁹ Pruss (2011: 105-6) also makes this point.

However, Pruss' last point seems not to fully respect his previous one. His previous point is that in wanting to improve *our own virtues*, otherwise-considered 'unsavoury' acts might be judged as quite righteous, if we know that GR is true. By sparing someone else from decay of moral character, I *do* improve *my own* virtue.²²⁰ Factoring other-worldly individuals into our moral decision making thus leads us to two further absurd conclusions: that self-sacrifice (of one type of virtue) and self-torture *improve* our moral character.

4.4. Compensatory Behaviour & Freedom

One might reply to the above worries as follows. "There are infinitely many worlds where a counterpart of the nearby-drowning child drowns (unsaved by some other-worldly counterpart of me stood nearby), and there are infinitely many worlds where a counterpart of the nearby-drowning child is saved (by a counterpart of me stood nearby). Regardless of whether I save the nearby-drowning child or not, infinitely many drowning children are guaranteed to be saved, and infinitely many drowning children are guaranteed not to be saved. Therefore, if I do save the child, I won't really be 'guaranteeing' the drowning of some other-worldly child. It's not as if the 'quota' of drowning children will have thereby been left un-met."

This reply might be tempting, but it won't work. If *all* of my other-worldly counterparts took this attitude, then a possibility (the possibility of me not saving the drowning child) would be left un-represented in modal space. Therefore, to ensure that modal space is complete, there must be a guarantee of 'compensatory behaviour' elsewhere in the pluriverse, behaviour which balances out what happens elsewhere. This guarantee of compensatory behaviour might actually prove quite useful in the context of theism. Perhaps the inevitable links between the different courses of action undertaken by an individual and their other-worldly counterparts are God's way of ensuring that, even though we've been granted free will, the universe has a fixed and positive axiological status. I am free to do (and not to do) the bad thing, but God has set things up so that, if I *do* make the bad choice, this does not in any way detract from the goodness the pluriverse has a whole, since someone else is guaranteed to make the good choice elsewhere.

²²⁰ This kind of reasoning could easily spiral out of control, however. In ensuring that one of my other-worldly counterparts doesn't commit a murder, I save them from decay of moral virtue in one respect, but in doing so I deny them the ability to develop another kind of virtue: one that comes with saving another from decay of moral virtue. So perhaps the virtuous thing to do is to not deny them the opportunity to develop that second kind of virtue. However, if I do not deny them that opportunity, then I do deny them the opportunity to develop the virtue that comes with not denying someone the opportunity not to deny someone else the opportunity to develop moral virtue, and so on and so forth.

The flip-side of this suggestion, however, is that it brings to the fore another significant moral challenge that might be levelled against GR. As Heller (2003: 13-14) identifies, these kinds of inevitabilities which hold between actions and events in different worlds look to *undermine* free will. If I and sufficiently many of my other-worldly counterparts don't do the good deed, then, collectively, we non-causally necessitate that one of my (our) counterparts *does* do it. So it seems that this person could not have made the bad choice *freely*: after all, their course of action occurred as a matter of *metaphysical necessity*. However, it could equally well be said that the decision my counterparts make metaphysically necessitates *my not* doing the good deed. If so, then we could just as well consider that it was my decision which was un-free. Indeed, since no world has an ontologically privileged status, the right thing to say seems to be that none of us take priority in determining other-worldly events: *not one of us is free*. Again, such a consequence proves more damaging in the context of theism (given, of course, that the ability to make morally significant choices presupposes free will).

Noting that '[t]he free will issue is already a tangled web of concepts' (*ibid.*), Heller is not himself keen to endorse this line of objection. However, free will is not the only web to disentangle if the points of dispute discussed in this sub-section are to be fully explored. It's an additional issue that there's no settled way to analyse the types of counterfactuals needed to support this free-will objection. This is so since the antecedents of such counterfactuals involve transworld states of affairs. Supposing, however, that we should analyse such counterfactuals by seeing what state of affairs the pluriverse as a whole satisfies, the types of counterfactuals needed to support the objection will then (under something akin to the standard semantics) be trivially true at best. For, given that the character of the plurality of worlds is non-contingent, the antecedent condition of a claim like *if none of my counterparts hadn't done the good thing, I wouldn't have done the bad thing*, is never met. While we cannot here properly resolve this particular issue, this observation should at least be enough to stave off the free-will worry for now. Below I instead consider an alternative response to the above worries.

4.5. Caring for Other-Worldly Individuals

The problems described in §3.1, §4.1, and §4.3 clearly depend on the assumption that sentient beings in other possible worlds have just as much moral significance as the individuals who are causally and spatiotemporally related to us in this world. In responding to the type of argument Adams and Heller give (and in addition to pointing out that our wants, desires, and moral aims are egocentric), Lewis asks whether he should 'lie awake at

night bemoaning the evils of other worlds, and...celebrate their joys' (1986a: 127). This is his answer:

I see no reason why I should bemoan the evils and celebrate the joys even of remote parts of this world, which I believe in along with everyone else. I suppose the cancer patients in the tenth century suffered as much as cancer patients today – ought I to spend time bemoaning their suffering?...[T]here are better ways to spend your life than in brooding about the futures of perfect strangers, even perfect strangers who are counterparts of yourself and those that you love. (*ibid.*)

If non-actual individuals shouldn't factor equally into our moral decision making, then a response to Heller's moral indifference objection, and the arguments from self-sacrifice and self-torture would be available. However, as Heller notes (2003: 4), if we are to be justified in privileging members of a certain group in our moral decision making, this must be because the members of that group have some morally significant feature in common. It's important to ask, then, what relevant feature actual individuals have (and non-actual individuals lack) which justifies our thinking that what befalls non-actuals shouldn't have an equal weighting in our moral decision making.

Lewis clearly thinks that evil of which we are a causal source is morally significant to us in a way that evil of which we are not a causal source is not. However, Heller's argument is persuasive in showing that there is, in fact, nothing special about the causal relation which should make us more concerned about evils whose occurrence we might cause, than ones whose occurrence we might ensure by some non-causal means. Usually, we care about evil of which we are a causal source because we know that our causing some evil, *e*, to happen is a way for us to ensure that *e* happens, and hence, is a way for us to be responsible for *e*, or to have *e* depend on us. And most of us don't want to ensure that any evils occur. However, since causal guarantees are not the only guarantees, then, should we become aware that certain of our actions or decisions are certain to have some evil as a non-causal consequence, then it seems there should be no reason why we wouldn't be equally concerned about making those decisions or undertaking those actions. The simple fact that non-actual individuals are *causally isolated* from us should, therefore, not justify failing to factor them (nor our factoring them less-equally) into our moral decision making.

Should the fact that non-actuals are *spatiotemporally isolated* from us justify our failing to factor them (or our failing to factor them equally) into our moral decision making? If we agree with Lewis' contention that there's no reason to bemoan the sufferings of individuals in far-flung corners of the actual world, then we might take this as evidence that we already consider ourselves to have such a justification. If it's at all intuitive that the further away

someone is in space and/or time from us, the greater the justification there is for not being concerned about their joys or sufferings (though Heller (*ibid.*) finds this suggestion to have ‘absolutely no plausibility’), then one might think that since non-actuals are *not even* extremely spatiotemporally distant from us, let alone close, we *do* have such a justification. However, if we do have no reason to be immediately concerned about the evils and joys of far-flung corners of the actual world, then this seems ultimately reducible to some further facts. Plausibly, what explains our seeing no reason to be concerned about the pain suffered by tenth-century cancer patients, even though we’re quite sure that their pain was no worse than the pain suffered by those in a similar situation right now, is simply that the past is over and done; that pain is past and there’s nothing we can do about it. Likewise, suppose we discovered that a group of ancient Aztecs somehow built a space-ship and travelled to a planet many light-years away, many Earth-years ago, and suppose that we somehow came to learn that the current descendants of these people were suffering from a horrible and deadly disease. If, upon learning of this, we lacked much concern for their suffering, this would probably be because we would know that, being many light-years away, it would be beyond our means to help them. Further, we see no point in deliberating over how some of our decisions may affect those in the year 4000 since, in most cases, we simply have no idea how our current actions might affect them.²²¹

My contention, then, is that the above demonstrates that a lack of concern for people in far-flung corners of the universe depends on (i) our thinking that our actions have no bearing on what befalls them, or (ii) our epistemic position being such that we are not aware of how our actions may bear on what befalls them. So lack of spatiotemporal proximity to – and lack of causal relation to – other individuals look insufficient for making our failing to factoring them (or factoring them unequally) into our moral deliberations justified. However, since, by hypothesis, all there is to distinguish actual from non-actual individuals in spatiotemporal and causal relatedness, we are then left with no obvious feature which could add credibility to the idea that non-actuals have (at least) less moral significance.

Now we cannot, of course, ignore that common sense morality understands us as having special obligations to our friends, family, colleagues, and those to whom we’ve made promises or commitments. Whether we can explain what grounds these *prima facie* special obligations is a matter very much up for debate, (see, e.g., Jeske (2014) for an overview of

²²¹ Some, but clearly not all. We should, for example, be concerned with how much energy we use and how much carbon we produce, since we know this will have an adverse effect on the climate for future generations.

the relevant issues.),²²² however, most party to this debate understand special obligations as being grounded in something other than the intrinsic nature of the obligee (Jeske, *ibid.*: §4). Let us grant that we do have such obligations (and that they are moral ones). This, in and of itself won't be helpful to those seeking to defend GR. For clearly we may often find ourselves in situations where we are required to make morally significant choices about whether to help actual individuals to whom we have no such special duties. Now, special duties contrast with *natural* duties in the sense that natural duties are supposed to be 'moral requirements which apply to all [persons] irrespective of status or of acts performed... owed by all persons to all others' (Simmons, 1979: 13). In other words, they are duties we owe to persons *qua* persons, i.e., because of their intrinsic natures. I contend that what Lewis needs to show is not that we have *a special duty to actuals*, but that we have *no natural duty to non-actuals*.

Problematically, however, the above considerations (about spatiotemporal and causal relations) show that there's no obvious feature non-actuals might lack such that we may have no natural duty to them. Further, it also seems that, in the context of theism, *there is positive reason to think that we do* have natural duties to non-actuals; that non-actuals have *just as much* moral significance as those individuals living in this world to whom we owe natural duties. For under theism, all living beings are *God's creatures*; and since I have ruled out CT as an adequate theory of divine *de re* representation, under both GR and GRO, all living beings, whether actual or not, will be the creatures of the very same God as ours. Further, given the theological doctrine of the *imago dei*,²²³ all *human* beings are in some sense made in the image of God – again, that very same God. This alone should suffice for taking all such beings as having intrinsic value – and *the same* intrinsic value – under theism. Moreover, Christian doctrine in particular teaches that one should love one's neighbour. Clearly, though, 'one's neighbour' is not intended to include merely those who live in close proximity to you. Nor is it, as the parable of The Good Samaritan makes clear,²²⁴ intended to refer only to those who you don't consider your enemy. 'One's neighbour' is supposed to be any member of the human race. For what such religious teachings point us towards is an *all-embracing solidarity with mankind*. See, for example, how Benjamin Milner describes the influential French theologian John Calvin as understanding the term:

²²² Whether the types of special obligations we owe to friends and family are even rightly considered *moral* obligations is also an open question. See, e.g., Cocking and Kennett (2000) for an argument to the effect that they are not.

²²³ Genesis 1:27, NIV.

²²⁴ Luke 10:25-37, NIV.

“The word neighbour”, John Calvin writes “extends discriminately to every man, because the whole human race is united by a sacred bond” It is a “sacred bond” because we are bound by God “for the purpose of assisting each other”. [It is] the divine intention that human society should be regarded as a neighbourhood, distinguished above all by mutuality: “No man is born for himself, but *mankind is knit together with a holy knot*. Therefore, unless we are disposed to overthrow the laws of nature, let us remember that we must live not for ourselves, but for our neighbours.” (Milner, 1970: 36, emphasis added)

Hence, I suggest that theists have strong reason to agree that, if we know GR is true, then we are not justified in thinking that we have more of a natural duty to care about those ‘closer to home’ than those in other worlds, and therefore that the worries of §3.1, §4.1, and §4.3 are legitimate.

4.6. How Does GRO Fare?

Thus far, I’ve been working with the assumption that CT would be the account of *de re* representation for non-divine individuals under GR. However, thus far we haven’t seen any reason why theists couldn’t instead adopt TI (and therefore, GRO). How, then, does TI fare with the problems of self-torture, self-sacrifice, and Heller’s moral indifference objection?

If TI is true then there’s no longer any case for thinking that self-sacrifice of virtue and self-torture would be righteous things to do. Given that I am not, under this theory, represented *vicariously* at other worlds by numerically distinct individuals, any pain I possibly suffer, but do not suffer here, *I* suffer elsewhere; that is, relative to some other world. To deliberately endure some pain here, then, is only to spare *myself* – not *some other* individual – that same fate at some other world. Likewise, by deliberately performing some otherwise-considered immoral act, I am not sparing any *other* person from decay of moral character; I am only sparing *myself* from decay of moral character at some other world.

Nonetheless, this only makes apparent that Heller’s moral indifference objection will be all the more clear-cut under TI. Since, under this theory, the options we face when we are required to make an otherwise-seeming morally significant decision – whether to rescue a drowning child, say – are not whether to help one child live and let another child drown, but whether to help one child live at this world and let *that same child* die at another, what could possibly obligate us to help the child at this world, rather than at another? The non-actual people we’re asked to consider in such cases are *identical* with the people we might actually help here in this world. So if we know GRO is true, then it seems that the consequences we would therefore know each course of action to inevitably have *really would* give rise to an indifference about which course of action to pursue. Why such indifference

should not be permitted is not at all clear. As Pruss (2011: 100) notes, one will know that striving hard to improve one's virtue at this world only results in one not having that virtue elsewhere.

Secondly, even supposing that Lewis' suggestion that evil of which we are a causal source is somehow more important to us, morally speaking, than evil of which we are not *does* hold sway, then it will not hold any sway under GRO. For we cannot avoid outright being a causal source of any particular evil we have the option of causing or preventing. At best, we can avoid being a causal source of a certain evil at a certain world; but in doing so, we will know that we are only inevitably going to be a causal source of (or will fail to prevent) that evil at some other. Every individual really does perform every evil action they could perform. When we are considering how individuals act across all worlds then, it becomes clear that no individual is really any better than any other, morally speaking. For every morally significant choice any individual faces at any world, that very same individual makes each possible choice at some other world. No-one, then, can be more virtuous than any other when we are considering how individuals act across reality as a whole: each of us makes all the bad choices we could make, as well as the good ones. How is God to judge us in such a scenario? GRO therefore seems to make a real hash of the theistic outlook.

Thirdly, it seems that knowledge of GRO licences indifferent about how we treat those to whom we owe *special* obligations. It is, for example, *my very family* – numerically the same individuals who are my parents and siblings in this world – who exist in other worlds and undergo different fates there. Given that what happens to my loved ones in distant parts of this universe concerns me no less than what happens to them in closer parts of this world (I care equally about whether they suffer now, or will in the future, or did so in the past;²²⁵ and it matters to me little whether they suffer on the other side of the globe rather than here), I see no reason why it should matter to me any less what might happen to them in far flung corners of the pluriverse. I care about what happens to them *simpliciter*.

5. The Modal Problem of Evil

5.1. Evil Abounds

The fact that every possible evil, both that results from immoral actions (moral evil) and that which does not (natural evil), will exist somewhere in the GR pluriverse means that,

²²⁵ From the perspective of the present moment I may prefer that the suffering occurred in the past rather than now; but it would be irrational of me to consider that it would be any worse, objectively speaking, for the suffering to have occurred in the past rather than now.

even with the theistic provisos to PR suggested in Chapter Four, there's still good reason to be sceptical about whether the GR pluriverse can accommodate the existence of a classical monotheistic deity. For there's still a guarantee of worlds that contain extremely high – perhaps even infinite – amounts of suffering; worlds that contain much more evil than good, or perhaps hardly any good at all. Given that much evil exists in this world, theists must, of course, accept that God's existence is compatible with *some* amounts, degrees, and types of, evil. However, across the GR pluriverse, there will exist evils of such a level and type that it is even harder for us to make sense of an omnipotent, perfectly good and omnipotent deity justifiably allowing them; worlds which are so abject that they far overshadow even the worst atrocities of this world. Call worlds which contain far more evil than good, or the worst kinds and levels of evil imaginable, 'evil worlds'. It follows from TPR that some possible worlds are evil worlds. Paraphrasing Lewis (1986a: 89) and utilising a famous example from Rowe (1979), if there could be a fawn suffering in agony after a forest fire for days on end, then there could be two duplicates of that fawn suffering one after the other, or seventeen, or 10^{300} , or *infinitely* many. Worlds containing nothing but sentient beings who suffer very terribly and seemingly, pointlessly, will be ten a penny. But theistic intuitions seems to militate against the existence of such evil worlds. This, then, is the modal problem of evil ('MPE').

MPE spells bad news for theism if (a) there's more reason to accept TPR's truth than its falsity, and (b) there's no way to explain how a morally impeccable God might be permitted to allow the kinds of evils evil worlds contain to exist.²²⁶ This suggests two general strategies for response. Theists can insist that there's more reason to accept the theistic intuitions which conflict with the existence of evil worlds than the modal intuitions which support TPR. Alternatively, if theists wish to preserve the modal intuitions which underlie TPR, they must find some way to explain why God – despite being morally impeccable – might permissibly allow the evils of evil worlds to exist.²²⁷

Under the first option, we have to accept that modal space is much smaller than theistically untutored modal opinion supposes; God's existence and nature put constraints

²²⁶ As is the line taken by Guleserian (1983).

²²⁷ It would not be satisfactory to respond merely by drawing attention to the fact that God's existence is an infinitely valuable state of affairs. "God is permitted to allow *any* evil *e*, to exist at any world, *w*", the suggestion might run, "for no matter what else might go on at *w*, *God's existence alone* is a guarantee that *w* contains more good than bad." Not only does this beg the question: whether there could *be* a morally impeccable omnipotent being existing at an otherwise evil world is precisely the issue; it also seems far from reasonable to suppose that ensuring that every world contains more good than evil exhausts the moral requirements placed on God (as Laura L. Garcia (1984: 380) rightly notes). Indeed, if this *did* suffice for divine impeccability, God would be impeccable no matter what he did! What drives the problem is that we expect, if God is essentially morally perfect, that no world for which God is responsible will contain more *contingently existing* good than evil.

on what's possible. This line is not without advocates – see, e.g., Thomas V. Morris (1987)²²⁸ – however, there are at least two good reasons to avoid it if possible. First, a willingness to accept a depleted modal space at this stage undermines the advantage GR was shown (in Chapter Two) to have over DI: avoiding both full and partial modal collapse was precisely the reason theists were giving to accept that there is no ontological difference between the actual and the merely possible. Secondly, given that theists already face the burden of defending against evils which are an undeniable occurrence at the actual world (*cf.* Fitzpatrick, 1981), it would be of much theoretical advantage if an extant and popular defence against actual evils could be extended to cover non-actual evils. Before examining this latter such approach, I first turn, in §5.2., to briefly consider an alternative.

5.2. Contingent Moral Perfection

Stephen Davis (1983) and Bruce Reichenbach (1982),²²⁹ argue that there's reason – independent of MPE – to think that God cannot be essentially morally impeccable. Their argument, in short, is that the concept of an *essentially good agent* is contradictory: a moral agent is one who has the *freedom* to act in accordance with moral principles; hence, someone for whom failing to act in accordance with moral principles is impossible, is someone for whom moral agency is impossible.

Although, if sound, this argument provides an immediate solution to MPE, it can be met with at least three different lines of resistance. Some, such as Morris (1984), forward independent reasons for thinking that divine moral perfection – unlike creaturely moral perfection – does not consist in the satisfying of duties. Others, such as Garcia (1987), maintain that it's rather the notion of *contingent moral perfection* that's incoherent. In Garcia's view, if God fails in his moral obligations at some world, that's because there is some moral defect which 'precedes' the decision for which God can be held morally culpable: 'God does not simply damage his character by his action; rather the action springs from his character and makes evident what that character is.' (*ibid.*: 142-3). Therefore, since it's necessarily contingent that God exhibits moral perfection; it's necessary that God's character has some modal defect. So God cannot be morally perfect at any world, including those at which he's not morally culpable. Although space won't permit exploration of these responses, I contend that a third is sufficient for resisting Davis/Reichenbach's suggestion.

²²⁸ Guleserian (1983) is critical of Morris' response and cites reasons for thinking that, on the contrary, the way in which we form our modal intuitions about evil worlds make them highly secure, and indeed, more secure than those which call them into doubt. See Garcia (1984) for a detailed response to Guleserian.

²²⁹ See also Guleserian (1985).

The third alternative involves specifying reasonable grounds for denying that divine freedom consists in the ability to do otherwise. To see why such grounds are reasonable, recall from Chapter One that there's good theological reason to think that it's necessary that God creates. If the ability to do otherwise is a prerequisite for free action, then God's decision to create cannot have been free. And while *at each world* what God does and creates may be considered free, what God does and creates *simpliciter* cannot be. Nonetheless, while there may be independent reason to think that divine freedom cannot presuppose alternative possibilities, this in itself is not sufficiently helpful. Without some plausible account of what divine freedom might otherwise consist in, we will only have escaped one problem by introducing another.

One plausible account has been forwarded by Timothy O'Connor (2008), who contends that 'the core metaphysical feature of freedom is being *the ultimate source*, or originator, of one's choices, and that being able to do otherwise is *for us* closely connected to this feature.' (*ibid.*: 145). What makes the ability to do otherwise a prerequisite for *our* actions having their source ultimately originate in us, says O'Connor, is our ontological status as a created, dependent beings. Unlike God, we mere mortal creatures are 'causally conditioned'; we owe our existence to causal factors outside of ourselves. Hence, our actions can originate ultimately in us – they have their source *properly in us* and not something else – *only if* they are not

wholly determined by their character and [antecedent] circumstances. For, if all my actions are wholly determined, then if we were to trace my causal history back far enough, we would ultimately arrive at external factors that gave rise to me, with my particular genetic dispositions. My motives at the time would not be the ultimate source of my willings, only the most proximate ones. Thus, only by there being less than deterministic connections between external influences and choices – and so my having alternative possibilities open to me in the final analysis – is it possible for me to be an ultimate source of my activity, concerning which I may truly say, 'the buck stops here'. (*ibid.*)

Free will in the human case thus presupposes a range of open or alternative possibilities lying before us like a forking path; it's 'up to us' which path we follow. However, since God is a maximally independent first cause, there's no doubt about whether he can be the source of his choices and actions. God's actions and choices reflect his very nature and that alone; that's why divine freedom need not presuppose a range of alternate possibilities or paths. It's by virtue of his ontological status that God can properly be said to be the ultimate originator or source of his actions.

Although we can't here explore this suggestion fully, it merits mention that this hypothesis – that to will freely is primarily to have one's acts and choices ultimately originate in oneself – has been defended at length by, e.g., Robert Kane (1996, ch. 5 and 6; 2005, ch. 11), and hence, has gained credibility outside of the context of the present debate. Further, as noted, other considerations about God's nature mean that the applicability of such an account to the divine will is independently motivated.

5.3. Moral Evil

The mention of free will brings us neatly back to my former suggestion of what may be a better strategy for defending against MPE: extending to the case of other-worldly evils an extant defence of theism against the existence of this-worldly evils. One of the most popular defences against actual evils involves the claim that morally significant free will is of great intrinsic and instrumental value. Morally significant free will involves the freedom to perform morally significant actions; such actions being those that would either be wrong to perform and right to refrain from performing, or right to perform and wrong to refrain from performing. Often-cited examples of instrumental goods morally significant free will is supposed to support include the goods associated with the building of one's own moral character. Through our abilities to respond freely to suffering in the world and make morally significant choices, we can develop our moral characters of our own accord and exhibit certain virtues and vices under the watchful eye of God.

Such instrumental values, it's argued, can only come about if we have *libertarian* freedom. A person is libertarian-free with respect to 'a given action, [if they are] free to perform that action and free to refrain; no causal laws and antecedent conditions determine either that [they] will perform the action, or that [they] will not.' (Plantinga, 1974a: 166). This may be contrasted with the compatibilist notion freedom, according to which a person acts freely so long as they could have done otherwise, and this is despite the fact that their action may have been determined by previous events, together with deterministic laws. It has been carefully and convincingly argued by, *inter alia*, Kane (1996) and O'Connor (2000) however, that the compatibilist view does not provide a satisfactory conception of free will. They contest that if determinism were true, agents would not cause their actions in the right kind of way needed for free will and moral responsibility; agents would not be the *ultimate source* of their actions in the sense described in §5.2, since their actions would originate in sources external to themselves. Taking Kane and O'Connor to be right about this, I suggest that libertarian freedom is a precondition for morally significant action, and since morally

significant action is an extremely valuable thing, God would thus want to create us so that we are libertarian free (which fits nicely with the line of thought above).

It is, however, a consequence of our divinely-bestowed morally significant freedom that God cannot prevent moral evil from occurring whilst ensuring that each of us *always* does the good. This is no failing on God's part; it's a necessary consequence of the nature of free will (given libertarianism). However, so the defence runs, the goods of morally significant freedom are of such great value that they outweigh any evils which may arise as a result. Hence, God is permitted in allowing such evils for the sake of a greater good.

While this defence is usually only employed to deal with evils occurring at the actual world, it could naturally be extended to defend against other-worldly evils. Consider that, under GR (as with any possible world theory), the truth-conditions for claims concerning free will involve happenings at other worlds. It turns out, then, that when the free will defence is given under GR, events and actions occurring at other worlds (partly) determine the axiological status of our world; since these make for the fact that certain goods, such as free will, are had in our world. Indeed, for any world whose denizens possess free will, the good associated with that free will is possessed in terms of worlds that are not actual from the perspective of it. So here is a way the proponent of GR may defend against other-worldly evils: there must be worlds at which God permits the most horrendous moral evils to occur, since this is what facilitates our being free in not performing those evils; and makes for certain evil-outweighing goods across the pluriverse.

5.4. Natural Evil

On the face of it, free will seems unable to justify *natural* evils. For, these are not caused by creatures with morally significant freedom (*cf.* Plantinga 1974a).²³⁰ However, one defence against natural evils appeals to free will as a justifying good in an *indirect* way. According this defence – as advocated by, e.g., Swinburne (2004: ch. 11; 2010a, ch.6) – a prerequisite of our ability to act effectively in the world and to make morally significant choices is that events in the world unfold in a regular way. We must know the correlations between different types of actions and events in order to make morally significant choices. For example, firing a gun at someone can't count as a freely formed intention to *kill* them if I don't know that this action has death or serious injury as a likely consequence. '[T]he operation of natural laws producing evils gives humans knowledge...of how to bring about

²³⁰ Plantinga argues that it's epistemically possible that natural evils could ultimately turn out to be the results of the behaviour of malevolent supernatural beings. However, this claim is not one that has much plausibility; it is merely forwarded as an attempt to suppress the logical argument from evil.

such evils themselves...and if evil is to be a possibility for them they must know how to allow it to occur' (Swinburne, 2010a: 94). What ensures that such regularities hold is natural laws. However, these laws have as a consequence that they sometimes give rise to natural evils. Such natural evils are nonetheless justified because they are entailed by natural laws: a world without natural laws would be a much worse world on account of lacking the goods mentioned. Swinburne thinks that natural laws also bear on the good of free will in a second way: by giving rise to evil, they provide valuable opportunities for certain emotional and morally significant responses. 'If things always went well with someone, there would be no scope for anyone's deep concern' (2004: 240).

This defence may have some plausibility at this world,²³¹ but it cannot be extended to justify natural evils across the board. For undoubtedly there will be worlds at which there are creatures who suffer natural evils resulting from natural laws and yet are not in a position to be able to respond, in a morally significant way, to that suffering. Take, for example, the world where millions of sentient creatures are chained for eternity to the ground so that they cannot help themselves, but endure severe burns from a heat blast at hourly intervals.

A different story about what greater good natural evils may serve will thus need to be told by the theist GRist. One such story involves the following principle about natural goods: that *it's better have them than to lack them*. To see this claim's plausibility consider an example of natural good – that the Sun will rise tomorrow, say, and ask: *why is this a natural good?* The answer, plausibly, is that, if it did not do so, life on Earth would soon perish. Now, under GR taken together with the Lewis/Stalnaker semantics for counterfactuals, the counterfactual *if the Sun did not rise and shine then life on Earth would perish* has a truth-condition involving a certain subset of worlds. This claim is true iff the worlds closest to the actual world where the Sun doesn't rise tomorrow are such that all living creatures soon die out in a nasty manner. Hence, God is justified in allowing the denizens of the world where the Sun fails to rise tomorrow to suffer because this is what he must do if he wishes to create a world, *w*, such that, at *w*, it's a natural good that the Sun rises and shines. God's allowance of such evils is done for the sake of certain natural goods. If the worlds closest to the actual world where the Sun ceases to shine are, rather, ones where God saves the relevant inhabitants by shining a divine planet-warming light, then, the thought might go, the Sun's rising tomorrow doesn't look like such a natural good after all (or else, its goodness consists in something much different from what we ordinarily suppose). Natural evil is thus a necessary counterpart of natural good: we can't have one without the other, and this accounts for God's allowing natural evils across the pluriverse.

²³¹ Though see Tooley (2015: §7.4) for a summary of objections to it.

5.5. Objection

There are no doubt many misgivings one could have about the responses outlined in §5.3 and §5.4. Amongst other things, one might question whether the goods associated with free will are really *so* valuable that they'd outweigh *any* potential resulting evil, and we may have strong reservations about the suggestion that the value of natural goods must be understood counterfactually. However, one clear-cut line of objection against these responses is this: the God of GR allows *real* suffering to occur at other worlds in order to secure certain moral and natural goods. The God who represents non-actual possibilities, not by creating other universes where merely possible evils genuinely occur, but merely by picturing them in his understanding, need not have those sufferings be genuinely endured to secure the same goods. The objection here is not that God, under GR, represents other worlds with concrete universes when he could have done so differently: we have not the required ontology to make for this claim's truth. Rather, it's that we have here before us two epistemic possibilities – we're wondering whether an essentially morally perfect deity would *necessarily* represent possibilities as the DIist says, or as the GRist says – and when we consider other-worldly sufferings, we can be in no doubt that it is the former which wins.

6. Conclusion

Theists looking to adopt a possible world theory face a dilemma. Under theism, any form of actualism, and so DI, has modal collapse as a consequence. GR does not have this same result, but other-worldly evils present two real problems for it and not DI: (i) regardless of what theory of *de re* representation is adopted, GR(O) transforms the moral decision-making of a person who has knowledge of its truth in a substantial and problematic way; (ii) it encounters MPE. In light of this, I turn, in the final chapter, to consider an alternative kind of modal theory.

6

Theism & Modal Projectivism

1. Introduction

Modal statements, such as *God exists necessarily*, and *there could have been tap-dancing turtles* have the appearance, when uttered, of predicating modal properties to objects; they look like *assertions*, and hence look truth-evaluable. We've seen that this gives rise to the grounding problem for modality: if what we're doing when we utter such expressions is making *truth-apt assertions*, then what are the truth-conditions for those assertions? If we are predicating modal properties of things, then what and where are those properties? So far, I've examined theism's fit with two different metaphysical accounts which attempt to answer this grounding problem – GR and DI – and found both wanting. However, in telling us what conditions reality must meet such that modal claims are true (or false), each also qualifies as what Simon Blackburn (1987) terms a *truth-conditional* approach to modality, and hence is met by a dilemma which, Blackburn (*ibid.*) contends, attends any such approach. This chapter outlines this dilemma (§2) and introduces Blackburn's own (1984; 1987) account of modality – *quasi-realist modal projectivism* – which supposedly escapes it (§4). It will be taken for granted that the dilemma does have some bite, though some have forwarded reasons for thinking otherwise (see e.g., Shalkowski (2008) and Cameron (2010)). For the main part, the focus will be on questioning whether Blackburn's modal projectivism might offer a viable account of theistic and non-theistic modal commitments (§6-§8). In light of Le Poidevin's (2012) contention that a related dilemma faces theists in particular (§3), there is additional motivation for doing so.

2. Blackburn's Dilemma

If we ask the proponent of a truth-conditional approach to modality what makes it so that some arbitrary proposition p must be the case, the answer will be of the form: ' $\Box p$ because f ' (where f is some further fact about reality, and 'because' expresses that what follows are necessary and sufficient conditions for ' $\Box p$ ', or that ' $\Box p$ ' consists in f , is made true by f , or

something of that nature) (Blackburn, 1987: 52).²³² As we've seen, the possible world theorist will tell us that $\Box p$ iff p is true in all worlds.

The dilemma Blackburn (*ibid.*: 53-4) raises against such approaches is this: necessarily, f is either necessary or not. In each case though, f does not offer us a satisfactory explanation of ' $\Box p$ '. For, suppose that f is itself necessary. Citing f as the truth-conditions for ' $\Box p$ ', does not, in that case, really answer our question of what makes it so that p is necessary; it seems, rather, to postpone an answer. For, now we'll need to ask what makes for the necessity of f . A truth-conditional approach will cite some further fact, f_i ; and f_i , likewise, must be necessary or else not. If necessary, the question arises again. To avoid regress, we must then, at some point be able to cite some further fact, f_n , which is not itself necessary and which ultimately accounts for the necessity of p . So suppose that f is *not* necessary. In that case, 'there is strong pressure to feel that the original necessity has not been explained or identified, so much as *undermined*?' (*ibid.*: 35, emphasis added). For all we have here is an explanation that bottoms out in a fact that *is* – but does not *have* – to be the case, so p 's necessity looks to have been analysed away. Hence, '[i]f neither modal facts nor non-modal facts are adequate for a theory of the modal, then on the modest assumption that all facts are either modal or non-modal, no truth-conditional theory of the modal is adequate.' (Shalkowski, 2008: 95). (See also Blackburn, 1984: 151-8.) Indeed, Blackburn thinks the very same problems face us when we attempt to fully analyse any concept. Hence, he also recommends a projectivist approach to the moral domain (1984: 167-96) and to truth (*ibid.*: 235-57).²³³

Supposing that Blackburn's dilemma is sound, where might we go from here? Blackburn suggests that all is not lost in terms of giving a theory of modal judgements: the dilemma only arises when we try to specify what the *truth-conditions are* for such claims, and it's possible to give a theory of modality that does *not* involve doing so. In §4, I outline the non-truth-conditional view of modality Blackburn (*ibid.*: 210-7) offers, before going on to evaluate it in the sections that follow. First, though, I turn to consider a second related dilemma forwarded by Robin Le Poidevin (2012). Since Le Poidevin contends that this dilemma gives theists in particular reason to depart from a truth-conditional approach – and to thus adopt a Blackburn-style projectivist account of divine necessity – examining how well projectivism fares in the context of theism seems even more pertinent.

²³² Page references to Blackburn (1987) refer to the reprint in Blackburn (1993a).

²³³ However, this isn't Blackburn's only reason for resisting alternatives to projectivism (see Blackburn, 1984: 181-9).

3. Le Poidevin's Dilemma

3.1. The Dilemma Explained

Le Poidevin's dilemma (2012: 12-15) goes as follows. Traditionally, *God exists* is taken to be necessarily true (if true at all). But should it be interpreted as being necessary *de dicto*, or as being necessary *de re*? As we've seen, while *de dicto* necessity is said to be a feature of *propositions*, *de re* necessity is said to be a feature of non-linguistic objects – things out there in the world. Thus, *God exists* is necessary *de dicto* when *it – the proposition itself –* has the feature of being necessary, and is necessary *de re* when *God – the individual the proposition refers to –* has the relevant modal feature. If *God exists* is necessary *de dicto* then it will be *analytic*. For, since we're supposing that it's *the proposition itself* which is necessary, some feature of *it* must be responsible for its status as necessary; propositions consist only of meanings, and so, *meaning* must suffice for the proposition's necessity (and so, truth). Since analytic statements are, therefore, ones whose meanings guarantee, suffice for, or fully determine their truth, *de dicto* necessities must be analytic. (Whilst Le Poidevin does not walk us through these steps, I assume this is what he had in mind.) However, for the reason that the meanings of analytic statements *suffice* for their truth, *God exists*, if necessary *de dicto*, cannot be made true by *God himself* (nor, indeed, could it be made true by any other non-linguistic entity); rather, *God exists* would be necessary simply by virtue of the meaning of the term 'God'. In that case, says Le Poidevin, 'some version of the ontological argument is sound... But even if there were a sound ontological argument, this would not be good news for theism.' (*ibid.*: 13). The reason being that the conclusion of any ontological argument wouldn't tell us anything substantive about *reality*, but only about *linguistic conventions*. And 'no theist will be prepared to say that *God exists* tells us nothing about the world!' (*ibid.*).

If, however, *God exists* is necessary *de re*, meaning that God himself has some feature which makes his existence necessary, then we encounter a different problem. For, while we might decide that it needn't be too problematic if *de re* necessity can't be analysed – after all, everyone's philosophy must contain *some* primitives – we do at least face the problem of explaining how we could *know* that God has necessary existence. 'We do not' explains Le Poidevin, 'have to be in the grip of a verificationist account of meaning to feel the pull of the demand that our account of necessity be epistemically responsible.' (*ibid.*: 15). However, if *God exists* is not analytic, then what epistemology can we give of it? What could justify our belief that God himself has the relevant modal feature? We can't directly observe modal properties in the world, so no empirical support appears to be available. (This is precisely Hume's point: we may observe constant conjunctions, but we don't observe *necessary connections* (Hume, 1739/1978: book I, part III, section XIV).) And while *physical* necessities

might be supported by abductive reasoning – for instance, through our feeling the need to posit an underlying explanation for regularities in the world – it's not at all clear what empirical observations could support a belief in *metaphysical* necessities. Further, Le Poidevin (*ibid.*: 16) calls into doubt the likelihood of our obtaining a justified belief in divine necessity through any *purely a priori* means. On the basis of these considerations, Le Poidevin, following Blackburn, suggests that theists may do best to look to a *non-truth-conditional* approach to modality.

3.2. The Dilemma Examined

How compelling is Le Poidevin's dilemma? For one, are all *de dicto* necessities analytic? The statement 'necessarily, water is H₂O' is necessary *de dicto*, but it's not analytic. It's not part of the *meaning* of water, that water be H₂O. As Sider notes, 'water' was in usage long before anyone knew what the chemical makeup of water was, and the term didn't change its meaning once this knowledge was acquired (2003: 27). In this case though, it wouldn't be unreasonable to take the view that the statement is ultimately necessary *de re*. Plausibly, the *de dicto* phrase derives its truth from the fact that *water itself* – taken as a natural kind – has a certain modal feature. Hence, one might not be convinced that it offers a genuine counter-example. Less contentious cases could be cited though: *anything which is yellow all over is not partly green* and *the inverse square law of gravitation is false in four-dimensional spaces* are both necessary *de dicto*, but *being not partly green* is not part of the meaning of *is yellow all over*, nor is *being incompatible with the inverse square law of gravitation* part of the meaning of *four-dimensional space*. If we accept, á la Kripke (1972), that some (*de dicto*) necessities are a posteriori – then some necessities will be discoverable features of the world and, hence, cannot be tied to meanings or linguistic rules. (We needn't look only to a posteriori necessities, though. Mathematical propositions are also necessary *de dicto* and yet not analytic.) But if not all *de dicto* necessities are analytic, then we can't assume that *God exists* owes its truth only to its meaning solely on the basis that it's necessary *de dicto*.

Perhaps not too much hangs on this point, though. The *de re/de dicto* distinction was just a stepping stone into the analytic/synthetic distinction, so we could bypass the former and jump immediately to framing the dilemma in terms of the latter: either *God exists* is analytic, or it isn't. If it is, then, Le Poidevin will contend, it will only tell us something about the meanings of our terms, not the world itself, and that's something theists won't accept. If it isn't, God's necessity seems unknowable. Only analytic and logical truths are knowable

a priori,²³⁴ and modal properties are, seemingly, not empirically detectable. Hence, God's necessity couldn't be known a posteriori. (At least, it couldn't be known a posteriori without some kind of divine intervention. It's entirely possible, of course, that God simply *tell us* that he exists necessarily; but certainly, it would be preferable if our modal epistemology did not have to hang on this suggestion.)

However, while recasting the dilemma in this way avoids one point of controversy, another remains. Can we really take for granted that no analytic statement tells us anything about the world? Consider, for example, A. J. Ayer's thesis that analytic propositions are knowable a priori for the very reason that 'they do not make any assertion about the empirical world, but simply record our determination to use symbols in a certain fashion' (Ayer, 1936: 31). Sider has recently argued that Ayer is mistaken since

[o]nly statements *about pronouncements*, for example, statements about conventions seem to be made true by our pronouncements...I cannot make it the case that it rains [or that it doesn't] simply by pronouncing...[nor can I] make it the case that *p* or *q* simply by pronouncement. Therefore, I cannot make it the case that either it rains or it doesn't rain, simply by pronouncement...[So in] what sense do logical truths "lack factual content"? 'It is raining or it is not raining' concerns the world, specifically concerning the matter of rain, and the disjunction says that one or the other will hold. (2003: 25)

It's hard not to agree with Sider on this. Analytic statements at least tell us something *conditional* about the world. Take any classic example of an analytic statement you like – *all vixens are female foxes*, for example. Even if we agree that there's a sense in which the meaning of this statement suffices for its truth, it doesn't follow that the statement tells us nothing about the world. It at least tells us this: *if* the world contains vixens, *then* it contains females (and foxes). *That* has all the seeming of something that's about the world, doesn't it? The sentence tells us *of the vixens in the world* that they're female foxes.

What about the theistic case? Does *God exists* tell us something about the world? On the surface it does. It tells us something about *God the individual*: that he exists. It also tells us that the world's such that God's a part of it. Taken as an *analytic* truth, the sentence is, again, more accurately understood as telling us something conditional. If existence is part of the meaning of *God*, then it tells us that any world that contains God is one where God exists (or, that if the term 'God' refers, or if something satisfies the concept 'God', then God exists). As such, we may agree that this sentence tells us something about the world,

²³⁴ Perhaps with the exception of 'I am here, now', as pointed out by Kaplan (1989). Though synthetic (and contingent), this is knowable *a priori*.

but nonetheless, we should also accept that what the sentence tells us about the world is entirely trivial. So perhaps Le Poidevin's point could be better phrased like this: *God exists* should tell us something *informative* about the world; but, if it's analytic, it will be the exact opposite – a mere tautology. *That's* why it shouldn't be taken as analytic. On the other hand, if *God exists* is taken to be a non-analytic necessity, then we face the epistemological challenge of answering the question: in virtue of what does *God exists* express a necessary truth, and how we can know it? As a way out of this dilemma, Le Poidevin will suggest, theists may do best to look to a non-truth-conditional approach. Let's turn, then, to consider one such approach – Blackburn's modal projectivism.

4. Blackburn's Account

4.1. Projectivism

Blackburn's ((1984: chapters 5-7) and (1987)) account is a form of modal projectivism; so called since it tells us that modality is not something out there in the mind-independent world to be perceived and responded to, but something we unconsciously *project onto* it. Under Blackburn's view, the function of modal discourse is to *express non-cognitive attitudes* and nothing more. It's in expressing attitudes in the form of modal judgements that we project a modal property, or status, onto some non-linguistic object or proposition; and since modal judgements are simply expressions of attitudes, 'attributing necessity to a proposition is not making a true or false claim about it' (Blackburn, 1987: 60).

To see what attitudes we're supposed to be expressing through our making of modal judgements, we need to understand the causal story Blackburn invokes to explain why it is that we modalise. For Blackburn, we commit ourselves to the necessity of some proposition, *p*, when we cannot make sense of *p*'s falsity and can give no naturalistic explanation of this inability. That is, when '[w]e cannot see our failure to make anything of [the proposition] as the result of a contingent limitation on our own experience, nor of a misapprehension making us think that their truth should be open to display in a way in which it need not be.' (1987: 70).²³⁵ Expressions of necessity give voice to the sentiment felt when a person is in a psychological state of this kind. ' $\Box p$ ' has the function of expressing the attitude of strong commitment towards *p*. Saying *p* is necessary, then, is 'more like adopting a norm, or a policy or a rule that [*p*] be put 'in the archives', above the hurly-burly of empirical determination.' (*ibid.*: 60). Expressions of possibility, by contrast, give voice to

²³⁵ See also Blackburn (1984: 216-7).

the sentiment felt when we either *can* make sense of *p*'s falsity, or *can* give a naturalistic explanation of our inability to make sense of *p*'s falsity.

Why are imaginative blanks on their own insufficient for prompting judgements of necessity? Because there are many cases where we have imaginative blanks, but we don't project necessity. Just like 'A Square' in E. A. Abbott's two-dimensional 'Flatland', who can make no sense of three-dimensional 'Spaceland', I can make no sense of the world's having four or more spatial dimensions. Nor can I really get my head around how vast space is, or just how small things are at the quantum level. But I don't take these imaginative failures as indicative of the impossibility of these things because I attribute them to my own meagre imaginative powers. Likewise, there are things we can 'freely imagine' which may well be impossible. I can make sense of a world without God, though others can't: some of us must be making sense of an impossible state of affairs (Blackburn, *ibid.*: 68-9).²³⁶

The idea, then, is that certain aspects of mind-independent modality-free reality elicit in us certain subjective feelings which cause us to project modal properties onto the world. '[W]hat starts life as a non-descriptive psychological state ends up expressed, thought about, and considered in propositional form' (Blackburn, 1993a: 5), giving us the appearance that modal facts are there to be discussed. Blackburn considers Hume to be 'the first great projectivist' (*ibid.*), as this is precisely Hume's account of causal necessity. For Hume, we respond to what is merely a regular succession of certain events by projecting a relation of causal necessity between them, one which isn't really there. In this way, the mind 'spreads itself' onto the external world (Hume, 1739/1978: 167). Blackburn is extending Hume's account to other types of necessity.

4.2. How Does Projectivism Help?

Since, under the projectivist view, the function of modal discourse is not to *describe* mind-independent facts in a way that is true or false, but to *project* non-cognitive attitudes, both dilemmas are avoided. There *is no* metaphysical problem of specifying what the truth-conditions for modal expressions are – nor is there any epistemological worry about how we can know whether such truth-conditions are met – if modal expressions are not even in the business of describing the way our world is.

²³⁶ Shalkowski (1996: 383) is critical of q-projectivism on this point. He takes it to show that, unavoidably, modal facts explain conceivability, not vice-versa. If certain imaginings don't count as genuine conceivabilities, 'perhaps because in imagining the scenario I must under-represent the content of [that scenario] to myself, then the genuine imagination of [that scenario] is ruled out because [that scenario] is impossible.' I think this criticism is perfectly legitimate, but I leave it aside for the sake of pursuing my own objections below.

It's important, then, that if the dilemma is to be escaped in this way, modal expressions must express attitudes *without reporting them*. As Frank Jackson and Philip Pettit (1998) note, if modal discourse 'expressed beliefs that the attitudes were present – then...they would automatically be true or false. They would be true just when the beliefs they expressed were true, just when the attitudes they reported obtained.' (*ibid.*: 240).²³⁷

4.3. The Embedding Problem

One of the principal problems for standard expressivist accounts, which stems from Peter Geach (1965), is sometimes referred to as *the embedding problem*, since it's one of explaining what modal expressions mean when they are embedded in semantically more complex expressions, such as conditionals and propositional attitude reports. Blackburn calls these 'unasserted contexts' (1984: 190). Asserted contexts, by contrast, are ones where it seems that a modal predicate is being asserted as applying to a given thing, as when, e.g., someone utters *p is necessary*. In this case the expressivist says the utterance expresses a certain state of mind: one which cannot make sense of $\sim p$. However, the relevant attitude is missing when the same expression features in, e.g., *is p necessary?* Thus, since '[i]n unasserted contexts no attitude, etc. is evinced when the sentence is uttered', even though 'the meaning is the same as in direct contexts when such an attitude is evinced; ...this (variable) feature does not give the (constant) meaning.' (*ibid.*: 191).

Relatedly, consider the following argument:

- P1. If it's necessary that *p*, then it's possible that *p*.
- P2. It's necessary that *p*.
- C1. Therefore, it's possible that *p*.

As Geach (1965) explains, if an argument such as this is to be logically valid, then it mustn't equivocate. The expression forming the antecedent of P1 must mean the very same thing as the expression occurring in P2, otherwise, the argument won't take a *modus ponens* form. But when someone utters the antecedent of P1 they're not expressing the same modal attitude (i.e., commitment) towards *p*; in this context, *it's necessary that p* has a purely representative function. According to the projectivist, however, the same string of words occurring in P *does* express an attitude. So the projectivist needs to explain how modal

²³⁷ Indeed, Jackson and Pettit (*ibid.*) argue that expressionism falls short here: it can't avoid the consequence that beliefs are reported when modal expressions are made.

statements can be found in what otherwise appear to be formally valid arguments.²³⁸ Indeed, they need to explain how sentences of modal discourse can enter into logical relations at all, since attitudes, unlike propositions, are not standardly taken to be capable of doing so.²³⁹

4.4. Quasi-Realism

To avoid these problems, Blackburn recommends a *quasi-realist* form of projectivism (hereafter, q-projectivism). The theory is anti-realist insofar as it's a type of non-cognitivism. It continues to deny that modal expressions have the function they outwardly appear to have, i.e., that of *describing*, in a truth-evaluable way, some part of mind-independent reality. However, the theory is realist in that it maintains that we are nonetheless justified in our practice of treating modal claims *as* the realist does – that is, as having truth-conditions. Hence, Blackburn refers to q-projectivism as ‘the enterprise of showing that...even on anti-realist grounds there is nothing improper, nothing “diseased” in projected predicates.’ (*ibid.*: 171). Unlike other forms of non-cognitivism – which may have it that, in the absence of any distinctive range of facts in virtue of which modal judgements are truth-evaluable, our speaking as if there are is *erroneous*²⁴⁰ – the q-projectivist hopes to offer an explanation (or ‘genealogy’) of why we convey our attitudes in this way, one which shows such a practice to be perfectly legitimate. There's a subtlety here that's easily missed, as Bob Hale explains:

the “no error” claim cannot be the claim that when we project, we are not in error if we *think that* there are moral facts, properties, etc. – it must be the claim that we are not in error if we [*think*] *as if*, as well as talk as if, there were moral facts, etc., even though there are none. (1986: 71)

That's the crucial point to understanding the realist component of q-projectivism.

Blackburn points out that to view the sentential connectives (‘and’, ‘or’, ‘if... then...’) as simply playing the role of truth functions is too restrictive. In many cases, they link utterances such as *Turn that music off!* and *Finish that thesis!*, which don't express beliefs or anything capable of truth-value (*ibid.*: 191-2). Once aware of this – i.e. that these terms *already* serve the wider function of linking commitments more generally, where ‘commitment’ is taken as a notion that includes beliefs as well as attitudes (*ibid.*) – we can

²³⁸ However, Hare (1970) and, later, Gibbard (1992), object that an analogous problem looms even when we consider conditionals which don't express non-cognitive attitudes: even in these cases, no *belief* in the antecedent is endorsed a conditional is stated.

²³⁹ That the same expression must not shift its meaning when it occurs in embedded contexts, Geach refers to as *the Frege Point*: ‘A thought may have just the same content whether you assent to its truth or not; a proposition may occur in discourse now asserted, now unasserted, and yet be recognizably the same proposition’ (Geach, 1965: 449); hence this also being known as *the Frege-Geach problem*.

²⁴⁰ See Mackie (1977b) for a famous articulation of such a position regarding moral discourse.

begin to give an account of what function modal expressions have when they occur in unasserted contexts. In Blackburn's view, the featuring of modal idioms in such contexts 'merely proves us to have adopted a form of expression adequate to our needs.' (*ibid.*: 195). That need, according to Blackburn, is that of *working out the implications of our commitments*, and the form of expression is one which can be understood in a projectivist-friendly way. Blackburn explains what we're 'up to' when we use conditionals involving projected attitudes by focussing on ethical rather than modal judgements:

A moral *sensibility*...is defined by a function from *input* of belief to *output* of attitude. Now not all such sensibilities are admirable...it is extremely important for us to rank sensibilities, and to endorse some and reject others...amongst the features of sensibilities which matter are, of course, not only the actual attitudes which are the output, but the interactions between them. For instance, a sensibility which *pairs* an attitude of disapproval towards telling lies, and an attitude of calm or approval towards getting your little brother to tell lies, would not meet my endorsement. I can only admire people who would reject the second action as strongly as they would reject the first...The conditional form shows me expressing this endorsement. (*ibid.*: 192)

This genealogy is supplemented with a semantic theory (*ibid.*: 193-6). We're asked to imagine a language, E_{ex} , containing two operators – H! for 'hooray!', and B! for 'boo!' – which attach to expressions to signal approval and disapproval felt towards actions or propositions. We'd expect the speakers of this language to want some way of expressing the structure of the above described sensibilities. 'They would need a notation with which to endorse or reject various couplings of attitudes, or couplings of beliefs and attitudes.' (*ibid.*: 193-4). Suppose this language uses the semicolon to signify that one attitude is coupled with another – so ' $A_1;A_2$ ' denotes attitude A_1 's being held with attitude A_2 – and puts expressions within bars |...| to signify that what's contained within them is being referred to. This would enable speakers of E_{ex} to express *second-order* attitudes. For example, $H!(|B!(lying)|)$ would express the moral attitude of approval towards holding the moral attitude of disapproval towards lying.

We can see how an analogous story would go in the modal case. We could have an operator, L!, to express the commitment felt towards some p which accompanies expressions of necessity (and which is explained by a 'blank imaginability' concerning $\sim p$). The operator M! could express the attitude that accompanies expressions of possibility (which is belied by an imaginative ability). Using these operators, the problematic conditionals described in §4.3 can be reinterpreted as expressing higher-order modal attitudes (see the reformulated argument below). For example, P1 can be seen as expressing

a certain commitment, one which is explained by an inability to make sense of an ability to make sense of p while at the same time being unable to make sense of $\sim p$:

P3. $L!(|L!(p)|; |M!(p)|)$

P4. $L!(p)$

C2. $M!(p)$

What explains the legitimacy of the above inference pattern is not formal consistency, but *attitudinal* consistency. We have here what we might call a ‘logic of attitudes’. If one is committed to p as P4 expresses, then, should one possess the modal attitude expressed in P3, one should not fail to have the modal attitude that accompanies the sincerely voicing of the expression *It’s possible that p* (C2). Otherwise, one would have a ‘clash of attitudes’ or

a fractured sensibility which cannot be an object of [commitment]. The ‘cannot’ here follows not...because such a sensibility must be out of line with the [modal] facts it is trying to describe, but because such a sensibility cannot fulfil the practical purposes for which we [commit to] things...In short, E_{ex} needs to become an instrument in serious, reflective, evaluative practice, able to express concern for improvements, clashes, implications, and coherence of attitudes. Now one way of doing this is to become like ordinary English. That is, it would invent a predicate answering to the attitude, and treat commitments as if they were judgements, and then use all the natural devices for debating truth...*This is what is meant by ‘projecting’ attitudes onto the world.* (*ibid.*: 195)

In short, conditionals and (apparently valid) arguments in which projected attitudes feature are explained in terms of attitudinal appropriateness (see McLeod, 2001: 89).²⁴¹ Further, the function of the connectives is to ‘operate on two or more commitments to form a sentence the acceptability of which depends on the acceptability of its components in a way specified by the acceptance table (whatever that is) for that connective’ (Brighthouse, 1990: 229). It’s in their ability to offer a more sophisticated account of the function and content of expressive discourse that the q-projectivist considers themselves (unlike the standard anti-realist expressivist) capable of meeting Geach’s challenge. And it’s in their giving a genealogy of modal judgements – explaining what causes us to express them in truth-conditional form – that they hope to show us as having earned the right to continue doing so whilst avoiding the metaphysical commitments and epistemological challenges associated with realism.

²⁴¹ It’s imperative, then, that attitudinal consistency be explainable without appeal to logical consistency. Hale (1986: 73-4) suggests adapting the account so as to do so. I am, however, sceptical of the prospects of doing so successfully.

Indeed, Blackburn (*ibid.*: 197-202) goes as far as to claim that the q-projectivist can develop a notion of *modal truth*, one defined not in terms of the external world's meeting any conditions, but in terms of a modal expression, *m*'s, belonging to 'the best possible set of attitudes', *M**. Blackburn takes such a set to be 'the limiting set which would result from taking all possible opportunities for improvement of attitude' (*ibid.*: 198). In other words, we'd have a truth property constructed not in terms of *truth*-conditions, but in terms of what we might call *correctness of expressability* conditions. Correct modal judgements are the ones expressive of our best modal attitudes.

Before proceeding, it's worth clearing up one potential source of confusion with Blackburn's proposal, one which informs the dilemma Lewis (2005) raises against it. Lewis objects that if the q-projectivist about modality wants to (earn the right to) say everything the realist does, then their position collapses into realism. However, if they insist their position is not straight-forward realism, then they must be 'making believe' that realism is true, and in that case, their position collapses into modal *fictionalism*.

Lewis is wrong about this. Like the q-projectivist, the modal fictionalist does deny that there are modal facts or properties, and does accept that it's nonetheless useful to speak *as if* there are such things. However, they recommend prefixing modal assertions with a fictional operator; a claim of the form ' $\Box p$ ' will not be true *per se*, but true *in the fiction of modal discourse*; we should say: *according to the modal fiction*, ' $\Box p$ ' is true. And the q-projectivist is not 'making believe' that sentences of modal discourse are true in this way. Rather, they take us to be seriously committed to what we express when we make modal judgements (Blackburn, 1993a: 157). Moreover, they think we're justified in treating these (un-prefixed) modal expressions as true, and, as Carrie Jenkins (2006) rightly notes, unlike the realist, they deny that we *assert anything* when we voice modal commitments; so modal expressions have a different content under q-projectivism from what they have under realism:

The fictionalist differs from the realist in adopting the realist account of what [modal] sentences mean in her mouth, but dissenting from those sentences (same content, different attitude). Whereas the [q-projectivist] differs from the realist in adopting a different account of what those sentences mean in his mouth, while continuing to accept those sentences (different content, same – or at least similar – attitude). (*ibid.*: 317)^{242, 243}

²⁴² This is slightly misleading. Fictionalism denies that *once prefixed* modal assertions have the semantic structure the realist thinks they have.

²⁴³ See Blackburn (2005) for his own response to Lewis.

5. A Q-Projectivist Account of Divine Necessity

Le Poidevin (2012) argues that theistic modal contentions can be understood in projectivist terms. For example, *God exists necessarily* can be understood as expressing commitment towards God's existence. In the more perspicuous language of E_{ex} , it says ' $\Box(God\ exists)$ ' and would be uttered (sincerely) by those in the psychological state of being unable to make sense of God's non-existence and being unable to see this inability as a mere contingent fact about their particular psychological make-up. However, it's one thing to make this suggestion, it's another to provide a convincing account of why theists might find themselves in this situation. Le Poidevin thinks such an account can be given, suggesting that information gathered in psychological studies concerning our methods of counterfactual thinking can (a) explain why theists might experience the imaginative blocks that would underlie their modal contentions and (b) give further detail to the account Blackburn sketches more generally.

5.1. Psychological details

When we're engaged in counterfactual thinking, we imagine certain aspects of the past being different, whilst keeping others constant (Le Poidevin, *ibid.*: 19). However, Le Poidevin explains that psychological studies show that which aspects to keep constant is not an entirely arbitrary matter. There are four general biases we exhibit when we wonder how some series of events might have gone differently (*ibid.*: 19-21). First, we are generally less willing to contemplate situations involving a big departure from reality. Second, as a psychological study from Byrne et al. (2000) shows, we have a general tendency to alter events that occurred more recently, as opposed to later, in time. So, when we wonder how a particular series of events might have gone differently, we're likely to hold fixed the events which occur earlier in the series and to see what follows from those, together with some alteration made to events occurring *later* in the series. The phenomenon is easily witnessed on BBC's 'Match of the Day'.²⁴⁴ In almost any post-match interview with the managers from two competing teams, A and B, where A were 1-0 up until B equalised towards the end of the match, B's manager will express delight and A's manager will express annoyance. While A's manager will lament that if only they hadn't 'let one in', they'd have won the match, manager will consider themselves lucky merely to have drawn. Yet, it's equally true of both teams that they could have won if they hadn't conceded a goal, demonstrating the tendency to hold fixed the goal scored earlier, merely because it was.

²⁴⁴ A good source for psychological insight if ever there was one.

Third, a study from Girotto et al. (1991) shows that we have a tendency to alter events in the series that were (seemingly) under the control of relevant individuals involved at the time. This suggests that we have an easier time imagining how people might have acted differently, than we do imagining how particular natural events (that is, ones not involving the conscious actions of agents) might have gone otherwise. Fourthly, a study from Walsh and Byrne (2005) shows that ‘people are more likely to contemplate alternatives to actual events where the actual event was morally or socially unacceptable, than ones where the counterfactual alternative involves the unacceptable’ (*ibid.*, 20). From these four general tendencies, Le Poidevin makes a further over-arching generalisation: *our counterfactual thinking is quite conservative.*

[W]e make relatively modest changes to the past in contemplating a counterfactual alternative. The reason is not hard to find: the more divergent the counterfactual situation from the one that actually obtained, the harder it is to work out the consequences. (*ibid.*: 20-1)

It’s clear that the first general tendency shows our counterfactual thinking to involve us making the least revisionary adjustments possible; but we can see that the others do so as well. For example, if, in our imagining a counterfactual scenario involving a certain series of events, we imagine an event occurring earlier rather than later in the series being otherwise, we’ll need to give much more thought to what we ought to say when specifying the consequent: the earlier the alteration, the more time there is for things to go differently as a consequence; the more opportunity there is for change. It’s much easier to think about what might have happened if I hadn’t come into university today, than it is to wonder what would be happening right now if I’d skipped off school on the same day in 1995. Likewise, it’s easier for us to imagine events involving actions going differently, since our actions are events we invariably consider to be under our control, and hence, are ones we likely find easier envisioning consequences of. Lastly, it puts something of a strain on our imaginative capacities to contemplate ourselves (and others) acting contrary to our moral principles, since these are principles to which we are strongly committed.

5.2. Explaining Theistic Contentions

How might the details gained from these psychological studies help explain the imaginative blocks which would, given q-projectivism, underlie theistic modal contentions, and legitimise the forms in which they’re expressed?

For reasons of space, I'll focus mainly on the claim of divine necessity, but similar explanations should follow *mutatis mutandis* for others. Le Poidevin begins by asking us to contemplate the theistic conception of God apart from any of the distinctly modal components it's normally said to contain. Under such a conception, God is the source of all being and all positive value, is extremely good, and is in possession of much knowledge. However, says Le Poidevin, when we're viewing God in this de-modalised way, we find ourselves quite unable to contemplate counterfactual scenarios involving God's non-existence. For whether we take these counterfactuals as historical ones or not – that is, whether we take them as describing what might have happened if something had been different *in time* – we are unable to properly engage in genuine counterfactual thinking.

Suppose a theist takes a counterfactual which involves God's non-existence in its antecedent as a historical one. This person will, in this case, need to say something of the form: *If God hadn't existed, then...* – but how should they fill in the blank? As noted, normally, when we engage in historical counterfactual thinking, we hold as fixed the events which occurred prior to the event we are (counterfactually) supposing not to have taken place. But, says Le Poidevin, if one is in possession of a firm belief that God is the source of all being (or something of that nature), then there is nothing – no event, no existent, no state of affairs – to hold fixed: 'there is no state of affairs prior to God's existence, against which we can cast the antecedent of the counterfactual *If God did not exist, then...*' (*ibid.*: 22).

So the proposition that God might not have existed is, for the committed theist, curiously empty: it suggests no very definite situation that we could examine. That does not mean that theists are incapable of contemplating it, but rather that they can make little of it, precisely because so much is bound up with God's existence. (*ibid.*)

Even if we take the counterfactual as *ahistorical* (as we would if we were to contemplate what would be the case if the product of 6 squared was not 36), how exactly the theist may fill in the consequent is no less mysterious. To see what would follow from a certain state of affairs, S's, failing to be the case, we need to be able to conceptualize some larger state of affairs, T, from which S could be subtracted in imagination, in order to see what follows from T-minus-S. So whether S is temporal is besides the point: there *is no* larger state of affairs from which to subtract God's existence – *that's* why the theist is unable to contemplate God's non-existence and is thus unable to see what follows from it.

Given that the above described psychological studies show that we're generally disposed to be quite conservative in our counterfactual thinking, the trouble theists encounter in contemplating counterfactuals with atheistic antecedents is made doubly acute.

We *want* to hold fixed as much as possible, but there *is nothing* to hold fixed in these cases. Further, ‘we prefer not to contemplate too many violations of moral order. But for any theist who views God as the source of goodness, no violation of the moral order could match that of the absence of God, for there would then *be* no moral order.’ (*ibid.*, 23). So, Le Poidevin’s projectivist explanation of theistic modal claims amounts to this: the more we can hold fixed in – and the more conservative we can be in – our counterfactual thinking, the easier it is for us to engage in such thinking. But, for theists contemplating counterfactuals whose antecedents involve God’s non-existence, there is nothing to hold fixed. So the general rule that we should make the most conservative or modest changes to the counterfactual scenario under consideration is violated in the most extreme way possible. This is why theists hold the strongest kind of commitment towards the claim *God exists* and subsequently give voice to it by means of the modal expression *necessarily, God exists*. It is also, under the proposed account, how they earn the right to express this commitment in a truth-conditional form.

The proposal is undoubtedly an ingenious one. But does its understanding of modal commitments, and in particular, the modal commitments of classical theism, stand up to philosophical scrutiny?

6. The Nature of Conceivability

6.1. The Problem

A first worry arises when we reflect more carefully on the psychological state, or attitude, which is supposedly expressed when a person projects modal properties. Take the case of necessity. Such a person is (i) unable to make anything of a certain proposition, *p*, and is (ii) unable to tell a naturalistic story in which they *are* able to make something of *p*; they *find* the former inability *resistant* to naturalistic explanation. It’s crucial that we be able to spell out these components in a way that respects the antirealist commitments of the account. Whether such a thing could be done, however, is not at all clear.

The problem arises, of course, because both components seem to involve elements q-projectivism eliminates. Beginning with (i), as Blackburn’s own wording (quoted above) makes explicit, something modal seems to be going on here: a person who projects necessity is such that they *cannot* make sense of some *p*. There is an *inability* to conceive of something. Most naturally, we’d say that what it is for some state of affairs, S, to be inconceivable to some person, *x*, is for it *not to be possible* that *x* conceive of S holding. Yet, projectivists deny

that there really is any modality in the world in any ontologically robust sense; modal facts and properties supposedly play no role in the forming of modal commitments.

Part (ii) is problematic for the reason that it involves describing the relevant subject as making modal *judgements*. The person is supposed not only judge that (a) something for them is not possible (i.e., their making sense of $\sim p$) but also that (b) this is *not just a mere contingent limitation* on their own experience (in the cases where possibility is projected onto $\sim p$ even though there is an inability to conceive of $\sim p$, they're supposed to judge that the inability *is* contingent). Hence, they are supposed to make a judgement about the modal status of their own mental state. This is greatly incongruous with the account, of course, because q-projectivism denies that there *are* any modal beliefs as such: modal discourse has no representative function. Rather than *judging things as* necessary or contingent, we just express (in propositional form) non-cognitive attitudes towards a modal-free reality. Here though, someone is described not only as seeing themselves as having a blank *unimaginability*, but also as seeing it as one that *couldn't be* explained by means of a naturalistic story, and thus, as *non-contingent* in some relevant sense. In a footnote to his review of Blackburn's *Essays in Quasi-Realism*, Gideon Rosen expresses the same concern: the mental state

seem[s] to involve, at the very least, the speaker's *judgement* that a certain fact about himself is non-contingent. *An expressivist who was skeptical about the representational credentials of modal words would presumably balk at this specification.* That Blackburn is undeterred by this patent circularity leads me to wonder whether I fully understand the rules of the game. (1998: 402-3, fn. 7, emphasis added)

6.2. A Failed Response

For these tensions to be resolved, there must be some way of explaining the psychological states underlying modal attitudes in terms not off-limits to q-projectivists. Someone who, for example, projects necessity onto God can't be described as being *really unable* to make something of God's non-existence (we can postulate no *real* 'can't conceive of...'), nor can they be described as being *really unable* to find a naturalistic explanation for this inability (it's not that their imaginative inability *really is resistant* to any naturalistic explanation the subject can think of): these modal-sounding states of affairs need explaining in purely natural, *categorical* terms.

The subject, x , will have to be re-described as (perhaps persistently) *just plain not making sense of* God's non-existence. This avoids the objection that x possesses – and judges themselves as having – a modal property. But now we need to deal with x 's supposedly recognising themselves as having this occurrent (perhaps recurrent) imaginative blank, and

judging it as (in some sense) non-contingent. At this point, the q-projectivist might say that the modal language used here is not to be taken too literally: it just provides a convenient – albeit loose and inaccurate – shorthand for something ultimately explainable in the normal projectivist terms. A proper description of the state in projectivist vocabulary just happens to be considerably more convoluted, as can be seen by working through this suggestion.

Sticking with cases where necessity is projected onto God, the first level description is this: x has an imaginative blank concerning $\sim God\ exists$ – call this imaginative blank ‘ B_1 ’ – and x sees B_1 as in some sense non-contingent. What this really means is that x has B_1 and has a further imaginative blank – call it ‘ B_2 ’ – when they try to make sense of scenarios in which either they themselves or others are better placed to make sense of $\sim God\ exists$. This is all well and good so far as it goes, but the explanation must continue. For, by the q-projectivist’s own lights, an imaginative blank on its own is not enough to give rise to (justified) judgements of necessity: as we’ve seen, in cases where necessity is projected, imaginative blanks have to be seen by their subjects in a certain way. For convenience, the q-projectivist might describe x as seeing B_2 as in some sense non-contingent, but what they should really say, if they want to speak more accurately, is that x has a further imaginative blank – ‘ B_3 ’ – concerning scenarios where x is, or others are, better placed to make sense of cases where they or others can make sense of sense being made of $\sim God\ exists$. But now B_3 needs to be seen in a certain way. Since, by the q-projectivist’s lights, mere imaginative blanks are not sufficient to give rise to judgements of necessity. For convenience, x might be described as judging B_3 as being in some sense non-contingent, but what we should say if, we are to speak more accurately, is that x has a further imaginative blank – ‘ B_4 ’ – concerning scenarios where x is, or others are, better placed to make sense of cases where they or others can make sense of sense being made of sense being made of $\sim God\ exists$. But now B_4 needs to be seen in a certain way. Thus, it becomes clear that, if a thorough-going non-cognitivist treatment is to be given to the mental states projected through modal judgements, q-projectivists will be forced to embark on a regress.

It’s customary, when regresses arise, to point out that some regresses are benign. A supporter of Blackburn may claim that here is such a case. “Of course,” they might say, “we encounter a regress once we *articulate* what it is for a person to be in such a psychological state. However, a person in possession of this kind of projected modal attitude need not be reflecting on their own mental state, nor need they be reflecting on what it is for them to be in it. There is no psychological problem with the account because the regress here uncovered has no adverse effect on the person experiencing this state.”

It's true that a regress arises once we properly articulate what the relevant mental states amount to, and that someone in possession of those states needn't be actively reflecting on what it is for them to be in them. But this doesn't dissolve the problem. The point is that, for any individual, x , in possession of the type of mental state, M , projected through judgements of necessity, M must be underpinned by x 's actively experiencing *infinitely many failed imaginings*. M involves x 's failure to make sense of some p ; *this* consists of x 's failure to make sense of their making sense of p ; and so on: at each stage, there's a description of the form ' x is not making sense of...'. The problem, of course, is that such a picture is completely psychologically implausible.²⁴⁵

6.3. Commitment

Another key aspect of the account we should push the q-projectivist for an explanation of is the notion of commitment. Commitments are most intuitively understood counterfactually: I have a commitment to p just when I *would* maintain p in certain counterfactual scenarios. Thus characterised, these states also seem *modal*. So it seems that this can't be how commitments should be understood. On the other hand, though, it's hard to see how such states can underpin Blackburn's logic of attitudes if they *aren't* modal. Being committed to p puts me in a position whereby I *would* have a clash of attitudes, *were* I to reject p . Rosen (1998: 392-3) makes a similar point concerning the attitude of commitment underlying moral assertions. In his view, the state of being committed puts one in a kind of *normative* condition: one of 'conditional obligation'. If someone is committed to p , then one *should*, or is *obliged to*, reject $\sim p$. At the very least then, q-projectivists have some further work to do. For whether these attitudes can be explicated in full conformity with notions their account permits remains to be seen.

7. Mind-Dependence

A second type of worry concerns the fact that q-projectivism seems to do intolerable violence to our common-sense conception of modal facts as mind-*independent*. For the fact is that the theory understands modal judgements – and the truth thereof – in terms of expressed non-cognitive attitudes. Yet, that modal truth doesn't depend on our *sentiments* is a view that seems unshakable (rape isn't wrong because of the way we happen to form

²⁴⁵ It's not open to q-projectivists to respond that x doesn't need to have infinitely many *actually occurring* imaginative blanks; it just needs to be that x *would* fail to make sense of each of the meta-scenarios, *were* they to entertain them (just as I have the inability to perform complex mathematical equations despite not actually attempting to perform them). For this involves an appeal to *dispositions*; insofar as such things only seem to be understandable in modal terms, invoking them forces a retreat towards realism.

attitudes about it). It's also one that, as we saw in Chapter Four, does not sit well with classical theism. Nonetheless, it's one the theory seemingly forces us to deny.

7.1. The Internal Stance

Blackburn is well aware of this potential source of hostility towards his account and tries to respond to it in a number of places, e.g., (1984: §6.6), (1998: 311-20), and (2006: §3). Discussing q-projectivism's application to the moral realm, Blackburn argues that the q-projectivist treatment of unasserted contexts shows the view to be perfectly consistent with mind-independence. Take a claim like (M1): 'if we'd had different sentiments, kicking dogs wouldn't have been wrong'. Blackburn thinks that to assess this claim, we'd have to ask what someone could be 'up to' in uttering it. On his above described 'commitment theoretic' understanding of conditionals,²⁴⁶ they'd be expressing a higher-order moral attitude of approval towards a sensibility whereby information about human sentiments is allowed to dictate a person's attitudes towards kicking dogs (1984: 218). In Blackburn's view, these conditionals express substantive moral claims, so we should view such claims *from the standpoint of the person engaged in moralizing*.

Blackburn continues to say that when claims like (M1) are assessed 'in the standard way', they turn out to be false. For 'nice people do not endorse such a sensibility' (*ibid.*). Imagining situations in which kicking dogs is thought of as fine only conjures feelings of strong disapproval. 'What makes it wrong to kick dogs is cruelty or pain to the animal. *That* input should yield disapproval and indignation as the output. (*ibid.*).⁷ So our standards for disapproving of this action don't track our attitudes towards it. This is what contrasting claims of mind-*in*dependence make salient. 'Kicking dogs would've been wrong regardless of our sentiments', effectively signals *rejection* towards the sensibility the contrasting counterfactual (M1) expresses, conveying that it's morally defective.

So we should not say or think that were our sentiments to alter or disappear, moral facts would do so as well. This would be endorsing the...the wrong kinds of sensibility, and it will be part of good moralizing not to do that.' (*ibid.*: 219, fn. 21).

And while this answer involves

assessing the scenario in the light of things one thinks and feels about such matters[,]...that is no objection, since there is no other mode of assessment possible. One cannot pass a verdict without using those parts of one's mind that enable one to pass a verdict. (2006: 154)

²⁴⁶ This terminology is due to Hale (2002).

Let's extend Blackburn's response to the modal case. Take (M2): 'if our sentiments had been different *God exists* would have been contingent'. This will be taken as expressing a higher-order *modal* attitude because (M2)'s consequent involves a modal claim. To sincerely utter (M2) is to express commitment towards *God exists* being contingent in some imagined scenario where our sentiments differ. Yet, *by the objector's own lights*, people don't have such sentiments; we express attitudes of rejection towards these kinds of sensibilities, and rightly so:

if someone so organizes his beliefs and the way he makes inferences that he cannot let the presence of a tree in suitable sunshine suffice to give him confidence that there is a shadow, but needs information about whether people think one way or another, he is in a mess. He will fail to be confident in truths about the actual world when he should be. (1984: 218)

In short then, Blackburn's insistence that q-projectivists needn't deny any of the common-sense commitments about the way modal (and moral) truth arises is underpinned by the thought that claims like (M1) and (M2) are assessable only from a standpoint internal to the relevant practice. And when assessed from these standpoints, we see that these conditionals express attitudes excluded by best sets thereof, entitling us to reject them as false.

Neil Sinclair (2008: §2) suggests that what distracts us from seeing that q-projectivism doesn't make modal truth mind-dependent is our having in mind a particular (realist-biased) way of understanding the common-sense intuition that moral truth doesn't depend on us. The issue of mind-dependence, he urges, really hangs on the question, not of whether *the distribution of moral properties* is mind-dependent, but whether *the correct conditions for the application of moral predicates* is mind-dependent. It is then an additional question whether moral predicates ascribe properties or express attitudes. It's my recognition of some natural property had by the thing judged – not awareness of certain attitudes – which makes the application of a modal predicate appropriate. Under realism, it's also my recognition of some property of the thing judged which makes the application of a moral predicate appropriate; it's just that that, in the realist case, the property will be a distinctively moral one. So in *both* cases some mind-*independent* feature makes the application of a certain moral predicate appropriate.

Suppose this tactic for responding to the mind-dependence issue is correct with regards to morality (though there may well be reasons to doubt it), will an analogous response work in the modal case? The first issue is that the modal and the moral cases are

not perfectly analogous. In the moral case, some apprehended feature of the thing judged suffices for an attitude of moral disapproval or approval's being appropriate. In the modal case, however, some apprehended feature of the thing judged, *together with some apprehension of the property of the subject's own mental state* is supposed to do the relevant work. Here the objection in §6.1 becomes relevant. Suppose, though, that Blackburn can find some way to articulate the mental blocks which underlie cases of modal projection in non-modal terms. Although some *categorical* feature of the mental state will then feature in the application conditions for the modal predicate, the fact still remains that *some feature of a mental state* contributes towards the conditions for correct assertion having been met. Doesn't that make modal truth mind-dependent? In a way, but not in a way that's problematic to the account. Modal truth would in this case be mind-dependent only in the harmless sense that the existence of minds is mind dependent. The second issue, which is one of specifying what the relevant 'ordinary feature of things' responded to might be in cases of modal projections, is more worrying. We might allow for the relevant features in cases of modal projections to be varied (just as harmfulness won't work for all cases of appropriate moral disapproval), however, it is, in the least, not at all easy to see what the relevant feature(s) could be. What categorical properties do, say, contingent things have such that we judge them as contingent? The q-projectivist owes us an explanation here. Whether one can be given, I leave to one side; below we'll see that, even if it can, mind-dependence remains a problem.

7.2. The External Stance

In other areas it seems legitimate to object that an 'internal assessment' of a mind-dependence claim would be misguided. Nick Zangwill (1994: 209-11) takes mathematics to be one such case: *the product of 6 squared would have been 36 no matter what our sentiments* isn't a *mathematical* truth. Further, Stig Alstrup Rasmussen (1985) argues that even in the moral case, the fact that claims like (M1) can be given an internal reading is beside the point. More generalised mind-dependence claims such as (M3): 'had our sentiments been different, the moral truth would have been different' cannot be given an internal reading because their consequents make no substantive moral claim (*ibid.*: 187). However, the modal case is disanalogous in these respects. (M2) and others like it – even ones expressing more generalised claims – do express modal claims. So these points don't show that Blackburn fails to be justified in giving *modal* mind-(in)dependence claims an internal reading, even if such readings may be inappropriate in other domains.

Nonetheless, there is, as Zangwill also notes, 'something unsettling about the internal reading technique...something about it strikes one as...a bit of a cheat' (*ibid.*: 211).

The dissatisfaction stems from the fact that ‘something...is being given with one hand (the participant’s) and taken away with the other (the theorist’s).’ (D’Arms and Jacobson, 2006: 199). For as Blackburn acknowledges, his theory has it that modal properties are ‘the children of our sentiments in the sense that the full explanation of what we do when we [modalise] cites only the natural properties of things and our natural reactions to them.’ (1984: 219, fn 21). D’Arms and Jacobson don’t consider this point to be decisive against Blackburn; I think they’re wrong about this.

The point of this objection is that, if (a) the sense in which modal truth does depend on our sentiments – the one acknowledged by Blackburn above – is only articulable from an internal standpoint; and (b) assessment of the counterfactuals representative of this sense reveals them to be false, then q-projectivism must, by its own lights, be false. For the internal reading has it that viewing modal truth as mind-dependent involves adopting a modally defective attitude. Considering the moral case, Rasmussen expresses similar sentiments when he says that, likewise, Blackburn’s internal reading has it that

it is immoral to regard moral truth as mind-dependent. Not only does such an accusation seem absurd: the rejoinder is immediate that if so, perhaps no nice people should endorse [q-projectivism], since, for all Blackburn shows to the contrary, that doctrine does make moral truth mind-dependent. (*ibid.*: 187)

On this basis, q-projectivism seems to be ‘propounded from a point of view for which that account does not provide’ (Rasmussen, *ibid.*: 190). Blackburn must, therefore, allow a reading of claims such as (M2) – ones where modal sentiments are directed towards the practice of modalising – which permits them to be assessed from an *external* standpoint.

Jenkins (2005) draws a distinction between (a) *what it takes* for something to be the case, and (b) *what it is* for something to be the case. The former notion concerns the standards for correct assertion. Specifying what it takes for p to be the case involves specifying sufficient conditions for p to be correctly judged as true. The latter concerns ‘what the standards are standards for’, i.e., what their *function* is, or what they track. Specifying what it is for p to be the case is a matter of specifying what it is for something to meet those standards. To help elucidate this notion, Jenkins gives an example: *what it takes* for Blackadder to be funny is for him to put some underwear on his head and shove some pencils up his nose. This action is sufficient for our finding Blackadder funny. *What it is* for Blackadder to be funny, however, is for him to provoke certain responses from us, e.g., to make us laugh; it’s more a matter of what funniness *consists in*. With this distinction drawn,

we can, suggests Jenkins, see that Blackburn considers the task of rebutting worries about mind-dependence to be one of answering the following kind of question:

- (1): Is it part of *what it takes* for some p to be necessary that we have an attitude of commitment towards it?

Blackburn thinks he can give the right kind of answer to this question because it's one that can be answered internal to the practice of modalising. 'What it takes' questions concern conditions for correct assertion, and modal discourse involves our applying modal predicates to things. Since the conditions which govern such applications do not involve our attitudes being a certain way, the answer to (1) is 'no'.

However, there's a different kind of question we can ask which *can't* be answered internal to the practice of modalising. Suppose we ask

- (2): Is it part of *what it is* for some p to be necessary that we have an attitude of commitment towards it?

As Jenkins explains²⁴⁷ (*ibid.*: 207), in asking this question, we don't seem to be asking what the standards for accepting p as necessary are, nor do we seem to be asking whether those standards are met. What we're asking is: *what's the nature of p 's being necessary?* Pointing out that certain features of the thing judged prompt our application of the predicate '...is necessary' will not answer this question; this just tells us what it takes to be necessary, and we want to know what *it is* to be necessary. (2) is a question about the nature of modality. It is thus one that has to be answered from the external standpoint of a person theorising about modality. Suppose we ask Blackburn that question. Then, says Jenkins – and I think we should agree with her on this – his answer will have to be 'yes'. While Blackburn might, then, say that it's no part of what it *takes* for some p to be necessary that our attitudes be a certain way, he cannot say (without rejecting his own position) that it's no part of what it *is* for some p to be necessary that our attitudes be a certain way. His view thus makes modal truth *essentially mind-dependent*: mind-dependent by nature.

Sinclair (2009: 835) responds to Jenkins that a supporter of Blackburn is under no obligation to answer the 'essential mind-dependence question' (i.e., (2)). 'It is not the quasi-realist's task to provide expressivist-friendly interpretation of everything the realist says...in characterising their position.' I think this quite misses the point. It is in articulating their

²⁴⁷ Jenkins focusses on moral discourse, but I take the point to be equally legitimate in the modal case.

view that the q-projectivist unavoidably provides an answer to this question. So Blackburn faces a dilemma: deny himself an external standpoint (the one of the modal metaphysician) from which to articulate his view, or accept a positive answer to (2).

7.3. The Reflective Modal Practitioner

Suppose x accepts Blackburn's position regarding modality and thus accepts a thorough-going projectivist account of the attitudinal content of modal expressions. Now suppose they sincerely express that God exists necessarily. Q-projectivism says that in uttering these words, x expresses that they are *strongly committed* to God's existence; so they must (if they speak sincerely), *feel* strongly committed to God's existence. By hypothesis, however, x accepts q-projectivism, x thus *recognises* that their commitment towards God's existence is but a consequence of their having (at least) two imaginative blanks: one concerning God's non-existence, the other concerning situations in which someone lacks this blank. (If I'm right about the way in which these blanks must be understood, they must also recognise that their finding God's non-existence appropriately inconceivable is a matter of their finding their finding God's existence appropriately conceivable, appropriately *inconceivable*, and so on.) Can x then maintain their feeling of strong commitment towards God's existence? It's hard to see how they could. What seems most plausible is that, on reflection, once x sees what their commitment really amounts to – namely, a description of the very mental state that supports such a commitment – their sentiment towards God's existence will, in all likelihood, lose its force. The reflective q-projectivist thus looks to be unable to make sincere modal expressions. This is an extremely significant problem for the account: acceptance of modal projectivism seems to preclude projectivists from maintaining the commitments modal verbs would enable them to express. In this sense, the position, *once knowingly accepted*, looks self-defeating.

This particular worry is especially pressing in the context of theism. Being theist involves being strongly committed to certain doctrines – including those which are traditionally expressed in modal terms. If accepting the Blackburn/Le Poidevin position on what those commitments amount to prevents a person from committing, to a relevant degree, to the theistic claims modal verbs might otherwise attach, then it seems that theists *qua* theists cannot accept this position. Now, it does not follow from this that theism is incompatible with projectivism *per se*: it may well be true that the God of classical theism exists and that the Blackburn/Le Poidevin model accurately captures what theistic modal commitments amount to or mean. It may also be true that a person can be theist while the Blackburn/Le Poidevin model is correct. However, what *does* follow is that one cannot

knowingly accept this model whilst endorsing the commitments of theism. Once aware of what those commitments amount to, maintaining those commitments looks impossible.

8. Modality from the Outset

A third worry concerns the Le Poidevin/Blackburn account of the *source* of divine necessity (i.e., its genealogy). Recall, the account requires that the theist begins with a *non-modal* conception of God.²⁴⁸ The modalised concept of God is arrived at only because theists (having such a non-modal concept in mind) subsequently find themselves unable to engage in a certain type of counterfactual thinking. How plausible is it, though, that the conception which underlies this inability – the one which supposedly prevents the theist from entertaining certain suppositions – is non-modal?

Crucial to a person's inability to 'make something of' God's non-existence is their viewing God as being something like *the source of all being*, or, in Le Poidevin's words, the 'creator of all things, and (in some way yet to be articulated) the basis of all goodness.' (2012: 21). However, these conceptions themselves only seem understandable in modal terms. As we've seen, it's characteristic of our understanding of causal relations that if event *c* (or agent *a*) caused event *e*, then had *e* not occurred (or had *a* not existed), *e* would not have occurred: there's a strong and close connection between causation and counterfactual dependence. However, this connection is unintelligible if causation is not itself something modal. So there are good grounds for maintaining that the theist's notion of God as creator requires them to conceptualise God in some modal way *from the outset*. That is, it presupposes that they judge God as being linked with the world via some modal relation. So the Blackburn/Le Poidevin position on the source of God's necessity seems to, as a matter of actual psychological fact, get things wrong: the mental state underlying such projections presupposes some modal thoughts about God.

Although the popular Lewis/Stalker semantics for counterfactual dependence relations assigns counterfactuals non-modal truth-conditions, this should not derail the objection. Even if one assigns counterfactual statements such truth-conditions, the *mental state* of the person entertaining a causal claim is still one in which that person is *thinking a modally-descriptive thought*, something of the form 'if this hadn't have happened, then that wouldn't have happened'. It is unlikely in the extreme that what someone has in mind when they are thinking that God is the source of being, or goodness, is not a counterfactual

²⁴⁸ Here we needn't read 'begins' and 'arrived at' as having a temporal sense. There may only be a conceptual priority of the non-modal to the modal concept of God.

thought along these lines, but something deeper – something as sophisticated as what Lewis and Stalnaker would have us say about closeness relations between different worlds!

The issue, again, is that q-projectivism denies modal discourse has a representative function. We don't judge things as being necessary or contingent; we just have certain sentiments towards non-modal propositions and non-linguistic entities. The non-cognitivist programme must therefore be extended to counterfactual and causal discourse: causal and counterfactual relations must also be projections of non-cognitive attitudes. Following the Blackburn/Le Poidevin account, the story would go something like this: the theist can make nothing of the world existing without God (and cannot assign a naturalistic explanation to this), and they project this inconceivability onto the world by saying 'God created the world' or 'God is the source of being' and so on. Now though, some account is needed of why such a person experiences an imaginative blank when it comes to contemplating the world existing without God. The theist must have some non-modal thought in mind – one whose falsity they can make nothing of – which underlies the relevant inconceivability. Yet, now it is us who experience an imaginative blank when we try to think of what such thought could be. What is left of the concept of God, once we strip it of its causal and modal content? With such a pared-down notion, all we appear able to say is that there's a very good personal being who possesses much knowledge.²⁴⁹ But with only that to work with, we have no good explanation for why someone would only experience imaginative blanks when attempting to conceive of a world without such a being. If causal properties and relations of dependence are merely projected onto the world as a means of expressing non-cognitive attitudes, then the Blackburn/Le Poidevin account of the source of divine necessity can't get off the ground.

Further, if the claims that God is the cause of the world's existence, or the ground of all goodness also require a modal understanding, then there's the additional problem that these classical theistic commitments will also be undermined once the Blackburn/Le Poidevin is accepted. Once a person acknowledges that 'all there is' to these claims is some suitable inconceivability, continued commitment to them looks unsustainable, given that commitment to a proposition seems to require that one at least not see reason for one's commitment as a mere feature of one's self.

²⁴⁹ And such a being's goodness would have to be conceived of as consisting only in their *actually doing* good deeds (or in their actually possessing good virtues).

9. Conclusion

Supplemented with the additional details Le Poidevin provides, Blackburn's q-projectivism provides an interesting alternative to truth-conditional accounts of both theistic and non-theistic modal commitments. But for all its novelty and ingenuity, the view faces at least three serious objections. First, there's no clear way in which the mental states which underlie modal projections can be properly understood in non-modal terms. Second, q-projectivism cannot, due to the answer it gives to the 'essential mind-dependence' question, be knowingly endorsed whilst maintaining theistic commitments. Third, for the account to work, some non-modal conception of God must plausibly underpin theistic modal attitudes. Whether one could do so is, however, highly doubtful.

Conclusion

The goal of this project was to go some way in answering the question of which metaphysical account of modality might best fit with classical theism. Chapters Two to Six explored three different theories, each of which aspires to eliminate modality from the ontological bedrock of reality. The original motivation for examining such theories is exactly what motivates us to look for an account of modality at all: unlike categorical truth, with modal truth it's hard to see what part of reality might ground it, and this makes it *prima facie* mysterious. Chapter One examined no such theory but instead questioned whether God's nature is intrinsic. The purpose of this was two-fold: (1) to demonstrate that a traditionally orthodox understanding of divine aseity leads classical theism to paradox, but that this can be overcome by adopting DI, thus providing a hitherto unnoticed motivation for adopting this distinctively theistic modal theory; (2) to lay some important groundwork for the discussions in subsequent parts of the thesis. Divine aseity is one of the key, but least explored, components of classical theism. To understand whether different modal theories might respect it, it was important to first determine what it might amount to, and hence, to see what it might require of – and how it might relate to – other aspects of the divine nature. The discussion cumulated at the end of Chapter Two, where I provided a new interpretation of this doctrine, and explained how it can provide a solution to other metaphysical problems associated with God's nature.

While DI has garnered recent support, it has not been explicated in any real detail; nor has any attempt been made to determine whether it can provide a fully reductive analysis of modality. Chapter Two has gone some way in plugging this gap and has hopefully showed that DI has at least a not implausible claim on its ability to do so. Despite what might be said in favour of DI, however, an extended argument showed that DI is untenable when coupled with the classical theistic doctrine of PB. This failing of DI pointed us towards the following: that theists wanting to endorse a possible world account of modality may do better to adopt a view, such as GR, whereby God in some sense actualizes *all* worlds.

Chapters Three and Four explored further new territory by examining which of CT, TI, or SV may be the best account of divine *de re* representation under GR. It was determined that, regardless of one's take on the question of divine spatiotemporally, a theistically acceptable account of divine *de re* representation is available. Those committed to divine timelessness can adopt SV, and those committed to divine temporality can adopt TI (requiring the adoption of GRO). CT was shown to be a non-viable account of divine

de re representation for four reasons: (i) it introduces a problem of luck; (ii) it fails to respect divine omniscience; (iii) it fails to respect divine ultimacy; and (iv) it's incongruous with the original motivation for rejecting DI in favour of GR. However, while this metaphysical issue can be resolved, theistic GR encounters moral challenges of its own, and Chapter Five showed that these cannot be easily resolved. These such challenges stem from the single fact that merely possible evils – and merely possible individuals – are, on this view, no less real than those here in the actual world. Not only does this lead to a modalised problem of evil (one for which the examined defences seem insufficient), it also transforms the moral decision-making of a person who has knowledge of GR in a substantial and problematic way – problematic, that is, especially in the context of theism. Further, it does not well-accommodate God's perceived role as moral judge.

The failings of DI and GR led us to consider an entirely different kind of account: Blackburn's q-projectivism. Supplemented with the additional details Le Poidevin provides, this theory provides an interesting alternative to truth-conditional accounts of both theistic and non-theistic modal commitments. But for all its novelty and ingenuity, the view faces three serious objections. (i) there's no clear way in which the mental states supposedly underlying modal projections can be properly understood in non-modal terms; (ii) q-projectivism cannot, due to the answer it gives to the 'essential mind-dependence' question, be knowingly endorsed whilst maintaining theistic commitments; and this makes the account self-defeating. (iii) the account needs some non-modal conception of God to plausibly underpin certain modal attitudes, and it's doubtful that one could do so.

In sum, we've seen that uncovering a theistically acceptable account of modality is no easy task. The substantive moral and metaphysical commitments of classical theism make an already difficult philosophical undertaking – answering modality's grounding problem – considerably more burdensome. Although a viable account has not been uncovered here, this thesis has covered important new ground in exploring (for the first time in any real detail) the credentials of DI, and examining how well GR and q-projectivism fare under theism. In addition to casting light on the relevant merits and demerits of these theories, it has further shown that continued exploration of this topic – examining how well other kinds of modal theory fare in the context of theism – is a worthy and important endeavour. Questioning theism's fit with accounts which *don't* aim to eliminate modality from the fundamental level, I suggest, would be one such project for further valuable work.

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