

Classical Theism

New Essays on the Metaphysics
of God

Edited by Jonathan Fuqua and
Robert C. Koons

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Does the God of Classical Theism Exist?

Robert C. Koons

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Does the God of classical theism exist? The principal reason for thinking that God fits the profile defined by classical theism is this: we have good metaphysical grounds for believing both that some entity that fits this profile exist, and we have good theological grounds for believing that, if such an entity exists, it must be identical to God, that is, to the God of the Bible, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Many of the other chapters in this volume discuss the theological compatibility of classical theism and biblical and patristic theology. In this chapter, I will focus exclusively on the metaphysical question.

So, what is the profile of the God of classical theism? There are four crucial characteristics:

- 1 God is absolutely the first cause of all causable things.
- 2 God is atemporal.
- 3 God lacks any intrinsic, passive potentiality.
- 4 God has no distinct nature and no distinct act of existence: He is identical to His own act of existence, which is also His nature or essence.

It is noteworthy that this list does not contain any of the traditional omnis: omniscience, omnipotence, or omnibenevolence. I haven't included personality on the list, nor such properties as having knowledge or will. I haven't included God's infinity or perfection or uniqueness. This is not because classical theism is silent on any of these points, but because, in the classical-theist tradition, all these divine characteristics follow from the four that I have listed. They are, from an epistemological point of view (that is, in the order of human understanding), secondary characteristics of the God of classical theism. These secondary characteristics are not points of controversy between classical and nonclassical theists; in contrast, all of the primary characteristics on the list are quite controversial.

There are, therefore, two tasks which the classical theologian must complete: first, to argue successfully that some entity satisfies the four primary characteristics, and, second, to demonstrate that any being with

the primary characteristics must also have the familiar secondary characteristics. Obviously, these are not easy tasks, and I can only provide a brief outline of an argumentative strategy here.

In section 2.1, I will rely on Aristotle's argument from motion (Thomas Aquinas's First Way) to argue for the existence of an atemporal being without passive potentiality (characteristics 2 and 3). In section 2.2, I will turn to Aquinas's Second Way, attempting to demonstrate the existence of an absolutely first cause (characteristic 1). This will provide additional support for the second and third primary characteristics as well. In section 2.3, I will take up the question of the analysis of existence provided by Thomas Aquinas in *De Ente et Essentia* and related passages. This analysis will provide support for all four primary characteristics. Next, I will argue in section 2.4 that God's infinity and perfection follow from the primary characteristics, and in section 2.5 I will try to include the corollaries of God's unlimited knowledge and power. I will conclude, in section 2.6, with some thought about whether it would be possible to affirm the existence of both the God of classical theism and that of the Bible, while denying their identity.

2.1 The Argument from Motion

Good metaphysical arguments don't operate in a vacuum. They occur within a theoretical framework provided by a successful, time-tested research program. The oldest and most successful research program in metaphysics is that of the so-called perennial philosophy, beginning with Plato and Aristotle, extended by the Neo-Platonists, and developed in Western scholastic philosophy. At the core of this program is the distinction between two modes of being, *potential* and *actual*, along with a commitment to a strong principle of proportionate causation, that is, the principle that the greater the effect, the greater the cause must be. Many contemporary philosophers have defended this program (myself included), and I will here take its soundness as a starting point.

Another important assumption of the perennial philosophy concerns the dependent nature of time. Time is not merely a static dimension within which events and states can be located. Such a Block Universe picture of time would leave us with many inexplicable data, including the irreversible direction of time and causation, the fixity of the past and the openness of the future, the basis of the Second Law of Thermodynamics and other irreversible laws, and our universal experience of the passage of time. Aristotle provides a much more satisfying account of time in Book III of his *Physics*: time is simply the measure of change. Change is the more fundamental phenomenon, and the distinctive characteristics of time are derivable from the nature of change.

This hypothesis requires that change itself not be given a real definition in terms of time. That is, we must reject Bertrand Russell's At-At theory

of change (Russell 1922, Lecture VI), according to which a thing x undergoes change just in case it has one feature at some time t_1 and a contrary feature at some later time t_2 . Instead, we must define change as Aristotle does. A thing x is undergoing change just in case there is some feature F of such a kind that x has a potentiality for F -ness that is in some degree of partial actualization. This definition does not make any reference to moments of time or their temporal relations of earlier and later. However, it does entail that if some entity x is undergoing change with respect to F -ness, there must be earlier and later times of such a kind that x is progressively closer to F at the successively later moments of time. Partial actualization requires at least two distinct modes of being (i.e., instants of time), one in which x is (still) only potentially F , and another in which it is actually F . In fact, there must be an infinite number of such instances, each with a different degree of actuality of x 's F -ness, with the full actualization of x 's potential for F -ness occurring in exactly one of these. The direction of time is determined by the prior direction of change: if x 's potentiality for F -ness is partially actualized, and this partial actualization corresponds to a set of moments, then the later moments in that set must be ones in which x is closer to being F .

Now let's add to this picture the assumption that all change must have a cause. Another word for 'change' in this context is 'passion'. Let's assume, then, that every passion has a corresponding action. On this picture, the action of the agent is the cause; the passion of the patient is the effect. Causation always involves two or more substances. Here we will also introduce a principle of proportionate causality. It is obvious, for example, that actual change or passion can only result from actual action, involving an actually existing agent and an actually possessed active power. A merely potential event cannot be the actual cause of any actual change. A merely potential agent cannot act.

If we were to abandon this principle of ontologically proportionate causality, we would have no explanation for the asymmetry and irreflexivity of causation. That is, we couldn't explain why a given passion couldn't be its own cause, promoting itself from mere potentiality to actuality. This would be tantamount to rejecting the causal principle altogether.

We have already seen that every passion must be located in time, since time is the measure of change. What is the temporal relation (if any) between an action and its corresponding passion? There are four logical possibilities: (i) the action is earlier than the passion, (ii) the action and passion are simultaneous, (iii) the action is later than the passion, or (iv) the action is unlocated in time. I will argue that only cases (ii) and (iv) are metaphysically possible.

Let's say that an entity is temporal when it has a state that is located in time. In cases (i) through (iii), the agent has a state (namely, the action) that is located in time, so the agent must be temporal. Only in case (iv) can we have an atemporal or timeless agent.

If an agent is temporal, then all its states are actual or potential only *relative to* the various moments of time (see Koons 2020; Koons forthcoming). Therefore, we cannot say that the agent's action is actual *simpliciter* but only that it is actual or potential *at* this or that time. We must also adapt our principle of causality to incorporate this relativity: for each passion, its corresponding action must be actual at the time at which the passion occurs. Actions occurring in the past or future are, at the time of the passion, merely potential. Hence, we can rule out cases (i) and (iii).

Every change must have a cause. If a temporal agent A acts at time t to produce a passion in some patient, then agent A must have undergone some change that eventuated in this particular action at time t . The temporal agent has changed from not being the agent of a particular change to being the actual agent of that change. Hence, the change in the state of the temporal agent requires a cause.

If all agents were temporal, this would lead to at least one infinite causal regress at each moment of time. We could then consider the whole plurality of things undergoing change at that time and ask, *What causes them to change?* Since these changes are all simultaneous, nothing prevents us from aggregating them together into a single, massive event. Given the principle of causation, this simultaneous plurality of events must have a cause that is both separate from itself and actual (at t). Since the plurality includes all changes occurring at this time t , the only possible cause of the plurality of changes would be the action of an atemporal agent. An atemporal action can act at any or all times without undergoing any change itself, and so without requiring a cause.

Here's another way to reach the same result. We know from experience and our best scientific theories that time passes continuously and, therefore, densely. There is a third moment of time between any two moments. This continuity of time also follows from the Aristotelian definition of change, since change must involve an infinity of moments, each bringing the patient closer to the endpoint of change. If any period of time consisted of a finite number of discrete moments, then any process of change would have to end one unit of time before reaching its endpoint, which is a contradiction in terms. At the endpoint, the patient is no longer changing (by Aristotle's definition), since it is no longer in a state of partial actualization of the process's *telos*.

In addition, the hypothesis that time is discrete or quantized and not dense leads to absurdities, especially in the case of locomotion. Suppose that two impenetrable bodies are approaching each other at a constant relative velocity of 2 meters per quantum unit of time and suppose that they begin 3 meters apart. What happens after two quanta of time? Either the bodies have interpenetrated each other by 1 meter, or they have bounced off each other, reversing velocity without ever coming into contact. Both options are unacceptable.

Finally, a theory of discrete time would still involve an unacceptable action at a temporal distance. Something with a power of acting that is actual at time t would have to produce an effect at time $t+1$, even though that power is no longer actual at $t+1$. To make sense of this, we would have to suppose that all earlier times have a higher, more inclusive mode of actuality than later times. As a result, we could not rule out action at extreme temporal distances. But this would contradict one of the most fundamental features of causation: the statistical *screening off* of the remote past by the proximate past (also known as Markov independence—see Pearl 2009, Reichenbach 1956, Suppes 1970). All experimental science presupposes the impossibility of temporally remote direct causation.

Assuming then that time is continuous, we can ask: what explains causally the perpetuation of time through any such continuum of moments? Take a given instant of time t_f . What explains the actualization of this instant, given the infinite density of prior moments of time? Since time is the measure of change, there must be one or more instances of change that require the existence of t_f for their actualization. What is the cause of those changes? Some of these changes may cause others at t_f , but we can identify a class of fundamental changes occurring at t_f , the class C_f , which are not caused by other changes at t_f . (If there were an infinite number of changes occurring at t_f forming an infinite causal regress, we can simply take the aggregate of all such changes and obtain a change without a cause at t_f .) What causes the members of C_f ?

We have ruled (by definition) out any actions occurring at t_f as causes of C_f . It is obvious that actions occurring later than t_f cannot cause any of the changes in C_f (or, if that is not obvious, my arguments against actions occurring earlier than t_f can be modified to rule this out). So, there are just two options: the changes in C_f are all caused by actions occurring earlier than t_f , or some at least are caused by some atemporal action (exercised by an atemporal agent).

But actions occurring earlier than t_f cannot cause the changes in C_f , for at least two reasons. First, the actions would lack actuality relative to t_f , and the principle of proportionate causality requires that the actions be actual with respect to the time of the corresponding passions. Second, this would involve causation over a temporal gap, which we have seen can be ruled out on independent grounds. Suppose that an action occurring at t_i was the immediate cause of some of the changes in C_f . (If some events in C_f have causes occurring at earlier times, they must have some immediate causes occurring at earlier times. Mediate causation is only possible by chaining together a finite number of immediate causings.) Let's suppose that entity A_i was the agent of this action at t_i . It is obvious that an event in the past cannot immediately cause an effect in the present. Distance in time rules out immediate causation.

Could the changes in C_f be caused by an infinite plurality of actions P , with the members of P approaching arbitrarily close to the deadline t_f ?

In this case, there is no temporal gap between P and C_f to be bridged. However, this suggestion runs into the following problem. Take some action A_i in P and divide P into two parts: those actions occurring before A_i and those occurring simultaneously with A_i or later. Call these parts P_0 and P_1 . Clearly, P_0 cannot be directly causally relevant to the occurrence of any of the changes in C_f , given P_1 . It can only be indirectly relevant, by virtue of causings in P_1 . This is once again a consequence of the screening off of earlier stages by later ones, a Markovian property of causation. The actions in P_1 must be the complete cause of C_f , or else we must again admit some kind of action over a temporal gap (Figure 2.1).

But P is entirely composed of segments that are like P_0 in this respect. Take an infinite series of actions in P that approach closer and closer to t_f . We can use this to define an infinite series of segments of P , each bounded by a successive pair of actions, and none adjacent to t_f , of such a kind that every event in P belongs to one of these segments. We have just seen that none of these segments can be directly connected to C_f , since each is separated from it by a finite temporal gap. But, if P is wholly composed of segments that are not directly connected to C_f , then P itself cannot be directly connected to C_f . This is true even if P is only potentially divisible into these parts.² Since P was an arbitrary plurality of this kind, we have shown that no such plurality can be the required cause. Any plurality that is extended over time will be of such a kind that it is entirely composed of segments separated by a temporal gap from C_f , and so no such plurality can be directly connected to it (Figure 2.2).

Here's another way to understand this point. A temporally extended process that does not include any changes at t_f consists entirely of parts

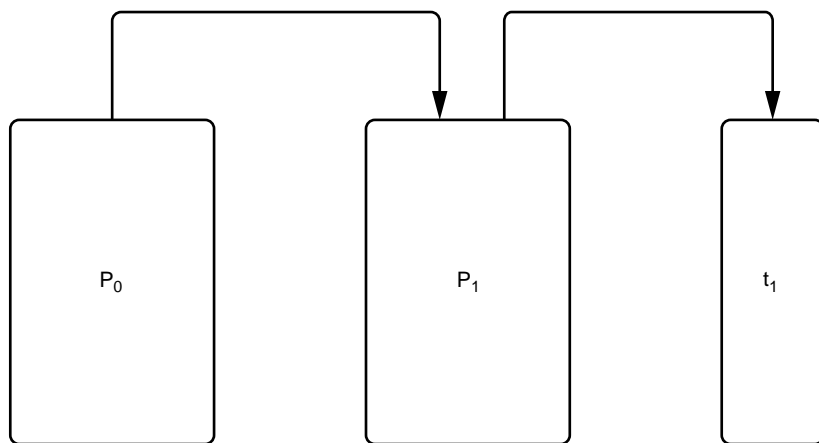


Figure 2.1 An Infinite Plurality of Causings?

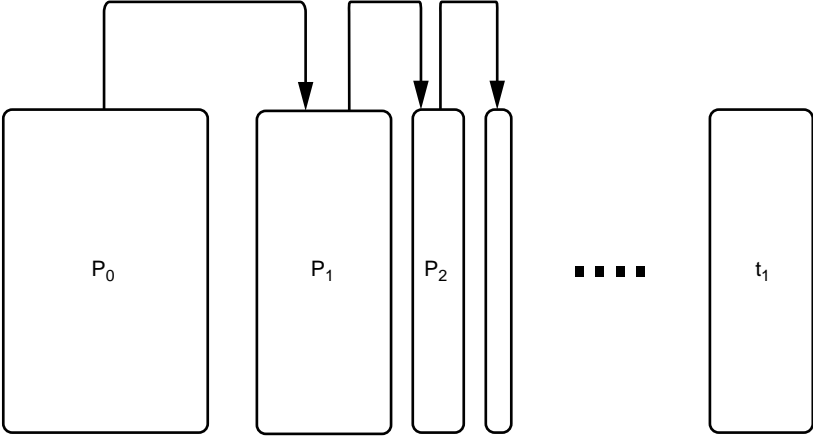


Figure 2.2 The Persistence of a Temporal Gap.

that are not actual at t_f . Something entirely composed of things not actual at t_f cannot itself be actual at t_f , and so cannot be causally responsible for any changes then. If one replies that the process as a whole acquires a causal power that is possessed by none of its parts, I can ask in response: *when* does the process acquire this power? If it acquires it before t_f , then it cannot be a power to effect a change at t_f . If it acquires the power at t_f , then this acquisition is itself a change and so part of C_f . It cannot be part of a cause of the members of C_f .

But why, one might ask, couldn't the change at t be the natural result of an infinite number of smaller changes, each occurring before t ? Suppose a cylinder is being moved across a finish line, with the first half being across the line at $t - \frac{1}{2}$ second, the next quarter at $t - \frac{1}{4}$ second, and so on. The whole cylinder will be across the line at t , as a result of the accumulation of an infinite series of steps. But the problem is this: why should the final time t arrive at all? Why isn't the infinite series being described merely a potential infinity? Suppose that the first half of the cylinder will cross the finish line this year, the next quarter the following year, and so on. In this case, the cylinder will never cross the line entirely, because there would be no actualization of the series as a whole. The issue in question is this: why do temporally bounded series of this kind always have an actual endpoint?

It is important to recognize that these arguments do not depend on deciding the A Theory/B Theory issue. In particular, they do not depend in any way on so radical a thesis as Presentism—the view that everything that is actual is actual at the present time. It is compatible with these arguments that there are infinitely many different modes of actuality, one for each moment of time, past, present, and future (Koons, 2020;

Koons, forthcoming). All that is required for the argument is the assumption that to effect a change that is actual in mode t , the agent must have a power that is actual in that same mode, i.e., at that same time.

The argument would not be consistent with a non-Aristotelian version of the B Theory—one in which every event at every moment of time is actual in exactly the same way. In such a Block Universe model, there is no room for defining change as the actualization of a specific potential. Such a model, as J. M. E. McTaggart (1908) long ago noted, fails to take seriously the reality of change.

I've shown that there must be a timeless agent. What is required for an agent to be timeless? The agent must be not just unchanging but absolutely unchangeable. A changeable but unchanging agent is still an agent whose states are located within time, since such an agent would be in a state of *rest* at each moment of time. If such an agent were to act at more than one moment of time, it would have to change from being inactive to being active, and so could not be unchanging. Only an absolutely unchangeable agent can act at various instants of time without existing within those moments. An agent is absolutely unchangeable only if it has no passive potentiality whatsoever. If it had some potentiality for passion or change, it would (by definition) not be unchangeable and so would not be atemporal.

Hence, the only possible explanation for the perpetuation of continuous time is the action of a timeless agent. How can a timeless agent produce events in time? I will try to explain that in section 2.5.

What about inertia? Couldn't the phenomenon of inertial change explain the continuous propagation of time? No. Inertial change depends on the passage of time. The law of inertia tells us that a body moving with a certain velocity will continue to move with that same velocity unless acted upon by some force. Having a constant velocity (or even a constant or predictable set of accelerations) entails that the body will occupy certain positions at certain future times. However, it does not explain why those future times exist. Inertia is a time-dependent phenomenon. It cannot explain the progression of time but only the progression of a body's positions *given* the progression of time.

Why not free will? Spontaneous self-changing? Same problem. The self-changer would have to first be actual at time t_f in order to act spontaneously at that time. To exercise power at time t_f , even power over oneself, one must be fully actual at time t_f . We need something outside of time to explain the arrival of t_f , which is presupposed by any spontaneous action at t_f . Once again, thanks to the principle of ontological proportionality, it is impossible for something merely potential at t_f to actualize itself. A spontaneous being must have its power to act at time t_f actualized before it can exercise that power spontaneously at that time. Note that this argument applies only to temporal spontaneous agents. A timeless spontaneous agent has the power to act at all times, since it is actual without temporal qualification.

The key explanandum of the argument from motion is the passage of time. We need an explanation of what we could call *temporal inertia*. Why does time keep moving forward?

Michael Tooley has proposed (Tooley 1997), relying on the Moving Block Theory of time, that the set of events occurring before t_f is jointly causally responsible for the existence of t_f , but we have seen that this cannot be the case, if causality respects the principle of ontological proportionality, ruling out the possibility of action across a temporal gap. On reflection, it is not surprising that the ultimate explanation of temporal phenomena must be non-temporal.

Defenders of the perennial philosophy must presuppose what has been called recently *existential inertia*—the principle that, if something exists for some period of time bounded by t , and no process of destruction occurs throughout that same period, then the thing must still exist at t . Existential inertia in this sense is not incompatible with the perennial philosophy—it is presupposed by it. In a sense, the first cause is responsible for the existence of each temporal thing at each moment t —but only by virtue of being responsible for the existence of the moment t itself by being the first cause of change at t .³

How is secondary causation possible? How can temporal beings cause anything, if a timeless being must be the first cause of all changes at each moment? The timeless first cause is responsible for some first change (*primum mobile*) at each moment of time—perhaps, the motion of photons, or the inertial motion of bodies. The causally primary changes at each point in time can trigger simultaneous actions at that time by temporal agents existing then. The primary motion at each instant t caused by the first cause actualizes at t the existential inertia of created things, thereby actualizing their potential to act at t in producing new effects. The first cause is not directly responsible for all changes, but only for the causally primary ones.

2.2 Argument for an Absolutely First Cause

We really want a stronger causal principle than the modest claim that all actual changes must have actual causes. We should extend the principle to cover some facts that are not changes—at least, some basic, positive facts.⁴ I want to know, for example, that all my current memory impressions have causes—that none of them exist without any cause at all, but memory impressions are states of being, not changes. If it were possible for some of my memories to exist uncaused, then it would be possible for all of them to be uncaused, which would have disastrous epistemological consequences, forcing me to take seriously a global skepticism about the past.⁵

What we need is a version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, a principle asserting that all the members of some wide class of facts

and pluralities⁶ of facts have suitable explanations. We shouldn't assume that absolutely all pluralities of facts have a noncircular explanation, since we can show that the plurality of *all the facts there are* cannot be explained by anything that isn't already a member of that plurality. But we should get as close to this ideal as possible since it is epistemologically problematic to carve out exceptions to our PSR without independent justification. (See Koons 1997, Pruss 2006 and 2009, Pruss and Rasmussen 2018, Rasmussen 2019.)

The simplest coherent version of the PSR is this: that all actual facts and pluralities of facts that *possibly* have a cause *actually* do so. The only exceptions that this version of the PSR allows are facts that are intrinsically uncausable (as a matter of metaphysical necessity), and that seems to be an eminently sensible class of exceptions. It's no surprise to be told that there is no cause for the intrinsically uncausable.

Given that there are actual facts, including some basic, positive facts, this PSR enables us to infer the existence of one or more first causes, facts that are intrinsically uncausable and that collectively cause all of the causable facts.

Here's how the proof goes:

- 1 There are basic, positive facts.
- 2 Let C be the plurality of all the basic, positive facts that are causable.
- 3 If every member of a plurality of facts can be caused, then the whole plurality can be jointly caused.
- 4 Therefore, C is jointly causable. (From 1, 2, and 3)
- 5 Every plurality that is jointly causable has an actual cause consisting of one or more basic, positive facts (PSR).
- 6 Therefore, C has an actual cause (or plurality of causes), G, that consists of basic, positive facts. (From 4 and 5)
- 7 If a plurality A is an actual joint cause of plurality B, then no member of B is a member of A. (The separateness of causes from effects)
- 8 Therefore, none of the members of G are members of C. (From 6 and 7)
- 9 Therefore, there is at least one actual, uncausable, basic, positive fact, and some plurality of these facts is the joint cause of all the causable facts C. (From 2, 6, and 8)

There is good reason to think that any wholly contingent basic fact is causable. If a fact F is contingent, then it fails to obtain in some possible world. Consider such a world w_1 . Now consider a world w_2 just like w_1 except that we add an entity with the causal power to produce fact F. Then further consider a world w_3 just like w_2 except that that entity actually exercises this power. This world w_3 will be one in which F is caused. By similar reasoning, we could show that any plurality of positive, wholly contingent facts is capable of having a joint cause.

This argument depends on a plausible subtraction principle: if every member of a plurality of basic, positive facts is contingent, then we can, starting with any given world, find a second world from which that entire plurality has been subtracted. This seems plausible, even if the plurality of facts extends infinitely far into the past.⁷

Once armed with a subtraction principle of this kind, we can give another argument in favor of the existence of a necessary being, as noted in unpublished work by Daniel Bonevac (2021), an argument inspired by Aquinas's Third Way. It is plausible that a fact is possible relative to a possible world only if there exists something in that world with the potential of making that fact actual. So, if a basic, positive fact F is contingent in the actual world, then it is not actual in some possible world w_1 . Assuming the B axiom of modal logic (equivalent to assuming that relative possibility is symmetric), this means that F is possible in w_1 , which entails that some agent A (or plurality of agents) in world w_1 has the power of making F actual. If we reached w_1 by using the subtraction principle, it follows that A is actual in the actual world. So, every contingent fact (or plurality of facts) is such that there are some things in the actual world with the power to make them actual.

Consider now the plurality of all basic, positive facts in the actual world that are contingent. There must exist agent N in the actual world with the power of causing all those contingent facts to be actual. Since no agent can cause its own existence, the existence of agent N cannot be a contingent fact. So, N exists necessarily.

But does this necessarily existing agent exist timelessly (characteristic 2), lacking all passive potentiality (characteristic 3)? I will argue that the answer must be Yes.

First, I will need the concept of a *logical moment*. If agent A causes some effect E , then we can identify two logical moments, even if the action and the effect are temporally simultaneous. If agent A causes E , then agent A acts at one logical moment M_1 , and the effect is first in actuality at a posterior moment M_2 . The relation of priority/posteriority between logical moments is transitive and asymmetric. No logical moment is prior to itself, and no moment is prior to any moment that is prior to it.

We have proven that there are absolutely uncaused facts. These facts must belong to logical moments that are absolutely primal—i.e., logical moments that are posterior to no logical moments.

Second, I need the concept of a full complement of intrinsic properties. A substance x has a *full complement* of intrinsic properties at moment N with respect to its nature if and only if every property P is such that, if x has P intrinsically at some logical moment in some possible world, then x has either P or its negation intrinsically at N with respect to its nature.

Now I'm in a position to propose a basic principle about causality:

The Completeness of Agents (COA). Necessarily, if agent x acts at logical moment M to produce some effect, then x has a full complement of intrinsic properties at M with respect to its nature.

The rationale for COA is this: in order to act at a logical moment, an agent must actually exist in that moment. But an agent cannot actually exist at a moment without possessing a full complement of properties at that moment. If it didn't possess such a full complement, it would fall short of actuality and would thereby be disqualified from acting.

I need one further principle:

The Groundedness of Contingent Intrinsic Properties (GCIP). Necessarily, if an individual x with essential nature E has an intrinsic property P contingently at logical moment M with respect to nature E , then there are some properties Q_1 through Q_n such that: x 's being P at M is wholly grounded⁸ by x 's being E and x 's having Q_1 through Q_n at M , and for each Q_i , x 's having Q_i at M is a basic, positive fact.

In order for a property to be a contingent intrinsic property of a thing with respect to its nature, it must be wholly grounded by some properties, each of which is a determinate of some determinable property that is essential to that thing. A thing can't just take on intrinsic properties willy-nilly.⁹ A basic intrinsic property must fulfill some essential role dictated by the thing's nature. The requirements of a thing's nature lay out the possibilities for a thing's intrinsic character.

Let's suppose that God is one of the agents acting at a primal moment M . Suppose for contradiction that God has some intrinsic property P at M contingently with respect to the divine nature.¹⁰ By GCIP, there must be some basic properties Q_1 through Q_n possessed intrinsically by God with respect to the divine nature at M , and God's having P at M is wholly grounded by His having Q_1 through Q_n at M . We can assume that grounding is a necessitation relation. Consequently, God must have at least one property Q_i contingently at M . If He had all of them at M necessarily, then He would have to have P at M necessarily as well.

Since it is a basic, positive, contingent fact that God possesses Q_i at M , then this fact (by the PSR or principle of causality) must have a cause. But that is inconsistent with our assumption that M is a primal moment, and so no fact at M can have a cause.

Hence, God cannot possess any contingent intrinsic properties at the logical moment M .

If it is necessary that God possess P intrinsically at M , there must be some explanation of this necessity. A logical moment is not a thing in its own right but simply a node in the causal network of the world.

So, if it is necessary that God possess P intrinsically at *M*, this must be a result of God's essence, and a result of God's essence alone, since there are no prior facts to appeal to. But if God's possessing P is a result of God's essence alone, then He must possess P necessarily at every logical moment in every possible world, and not just at *M*.

If we suppose that God has, by virtue of His nature, some intrinsic property P in primal moment *M* in our possible world but some contrary property Q in other primal moments in other worlds, then we would need an explanation of why it was *M* rather than some other primal moment that was actual, and this will again contradict that supposition that *M* is truly primal (uncaused). Alternatively, if we suppose that it is somehow part of God's nature that God has some intrinsic property P at every primal moment in every possible world, but God nonetheless has contrary properties at other moments in some possible worlds, we would want to know *why* God's essence requires that particular property P in the primal moments instead of some other property equally compatible with God's nature. We would have to accept a brute necessity, an arbitrary constraint on the space of possibility.

Tim O'Connor has suggested (in private communication) this reply: "God's possible contrary properties at other logic moments are necessarily consequent on God's engagement with a contingent creation; God's invariant nature in primal moments across worlds reflects the fact that God is the absolute source of all contingent truth." But, on this picture, what accidents does God have in the primal moment? All the properties He would have in a world in which He creates nothing at all? Surely not, for in those worlds God knows in the primal moment that He will not create anything.¹¹ Or does He know then that He has not yet made up His mind as to what to create in a still open future? How does God's essence determine that He must begin in such a state of indecision and ignorance of the future? If it does, could He remain forever in such a state?

Remember, the crucial point about God's state in the primal moment is not its metaphysical necessity but its uncausability. Any intrinsic state that is changeable is in principle causable. So, God's state at the primal moment must consist entirely of unchangeable properties. If God's state in the primal moment were changeable, then He could be in that very same state in some non-primal moment, and His being in such a state in such a moment could have a causal explanation.

Suppose that God has an intrinsic property P at some logical moment *N* in some possible world. Since God has a full complement of properties at the primal moment *M*, God must either have P or its negation at *M*. From the argument just given, it follows that God *qua* God must have P necessarily at *all* logical moments in all possible worlds. Hence, God has all His intrinsic properties necessarily at every logical moment.

Here's another way to look at this. Why can't God *lack* some intrinsic property P at primal moment *M*, such that God could *gain* P in some

subsequent logical moment? For a thing x to lack a possible intrinsic property is for it to have an intrinsic character of a certain kind. This intrinsic character must be a positive fact about x . Either the absence of P is grounded by x 's having some contrary intrinsic property Q , or else there is some *totality property*¹² T of x that encompasses the fact that x 's total complement of intrinsic properties does *not* include P . In either case, there is a basic, positive fact about x that must be causally explained (given the PSR). When God lacks a particular intrinsic property (with respect to His divine nature), this absence is not a mere absence but a kind of *privation*. Accidental privations that are not necessitated by a thing's essence are causable facts, and so the PSR requires that they all have actual causes (see Haldane 2007). Consequently, God cannot have (*qua* God) any accidental privations of this kind in the primal moment M . It is not possible for Him to subsequently gain intrinsic properties in His divine nature, since He has with necessity a full complement of intrinsic properties at that primal moment.

Since God has every intrinsic property essentially, He must be a being of pure actuality, with no passive potentiality (characteristic 3). Consequently, He must be timeless (characteristic 2).

This sort of argument from contingency has often been challenged by the prospect of a modal collapse (Ross 1969, 295–304; van Inwagen, 1993, 202–4). That is, if everything is fully caused by a necessary being, won't that make every fact necessary? How can there be any contingency in such a world?

The standard classical-theist response is simply to deny that complete cause or causal explanation must necessitate its effect. In her inaugural lecture at Cambridge, Elizabeth Anscombe (1981) pointed out that there is a clear difference between uncaused and undetermined (or un-necessitated). Probabilistic causation in quantum physics provides us with many plausible cases of causes that do not necessitate. A quantum experiment can cause an electron to appear in the left half of a screen, even if the same experimental conditions could have caused the same electron to appear on the right half of the screen. Libertarian free will provides more plausible cases like this. An agent with free will can cause himself to walk on the left side of the street, even if he had the power and equally good reasons for walking on the right side instead. In the same way, the necessary first agent can cause a contingent world of a certain kind to exist, even if it was possible for the agent to actualize any of an infinite number of alternative possibilities.

Does this mean that we lack complete, contrastive explanations—i.e., explanations of why the free agent chose to go left *rather than* right? This depends on exactly what we require of complete and contrastive explanations. If we require them to *necessitate* their explananda, then, yes, we must give up the notion that such explanations always exist. However, we can still find contrastive but non-necessitating explanations. If the free

agent freely chose to go to the left, he had good reasons for going to the left rather than the right, and equally good reasons for going to the right rather than the left. We can appeal to the former to offer a complete explanation of the fact that he chose to go to the left rather than the right, just as we could have appealed to the latter to offer a complete explanation of the fact that he chose to go to the right rather than the left, if he had in fact chosen to do so.

2.3 Argument for a Being of Pure Existence

Let's consider necessary beings again. Couldn't some necessary beings be causable? That is, couldn't some necessary beings be eternally and necessarily caused by something else? If that were the case, these dependent necessary beings wouldn't be necessary in and of themselves (*per se*). They would have a derived necessity that depends on the necessity of some other necessary being.

What if the dependent necessary beings formed an infinite causal regress? At this point we have to distinguish between accidentally and essentially infinite regresses. As I interpret the distinction, it is a distinction between two kinds of infinite causal regresses: those that are essentially infinite, and those that are merely accidentally infinite. In an accidentally infinite causal series, each member of the series is of the same kind. For example, if each human being had an infinite number of ancestors, then the infinite regress of generations would be only accidentally infinite, since each generation consists of the same kind of entity, namely, human beings. An accidentally infinite series offers no explanation at all of why there exist any members of that kind, since each link in the series presupposes that fact. The members of an accidentally infinite series can be aggregated into a single plurality, and we can then insist upon identifying a joint cause of the whole plurality. This would have to be a timeless cause of the existence of all of the infinitely many generations of human beings.

An essentially infinite regress, in contrast, offers at each step a real, noncircular explanation of why we have actual members of the kind involved in the next step. So, for example, suppose we explained the existence of human beings in terms of the existence of planets, and planets in terms of the existence of stars, and stars in terms of the existence of gas clouds, and so on, ad infinitum. It is not nearly so obvious that such an infinite series of categorically different facts would have to have a joint cause.

An accidentally infinite series of necessary beings would pose no problem since we could then aggregate all of the dependent necessary beings into a single totality and ask, What is the cause of its necessity? This would get us to at least one being with independent, uncaused necessity.

But what about the possibility of an essentially infinite regress? The tradition, beginning with Aristotle, is unanimous in considering such a thing impossible, but I will proceed more cautiously here. We can note that positing an essentially infinite regress comes at a very high theoretical cost: we would have to postulate an infinite number of distinct degrees or modes of necessity, each dependent on all of the “higher” modes. In fact, we might argue that such a situation is impossible. All of the supposed infinity of degrees or modes of necessity are all degrees or modes of the same thing, namely, *necessity*. They must be related to one another by *analogy*, to use the technical Aristotelian term. But what makes them all modes of the same thing? The standard answer is this: whenever we have a plurality of properties that bear some analogy to one another, there must be some single anchor property: one that is principally and focally what all of the others are in some derived way. If so, this principal mode of necessity would be a regress stopper, giving us once again a being that is independently and uncausably necessary.

Here’s a second, independent argument against the regress. Let’s suppose for contradiction that there is an infinite regress of necessary beings, each of which derives its necessity from its predecessor. So, N_1 is caused to be necessary by N_2 , N_2 is caused to be necessary by N_3 , and so on. And let’s assume that all necessary beings belong to such a regress: nothing is necessary in and of itself (unconditionally). Now, a world in which none of N_1, N_2, N_3 , etc. exist is an impossible world, since each of these beings exists necessarily and so exists in every possible world. So, the scenario in which none of the N ’s exist is an “impossible world,” if you’ll allow me to talk of it that way. Let’s call this impossible world w_1 .

Let’s assume that if a scenario S is impossible, and this scenario S can be derived from some possible world w simply by *deleting* entities that exist in w , then there must be some ground or explanation of S ’s impossibility. Let’s stipulate that the impossible world w_1 comes from the actual world (which is possible) by deleting all of the conditionally necessary beings in the actual world. Then the impossibility of w_1 must be explained in one of two ways: it fails to include something that is unconditionally necessary, or it violates some constraint of conditional necessity, i.e., it contains A but not B , even though A would (if it existed) necessitate B ’s existence (which it could do by necessitating B ’s necessary existence). But w_1 is not impossible in either of these ways. There is (by hypothesis) no unconditionally necessary being, so it isn’t impossible for that reason. And it satisfies all of the conditional constraints by never including any of the N ’s. Its noninclusion of N_i is permissible because it also fails to include $N_{(i+1)}$, and N_i is necessary only conditional on $N_{(i+1)}$ ’s existence. So, w_1 is possible, after all, which means that none of the N ’s is necessary. Contradiction.

Therefore, it is impossible for anything to be necessary unless something is necessary unconditionally. And to be necessary unconditionally

is to be necessary in and of oneself. And such a being would have to be absolutely uncausable in its existence.

Aquinas's next claim is this: a being of pure existence, i.e., an entity that is identical to its own act of existence, is the only kind of being that would be intrinsically uncausable (*De Ente*, chapter 2, par. 80). Hence, there must be such a being (characteristic 4). Moreover, such a being will also have the other three basic characteristics of the God of classical theism.

Aquinas's theory of *esse* (existence) and *actus essendi* (acts of existence) is a substantive metaphysical proposal, not merely an analysis of ordinary language and thought. Aquinas is offering an interesting and attractive theory about actuality, something that philosophers have wrestled with from antiquity to the present time. How are my actual daughters different from all the possible but not actual daughters that I could have had but didn't? There have been relatively few accounts of this fact in the history of philosophy:

- A *Actualism*. There is no such thing as a *non-actual daughter*. Talk about such things must be paraphrased as talk about our ideas or suppositions.
- B *Mysterious Quality*. There is a special, ineffable quality that all and only actual things have.
- C *Kantianism*. To be actual is to be connected in appropriate ways to sensations (as opposed to acts of imagination or supposition).
- D *Leibnizian Optimism*. To be actual is to be a denizen of the best possible world.
- E *Centrality*. To be actual is to belong to the central portion of reality, upon which all merely potential realities depend (by being related to the powers or dispositions of actual things). (Koons and Pickavance 2018)
- F *Divine Causality*. To be actual is to be caused to exist by the absolutely necessary being (Robert M. Adams)
- G *Thomism*. To be actual is to contain an act of existence (*actus essendi*). These acts of existence are all exactly the same, with one exception—all but God are cases of participated existence, while God is the unique case of unparticipated existence.

It's easy to dispose of options B, C, and D. We have no acquaintance with any actual-ish quality, and even if we did, it would be easy to conceive of nonactual things with that quality (disposing of B). To make B work, we would have to suppose that there is a quality of ordinary objects that can only be found in actual situations—that could never be merely possibly instantiated by anything. That is contrary to the very notion of a quality. Kant's attempted definition ignores the fact that it is only actual sensations that are relevant to the actuality of a physical

thing, rendering his definition of 'actual' viciously circular (disposing of C). Being part of the best possible world intuitively has nothing to do with being actual. If God chooses to make the best possible world actual, He must do something. Being best isn't sufficient to make it actual on its own (disposing of D).

I don't think E is really a competitor with G. Necessary beings (like God) are essentially "central" in this way, so E would provide some basis for identifying God as actual. However, many actual things are contingent. This means that although they are in fact metaphysically central, they could have been peripheral. We still need an explanation of what makes one contingent thing metaphysically central and another peripheral.

Adams's proposal F might be confused with Aquinas's, but I think that it (like Kant's definition C) has a fatal flaw. What matters for actuality is not that God should cause a thing to exist, but that He should *actually cause* that existence. Every possible creature would, if it were to exist, be caused to exist by God. And, given God's simplicity (His lack of accidents and passive potentiality), what God actually does cannot depend on God's internal state. And even if (*per impossibile*) it did depend on that state, it would depend on God's *actual* state, not on some merely possible one. So, we are still left with no account of what makes the difference between actuality and mere possibility.

So, that leaves only A and G. Aristotelians will reject A (actualism) on the ground that it denies the metaphysical significance of the actuality/potentiality distinction. If everything nonactual is completely unreal, then we face the Parmenidean problem of explaining how substantial change (generation and corruption of substances in nature) is possible. Even more importantly, we cannot treat active powers or passive potencies to change as aspects of reality. If something has the potential to become hot, for example, this consists in the thing's having a real relation to a merely potential accident of heat. If there are no merely potential entities, then we would have to embrace some form of Platonic realism, understanding the potentiality for heat as a relation to the universal idea of Heat Itself.

Aquinas postulates that everything created *receives* its existence through its form. Thus, for Socrates to exist, existence must come to Socrates through his form of humanity. Consequently, Socrates cannot exist without being a living human being. Thus, for Socrates, to be is to be human, a living human being. However, Aquinas's theory is that this is true only of creatures. God does not *receive* His existence from anything. Consequently, it does not have to come to Him through any limiting form. His existence is simple, unqualified, and unlimited. For God to be is simply for God to be, full stop.

Alex Pruss has made (in conversation) the following objection (which he doesn't ultimately endorse). Acts of existence can't explain the

difference between actuality and mere potentiality, because it is only *actually existent* acts of existence that can do this. We would need an explanation of the difference between actual acts of existence and merely possible ones, and so the former would need their own acts of existence, *ad infinitum*.

The Thomist's answer should be that there are two ways that things can exist in actuality: the way in which acts of existence do, and the way in which everything else does. In the latter case, things exist by having acts of existence. An act of existence just is *simpliciter*. With respect to acts of existence, we should be strict actualists (option A). Absolutely nothing is a *merely possible* act of existence. We don't countenance nonexistent acts of existence in our domain of discourse.

Isn't this inconsistent? If we can take the actualist line (option A) for acts of existence, why can't we do so for all entities? The reason is that we don't need merely possible acts of existence to make sense of all nonactual possibilities, but we do need merely possible entities of every other kind. We need merely possible substances, merely possible accidents, merely possible forms, and merely possible matter. Without all of these things, we cannot account for the internal structure of mere possibilities. However, we never need merely possible acts of existence. They are needed only at the final stage to distinguish one possibility (the actual one) from all others.

If we think of essences as representing the potential existence of something, and the act of existence as the actuality of that potential, then essences must be thought of as passively receiving existence from something else. Since a thing can't exist until its essence has received such existence, nothing of this sort could be uncaused. Therefore, since the necessary first cause is uncaused, its essence cannot receive existence. So, it could exist only if its essence already *was* an act of existence.

Of course, this presupposes that we have accepted the proposal that essences are potentialities for existence. This turns, I think, on seeing Thomas's theory of acts of existence as a theory of actuality. It is acts of existence that actualize possibilities. Mere essences, *sans* such acts, are thus mere potentialities for existence.

Aquinas has a second strategy for demonstrating that God is identical to His own act of existence. First, he shows that God's essence is identical to His act of existence, and then he shows that, given this identity, God himself must be identical to His act of existence/essence. In *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.22, paragraph 2, Aquinas argues for the first identity in the following way. First, he shows that God's essence must be compatible with existence. Consequently, Aquinas argues, if God's essence is not identical to His own act of existence, then there are just three alternatives: either God's existence depends on His essence, or both depend on some third thing, or the essence must depend on the existence. One might push back here: why couldn't both the existence and essence

be independent, uncaused things? Or why couldn't they be *interdependent* things, with the existence depending on the essence for its form, and the essence on the existence for its actuality? Inter-dependent things must be at least partially independent—the essence being what it is independent of the act of existence, and the act of existence having its actuality independent of the essence. If two partially independent things become intertwined, we can ask for the cause of the intertwining. But if God's existence is uncaused, and His existence and essence are distinct entities, there could be no such cause.

If God's existence depended on His essence or on some third thing, then God's existence couldn't be uncaused. There's an independent reason for thinking that His existence cannot depend on His essence: no essence can cause or ground the actual existence of something except by being actualized by an act of existence. Essences *sans* existence dwell in a realm of pure potentiality. So the case to consider is that in which God's essence depends on His existence. Here again, we have to turn to the actuality/potentiality distinction. If essence and act of existence are distinct, then the act of existence must actualize the possibility represented by the essence. The act of existence cannot both bring into being a possibility and then actualize that same possibility. An act of existence cannot do anything prior to its actualizing of an essence—it is only after actualizing an essence that it can be said to have a nature that could bring about anything. Since this is impossible, God's essence must be identical to His act of existence.

Given this identity, it is easy to see that God himself must be identical to His act of existence. At any primal moment of God's time, every feature of God, whether essential or accidental, must be immediately actualized by His act of existence. Since His act of existence is identical to His essence, this means that every feature of God at the primal moment is immediately actualized by His essence. By definition, an accident is a feature that is not immediately actualized by a thing's essence. So, God cannot have any accidents at any primal moment. A being with no accidents is identical to its own essence. So, God is identical at the primal moment to His own essence and, consequently, to His own act of existence. Since God has no accidents then, He cannot acquire any later (*qua* God), and so God is always identical to His own act of existence.

Does this definition of God as pure existence open the door to St. Anselm's ontological proof? No, we cannot prove that God exists simply by defining Him in terms of existence. We cannot know, by definition alone, whether a being actually exists that is identical to its own act of existence. We cannot even know in that way that such a being is possible. The existence of such a being must be proved by first proving the existence of an uncausable first cause, and then by showing that such an uncausable being must be identical to its own act of existence.

We can also see why it is not sufficient for God's essence to *include* or *entail* His existence, without simply *being* His act of existence. If God's act of existence were merely a *part* of His essence, then we would still need a causal explanation for the actual combination of His act of existence with the rest of His essence. In addition, we would have to ask which is ontologically prior, God's essence or His act of existence? Either answer would lead to a contradiction.

Once again, we can see that God must lack all passive potentialities. Any passive potentiality would be the potentiality for an accidental feature, since nothing has the potentiality to lack any of its essential features. But God has no accidents. So, He cannot have any passive potentialities, either (characteristic 3). And, a being without passive potentialities unchangeable and thus timeless (characteristic 2).

There is a unique first cause of all causable things, and this first cause must be absolutely uncausable. Only a being that is identical to its own act of existence is absolutely uncausable. So, God must also be the absolutely first cause of all causable things (characteristic 1).

2.4 Infinity, Perfection, and Unity of the First Cause

Aquinas insists that God's existence is not the greatest-common-factor kind of existence that is common to every actual thing (SCG I.26, and *De Ente et Essentia*, par. 90). That kind of generic existence is shared by both God and creatures—in God it is unlimited, in creatures it is limited by essence. God's existence is the sort that is incompatible with any kind of limitation or restriction.

An act of existence must give whatever actuality a thing has. Hence, acts of existence, as such, are infinite, while all substances and accidents are finite. If acts of existence as such were finite in any way, then there would be possible entities that could not be actualized. But that is a contradiction in terms: to be a possible entity is to be possibly actualized. Hence, acts of existence must have the power to actualize everything, to the outermost limits of possibility. They must be intrinsically infinite.

Furthermore, if any act of existence were finite as an individual, then this finitude would define a particular kind of being. In other words, the act of existence would have a kind of essence built into it. But if the act includes such an essence, then it would make sense for the act to exist only in potentiality. But, as we've seen, this is impossible. Every act of existence must be actual.

Finally, existence itself can have no limit, since a limit implies some possible thing beyond the limit, but nothing can exist "outside" of existence. A limit is something that receives existence, and that limits the existence it receives. Existence itself cannot be or have a limit.

God is a pure act of existence, without any associated essence. Hence, God is absolutely infinite. He must possess every possible perfection without any limit whatsoever.

Is there one God or many? In *Summa Theologiae* Part I, Question 11, article 3, Thomas offers three arguments for the oneness of God. The first argument appeals to God's simplicity. God is made to be God by His divine nature, and that divine nature also makes Him exist as a particular being. For there to be two gods, there would have to be two divine natures, each of the same species. But for two natures to exist with the same species, there would have to be something responsible for making each distinct from the other. So, for example, two men can be two by virtue of being combined with two packets of prime matter.¹³ Two packets of prime matter have no actual nature of their own, and so they can be fundamentally or primitively distinct. The divine nature is an actual nature (it is maximally actual), and so two divine natures cannot be fundamentally distinct. Since God is identical to His own nature, there cannot be two instances of the divine nature, just as there cannot be two instances of a single angelic species.

In the second argument, Thomas appeals to the infinity of God's perfection, by which he means that nothing can be superior to God in perfection. Suppose that there were two such maximally perfect beings. In this argument, Thomas concedes (for the sake of argument) that there could be two distinct species of god. If there were two such species, something would have to differentiate them. One would have to have something that the other did not have. But this means that one would have to have some form of perfection that was lacking in the other. But God has all perfections.

Third, Thomas appeals to the apparent unity of the world. This is one of the relatively few cases in which Thomas appeals to some form of the Fifth Way—pointing to God as the cause of the world's systematic harmony, the fact that the active and passive powers of the world's created substances fit together in order to make a stable, scientifically intelligible universe. Thomas gives a more detailed version of this argument in *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1.42, paragraph 7.

It is clear that a being of pure existence, one identical to its own essence and its own act of existence, will lack proper parts. God can have no parts accidentally since He has no accidents at all. He cannot have parts essentially, since, if He did, His essence would be in part constituted by those parts and their essential inter-relations. Such an essence could not be identical to a simple act of existence.

Is this compatible with the doctrine of the Trinity? Yes, since any orthodox version of that doctrine will deny that the three Persons are mere parts of God. In fact, I have argued that an orthodox version of the Trinity requires the classical-theist conception of God. (Koons 2018; see also Chapter 15 in this volume)

2.5 Intelligence in the First Cause

Is the God of classical theism a personal being? In particular, is He intelligent? Does He know and understand things? We can answer Yes for a number of reasons.

First, as we have seen, God enjoys the infinite perfection of being. If being intelligent and knowledgeable is a fundamental and real form of being, and one that does not entail any limitation or privation, then God must be intelligent and knowledgeable. I will assume here that intelligence is real and irreducible (see Koons and Bealer 2010). Being intelligent and knowledgeable does not, in and of themselves, entail any limitation or imperfection.

Second, God is the timeless cause of all temporal change. This raises the specter of Al-Ghazali's objection to a timeless cause: if the cause is eternal, why isn't the effect equally eternal? We know from experience only two kinds of causes: personal and impersonal. An impersonal cause cannot impose temporal structure on its effect. Consequently, Al-Ghazali is right about any timeless impersonal cause: such a cause could only have timeless effects.

However, we know that minds can create temporal order. In fact, minds are the only known cause of temporal series. Consider the way in which an author (like J. R. R. Tolkien) is able to create and impose an alien temporal structure on his story, or the way in which a musical composer does on his composition. It makes no sense to ask whether Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings* before, during, or after the Second Age of Middle Earth, or whether Beethoven composed the Ninth Symphony before, during, or after the second movement. Human minds can create structures that have their own temporal order, one that is separate and distinct from the temporal characteristics of the creator's own actions. In an analogous way, a personal, timeless Creator can impose temporal structure on His creation.

Third, we know that God has the power to cause the existence of every possible kind of creature. An immaterial substance can have an active power (like the power to cause things' existence) only through the capacity for understanding and will. The forms of all possible creatures must pre-exist somehow in God. They cannot exist in God "naturally," in the sense that God could actualize each of the forms in His own person, since many of the forms are mutually incompatible. Nothing can be black and white, or a blue whale and a daffodil. So, they must exist in God in some kind of "intentional" (non-natural way). And we could plausibly define *understanding* as simply being a thing that contains forms intentionally.

But what about unintelligent, material substances that have active powers? Take, for example, the sun's power of heating the surface of the earth. In the Fifth Way, Thomas Aquinas argues that such active powers

cannot exist in unintelligent bodies except instrumentally, by virtue of existing primarily in some intelligent maker or user of the unintelligent thing. So, perhaps we could define understanding in this way:

- Substance *x* *understands* form *F* if and only if *F* exists in *x* intentionally and intrinsically (not by virtue of *x*'s being an instrument of some other substance).

And we could define 'intentional' existence of a form in a substance thus:

- Form *F* exists *intentionally* in substance *x* if and only if *F* exists in *x* in some mode *M* such that it does not follow with metaphysical necessity that: if some form *G* exists in some substance *y* in mode *M*, then *G* can be predicated truthfully of *y*.

Given these definitions, we can prove that God understands every form that could possibly exist in any substance. Note that this argument relies both on God's unity and on His status as the necessary first cause of everything else.

2.6 The God of the Bible

Is the God of the philosophers identical to the God of the Bible? I will not address here the question of whether there are inconsistencies between the two accounts—I will leave those questions to other contributors. So, assuming that the God of classical theism exists and that the characteristics of the God of classical theism are consistent with characteristics attributed to God in the Bible, should we identify the two? Surely under those conditions the identification would be irresistible. If the God of the Bible were not identical to the God of classical theism, He would have to be a creature of that God, and that is surely incompatible with the Biblical account, as well as with the ecumenical creeds. A mere creature would not be maximally great or worthy of worship, even if it existed eternally.

But are the characteristics of the God of classical theism compatible with those of the God of the Bible? The greatest point of tension concerns God's love and concern for creatures. The God of the Bible has freely chosen to create the world. So, every creature exists contingently. God knows and loves each creature. Yet, the God of classical theism is in exactly the same intrinsic state in every possible world. How then can He know, love, and respond to contingently existing creatures?

A couple of critical points. First of all, in Aristotle's metaphysical system, the action of an agent is wholly located in the patient. An agent *qua* agent is not modified by acting—only the patient need be modified. Consequently, the truthmaker for each of God's contingent actions

is the contingent fact that He causes. No internal modification of God's being is required. Second, God's knowledge and concern do not require internal representations in the way that our intentional states do. God does not have to re-present external things to Himself. They are immediately present to His mind. He does not have to calculate, infer, reason, or deliberate, since He grasps all truths, both necessary and contingent, by a single, simple act of cognition (an act that is intrinsically unvarying across possible worlds).

Does this make God somehow cognitively or phenomenologically "blind"? How could God's phenomenology include an attitude of love toward a particular creature, if God's intrinsic state is invariant? This assumes that the phenomenology of God's consciousness depends only on His intrinsic state. Many recent philosophers of mind (the semantic "externalists") have denied that this is true, even in the case of human consciousness. We can suppose that God's phenomenology varies independently of His intrinsic state, depending in part on the world that He in fact creates and sustains.

There is one important qualification. The God of the Christian Bible has assumed (in the person of the Son) a created human nature, with the result that the Son is both God and man. Could the God of the Bible undergo such a transformation? Again, I will leave this question to Timothy Pawl (Chapter 16), but I will here say only that classical theism is committed only to the thesis that God *qua* God possesses each of the four characteristics and all their logical corollaries. Given that God has assumed a created nature, there are things that are true of God but not true of God *qua* God.

Notes

- 1 I want to thank Tim O'Connor, Christopher Tomaszewski, and Dan Bonevac for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.
- 2 This is in fact the view Aristotelians should take of continuous processes, in order to avoid Zeno's paradox of the stadium. Only a finite number of events within any process are fully actual—the rest exist as mere potentialities, liable to becoming actual if the process were to be interrupted at the corresponding point in time. But mere potentialities existing before t_f clearly lack the ontological status of being able to cause a change in C_t , for two reasons: the temporal gap, and their status as mere potentialities.
- 3 In light of the theory of relativity, we can suppose that the instants of time are in some sense localized in space as well. Consequently, God can annihilate an individual substance by simply refraining from actualizing the relevant instant in the substance's local timeline.
- 4 By *basic, positive facts* I mean the existence of substances and accidents (the ten categories of things in Aristotle's ontology). This term excludes negative facts (mere absences), as well as logically complex facts like disjunctions or generalizations. All logically complex propositions are made true or false by the existence or nonexistence of such basic, positive facts, so these are the sorts of things that require causal explanation.

- 5 See (Koons and Pruss 2021) for arguments for the claim that denying the PSR leads to global skepticism.
- 6 A *plurality* of facts is my way of referring to *some facts*, taken collectively. The term ‘plurality’ looks singular, but it is actually a plural noun, referring to many facts at once. (British English respects this feature of collective nouns by combining them with verbs in the plural form: e.g., ‘the committee have decided’. For a discussion of plural reference, see Boolos 1984.) I am not assuming that any plurality of facts forms a single, composite fact, but I am assuming that we seek causal explanations for pluralities of facts as well as for individual facts. An ordinary collection of ordinary facts, even if infinite, should have a joint cause (which might be a plurality of causes).
- 7 Tim O’Connor (personal communication 2021) has pointed out that, if theism is true, then the necessary existence of God might ground exceptions to the subtraction principle. If so, the argument could be reconstructed as a *reductio ad absurdum* of atheism.
- 8 This is intended to be what is called ‘weak grounding’—I want to allow for the case in which *x*’s being *P* is itself a basic, positive fact, in which case this fact weakly grounds itself.
- 9 As I will explain in Section 6, God’s assuming of a created nature (like Jesus’ humanity) is an exception to this rule. But it remains true that God *qua* God cannot have any intrinsic properties that are not grounded by some part of a nature-constituted disjunction.
- 10 Note that this argument does not rule out God’s having contingent intrinsic properties with respect to other natures, such as an assumed human nature. This renders the account compatible with a Chalcedonian doctrine of the Incarnation.
- 11 Here I am making a false assumption, for the sake of an *ad hominem* argument against the critic: namely, I am assuming that the different possible contents of God’s decision of what to create and whether to create correspond to different intrinsic properties of God’s mind.
- 12 A totality property is a constituent of what David M. Armstrong (1997) called *totality facts*. A totality fact about some particular substance would entail that the substance lacks any intrinsic property not contained in some totality *C*. Totality facts are basic, positive facts that ground truths about privations.
- 13 Thomas says that it is “designated” or “signate” matter that individuates. I take ‘signate matter’ to refer to what I am calling “packets” of prime matter since we are able to refer to such packets only via their spatio-temporal locations. Nonetheless, the distinctness of two packets of prime matter is metaphysically prior to the distinctness of spatiotemporal locations.

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