THE DEPENDENCE PROBLEM:  
THEISM, COUNTERPOSSIBLES, AND NECESSITY

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

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This dissertation explores various attempts to solve the Dependence Problem — the problem posed by the following question: How can necessary truths stand to God in a one-way relation of dependence, given that neither they nor God could have failed to exist? In chapter 1, I examine the possibility that the requisite asymmetry might be counterfactual in nature. I argue that this type of counterfactual solution requires a nonstandard account of counterpossibles. I survey a recent attempt by Linda Zagzebski to offer such an account, and conclude that (taken alone) it fails to solve the Dependence Problem, since it presupposes a thesis Zagzebski only gestures at: that propositions are causally related to God.

In Chapter 2, therefore, I explore the question of whether necessary truths are asymmetrically (and causally) dependent on God. Here I discuss recent defenses of theistic activism — the view that all abstracta are the causal products of God's conceptual activity — by Brian Leftow and Thomas V. Morris. I argue that Leftowian theistic activism (and perhaps also its Morrisian compatriot) is committed to a nonstandard account of counterpossibles, but that this account is flawed in crucial respects.
In chapter 3, I take up a different solution to the Dependence Problem, one that, unlike the preceding solutions, does not assume that necessary truths are distinct from God. I contend that this approach to the problem presupposes the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (whose general claim is that God has no properties distinct from himself). I examine three versions of this doctrine, and find that none (taken alone) succeeds in identifying every necessary truth with God, which is the crux of the present solution.

In the final chapter, I propose a solution to the Dependence Problem that incorporates select elements from the previous solutions, and conclude that it is possible for all we know that necessary truths stand to God in an asymmetrical (causal) relation of dependence.
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Finally, I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to my beautiful and long-suffering wife, Caroline. I am deeply beholden to her for years of unstinting love, encouragement, and sacrifice. Her financial support (as a teacher) and domestic support (taking care of our son, Wesley) has made this dissertation possible. I don’t know where I’d be without her. To Caroline Davis I dedicate this work.

_Aurora, Ontario_  
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R.D.
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Theists typically hold that God is sovereign over his creation. This is often taken to mean that God creates and causally sustains everything distinct from himself, so that every nondivine object depends on God for its existence. Theists typically add that the converse does not hold: God is not dependent on anything distinct from himself for his existence. There is therefore an asymmetrical or one-way relation of dependence running from each nondivine object to God. Consider, for example, an object such as the Eiffel Tower. Surely, according to theism, the existence of this object depends on God; in the absence of God’s causally sustaining contribution, this object would not exist. And yet, just as surely, God does not depend for his existence on the Eiffel Tower.

But why not? One answer to this question is that, unlike the Eiffel Tower, God is a necessary or noncontingent being: a being that could not have failed to exist; stated in terms of possible worlds, this is to say that God exists in every possible world and fails to exist in none. If this is so, then since the Eiffel Tower is contingent, there are possible worlds in which God exists but it does not. In other words, God could have existed even if the Eiffel Tower had not. What this suggests, in general, is that God does not depend on any nondivine contingent object for his existence; rather, the relation of dependence goes entirely in the other direction.

It is also plausible to suppose, however, that in addition to the class of nondivine contingent objects, there is also a class of nondivine necessary objects.
According to modal realism, there really are (exist) such things as propositions: bearers of truth-value. Furthermore, while some propositions (e.g., *The CN Tower is taller than the Eiffel Tower*) have the property of being true contingently, others (e.g., *The Eiffel Tower is not taller than itself*) have it necessarily — that is, they have it and could not have lacked it. Since a proposition is necessarily true just in case it is true in every possible world, if modal realism is true, there are propositions which have the property of being true in every possible world. But since it is not possible for any object (hence any proposition) to exemplify a property in a world in which it does not exist, necessary truths (that is, necessarily true propositions), like God, exist in every possible world and thus are necessary beings. There is no world, for example, in which God exists but the proposition $7 + 5 = 12$ does not.

Some have seen a problem for theistic modal realists here. If the proposition that $7 + 5 = 12$ has necessary existence and is distinct from God, then it follows (given the sketch of theism above) that $7 + 5 = 12$ depends on God, but not vice versa. It is hard to see how this could be. If an asymmetrical relation of dependence obtains between God and the Eiffel Tower (at least in part) because the Eiffel Tower

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2 Throughout the text, I shall follow common practice and use an italicized sentence to name the proposition expressed by the sentence in italics. Thus, for example, the sentence ‘Socrates is wise’ expresses the proposition *Socrates is wise*. Unless otherwise indicated, items set apart from the text and numbered refer to propositions.

3 Plantinga calls this doctrine *serious actualism*. See ibid., pp. 197-201.
could have failed to exist but God could not, then how could this sort of relation
obtain between two beings, neither of which could have failed to exist? The problem
posed by this question — the Dependence Problem as we might call it — has led
some contemporary philosophers to the view that it is logically impossible that any
necessary being asymmetrically depend on another. Keith Yandell, for example, says
that such a relation of asymmetrical dependence

is a genuine possibility provided it is not also held that the sustainer and
the being sustained have logically necessary existence. If a being enjoys
logically necessary existence then its nonexistence is logically
impossible. Existence, but not logically necessary existence, can be
sustained by something distinct from its owner (or by its owner relative
to itself) ... X's existence is logically necessary, and its logical necessity
(or its existence) is sustained by Y is contradictory.4

Although Yandell’s remarks suggest that it is contradictory to maintain that one
necessary being could asymmetrically depend on another, I do not see that he has
identified the contradiction. If there is a contradiction here, it is certainly not
explicit. Presumably, then, additional premises are needed to bring it out. So far as I
know, however, no philosopher (including Yandell) has ever attempted to supply
these additional premises. Indeed, according to Peter van Inwagen, this task might
prove difficult:

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It is not ... easily demonstrable that just any necessary being would be an independent being. Anyone who wanted to demonstrate this conclusion would have somehow to prove the impossibility of cases like the following one. Suppose that A is a necessary being and that A causes the existence of B and that it is necessary that A cause the existence of B. Then B will be a necessary being — B will exist in all possible worlds, since A exists in all possible worlds, and, in every possible world in which it exists, causes B to exist in that possible world — but B will nonetheless [asymmetrically] depend upon A for its existence.  

So what leads Yandell to his conclusion that there cannot be one-way dependence relations between necessary beings? How does the argument go? I suspect that Yandell is thinking along the following lines: It is a necessary truth that for any objects x and y, x asymmetrically depends on y just in case x exists entails y exists, but y exists does not entail x exists. If entailment is understood in terms of strict implication, this amounts to saying that while it is impossible for x to exist without y, it is possible for y to exist without x. Now suppose, for the sake of argument, that x and y are necessary beings. Then (necessarily) x exists and y exists are mutually entailing; hence, it is impossible for x to asymmetrically depend upon y; the relation between x and y, rather, is one of mutual logical dependence. This conclusion generalizes to every pair of necessary beings.

What are we to make of this line of reasoning? A crucial assumption of the argument is that asymmetrical dependence is to be cashed out solely in terms of

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logical entailment. In the presence of that assumption, it is not at all surprising that there can be no one-way relations of dependence between necessary beings. But why should one assume that the asymmetrical dependence relation the theistic modal realist needs to solve the Dependence Problem must be that of logical dependence? Perhaps there are alternative asymmetrical dependence relations on which the theistic modal realist might rely. In the chapters to follow, I shall canvass several possibilities and attempt to identify a dependence relation that could reasonably be expected to hold between necessary truths (hereafter, NTs) and God such that they depend on him but not he on them.

In chapter 1, I examine the possibility that the requisite asymmetry might be had by way of counterfactual dependence. The idea, in brief, is this. If it could be shown that

\begin{enumerate}
\item If God did not exist, then NTs would not exist
\item If NTs did not exist, then God would not exist
\end{enumerate}

is true, while its converse

\begin{enumerate}
\item If NTs did not exist, then God would not exist
\item If God did not exist, then NTs would not exist
\end{enumerate}

is false, then the theistic modal realist could claim that although God and NTs are mutually logically dependent, there is a one-way counterfactual dependence of NTs on God. This solution to the Dependence Problem requires that the standard semantics for counterpossibles such as (1) and (2) — that is, counterfactuals with impossible antecedents — be rejected; for that semantics assigns trivial truth to all counterpossibles.
Here I examine in detail a recent attempt by Linda Zagzebski to argue for a nonstandard approach to counterpossibles. The crux of her case rests on a division of impossible propositions into two classes: those which are self-contradictory and those which are not. Call the latter ‘Interesting Impossible Propositions’ (IIPs). Zagzebski argues that, unlike self-contradictory propositions, IIPs have different counterfactual implications and hence different truth-values. I contend that Zagzebski’s nonstandard semantics (taken alone) fails to provide the resources necessary for constructing a satisfying solution to the Dependence Problem.

Chapter 2 explores the question of whether NTs stand in a relation of asymmetrical causal dependence to God. Here recent defenses of theistic activism — the view according to which all abstract objects are the causal products of God’s intellectual activity — come to the fore. I begin by sketching the essentials of this view as they are laid out by Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel. I then turn to an extended examination of what (as I see it) is the most sophisticated version of theistic activism on offer, that of Brian Leftow.

To make sense of the sort of causation operative between God and abstract objects, Leftow follows Zagzebski’s lead in developing a nonstandard account of counterpossibles. He, too, attempts to partition impossible propositions into two classes: the ordinary and the extraordinary. Ordinary impossibilities are those impossibilities not involving God’s nonexistence; they counterfactually imply everything whatsoever. Extraordinary impossibilities, on the other hand, do involve
God's nonexistence; accordingly, they fail to counterfactually imply anything which implies that something exists, since if God did not exist, nothing else would exist either. The fundamental flaw with Leftow's account, I argue, is that it commits him to an unorthodox interpretation of the possibility operator and, in the end, to the position that some propositions are contingent beings.

The counterfactual and causal solutions to the Dependence Problem operate on the assumption that NTs are distinct from God. In chapter 3, I take up an entirely different solution to our problem, one that makes use of the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS) — whose general claim is that God has no properties distinct from himself. Thus, I call it the Simple Solution. Broadly speaking, this solution attempts to identify NTs with God via his properties. There is therefore no need to identify the elusive relation of asymmetrical dependence; for if NTs are identical with God, then the categories of being dependent on God and being independent of God simply do not apply.

For the Simple Solution to work, however, it must have a coherent formulation of the DDS. I investigate three versions of the DDS: the property view, the property-instance view, and the property-individual view. I conclude that none of these views (taken alone) is able to accomplish the task of identifying every necessary truth with God.

In the final chapter, I offer some further general observations on the prospects for a counterfactual solution to the Dependence Problem. I show how combining
Leftow's and Zagzebski's respective semantics for counterpossibles also fails to provide the theistic modal realist with an adequate solution. I go on to argue that any nonstandard account of counterpossibles which subscribes to the idea that if God did not exist, then nothing would exist runs afoul of serious actualist considerations. Finally, I propose a solution to the Dependence Problem that incorporates elements of both the Causal and Simple Solutions, and end by showing how my solution is immune to certain problems infecting rival solutions. My conclusion is a modest one: it is possible for all we know that an asymmetrical (causal) relation of dependence obtains between NTs and God.
Chapter 1
The Counterfactual Solution

According to Descartes, the existence of God is the “first and most eternal of all possible truths and the one from which alone all others derive.”¹ Thus, “we must not say that if God did not exist nonetheless these truths would be true.”² Rather, says Descartes,

The mathematical truths which you call eternal have been laid down by God and depend on Him entirely no less than the rest of his creatures. Indeed to say that these truths are independent of God is to talk of Him as if He were Jupiter or Saturn and to subject Him to the Styx and the Fates.³

Moreover,

There is no doubt that if God withdrew his co-operation, everything which he has created [including the eternal truths] would go to nothing, because all things were nothing until God created them and provided his co-operation.⁴

³ Letter to Mersenne, 15 April 1630; K, p. 11.
So the idea, perhaps, is that NTs (necessary truths) stand to God in a relation of dependence, *counterfactual* dependence as we might call it, according to which the counterfactual conditional⁵

(1) If God did not exist, then NTs would not exist

is true, but

(2) If NTs did not exist, then God would not exist

is false. (Descartes does not explicitly say that (2) is false; however, I think this follows from his claim that God's existence is the "first and most eternal of all possible truths.") And hence on his view, NTs are dependent on God in a way that God is not dependent on them. The dependence relation at issue here is therefore both asymmetrical and counterfactual.

It is clear, I think, that if this relation were available to the theistic modal realist, she would be well on her way to solving the Dependence Problem; for although the relevant relata here all enjoy logically necessary existence (so that the antecedents of (1) and (2) are impossible), there is (on the present suggestion) an important sense in which NTs asymmetrically (and counterfactually) depend on God. Let us call this the Counterfactual Solution. And now the crucial thing to see is that in order to make use of this solution, the theistic modal realist requires the truth of (1) and the falsity of (2). But how, exactly, is this result to be secured? An

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⁵For present purposes, I shall take a counterfactual conditional to be a conditional of the form "If it were the case that A, then it would be the case that C" regardless of whether in fact the antecedent is false. For supporting argument, see Donald Nute, "Conditional Logic," in *Handbook of Philosophical Logic, Vol. II*, eds. D. Gabbay and F. Guenthner (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1984), p. 389.
initially promising approach to this question might begin with an attempt to identify a semantics for “counterpossibles” — that is, counterfactual conditionals with impossible antecedents\(^6\) — under which (1) comes out true and (2) comes out false. Theistic modal realists attracted to the Counterfactual Solution to the Dependence Problem are, of course, committed to such a semantics. But is there a semantics which fits the bill?

I. The Standard Semantics Reviewed

According to the conventional wisdom on these matters, the truth conditions for counterfactual conditionals are given in terms of possible worlds and invoke a relation of comparative similarity said to hold between worlds. Thus, on Robert Stalnaker’s view, a counterfactual \(p > q\)\(^7\) (where \(p\) and \(q\) are propositions) is true if and only if either (i) \(p\) is false in every possible world or (ii) \(q\) is true in the \(p\)-world most similar to the actual world (where a ‘\(p\)-world’ is a possible world in which \(p\) is true). It was quickly recognized, however, that this account assumes that there is exactly one \(p\)-world most similar to the actual world. (This is known in the literature as ‘Stalnaker’s Uniqueness Assumption’.) There are interesting implications here.

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\(^7\) Here \(p > q\) is to be read as ‘if \(p\) were true, then \(q\) would have been true’. It should also be noted that the symbols ‘\(p\)’, ‘\(q\)’, and ‘\(>\)’ are being used autonomously (that is, as names of themselves) in the manner of Alonzo Church and H. B. Curry. For a brief discussion, see Richmond H. Thomason, *Symbolic Logic: An Introduction* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1970), pp. 58–60. Unless the context indicates otherwise, terms which appear in bold-face and their corresponding operators or connectives (if any) are used in this fashion.
For example, suppose \( W \) is the \( p \)-world in question. Then, in \( W \), either \( q \) is true or \( \sim q \) is true. Hence, in \( W \), either \( p \& q \) is true or \( p \& \sim q \) is true. Accordingly, on Stalnaker’s semantics, Conditional Excluded Middle (CEM) holds for counterfactuals; that is, for any counterfactual \( p > q \), either \( p > q \) or \( p > \sim q \) is true.

Notice, however, that this assumes there is a \( p \)-world most similar to the actual world. But that there is such a world has seemed to many quite doubtful. For it seems distinctly possible that there be several \( p \)-worlds (perhaps even an infinite number), each equally similar to the actual world.\(^8\) This is the view held by David Lewis. According to his influential theory, a counterfactual \( p > q \) is true if and only if either (i) \( p \) is false in every possible world or (ii) no world in which \( p \& \sim q \) is true is as similar or more similar to the actual world than any in which \( p \& q \) is true.

On Lewis’ theory, then, there may be no single \( p \)-world which is most similar to the actual world; accordingly, CEM fails for counterfactuals.

For present purposes, the important thing to see in these standard treatments of counterfactuals is not the points on which they differ, but rather those on which they are in agreement; Stalnaker and Lewis both subscribe to the idea that all counterpossibles are trivially true.

Now in her intriguing paper, "What If the Impossible Had Been Actual?" Linda Zagzebski argues that the Lewis-Stalnaker account of counterpossibles must be revised. She makes essentially two points. First, and by way of example, she proposes that the standard semantics has important metaphysical implications; indeed, she thinks it has the potential to do "quite a lot of harm." She goes on to argue, however, that these implications are not at all inevitable; for the standard view of counterpossibles is not only unjustified, it is false. Let us examine each of these claims in turn.

II. The Standard Semantics Rejected

A. Metaphysical Implications

There are, according to Zagzebski, many examples which establish the fact that the standard semantics significantly "affects the outcome of a metaphysical argument or position." Suppose we ask whether this is so in the present case. How, in particular, are (1) and (2) affected by the Lewis-Stalnaker semantics? And what implications does this have for the Counterfactual Solution to the Dependence Problem? Before we tackle this question, however, we must confront the following dilemma. According to theism, God exists is true. Proponents of theism, though,

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10 "What If the Impossible Had Been Actual?," p. 179. Hereafter, this work is cited as "What If".

11 Ibid.
have been divided over the modality of this proposition. Thus, according to plain theism, the proposition God exists is contingently true; that is, it is true in some worlds but not others (where a proposition p is true in a world W just in case it is impossible that W obtain and p fail to be true). Anselmian theism, on the other hand, holds that God exists could not have failed to be true; it is a necessary truth, one that is true in every possible world.

Now it might be suggested that if plain theism is true, solving the Dependence Problem becomes difficult (if not impossible). Thus, Keith Yandell:

No doubt plain theism has its prices. A plain theist, I take it, cannot ground the truths of logic in God's thinking them, for they are necessarily true and it is not necessarily true [given plain theism] that God exists to think them.\(^\text{12}\)

Yandell's remarks suggest the following line of argument. Suppose plain theism is true. Then there is at least one world W such that God exists is not true in W. But if so, then, in W, either God exists is false or (given existentialism\(^\text{13}\) — the thesis that singular propositions can exist only if the individuals they involve exist) nonexistent. In either case, however, God does not exist in W. Now consider any proposition p. If p is necessary, then it will be true in every possible world, including W. It follows,

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therefore, that \( p \) exists in \( W \) but God does not. So plain theism implies that it is possible for NTs to exist apart from God, in which case they are not counterfactually dependent on him. For if there are worlds in which \( p \) is true and God does not exist, then (1) is false; it is not the case that if God were to fail to exist, then there would be no NTs.

But here, perhaps, the existentially-inclined plain theist is not without reply. Consider, for example, such a proposition as

\[(3) \quad \text{Quine is a philosopher or Quine is not a philosopher.}\]

According to the existentialist, although (3) is necessary, there are nonetheless worlds in which it fails to exist. At face value, this claim strikes one as exceedingly odd. If a proposition is necessary, how could it possibly fail to exist? Well, the core insight of existentialism is that there are no propositions about Quine, for example, in worlds in which he does not exist; that is, propositions about Quine are ontologically dependent on Quine himself. Assuming that there are worlds in which Quine fails to exist, then, (3) cannot be necessary in any strong sense, where

\[(4) \quad p \text{ is strongly necessary } = \text{df. } \text{p is true in every world simpliciter.}\]

It does not follow, however, that (3) is not necessary under the following definition:

\[(5) \quad p \text{ is weakly necessary } = \text{df. } \text{p is true in every world in which p exists.}^{14}\]

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\[^{14}\text{For discussion of weak necessity and its modal implications, see Alvin Plantinga, Warrant and Proper Function (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 118-119.}\]
And indeed, in every world in which Quine exists, (3) exists and is true; hence (3) expresses a (weakly) necessary truth under (5).

Now how, exactly, is this supposed to help the plain theist forge an asymmetrical, counterfactual relation of dependence between NTs and God? Well, perhaps as follows. The plain theist, if she endorses existentialism, is obliged to distinguish between strong and weak necessity. Now suppose we agree that singular propositions depend for their existence on the individuals they involve. Then it is plausible to think that there are many propositions — propositions singular with respect to contingent individuals, that is, individuals that exist in some worlds but not others — which are weakly necessary. Now if these individuals are concrete as well as contingent, then (given theism) we can also say that in every world in which these individuals exist, so too does God; for according to theism, every nondivine, concrete, contingent object depends on God for its existence. Hence, the plain theist, if she is also an existentialist, is in a position to hold that for any world \( W \) in which there exists a weakly necessary proposition \( p \), singular with respect to some such individual, God creates and sustains that individual in existence.

This much is correct. But in the final analysis, it is hard to see how it is of any real help to the plain theist. For surely she will agree that there are propositions singular with respect to such objects as the number 9. And if she does, there is trouble. For, unlike Quine, the number 9 is noncontingent. Like everything else, Quine exists in every world in which he exists — he exists essentially; but the
number 9 is even more impressive; it exists in every world *simpliciter*. Taking existentialism for granted, therefore, there is still no world in which, for example, the proposition *9 is odd or not odd* fails of existence or truth. Accordingly, not only is this proposition weakly necessary, it is strongly necessary: true in every world. But then if plain theism is true, there are worlds in which this proposition exists but God does not; and if so, then it does not asymmetrically (let alone counterfactually) depend on God.

It seems to me, therefore, that Yandell is correct that plain theism "has its price"; the price, however, is not right. So let us return to our original question: How does the Lewis-Stalnaker semantics affect the Counterfactual Solution to the Dependence Problem? Recall that we are assuming that either plain theism or Anselmian theism is true. If plain theism is true, then so far as I can make out, the Dependence Problem goes unsolved. But suppose, on the other hand, that Anselmian theism is true. At first glance, it might appear that this provides a solution to our problem. For the Anselmian theist maintains that *God exists* is strongly necessary; there is no possible world in which God does not exist. But then there will be no world in which some necessary truth exists but God does not.

Things, however, are not quite so easy. If God and NTs exist in every possible world, then (1) and (2) are counterpossibles, since their antecedents are false in every world (without qualification). But then if the standard semantics is correct, it is not the case that
(2) If NTs did not exist, then God would not exist

is false, as the Counterfactual Solution requires. This is problematic. For if, as we said earlier, the truth of

(1) If God did not exist, then NTs would not exist

expresses a counterfactual dependence of NTs on God, then (2) — if true — would express just such a relation, this time running in the other direction: from God to NTs. So if we endorse the Trivial Truth Thesis — the thesis that every counterpossible is trivially true — then both (1) and (2) come out true. But if so, any relation of counterfactual dependence obtaining between God and NTs will be a symmetrical one; and this effectively guts the Counterfactual Solution, which, after all, is just an attempt to show how one necessary being could asymmetrically depend on another.

In view of these considerations, it seems to me that what we have here is a confirmation of Zagzebski’s claim that “the truth value of a counterpossible [in many cases] affects the outcome of a metaphysical argument or position.”15 If the standard semantics for counterpossibles is correct, there is no one-way relation of counterfactual dependence running from NTs to God, in which case the Dependence Problem has no counterfactual solution. Accordingly, we must ask why the standard view of counterpossibles is correct? Why should we think that every counterpossible is trivially true? In response to this question, Zagzebski cleverly distinguishes

15 “What If,” p. 179.
between those counterpossibles whose antecedents are self-contradictory (e.g., *Quine is wise and Quine is not wise*) and those which are not (e.g., *The number 9 is a person*) — she refers to the latter as “Interesting Impossible Propositions” (hereafter, IIPs). Perhaps the Lewis-Stalnaker results hold for the former, she says; but it is far from clear that they hold for the latter.

There are two main stages in the argument she offers in support of this claim. Zagzebski first argues that there are no good reasons for affirming the Trivial Truth Thesis. Each of the three lines of argument typically advanced in support of the standard view, she claims, is flawed in some crucial respect. She then goes on to offer a positive case of her own for the view that some counterpossibles are nontrivially true while others are nontrivially false. Let us examine each stage of her argument in turn.

**B. Justification for the Standard View**

1. *The Argument Based on the Concept of Entailment*

Perhaps the most powerful and compelling argument Zagzebski considers in favor of the Trivial Truth Thesis is one of her own devising. The argument, which turns on an appeal to the notion of ‘entailment’, proceeds as follows:16

(6) For all propositions \( p \) and \( q \), if \( p \) is impossible then \( p \) entails \( q \).

(7) For all propositions \( p \) and \( q \), if \( p \) entails \( q \) then \( p \) counterfactually implies \( q \). [PLACE]

Hence,

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For all propositions $p$ and $q$, if $p$ is impossible, then $p$ counterfactually implies $q$. [Trivial Truth Thesis]

Zagzebski thinks this argument is inconclusive. (6), she is prepared to grant, is “obviously true” — indeed trivial — if either ‘entails’ means ‘strictly implies’ (in C. I. Lewis’ sense) or if every impossible proposition has an explicitly contradictory structure. In the former case, to say that $p$ entails $q$ is just to say that $p$ strictly implies $q$, that is, $\sim \Diamond (p \& \sim q)$ — where ‘$\Diamond$’ is the possibility operator. This seems intuitively correct, as Alfred Freddoso, another theistic defender of (6), explains:

To say that $p$ strictly implies $q$ is to say that it is metaphysically impossible that $p$ be true and $q$ false — a condition trivially satisfied if $p$ is itself necessarily false. So it would be foolhardy indeed to doubt that a necessarily false proposition strictly implies any proposition you please.\(^{17}\)

Hence, the conjunction of a necessarily false proposition with any proposition is broadly logically impossible. And this is reflected in the fact that $\sim \Diamond p \supset \sim \Diamond (p \& q)$ is a theorem in the standard modal systems (for example, in Feys’ system T and the Lewis systems S4 and S5).

In the latter case, we have C.I. Lewis’ oft-repeated demonstration that any proposition is deducible from an explicit contradiction:

\[(9)\quad p \& \sim p \quad \text{Assumption}\]
\[(10)\quad p \quad 9, \text{Simp}\]
\[(11)\quad \sim p \quad 9, \text{Simp}\]
\[(12)\quad p \lor q \quad 10, \text{Add}\]

Assuming that the entailment relation is transitive and, further, that every necessarily false proposition entails a proposition having an explicitly contradictory structure, it follows that (6) is true.

The real problem with the argument, according to Zagzebski, lies with its second premise — the Principle of Logical and Counterfactual Entailment (PLACE), as we might call it. This principle has not been adequately defended. Here she cites the fact that John Pollock fails to offer any defense of PLACE; he simply remarks that it "seems evident,"\(^\text{18}\) and proceeds to treat it as an axiom of counterfactual logic. David Lewis, on the other hand, comments that PLACE "ought always to be true,"\(^\text{19}\) while noting that where the antecedent of a counterpossible is explicitly contradictory it logically implies any consequent.

I think we can agree that these considerations are less than wholly coercive. But this fact (taken alone) does not give us a good reason to reject PLACE as false or otherwise objectionable. For from the fact that a given principle has yet to receive an adequate defense, it does not follow that it is indefensible. And, in fact, in his forthcoming "Theism and Counterpossibles," Edward Wierenga has constructed a rather clever argument for this principle. His premises are

\[(14) \text{ For all propositions } p, q, \text{ and } r, \text{ if } p \text{ counterfactually implies } q, \text{ and } q \text{ entails } r, \text{ then } p \text{ counterfactually implies } r\]


\(^{19}\) *Counterfactuals*, p. 24.
For every proposition \( p \), \( p \) counterfactually implies \( p \).

These are taken to be obvious truths. If we let \( P \) and \( Q \) be particular propositions,

then from (14) it follows that

(16) If \( P \) counterfactually implies \( P \) and \( P \) entails \( Q \), then \( P \) counterfactually implies \( Q \);

and from (15) it follows that

(17) \( P \) counterfactually implies \( P \).

But (16) and (17) together entail

(7) For all propositions \( p \) and \( q \), if \( p \) entails \( q \) then \( p \) counterfactually implies \( q \). [PLACE]

Now it seems to me quite clear that Wierenga's argument constitutes a serious defense of PLACE, one that (unlike the terse remarks of either Pollock or Lewis above) cannot be easily brushed aside. So what is Zagzebski supposed to say at this point? Although her discussion antedates Wierenga's argument, I think we can hazard a guess at her response. For according to Zagzebski, there are various counterexamples to PLACE. Consider, for example, the following propositions:

(18) Zagzebski goes backwards in time and changes her lecture last week.

(19) God does not exist.

(20) God is not good.

Each of these, says Zagzebski, is necessarily false. But if so, then each is an IIP; for obviously enough, none of these propositions is explicitly contradictory. Moreover, as impossible propositions, they entail any proposition whatever — at least if
entailment is strict implication. Nevertheless, Zagzebski is "strongly inclined" to think that the following counterpossibles are false.\(^\text{20}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
(21) & \text{ If Zagzebski were to go backwards in time and change her lecture last week, then she would not reach the same moment of time twice.} \\
(22) & \text{ If God did not exist, matter would exist anyway.} \\
(23) & \text{ If God were not good, there would be less evil in the world than there is.}
\end{align*}
\]

Thus, we have three counterexamples to \textsc{place}: (18), (19), and (20) individually entail any proposition you please; however, they do not counterfactually imply every proposition — not if (21), (22), and (23) are all false.\(^\text{21}\)

As Zagzebski sees things, then, \textsc{place} is false; she therefore finds herself in the position of having to deny one or more of the premises in Wierenga’s (deductively valid) argument. (15) is tautologous; that leaves (14) as the candidate for rejection. (14), however, does (it seems to me) possess a certain initial intuitive plausibility. So the question is: "Which enjoys the greater degree of warrant: (14) or the denial of \textsc{place}?" Somewhat more precisely: we want to know whether Zagzebski’s defeaters to \textsc{place} are more strongly warranted than (14).


\(^{21}\) A similar protest against \textsc{place} may be found in Freddoso’s work: he acknowledges that while this principle “is plausible if ‘p’ stands just for propositions that are possibly true, it is precisely when we allow ‘p’ to stand for necessarily false propositions that doubts begin to arise — and with good reason, I believe” (See his “Human Nature, Potency, and the Incarnation,” p. 44).
Here it is important to note that if the antecedents of (18)-(20) really are impossible, then (21)-(23) are all trivially true — at least if we adopt the standard semantics for counterpossibles. Zagzebski's counterexamples to PLACE, however, presuppose just the opposite: that (21)-(23) are all false. But what is her evidence for this claim? Furthermore, given that the antecedents of (21)-(23) are not self-contradictory, it follows that they are impossible only if they are IIPs; and this, in turn, presupposes that there are IIPs. But why should we think so? We shall have to return to these questions later; for now let us simply note that the warrant enjoyed by Zagzebski's counterexamples appears to depend on whatever grounds she might have for treating counterpossibles in a nonstandard way.

2. The Argument Based on Reductio Ad Absurdum

I turn now to Zagzebski's comments on the second argument given for the Trivial Truth Thesis. According to David Lewis, holding to reductio ad absurdum requires treating counterpossibles as vacuously true:

... one sometimes asserts counterfactuals by way of reductio in philosophy, mathematics, and even logic ... These counterfactuals are asserted in argument, and must therefore be thought true; but their antecedents deny what are thought to be philosophical, mathematical, or even logical truths, and must therefore be thought not only false but impossible. These asserted counterphilosophicals, countermathematicals, and counterlogicals [hereafter, CPMLs] look like examples of vacuously true counterfactuals.22

22 Counterfactuals, p. 24.
The conclusion of Lewis' argument seems to be this: all CPMLs are counterpossibles; more exactly, every CPML is a vacuously true counterpossible. But how does this show or assume that every counterpossible is vacuously true? That is, why should we think that

(24) Every CPML is a vacuously true counterpossible

implies

(25) Every counterpossible is vacuously true?

After all, this is not just obvious. How does the argument go? As follows, I think. Suppose \( p \) is a philosophical, mathematical, or logical truth. Here we often argue that if the denial of \( p \) were true, then \( q \) would be true. But \( q \) is impossible; so, therefore, is \( \sim p \). Accordingly, (24) is true; for, clearly enough, the antecedent of each CPML is impossible. And since each of these impossible antecedents counterfactually implies any proposition \( q \), it follows that (25) — or what comes to the same thing, namely, the Trivial Truth Thesis — is true.

Here Zagzebski briefly objects that "the reductio procedure does not require that for every \( q \), if \( p \) is impossible, \( p > (q \& \sim q) \). It is enough that there be some impossibility that would be true if \( p \) were true." Just so. What this shows is that Lewis' argument may be invalid. Lewis apparently argues that every counterpossible must be vacuously true, in order for every CPML to be a vacuously true counterpossible. But strictly speaking, is this not just false? You might as well argue

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23 "What If," p. 169, emphasis mine.
that every proposition believed by God is a true proposition, and hence every proposition is true.

The fundamental problem with the argument is this. In order for (24) to be true, all that is required is that the antecedent of each CPML counterfactually imply some impossible proposition or another; but (25) follows from (24) only if we assume that the relevant antecedents counterfactually imply every impossible proposition. And the difficulty is that Lewis has given us no reason at all for supposing this to be the case. So for all Lewis has said, it could be that (24) is true, and yet there are some nonvacuously true (or false) counterpossibles.

3. The Argument Based on Intuition

What we really need here is an argument to rule out this sort of possibility. And, in fact, Lewis has proposed such an argument:

There is at least some intuitive justification for the decision to make a ‘would’ counterfactual with an impossible antecedent come out vacuously true. Confronted by an antecedent that is not really an entertainable supposition, one may react by saying, with a shrug: If that were so, anything you like would be true!24

The thread of this argument is somewhat difficult to make out. But Zagzebski suggests that we understand Lewis to be reasoning as follows: “The supposition that this impossible proposition is true is so absurd that any other

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proposition might just as well be supposed true.”25 Thus, every counterpossible is true.

What are we to make of this argument? Not much, Zagzebski thinks. For there seems to be just as much intuitive support for the view that all counterpossibles are trivially false — call this the Trivial Falsity Thesis — as there is for the view that they are all trivially true:

If some state of affairs \( \phi \) could not have obtained no matter what, we might say there is literally nothing that would have been the case if \( \phi \) had obtained. There simply is no “what if” in such a case. But this suggests that no counterfactual conditional with an impossible antecedent would be true. By the Law of Excluded Middle they would all be false.26

Lewis disagrees. As he sees things, it is intuitively preferable to have all counterpossibles come out vacuously true. His argument here crucially involves the Interdefinability Thesis. According to this thesis, the ‘might’ counterfactual — “If \( p \) were true, then \( q \) might be true” — can be defined in terms of the ‘would’ counterfactual as follows: “It is not the case that if \( p \) were true, then \( q \) would be false.” Where \( p \) is an impossible proposition, this thesis (together with Lewis’ semantics) implies that every ‘would’ counterpossible is trivially true only if every ‘might’ counterpossible is trivially false.

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26 Ibid., p. 170.
True enough. But why not opt instead for a trivially true ‘might’ counterpossible with corresponding trivially false ‘would’ counterpossible? Lewis cites the fact that, as he sees things, the former pair is “somewhat better intuitively” than the latter and adds “There seems not to be much more to be said.”\textsuperscript{27} Zagzebski, however, goes on to show that Lewis’ position actually leads to “exceedingly strange” results. Thus, for example, on Lewis’ view both

(26) If it were both raining and not raining here at this moment, then I would be Pope

and

(27) If it were both raining and not raining here at this moment, then I would not be the Pope

are trivially true. Taking the interdefinability of ‘would’ and ‘might’ counterfactuals for granted, therefore, it follows that

(28) If it were both raining and not raining here at this moment, then I might be the Pope

and

(29) If it were both raining and not raining here at this moment, then I might not be the Pope

are trivially false. But, says Zagzebski, “The pair of true [(26)] and false [(28)] and the pair of true [(27)] and false [(29)] seem to me to be exceedingly strange.”\textsuperscript{28}

This is surely true; but what follows? That the Trivial Truth Thesis is no better off than the Trivial Falsity Thesis? No. For this is to suppose, in the first place, that the “exceedingly strange” results in question are inevitable. But why think that?

\textsuperscript{27} Counterfactuals, pp. 25-26.

\textsuperscript{28} Zagzebski, “What If,” p. 171.
After all, the culprit here is not just the idea that all counterpossibles are trivially true; rather, it is this idea together with the fact that the ‘would’ and ‘might’ counterfactual are interdefinable that accounts for the strange counterpossible pairs above.

But is the Interdefinability Thesis acceptable? Not obviously. There are, I think, independent reasons for rejecting this thesis. Consider, for example, the following pair of counterfactuals:²⁹

(30) If I were offered a one-year contract teaching philosophy in Alaska, then I might accept the offer.

(31) If I were offered a one-year contract teaching philosophy in Alaska, then I would not accept the offer.

There appears to be little difficulty in my accepting (30); supposing that there are no causal laws and/or antecedent conditions which determine either that I accept or reject the offer, it seems that were I made such an offer, I might accept. I am also confident of the truth of (31). When I reflect on the nature of the offer in question, I feel quite certain that I would reject it were it made. As far as intuition goes, therefore, (30) and (31) impress me as being true.

But here we strike a problem. For the Interdefinability Thesis tells us that (30) is true only if (31) is false. And what this suggests (as I see things) is not that our intuitions about (30) and (31) are mistaken, but rather that the Interdefinability Thesis is not acceptable. I am therefore strongly inclined to think that the

²⁹ The counterexample which follows is patterned on one given by Thomas Flint. See his *Divine Freedom* (University of Notre Dame, 1980), unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, pp. 79-80.
“exceedingly strange” results noted above are not be laid at the door of the Trivial Truth Thesis. (And here I do not mean to suggest that Zagzebski thinks otherwise. Indeed, she does not.)

So the Trivial Truth Thesis enjoys a certain intuitive support. Furthermore, perhaps we can soften ourselves up to the idea that an impossible proposition counterfactually implies any proposition whatsoever as follows. Given the Trivial Truth Thesis, we are entitled to affirm that if 7 were less than 5, then 7 would be less than 6. This, I suspect, troubles us not at all. More disturbing, however, is the fact that we are also entitled to say that if 7 were less than 5, 7 would be greater than 8. This is indeed perplexing. But even so, it is neither more nor less perplexing, I believe, than the claim that (necessarily) if 7 is less than 5, then 7 is greater than 8 — a simple consequence of the fact that an impossible proposition strictly implies any proposition. In short, the “paradoxes” of counterfactual implication seem to pose no greater obstacle to our belief than the so-called “paradoxes” of strict implication. If we can live with the latter, why not the former?

But now consider the position of the Trivial Falsity Theorist. She will no doubt concede that the argument for the Trivial Truth Thesis based on the concept of entailment — that is, the argument from (6) and (7) to (8) — is valid (for the simple reason, of course, that it is valid). She now faces the following dilemma. If she

\[^{30}\text{I borrow this particular example from Scott Davison, who attributes it to Alvin Plantinga. See Scott A. Davison, “Could Abstract Objects Depend Upon God?” Religious Studies 27 (1990): 490.}\]
holds (in addition) that the argument is sound, she will be obliged to affirm (8). But something wicked this way comes. For the Trivial Falsity Theorist contends that all counterpossibles are false; in order to affirm the truth of (8), therefore, she must deny its antecedent, since, by hypothesis, she denies its consequent. And this commits her to holding the outrageous view that there are no impossible propositions. Surely this constitutes a far greater offense to the intellect than embracing the Trivial Truth Thesis and its entailments.

There is only one way of escape for the Trivial Falsity Theorist: to deny the argument's soundness. But then on the assumption that she accepts (6), there is no alternative left her but to reject (7), thereby committing herself (like Zagzebski) to the view that some counterpossibles are nontrivially false. (And, in fact, it is on the basis of her counterexamples to (7) that Zagzebski claims the Trivial Truth Thesis is no better off than the Trivial Falsity Thesis.)

C. Justification for a Nonstandard View

So Zagzebski's rejection of the standard view of counterpossibles turns on her reasons for embracing a nonstandard semantics. And what are those reasons? Here we are told that the Lewis-Stalnaker semantics for counterfactuals errs in its assumption that every impossible proposition has the same logical and counterfactual implications:

We can say coherently and truly that certain things would have been the case had some impossible state of affairs obtained and that certain other

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31 I owe the idea for this argument to Paul Martin, to whom I express my thanks.
things would not have been the case. The reason, I believe, is connected with the fact that it is a mistake to think of one necessary state of affairs as the same as any other, and for the same reason it is a mistake to think of one impossible situation as the same as any other.32

Let us call a counterpossible whose antecedent is an IIP an Interesting Counterpossible (ICP). Then Zagzebski’s claim is simply that ICPs are sometimes nontrivially true and sometimes nontrivially false.

This claim raises at least two crucial questions. First, what reason is there for supposing that there are IIPs? And secondly, taking the existence of IIPs for granted, why should we believe that they have different counterfactual implications than impossible propositions whose structure is formally contradictory?

1. An A Priori Argument for IIPs

Consider the first question first. Here we are treated to an ingenious a priori argument for

(32) It is possible that there is an IIP.

Suppose for reductio that (32) is false. If so, then of course there are no IIPs; and from this it follows that if there are any impossible propositions (and of course there are), they will be of the self-contradictory variety. But now consider

(33) There is a proposition which is false in all possible worlds but is not self-contradictory.

This proposition is not itself self-contradictory; it clearly lacks a formally contradictory structure. Further, (33) entails

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(34) There is an IIP.

Hence (34), too, is non-self-contradictory. But then if every impossible proposition really is self-contradictory, (34) is not impossible; that is to say, (34) is possibly true. And this contradicts our supposition for *reductio*; hence (32) is true.

Perhaps so; but even if so, how does it follow from this modal fact that *there is* an IIP? Zagzebski’s case for embracing a nonstandard semantics assumes that there are ICPs, a fact which presupposes the existence of impossible (but noncontradictory) propositions. What we are in need of, therefore, is some reason for thinking that IIPs really do exist. On this point, we get the following argument:

If it is possible that there is an IIP, this is to say that there is an IIP relative to some world possible relative to the actual world. But in a modal system at least as strong as S4 the accessibility relation is transitive. So if there is an IIP relative to any world possible relative to the actual world, there is an IIP relative to the actual world, which is to say, if it is possible that there is an IIP, there is one.\(^{33}\)

Now it is indeed true that in semantical treatments of modal logic a proposition is said to be possible in a world \(W\) just in case it is true in some world possible relative to \(W\). Hence, if (32) is actually true, then there is a world \(W\) possible relative to the actual world — call it ‘\(\alpha\)’ — and in which the proposition *There is an IIP* — that is, (34) — is true. Furthermore, Zagzebski is right in pointing out that in the S4 modal

\(^{33}\)“*What If,*” p. 175.
system this relation of accessibility or relative possibility (in addition to being
reflexive) is transitive.

Still, why should we think that "if there is an IIP relative to any world possible
relative to the actual world, there is an IIP relative to the actual world"? How does
this follow? As things stand, I cannot see that it does. What follows is only that there
is an IIP possible relative to the actual world. In other words, the mere fact that (34)
is possible relative to \( \alpha \) doesn’t establish that (34) is true in \( \alpha \).\(^{34}\)

Can we assemble an argument for the actual truth of (34), taking (32) as an
initial premise? Indeed we can; but not, I think, without making some stronger
modal assumptions. Let \( A \) be the property being false but noncontradictory. Now if
(32) is true, there is a world \( W \) possible relative to \( \alpha \) and in which some proposition
— call it ‘Alvin’ — exists and has the property being \( A \) necessarily.\(^{35}\) Next suppose
for reductio that (34) is false; that is, that every actually existing proposition is
possibly such that it has the complement -\( A \) of \( A \). Accordingly, Alvin also has this
property if it is among the propositions existing in \( \alpha \); in which case there is a world
\( W^* \) possible with respect to \( \alpha \) and such that

\[(35) \text{ Alvin has } -A\]

\(^{34}\)The root difficulty here is that in S4 the accessibility relation between worlds is not
symmetrical. If There is an IIP is possibly true, then we know that there is a world \( W \)
accessible from \( \alpha \) in which this proposition is true. But from this we cannot infer that
There is an IIP is true in \( \alpha \), since S4 does not guarantee that \( \alpha \) is accessible from \( W \).

\(^{35}\)I assume that it is impossible that there should be a proposition which has the property
of being noncontradictory only contingently; any noncontradictory proposition is
essentially noncontradictory.
is true in $W^*$. But then since, in $W$, Alvin has $A$ necessarily, it follows that

(36) Alvin has $A$

is true in every world accessible from $W$ in which Alvin exists. Hence if $W^*$ is possible relative to $W$ and Alvin exists therein, then (36) is true in $W^*$ as well. But surely it is impossible for both (35) and (36) to be true in $W^*$. Contrary to our supposition for reductio, therefore, it is false that every actually existing proposition has $-A$ in some world. (34), therefore, is true: there is some proposition, which, in every world, is false but noncontradictory. So (32) does imply (34): “if it is possible that there is an IIP, there is one.”

But notice that in order to put this argument through, we have had to assume that Alvin (the proposition, not the person!) exists in $a$. And it is plausible to suppose, I believe, that the only way of ensuring this result is by first assuming that

(37) Every proposition exists necessarily

expresses a necessary truth.\(^\text{36}\) If so, then (37) is true in every world accessible from $a$. Hence (37) is true in $W$, since $W$ is accessible from $a$. But then since Alvin exists in $W$, it follows by (37) that Alvin exists in every world accessible from $W$. Accordingly, if $a$ is accessible from $W$, then Alvin exists in the actual world. The argument then proceeds as above.

\(^\text{36}\) Brian Leftow has suggested to me that Zagzebski need only assume that Every possible proposition exists actually for her argument to go through. But this, it seems to me, is mistaken; for Alvin, by hypothesis, is an IIP — an interesting impossible proposition. Thus even if we assume that every possible proposition exists in $a$, from the fact that Alvin exists in $W$, and that $W$ and $a$ are inter-accessible, it does not follow that Alvin exists in $a$. 
Of course if \( \alpha \) and \( W \) are each accessible to the other, then our argument requires a modal system in which the accessibility relation between worlds is symmetric (in addition to being reflexive and transitive), which means that we need a system at least as strong as S5. S4 is not symmetric; so it will not do here.\(^{37}\) In short, what Zagzebski needs to put through her \textit{a priori} argument for IIPs (so I say) is a strongly modalized Platonism, according to which propositions are necessary beings which have their alethic modalities necessarily.

2. \textit{IIPs and Causal Relations}

I turn now to the second question raised by Zagzebski's claim that counterpossibles are sometimes nontrivially true and sometimes nontrivially false. Here, you recall, she distinguishes between two types of counterpossibles: those whose antecedents are formally contradictory, and those whose antecedents are not. The former, she claims, might very well be trivially true; their antecedents have the same logical and (perhaps) counterfactual implications.\(^{38}\) The latter — those counterpossibles whose antecedents are IIPs — are sometimes nontrivially true and sometimes nontrivially false; their antecedents have the same logical but different counterfactual implications.

\(^{37}\) The salient difference between S4 and S5 is that in S4 only necessary truths and necessary falsehoods have their modalities necessarily, whereas in S5 every proposition whatsoever (including every contingent proposition) has its modality necessarily.

Does this fact provide us with a sufficient basis for distinguishing between those counterpossibles which are trivially true and those which are not? No. For there is still the unanswered question of how to separate the nontrivially true from the nontrivially false ICPs. Zagzebski conjectures that the division is to be made on the basis that not all IIPs have the same counterfactual implications — a fact somehow connected with the idea that certain necessary states of affairs (or propositions) are capable of sustaining causal relations with their fellows. And here she specifically mentions Theistic Activism, the view according to which propositions are the causal products of divine intellectual activity:

some philosophers, such as Thomas V. Morris, have suggested that God’s existence is a necessary state of affairs which is causally related to other necessary states of affairs, such as the existence of numbers.\(^{39}\)

Many questions could be raised about these brief remarks (which harbor several rather deep issues). I shall mention just a few. States of affairs (along with propositions, possible worlds, numbers, and the like) are typically thought of as abstract objects. But \textit{abstracta}, according to the conventional wisdom, cannot stand in causal relations with anything whatsoever. So how could the state of affairs consisting in God’s existing stand in causal relation to (say) 9’s existing? What is the sense of ‘is causally related to’ such that we can intelligently make these claims?

Unfortunately, Zagzebski neither asks nor answers these questions. It therefore seems to me quite premature to consider her brief remarks on this score as establishing that IIPs can sustain causal relations with other propositions. It is an even greater stretch, I think, to conclude from all this that IIPs have different counterfactual implications, and therefore that some counterpossibles are nontrivially true and others nontrivially false.

Zagzebski has certainly gone a long way toward overturning the standard account of counterpossibles. This, as we said earlier, is essential to the success of the Counterfactual Solution. But some caveats are in order. For Zagzebski’s case against the standard view hinges on her counterexamples to PLACE; in particular, (21)-(23) must be ICPs — indeed, nontrivially false ICPs — if PLACE is to be shown false. Furthermore, her case here must infuse her counterexamples with a greater degree of warrant than that enjoyed by Wierenga’s (14); otherwise, it seems that Wierenga’s argument for PLACE is a sound one; in which case it is hard to see why the argument based on the concept of entailment would not establish its conclusion — the Trivial Truth Thesis, thereby spelling disaster for the Counterfactual Solution.

The potency of the counterexamples depend on two crucial considerations: first, that there are IIPs; and second, that IIPs have different counterfactual implications. Zagzebski’s a priori argument in favor of IIPs, although extremely ingenious, is not wholly successful — at least as it stands; for it requires not just a
modal system in which the accessibility relation is transitive, but one in which this
relation is symmetric as well. Moreover, the argument must assume (so I say) that it
is necessarily the case that all propositions are necessary beings.

Here the theistic modal realist must be careful. For if she joins Zagzebski in
supposing that IIPs have different counterfactual implications on the grounds that
certain necessary propositions are causally related to their fellows, then (I suppose)
she will hold this sort of view because she thinks these propositions are causally
related to the same thing (namely, God) and thus to each other. The challenge here
— at least if the amended version of Zagzebski’s a priori argument is wanted — is
to fill in the details of this suggestion in a way not requiring that (possibly) some
propositions are contingent beings. This, of course, Zagzebski has not done.

I conclude, therefore, that it has not been shown that some ICPs are
nontrivially true and others nontrivially false; the Counterfactual Solution — at least
at it has been developed here — is not entirely coercive. In the next chapter, I shall
turn to yet another attempt to solve the Dependence Problem, one that takes up and
develops Zagzebski’s suggestion that propositions (and so NTs) are causally related
to God.
We have been examining what I call ‘The Dependence Problem’: the problem posed by the question “How could any necessary truth stand to God in a relation of asymmetrical dependence, if neither that truth nor God could have failed to exist?”

Clearly, if the dependence relation in question is parsed in terms of logical entailment, then (given that the relata here all possess logically necessary existence) we will be left with the conclusion that NTs (necessary truths) cannot stand in a one-way relation of dependence to God, since for any necessary truth \( t \), \( t \text{ exists} \) and \( \text{God exists} \) are mutually entailing. The way around this difficulty, I have suggested, is to identify a nonlogical dependence relation which could reasonably be expected to hold between NTs and God such that they turn out to be dependent on him, but not he on them.

As we saw in the previous chapter, appealing to counterfactual dependence for purposes of solving the Dependence Problem presents a formidable challenge. In order to secure the requisite asymmetric relation of counterfactual dependence, it turns out that we must endorse a nonstandard semantics for counterfactuals, one on which counterpossibles are sometimes nontrivially true and other times nontrivially false. And I argued that Zagzebski’s argument for this sort of semantics is not wholly successful. It must be admitted, however, that at least part of Zagzebski’s case turns
on the claim that God is *causally* related to necessary states of affairs and propositions. This claim has yet to be investigated.

In this chapter, therefore, I shall explore the idea that God and NTs stand in an asymmetrical, *causal* relation to one another. (We might call this 'the Causal Solution' to the Dependence Problem.) Here, for the sake of definiteness, I shall survey a recent attempt by Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel to spell out some of the details. The authors’ proposal, which they dub “theistic activism,” is perhaps the most innovative account of God’s relation to *abstracta* yet to be developed;\(^1\) moreover, as an added bonus, Morris and Menzel (hereafter, M&M) also attempt to show how, on their view, abstracta (including NTs) are asymmetrically dependent on God.

The influence and appeal of the M&M proposal is underscored by the fact that Alvin Plantinga, at once theist and abstractionist *par excellence*, has cautiously endorsed this theory, hinting that if something like theistic activism were true, then “abstract objects would be necessary beings that are nevertheless causally dependent upon something else.”\(^2\) I propose to argue, however, that it is not (yet) clear that the relation of causal dependence is of any more help in solving the Dependence Problem than was its counterfactual predecessor.

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\(^1\) True at the time of writing. However, Brian Leftow’s forthcoming book *Divine Ideas* will no doubt falsify my claim here.


I. *Theistic Activism Explained*

A. The Basic Idea

Theistic activism is best understood, I believe, as a development of independently made suggestions by Robert Adams and Alvin Plantinga for reconciling the necessary existence of abstracta and modal truths with their mind-dependence.\(^3\) In his 1982 APA presidential address, Plantinga observes that although *being believed by God* and *being true* are necessarily coextensive properties,\(^4\) it is not the case that for any proposition \(p\), God’s believing \(p\) explains, is the reason for, or is what makes it the case that \(p\) is true. Nevertheless, he says:

> a proposition exists because God thinks or conceives it. For propositions, as I see it, are best thought of [as] the thoughts of God. You might think this idea compromises the necessary existence of propositions; but not so. For God is a necessary being who has essentially the property of thinking just the thoughts he does think; these thoughts, then, are conceived or thought by God in every possible world and hence exist necessarily.\(^5\)

Robert M. Adams adds that:

> To many of us both of the following views seem extremely plausible. (1) Possibilities and necessary truths are discovered, not made, by our

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\(^4\) A property \(P\) is necessarily coextensive with a property \(Q\) if and only if, for every world \(W\) and object \(x\), \(x\) exemplifies \(P\) in \(W\) just in case \(x\) exemplifies \(Q\) in \(W\).

thought. They would still be there if none of us humans ever thought of them. (2) Possibilities and necessary truths cannot be there except insofar as they or the ideas involved in them, are thought by some mind. The first of these views seems to require Platonism; the second is a repudiation of it. Yet they can both be held together if we suppose that there is a nonhuman mind that eternally and necessarily exists and thinks all the possibilities and necessary truths. Such is the mind of God, according to Augustinian theism.6

The overall idea, then, is that propositions are divine thoughts. It is but a short step to the conclusion that propositions are causally related to God. For propositions (qua divine thoughts) would be produced, naturally enough, by some sort of divine thinking. And what could be more reasonable than to suppose that this relation of being produced by is causal in nature?

In their paper “Absolute Creation,” Morris and Menzel go on to offer a deeper development of these suggestions:

all properties and relations are God’s concepts, the products, or perhaps better, the contents of a divine intellective activity, a causally efficacious or productive sort of divine conceiving.7


Hence, properties and relations are not independent of God; on the contrary, they depend for their very existence on God's mental activity. The same thing goes for propositions:

This view can be extended to the rest of the Platonic domain as well. All necessarily existent propositions, for example, can be thought of as "built up" out of properties. Thus, in the way in which we characterize properties as God's concepts, we can characterize propositions as God's thoughts.\(^8\)

Thus, for example, the proposition *Red is a colour* exists because God conceives of the property of redness standing in the *having* relation to the property of being a colour. And numbers, too, can be considered a kind of property — a property of equinumerous sets, as Menzel would have it (where a set is understood to be a constructed entity, the product of a certain sort of collecting activity on the part of God's mind).\(^9\) Hence numbers (*qua* properties) are also divine concepts.

So what we end up with is a model on which God's mental activity is responsible for the existence of the entire modal realm of necessary abstracta. This clearly goes beyond the suggestions of Adams and Plantinga. But M&M push things still further, affirming what Plantinga will not: God is responsible, they say, not only

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\(^8\) Morris and Menzel, "Absolute Creation," p. 166.

for the *existence*, but also the *truth* of every necessary proposition.\(^{10}\) How so, exactly? Take, for example, the necessary mathematical proposition

\[(1) \quad 2 + 2 = 4.\]

According to Theistic Activism, (1)'s constituents, that is, the numbers 2 and 4, as well as the relations of addition and equality, are divine concepts. These concepts are necessarily among the contents of God's (necessarily existent) mind. Therefore, (1) is necessarily true (and so necessarily existent) in virtue of the fact that God necessarily thinks of these concepts as being related in just the way expressed by (1). It is in this way, say M&M, "that both the truth-value and the modal status of a necessary truth, or a necessary falsehood, are dependent upon God."\(^{11}\)

B. Counterpossibles Again

Well, suppose we concede, for the purposes of argument, that God and NTs are related in the way described by theistic activism. Suppose we agree, that is, that NTs are causally or ontologically dependent upon God for both their existence and truth. Does it follow that we need look no further for a solution to the Dependence

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\(^{10}\)Peter van Inwagen demurs. According to van Inwagen, Abstractionists — those philosophers who regard propositions as abstract objects of some sort — hold that "propositions are necessarily existent objects that have their truth-value dispositions essentially." These truth-value dispositions, he says, "have nothing to do with human convention (or with divine decree, for that matter)." See his "Two Concepts of Possible Worlds," in P. French, T. Uehling and H. Wettstein, eds, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 11: *Studies in Essentialism* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986], p. 202, emphasis added.

\(^{11}\) "Absolute Creation," p. 167.
Problem? Not necessarily; not, at any rate, unless we have some reason for thinking
that this relation of causal or ontological dependence is asymmetrical. But is it?

It is important to note in this connection that M&M consistently speak of the
dependence relation in question as being “causal or ontological.” This initially
suggests that M&M are thinking of causal dependence in terms of ontological
dependence. But then how shall we construe “ontological dependence”? The most
natural and appealing way, I think, is as follows:

An object \( x \) is ontologically dependent upon an object \( y \) if the existence
of \( x \) entails that of \( y \). But then take any objects \( x \) and \( y \). It follows, on this account, that \( x \) is necessarily
such that if it exists, then \( y \) exists; \( x \) could not have existed unless \( y \) did. But of
course where \( x \) and \( y \) are necessary beings, the proposition that \( x \) exists both entails
and is entailed by the proposition that \( y \) exists, in which case the relation of

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12 “Absolute Creation,” p. 165, emphasis mine.

13 This interpretation is, I think, a plausible one. William Lane Craig, for example, has
argued that it is misleading to represent God’s relation to abstracta as one of causal
creation. According to Craig, “Such language leads Morris to propound the view that God
creates his own properties and therefore his own nature. This sounds utterly bizarre
unless one forces himself to evacuate the notion of creation of almost all its usual
[causal] connotations and to reduce it to mere ontological dependence.” See his “Review
of Anselmian Explorations, by Thomas V. Morris,” Journal of the Evangelical

14 See Alvin Plantinga, “Reply to Kit Fine,” in Alvin Plantinga, eds. James Tomberlin and
Peter van Inwagen (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), p. 394; and Christopher Menzel,
Spinoza: “From a definite cause an effect necessarily follows” (Benedict de Spinoza, The
Ethics, Part I, Ax. III, in On the Improvement of the Understanding, The Ethics,
Correspondence, translated with an introduction by R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover
ontological dependence (at least when its relata are necessary beings) turns out to be symmetrical. Solving the Dependence Problem in the present case, however, requires an accounting of causal dependence in asymmetrical terms. To remedy this problem, we could of course attempt to add further conditions to our analysis of 'ontological dependence'. However, it is not necessary to do so; so long as our ontological relata are necessary beings, and the main relation in the *analysans* is the entailment relation, the point remains that ontological dependence (at least on this way of construing things) comes out symmetrical.

We might say instead (perhaps under the influence of David Lewis) that "causal or ontological" dependence should be understood in terms of counterfactual dependence. Perhaps you think subjunctive conditionals a far better-understood

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15 Thus, Jorge Manuel Valadez: “It is not clear what it would mean to say that an entity is *ontologically dependent* but that there is no metaphysically possible worlds where it does not exist” (*A Metastructure for Analyzing Ontological Frameworks* [Yale University, 1991], unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, p. 125). Accordingly, Valadez stipulates that if x ontologically depends upon y, then x is not a metaphysically necessary being.

commodity than causal statements. If so, then "it is forgivable," quips Zagzebski, that you will be highly motivated to reduce the latter to the former. 17

Here it is important to note that theistic activism (at least as M&M describe it) is not committed per se to any semantics for counterfactuals. So theistic activists inclined to use counterfactuals in displaying the dependence of NTs on God may be said to be faced with two choices. They can either affirm or deny the standard semantics. The latter move, say M&M, "would be a semantic maneuver of significant interest, and one which many theists might find attractive for reasons completely independent of our problem [that is, the Dependence Problem]." 18 We have seen that this is certainly true in Zagzebski's case.

A question of genuine interest is whether theistic activism could be developed in such a way as to permit this semantic maneuver. And here, fortunately, we have Brian Leftow's original and carefully worked-out suggestion for how a nonstandard account of counterpossibles can help us to "make sense of" the causal dependence NTs have on God. To assist us in our investigation, therefore, I want to consider Leftow's recent proposal, before turning briefly to M&M's own semantic maneuvers.


18 "Absolute Creation," p. 165.
1. Leftow's "Black Hole" Argument

According to Leibniz, the "essences or possibles," — that is, "the necessary truths" — depend on the ideas in God's understanding in such a way that if God did not exist, then "not only would nothing exist, but also nothing would be possible."¹⁹ Leftow finds in these remarks both the germs of theistic activism and the clue to the sense in which NTs can be said to causally depend on God. He asks us to consider a series of 'would' counterfactuals (where p stands for any necessary proposition):²⁰

(2) God does not cause p > p does not exist.
(3) God does not cause p > p exists.
(4) Nothing causes p > p exists.
(5) God does not exist > p exists.

Each of these propositions, given theistic activism, is a counterpossible whose antecedent is impossible. Given the standard semantics for counterpossibles, then, each of (2) - (5) is trivially true. But here we can imagine a critic of theistic activism immediately objecting that if this is so, "we can make no sense of the dependence a necessary being is said to have on God."²¹ For if p would have existed even if God had not, or even if neither God nor anything else had caused p, then how can we say that p nevertheless depends on God for its existence? This does not seem to be a sensible claim.


²¹ Ibid., p. 195.
What can be said by way of reply? Well, according to Leftow, while (2) is true, (3) - (5) are false. So we must ask first of all why Leftow believes that some counterpossibles should be handled differently than others. On what basis are we to distinguish semantically between counterpossibles, separating the sheep from the goats as it were? Perhaps, after all, there is no basis for such a division. As Scott A. Davison puts it:

I can’t think of any way to characterize the purported asymmetric ‘connection’ between antecedent and consequent which would distinguish the ‘good’ from the ‘bad’ counterfactuals with impossible antecedents ... [To be sure] some of these conditionals seem more true than others. But perhaps we could explain these appearances as misleading appearances, without supposing that the counterfactuals involved are really non-vacuously true.\(^{22}\)

Davison is quite correct, I think, in his diagnosis of the status of our intuitions concerning counterpossibles: at times, appearances are misleading. But he is very much mistaken when he suggests that there are no available candidates in the derby for uncovering a basis for separating ‘good’ from ‘bad’ counterpossibles. Recall that Zagzebski distinguishes between two types of counterpossibles: those with self-contradictory antecedents and those without. It might be that the former are trivially true, in which case their antecedents would have the same logical and counterfactual implications. But, she says, the latter — those counterpossibles whose antecedents

are IIPs — are sometimes nontrivially true and sometimes nontrivially false; their antecedents have the same logical but different counterfactuals implications.

Now this is an intriguing suggestion. The question, however, is whether it provide us with a sufficient basis for distinguishing between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ counterpossibles, that is, between those counterpossibles which are nontrivially true and those which are nontrivially false. It certainly provides us with a basis, but not a sufficient one. For there is still the unanswered question of how to separate the nontrivially true from the nontrivially false ICPs. In other words, what we have so far is something like the following classification of counterpossibles:

Counterpossibles

Antecedent: Antecedent:
\( p & \sim p \) \( IIP \)
(trivially true) (not trivially true)

\(? ?\)
(nontrivially true) (nontrivially false)

The question marks here indicate the missing basis for the semantic separation of ICPs into the nontrivially true and the nontrivially false. Zagzebski conjectures that the division is to be made on the grounds that not all IIPs have the same counterfactual implications — a fact somehow connected with the notion that certain necessary states of affairs (propositions) are capable of sustaining causal relations with their fellows.
Perhaps so; but why should a necessary proposition’s being so related incline us to think that some ICPs are nontrivially true and others nontrivially false? As things stand, these considerations hardly seem relevant. Leftow, however, adds an interesting new wrinkle: the relevance of these considerations is revealed by taking the perspective of the theistic activist. For it is “well-grounded” in the theory of theistic activism that “where a conditional’s antecedent involves God’s not existing [or his failing to have one of his essential properties], special rules apply [to counterpossibles] in virtue of God’s special relation to propositions.”

Let us take a deeper look at the theistic activist account of propositions to see whether in fact this is the case. On this account, for example,

[The proposition that \(2 + 2 = 4\)] is true in virtue of what the number 2, the number 4, addition, and equality are, i.e. in virtue of how God conceives them ... The number 2, for example, would not be the number it is if it were not such that when added to itself the result is 4. This, we might say, is part of 2’s nature.

Hence, there will be a certain relation — let us call it the makes-true relation — that God bears to the proposition \(2 + 2 = 4\). This relation of course is essentially causal; for properties and relations (and so, in the final analysis, propositions, which are simply “built up” out of properties) are said to be the creations or causal products of divine conceivings. Now in order for the necessary truth that \(2 + 2 = 4\) to be the


product of God's conceptual activity, God must necessarily make true the
proposition \(2 + 2 = 4\) exists or (what comes to the same thing) make true the
proposition \(2 + 2 = 4\) necessarily exists.\(^{25}\) This amounts to God's (necessarily)
causally producing the concepts of 2, 4, addition, and equality, and then (by way of
a "second-order" conceptual act) relating them such that \(2 + 2 = 4\). It is God's
performing this conceptual activity in every possible world that accounts (causally)
for the essential natures of the numbers and relations involved and makes this
proposition necessarily true.

So as the theistic activist sees things, there is indeed a "special relation"
between God and propositions. Still how can we conclude that there are "special
rules" for counterpossibles whose antecedents involve God's nonexistence? Perhaps
as follows. According to theistic activism,

\[(6) \quad \text{God makes true the proposition that } 2 + 2 = 4.\] \(^{26}\)
is true — indeed, necessarily true. Furthermore, (6) entails and is entailed by

\[(7) \quad \text{The proposition that } 2 + 2 = 4 \text{ causally depends on God for its existence.}\]

\(^{25}\)I was helped in my thinking here by some remarks of Evan Fales. See his "Can God
Create Necessities?" Paper read at the Midwest Regional Meeting of the Society of
Christian Philosophers, April 1996.

\(^{26}\)This is just to say that God causes it to be the case that \(2 + 2 = 4\), since, as Richard
Taylor rightly points out, "to say that A made B happen obviously means that A caused
B." See Richard Taylor, "The Metaphysics of Causation," in Causation and
Conditionals, ed. Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 42. It is also
worth noting that if God causes necessary truths to exist, then they are distinct from him,
given the plausible assumption that God cannot cause himself to exist.
Now, for ease of exposition, let $S$ be the set comprised of the numbers 2 and 4 and the relations of addition and equality. Then on theistic activism (7) implies

(8) If God had failed to produce either (i) any member of $S$, or (ii) the property being such that $2 + 2 = 4$, or (iii) the second-order conception that each member of $S$ has being such that $2 + 2 = 4$, then $2 + 2 = 4$ would not have existed.\(^\text{27}\)

Clearly the example can be generalized: for any proposition $p$, if God had not causally produced $p$, then $p$ would not have existed; that is to say, Leftow’s (2) above is true.

A point of first importance now confronts us. For although on theistic activism (8) expresses a necessary truth (since it is implied by (7), itself a necessary truth), it is not for all that trivially true. It is not true solely because its antecedent happens to be impossible; rather, its being true is connected with the fact that its antecedent fails of possibility in an interesting way. For the impossibility of (8)’s antecedent in this case is a consequence of the theistic activist conception of God as a necessary being causer — an NBC, as Leftow puts it.\(^\text{28}\) Still further, on this view God is essentially an NBC; being an NBC is a property God could not possibly have lacked, so that (necessarily) had God failed to be an NBC, he would have failed to

\(^{27}\) Perhaps it might be objected that Leftow never really intended to offer a counterfactual analysis of causal dependence; rather, he was simply trying to show that certain counterfactual claims follow from the causal dependence of necessary abstracta on God. Still, if entailment is strict implication, (7) and (8) are broadly logically equivalent. For where $p$ is any necessary proposition, the proposition $p$ causally depends on God entails the proposition If God did not exist, $p$ would not have existed. And since, on theistic activist principles, the former proposition is necessary, so too is the latter. But then it follows that these propositions are mutually entailing.

\(^{28}\) "A Leibnizian Cosmological Argument," p. 144.
exist. From this it follows that any counterpossible whose antecedent involves God's not being an NBC is such that it involves God's not existing.

Accordingly, (8) expresses a necessary (but nontrivial) truth at least in part because its antecedent involves God's not existing. But this is not the whole story; for, obviously enough, we cannot semantically distinguish nontrivially true from nontrivially false counterpossibles just by appeal to states of affairs involving God's nonexistence (SIGNs, for short). This is because each of the antecedents in (2) - (5) apparently includes (or implies) a SIGN. But Leftow wants to say, contrary to all expectation, that (2) — or equivalently, (8) — is trivially true, while (3) - (5) are nontrivially false.

Clearly, then, there must be something more to Leftow's "special rules" for counterpossibles whose antecedents include SIGNs. What is this "something more"? The answer lies embedded in the actualist, set-theoretic view of possible worlds with which Leftow is working. Leftow's world theory is actualist; he holds that "the actual cosmos contains all there is, including all abstract entities."29 Here 'the actual cosmos', I take it, designates the entire set (or perhaps mereological sum) of concrete and abstract objects. If we let C be that set (or mereological sum), then Leftowian actualism is the view that everything there is is a member (part) of C.

Among C's members (or parts) are worlds — sets of atomic propositions (where a proposition, I take it, is an abstract entity). A non-null world is a maximal

A proposition: a set of propositions which includes, for every atomic proposition \( p \), either \( p \) or its denial. A **possible world** is a maximal consistent proposition, that is, a consistent non-null world.\(^\text{30}\) Naturally, if a world is not possible, it is impossible.

Among impossible worlds, Leftow carefully distinguishes impossible non-null worlds\(^\text{31}\) from the **null world** — that is, the null set of propositions.

A firm grasp on this latter distinction, he thinks, helps us to see how some counterpossibles can be nontrivially true and others nontrivially false. Leftow makes the interesting suggestion that

Any possibility except for God's nonexistence, including the nonexistence of necessary beings other than God, occurs in some set of inconsistent worlds. But God's nonexistence occurs only in the null world. Any world containing God's nonexistence is *ipso facto* identical with the null world.\(^\text{32}\)

So the null world — call it '\( \emptyset_w \)' — is unique among impossible worlds; it alone contains God's nonexistence, the remaining impossible worlds presumably being of

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\(^{30}\)This definition is quite common. Compare, for example, Roderick Chisholm: "A [possible] world is a self-consistent, maximal proposition" (*A Realistic Theory of Categories: An Essay in Ontology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], p. 25).

\(^{31}\)Perhaps you doubt whether there could be impossible non-null worlds. Then consider the perfectly general fact that for any proposition \( p \) and set \( S \) of propositions, if \( S \) includes \( p \) and \( S \) includes \( \neg p \), then (by simplification) \( S \) includes \( p \). Hence (by addition) \( S \) includes \( p \) or \( S \) includes \( \neg p \). Thus from the fact that a set of propositions contains a contradiction, it does not follow that it cannot be maximal with respect to proposition inclusion.

\(^{32}\)Leftow, "God and Abstract Entities," p. 197.
the inconsistent non-null variety. But what does this come to? What could it mean to say that $\emptyset_w$ contains God’s nonexistence?

Initially, we might try the following explanation. It seems relatively clear, on Leftow’s view, that there is such a thing as $\emptyset_w$; for presumably $\emptyset_w$, like any other set, is one of the many abstract members of $C$ — the actual cosmos, which, we may suppose, contains only existing things. (This follows, at any rate, if we assume the serious actualist thesis that no object could have had a property without existing; in which case the null world could not have exemplified being impossible without existing.) Furthermore, Leftow describes $\emptyset_w$ as “the null set of propositions.” Hence

(9) $\emptyset_w$ contains God’s nonexistence

can be read as the claim that

(10) $\emptyset_w$ includes the proposition God does not exist.

(“God’s nonexistence,” Leftow tells us, “occurs in the null world.”) Perhaps, then, what Leftowian theistic activism advises is that there is such a thing as $\emptyset_w$; and further $\emptyset_w$ contains just one proposition: the proposition that God does not exist. Still further, if we permit ourselves the fairly standard definition that a set $S$ of propositions includes a proposition $p$ just in case $S$ entails $p$, then (10) entails

(11) Necessarily, if $\emptyset_w$ were true, then the proposition God does not exist would be true.

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34 I here assume that it is intelligible to speak of sets of propositions as being true (at least in a derivative sense). A set of propositions is true, we might say, just in case each of its members is true.
This is not to say, of course, that if (11) were true, then either God would not exist or that he would be such that he could fail to exist; (11) is perfectly compatible with the theistic activist claim that God is a necessary being.

But now for Leftow's so-called "black hole" argument. Contrary to what I have just said, he believes

That God's nonexistence occurs in the null world does not entail that the proposition "God does not exist" exists in the null world. It does not exist there. In the null world, no propositions exist, and so none are true (or false). God's nonexistence is a logical "black hole," sucking all the propositions of a world into itself.\(^{35}\)

This is a bold suggestion. If what Leftow says here is true, then it is a mistake to read (9) as (10) — or (11) for that matter. We must be careful not to confuse Leftow's null world with, say, Stalnaker's "absurd world" (called '\(\lambda\)'). In Stalnaker's model-theoretic semantics for counterfactuals, \(\lambda\) is a member of the set of all worlds; it is "the world in which contradictions and all their consequences are true."\(^{36}\) \(\lambda\)’s

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\(^{35}\)"God and Abstract Entities," p. 197. Apparently, the "black hole" metaphor has suggested itself to others. David Lewis describes the reigning concept of the null set as follows: it is "a most extraordinary individual, a little speck of sheer nothingness, a sort of black hole in the fabric of Reality itself ... ." See his *Parts of Classes* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 13, emphasis added. Lewis rejects this notion of the null set, arbitrarily defining it instead as the fusion of all individuals or memberless things.

function is to provide truth conditions for counterpossibles. But notice how this feat is accomplished: by having things turn out so that every impossibility is true in λ. And this surely implies that there are propositions which exist therein.

Leftow's null world is an entirely different animal; although he affirms (9), Leftow is at pains to emphasize $\emptyset_w$'s propositionless nature: Nothing whatsoever exists in $\emptyset_w$, including the proposition God does not exist. This is initially perplexing. How could God's nonexistence occur in $\emptyset_w$, if $\emptyset_w$ failed to include the proposition God does not exist? The explanation goes as follows:

while nothing is true in the null world, there are truths (and falsehoods) about the null world, e.g., that it is null and that God does not exist in it. The propositions expressing these truths exist only in other, non-null worlds.\(^{37}\)

Here Leftow is borrowing a chapter from Robert Adams, who distinguishes between 'truth in W' and 'truth at W':

A [possible world] that includes no singular propositions about me constitutes and describes a possible world in which I would not exist. It represents my possible non-existence, not by including the proposition that I do not exist but simply by omitting me.\(^{38}\)

Take, for example, the proposition Quine does not exist. In order for this proposition to properly represent Quine's nonexistence in a world W, it need not be true in W;

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\(^{37}\) Leftow, "God and Abstract Entities," p. 197.

that is to say, \( W \) need not include the proposition \( \text{Quine does not exist} \). It suffices, instead, that this proposition be true at or of \( W \), which is just the case when \( W \) "omits" Quine, when (in other words) Quine is not among the denizens of \( W \).

What Leftow does is to take the true-in/true-at distinction — a distinction Adams draws with respect to possible worlds — and extend it to impossible worlds (in particular, the null world). So when Leftow asserts (9), he is (I think) claiming that the proposition expressed by

\[
(12) \quad \text{God does not exist}
\]

is true of or at \( \varnothing \). And this apparently amounts to saying that

\[
(13) \quad \text{God does not exist in } \varnothing_w
\]

is true, a claim to be sharply distinguished from

\[
(14) \quad \text{God does not exist exists in } \varnothing_w.
\]

For, by definition, \( \varnothing_w \) is memberless, so that while (13) is true, (14) is not. This leaves one wondering, of course, just where (13) is true; if it is not true in \( \varnothing_w \), then where is it true? Leftow's answer: (13) is true "only in other non-null worlds." But of course non-null worlds come in two varieties: the possible and the impossible. So I gather Leftow intends that (13) is true in both sorts; more importantly, he clearly wants to say that (13) is true — that is, true simpliciter. And this amounts to affirming that (13) is true in one particular non-null world: the actual world. Now Leftow does not define the actual world for us, but it is easy to see what it is on his world theory. Since worlds are maximal propositions, the actual world is simply the
sole maximal proposition that is both consistent and in fact true — true because of the way the actual cosmos is.

We are now in a position to see what (9) comes to on Leftow's world theory. (9) expresses the claim that (12) is true at $\emptyset_w$, which is just to say that

(15) (13) is true

or (if you like) its more perspicuous equivalent

(15*) The proposition God does not exist in $\emptyset_w$ is true in the world which is in fact actual\(^{39}\) is true. Again, we must take care not to confuse (12)'s being true at $\emptyset_w$ with its being true in $\emptyset_w$. Since nothing exists in $\emptyset_w$, (12) cannot be true in $\emptyset_w$. This is no doubt correct; but what about all those other impossible worlds of the non-null variety? Why couldn't (12) be true in them? Like Stalnaker's absurd world, they are non-null, so that (presumably) they contain all manner of impossible propositions. So why not (12)? Leftow's answer, essentially, points to the fact that (12) is a "logical "black hole"." Of course this is a mere metaphor — if, at any rate, propositions are abstract entities. There is no such thing as a proposition's "sucking all the propositions of a world into itself." So what does Leftow have in mind here? What is the cash value of this metaphor?

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The basic idea (an idea suggested by the metaphor of the propositions of a world being sucked into a black hole) seems to be that for any non-null world \( W \), if \( W \) were to include (12), then (necessarily) if \( W \) were true, then the null world would have obtained (been true). But this entails that nothing would have existed, since the null world is empty. Thus, "Any conditional with an antecedent involving God's nonexistence [that is, (12)] is a claim about the null world."\(^40\) Call these conditionals 'null conditionals'. Then, strictly speaking, any null conditional whose consequent implies that something exists also implies that something exists in the null world. And this is simply false. Hence this sort of null conditional is nontrivially false. On the other hand, if the consequent of a null conditional does not imply that anything exists, then it is nontrivially true.

We could put this point another way. Let us say that a proposition \( p \) is an ordinary impossibility if and only if there is some impossible non-null world \( W \) such that \( p \) is true in \( W \). Now "an ordinary impossibility," says Leftow, "entails everything, [so] we usually assign trivial truth to all conditionals with ordinarily impossible antecedents."\(^41\) More exactly, since an ordinary impossibility logically and counterfactually implies everything, every ordinary counterpossible — that is, every counterpossible whose antecedent is an ordinary impossibility — is trivially true.

\(^{40}\) Leftow, "God and Abstract Entities," p. 197.

\(^{41}\) Ibid.
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(It is interesting to note that no use is made here of Zagzebski’s distinction between self-contradictory propositions and IIPs.) At any rate, how is all of this relevant to (2) - (5)? How do these propositions fit into this classification scheme? I said earlier that Leftow, contrary to one’s expectations, thinks that (2) — or equivalently, (8) — is trivially true, whereas (3) - (5) are nontrivially fake. This means, of course, that Leftow’s “special rules” for counterpossibles (which are encapsulated in the right-hand branch of the schema above, the branch labeled ‘@’) apply only to (3) - (5) and not to (2). And the reason for this, presumably, is that while (3) - (5) are extraordinary counterpossibles, (2) is not. But why not? What is the argument?

Leftow begins by pointing out that on theist activist principles, the following proposition is true:

(16) Necessarily, God does not create p if and only if God does not exist.

He then goes on to argue that if (16) is true, then the antecedents of (3) - (5) each imply a SIGN and are therefore claims about the null world. Further, since the consequents of (3) - (5) each imply that something exists, it follows by our schema that they are one and all nontrivially false. But what about (2)? Here we are told that
By contrast, [(2)] remains — unproblematically true. For as [(2)]'s antecedent does not involve God's not existing, [(2)] is still to be treated as all other counterfactuals with impossible antecedents are.43

There is a slight flaw in this reasoning. It seems to be a mistake to treat (2) as an ordinary counterpossible; for its antecedent is the proposition God does not create p, which together with (16) entails that God does not exist. So (2)'s antecedent does imply a SIGN; and since its consequent does not imply that something exists, it should be treated as a nontrivially true, extraordinary counterpossible.

But let us waive this minor slip. Whether (2) is trivially true or nontrivially true, the important thing to see is that Leftow has apparently succeeded in his project of “making sense of” or “providing content to” the claim that NTs causally depend on God. His “null world semantics” provides a plausible explanation for why

\[(2) \quad \text{God does not cause } p \rightarrow p \text{ does not exist.}\]

is true, but

\[(3) \quad \text{God does not cause } p \rightarrow p \text{ exists,}\]
\[(4) \quad \text{Nothing causes } p \rightarrow p \text{ exists,}\]
and
\[(5) \quad \text{God does not exist } \rightarrow p \text{ exists}\]

are not. This is significant because it does not “make sense” — that is, it contradicts our firm intuitions about causation — to say that (necessarily) God causes the existence of p, but p would exist even if it had no cause whatever. If God really is

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the cause of \( p \), then in the absence of this cause, we would expect a corresponding absence of its effect: \( p \)’s existing. So making sense of the causal dependence of NTs on God minimally requires the truth of (2) and the falsity of (3)-(5). Leftow’s nonstandard semantics seems to deliver the goods on this score.

2. **M&M’s Causal Agency Argument**

Causal dependence theorists — those who think that NTs causally depend on God — come in at least two styles. The first sees ‘causal dependence’ as susceptible of counterfactual explanation,\(^{44}\) the second sees it as a primitive, unanalyzable notion.\(^{45}\) Brian Leftow’s account of causal dependence is of the first sort. Morris and Menzel’s “Absolute Creation” contains an account of the second sort, to which I now turn.

According to M&M, the theistic activist is not obliged to make the kind of semantic maneuvers that Zagzebski and Leftow do. It is not necessary, they think, to opt for a nonstandard treatment of counterpossibles to get an asymmetrical relation of causal dependence between NTs and God. The theistic activist can affirm the standard semantics for counterfactuals, thereby assigning trivial truth to both

\(^{44}\) It might be objected that the most Leftow ever says is that if a causal claim is true, then a counterfactual claim is true; and this does not imply that the latter explains the former. But this is not entirely correct; for it must be remembered that Leftow’s nonstandard semantics for counterpossibles, which allows him to say that (2) is true and (3)-(5) are false, is developed in response to the imagined critic who claims that we can make no sense of the dependence a necessary being has on God, if each of (2) - (5) is trivially true. Thus it is quite plausible to suppose that Leftow is trying to “make sense of” or “explain” the dependence relation in question.

\(^{45}\) On this point, see Davison, “Could Abstract Objects Depend Upon God?” p. 489.
(17) If God did not exist, then there would be no NTs

and

(18) If there were no NTs, then God would not exist

on the grounds that each has an impossible antecedent. What this shows, they say, is that there is a relation of logical dependence running both ways between God and NTs. But this does not prevent the theistic activist from holding that there is a relation of causal dependence that runs in just the one direction: from NTs to God.

Well, how shall we understand ‘causal dependence’ here? What is it for a necessary truth to causally depend on God? So far as I can see, M&M have very little to say on this score. Indeed, one critic has charged that since they reject any nonstandard account of counterpossibles, M&M “cannot provide anything more than metaphorical accounts of their crucial notions [of creation and dependence].”

It would be more charitable, perhaps, to represent M&M as treating the relation of causal dependence as an undefined primitive. Still, apart from their rejection of a counterfactual analysis of ‘causal dependence’, it is not precisely clear what the justification for this move is supposed to be. However, we are given an explanation for the asymmetrical nature of this relation in the present context: “God is thought of as causally active, indeed as the paradigmatic causal agent, whereas [NTs] are standardly regarded as causally inert.” The implication, of course, is that NTs causally depend on God because he is their cause. There is not much more to be said.

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about M&M's notion of causal dependence, which is to be suspected, I suppose, given its nature as an unanalyzed notion.

II. Theistic Activism Examined

As we pointed out earlier, Peter van Inwagen has said that

It is not ... easily demonstrable that just any necessary being would be an independent being. Anyone who wanted to demonstrate this conclusion would have somehow to prove the impossibility of cases like the following one. Suppose that A is a necessary being and that A causes the existence of B and that it is necessary that A cause the existence of B. Then B will be a necessary being — B will exist in all possible worlds, since A exists in all possible worlds, and, in every possible world in which it exists, causes B to exist in that possible world — but B will nonetheless depend upon A for its existence.48

Perhaps van Inwagen is right; perhaps it is no easy matter to demonstrate the impossibility of such cases. Nevertheless, in what follows I shall attempt to sketch some of the more pressing difficulties confronting the Causal Solution. On the face of things, there are difficulties for the theistic activist in connection with getting the relation of causal dependence to come out asymmetrical and, perhaps, even irreflexive given the (necessarily existing) relata with which she is working.

A. Issues of Asymmetry

I said above that there are two basic angles by which the theistic activist can approach 'causal dependence', in order to secure the asymmetry of this relation. The

first argues for and makes use of nontrivially true (false) counterpossibles. The second takes ‘causal dependence’ as an undefined primitive. I wish to comment on both of these approaches.

1. Leftow: The Nontrivial Counterpossibles Approach

We can agree, I think, that (contra Davison) Leftow has in fact provided a basis for separating the ‘good’ (nontrivially true) from the ‘bad’ (nontrivially false) counterpossibles as it were. In doing so, he has no doubt made significant progress in explaining the sense in which NTs can be said to causally depend on God. Two questions of interest remain. First, is Leftow’s “null world semantics” consistent with the claim that (necessarily) propositions are necessary beings — a claim, which, as we saw in the last chapter, Zagzebski requires for her own view of counterpossibles? And secondly, has the Dependence Problem been solved?

Take the first question first. Is Leftow’s nonstandard semantics compatible with the strongly modalized Platonism at work in Zagzebski’s a priori argument for IIPs? This is not obvious. As we noted earlier, Leftow claims that

\[(19) \quad \text{If God does not exist had been true, then } \varnothing_w \text{ would have been true.}\]

Now from the definition of the null world it follows that

\[(20) \quad \text{Necessarily, } \varnothing_w \text{ is true if and only if nothing exists.}\]

But surely

\[(21) \quad \text{Necessarily, nothing exists if and only if it is true that nothing exists.}\]

And from (19), (20), and (21) it follows that
(22) Necessarily, if *God does not exist* had been true, then it would have been true that nothing exists.

Now the proposition *It is true that nothing exists* — the consequent of (22) — is true if and only if the proposition *Nothing exists* is true;\(^4^9\) hence, (22) is broadly logically equivalent to

(23) Necessarily, if *God does not exist* had been true, then the proposition *Nothing exists* would have been true.

Leftow, however, cannot accept (23); for on his semantics (23) is an extraordinary counterpossible; its antecedent clearly involves God’s nonexistence, and therefore makes a claim about the null world. Furthermore, the consequent of (23) entails that something exists — at least given serious actualism; the proposition *Nothing exists* could not have been true, according to serious actualism, unless it existed. So what (23) tells us is that if the null world had obtained (been true), there would have been at least one thing which existed: the proposition *Nothing exists*.

Thus, on Leftow’s view, not only is (23) an extraordinary counterpossible, it is nontrivially false.

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\(^4^9\) Objection: “you assume that “nothing exists” would be true only if there were a proposition, namely, *Nothing exists*, to bear the property of being true. But this overlooks the fact that on some deflationary concepts of truth there need be no propositions for there to be truths.” Reply: stipulate for purposes of argument that there are such concepts of truth. The important thing to see is that any such deflationary account of truth will be incompatible with modal realism, according to which it is impossible that there be truths unless there are truth bearers. (See Plantinga, “Two Concepts of Modality,” p. 190.) Thus if Leftow opts for this sort of deflationary theory of truth (say, to avoid having to deny (21)), then the position he advances will be inconsistent with theistic modal realism, and therefore will provide us with no solution at all to the Dependence Problem. For, after all, *that* problem concerns the compatibility of theistic modal realism with the doctrine that everything distinct from God asymmetrically depends on him for its existence.
But how does this cast doubt on the null world semantics? How is this at odds with a strongly modalized Platonism, according to which propositions are necessary beings? As follows. Since the argument culminating in (23) is pretty clearly valid, Leftow must deny one of its premises, if he wants to maintain that (23) is false. Now I take it that (19) and (20) are relatively uncontroversial; these propositions follow directly from Leftowian theistic activism itself. But if so, then it seems to me that Leftow (at least if he is a modal realist) is committed to denying the only other available premise, namely,

(21) Necessarily, nothing exists if and only if it is true that nothing exists.

He is therefore obliged to affirm

(22) It is possible that either (a) nothing exists and it is false that nothing exists,\(^{50}\) or (b) it is false that nothing exists and it is true that nothing exists.\(^{51}\)

Now (22b) is an explicit contradiction and therefore logically impossible; hence, Leftow is committed to

(22a) It is possible that (nothing exists and it is false that nothing exists).

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\(^{50}\) Leftow has suggested to me that the denial of “It is true that nothing exists” is not “It is false that nothing exists” if one allows for truth-value gaps. This is correct but presently irrelevant. For if modal realism is true, there won’t be any such gaps for propositions. See Plantinga, “Two Concepts of Modality,” p. 190; and “Divine Knowledge,” in Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge, eds. C. Stephen Evans and Merold Westphal (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), p. 43.

\(^{51}\) Strictly speaking, (22b) should read: “It is not the case that nothing exists and it is true that nothing exists.” But notice that It is not the case that nothing exists mutually entails Something exists, which, in turn, mutually entails It is false that nothing exists.
But surely the sense of 'possibility' at work here is atypical; it cannot mean 'could have been true'. For if 'possibility' is an alethic modality—a mode of truth—then (22a) entails

(23) It is possibly true that (nothing exists and it is false that nothing exists), which, in turn, entails

(24) The proposition Nothing exists is possibly true.

But Leftow cannot accept (24). First of all, suppose that (24) were true. Then there would be a possible world W such that Nothing exists is true in W. But then W would entail Nothing exists, so that (necessarily) if W were actual, then the proposition Nothing exists would have been true, in which case nothing would have existed, including the proposition Nothing exists, so that this proposition would not have had the property of being true in W. 52 (At least this follows given serious actualism—a doctrine Leftow shows no inclination to deny.) Secondly, according to Leftowian theistic activism, God is a strongly necessary being; that is to say, the proposition God exists is necessarily true. But if so, then given that God exists entails Something exists, it follows that this latter proposition is equally necessary and therefore that (24) is false.

Perhaps, however, Leftow would reply that I am begging the question against him. I assume that a proposition p is possibly true if and only if there is a world W

52 My argument here (as on pp. 69-71) is patterned on one given by Plantinga for the conclusion that propositions cannot be concrete. See his Warrant and Proper Function (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 118.
such that \( p \) is true in \( W \). Why not say, instead, that \( p \) is possibly true just in case \( p \) is true at \( W \);\(^{53}\) and \( \text{Nothing exists} \) is possible if there is a world \( W \) such that \( \text{Nothing exists} \) is true at \( W \)? If, as Adams says, a world in which I do not exist represents my possible nonexistence, then surely a world in which nothing exists represents the possibility of there being nothing.

The first thing to note here is that there are difficulties in connection with Leftow's pressing this objection. Leftow, you will recall, endorses a set-theoretic world theory: worlds are set-theoretical constructions on propositions. But now consider the fact that sets lack the intentional properties of propositions; sets do not represent things (in particular, their members) as being a certain way (or any way for that matter). As Plantinga notes,\(^{54}\) they are entirely silent on this score as on every other. Thus, for example, \{Leftow\} does not represent Leftow as being a philosopher or not being a philosopher; it makes no claim or assertion about him whatsoever. Accordingly, Leftow's unit set is neither true nor false. And the same thing goes for every other set, including \{Nothing exists\} and other maximal sets of propositions. Hence, \( W \) cannot represent the possibility of there being nothing, in which case \( \text{Nothing exists} \) cannot be true at \( W \), in which case it is not possible (in the present sense) after all.


\(^{54}\)See his "Two Concepts of Modality," pp. 208, 212.
But suppose we allow an analogically extended sense of the term ‘true’. A set, we might say, is true just in case each of its members is a true proposition; and a set represents things as being a certain way just if its members do. This reply, however, does not come to much. For it must be remembered that Adams’ central claim is that if \( W \) omits me, then it represents me as possibly not existing. And is this not just false? If \( W \) includes no singular propositions about me, then \( W \) makes no claim about me one way or the other. In order for \( W \) to represent me as not existing, it would have to make some sort of claim about this (no doubt tragic) state of affairs. But of course it does not, since it includes no propositions singular with respect to me; and propositions are the sorts of things which make claims and represent things as being thus-and-so.\(^{55} \) If this line of reasoning is correct, then \( W \) represents there being nothing whatsoever just in case it includes the proposition \( \text{Nothing exists} \); just in case, that is, this proposition is true in \( W \).

The concept of a proposition’s being true at a world may be perfectly respectable. But if a proposition \( p \) is true at a world \( W \) in virtue of \( W \)’s representing things as being the way \( p \) says they are, then \( W \) must include \( p \) — at least if (fundamentally) it is propositions and not sets which possess the relevant intentional

\[^{55}\text{You might reply that } W \text{ need not include singular negative existentials about me to represent me as not existing; after all, } W \text{ might just include the general proposition } \text{There are no human beings}, \text{ a proposition surely representing my nonexistence. But of course if } W \text{ included this proposition, then it would also include a negative existential proposition singular with respect to me. The reason is that } \text{There are no human beings} \text{ entails the proposition that I do not exist; hence, every world which includes the former proposition also includes the latter.} \]
properties to do the representing. But then if (as I have argued) Leftow really is committed to

(24) The proposition *Nothing exists* is possibly true,
it will not help to defend this commitment by saying that (24) is true exactly when the proposition *Nothing exists* is true at some world $W$ — not at least if this also implies that it is true in $W$. For then the aforementioned criticisms (pp. 72-73 above) apply all over again.

Someone might object, however, that Leftow’s claim is not that the proposition *Nothing exists* is true at some possible world, but rather that it is true at the null world. But again, this reply does not really help. For we cannot even properly speak of the null world’s being true (and thus as representing things) in our analogically extended sense. After all, it has no members! So the null world cannot possibly be an intentional object; it cannot possibly represent there being nothing. In order to do *that* (so I say) it would have to include the proposition *Nothing exists*. But, by definition, the null world is empty; so that is out of the question.

Adams and Leftow get things partly right; they are correct in their insight that a proposition of the form $x$ *does not exist* can be true at a world $W$ without implying that $x$ exists in $W$. For example, that the proposition *Quine does not exist* is true at $W$ does not entail that Quine exists in $W$; it does not entail, that is, that Quine both *exists in $W$ and has the property of not existing therein*. Strictly speaking (and given serious actualism) this is impossible. For Quine to have *not existing* in $W$, says the
serious actualist, he would have to exist in W. What is required for this proposition to be true at W is that the proposition *It is false that Quine exists* be true in W, which is just to say that (necessarily) if W had been true, then the proposition *It is false that Quine exists* would have been true (simpliciter). And it is important to see that this proposition is impredicative with respect to Quine; it does not predicate *nonexistence* of Quine, but rather falsehood of the proposition *Quine exists.*

Where Adams and Leftow go wrong is in assuming that a proposition can be true at a world without being true in it. If worlds are representational entities, this is not at all possible.

The upshot of all this is that Leftow cannot affirm (24): that the proposition *Nothing exists* is possibly true. And since (24) is entailed by

(23) It is possibly true that (nothing exists and it is false that nothing exists),

neither can he affirm (23). But, as I argued earlier, Leftow's null world semantics commits him to

(22a) It is possible that (nothing exists and it is false that nothing exists).

But how can one hold that the proposition

(25) Nothing exists and it is false that nothing exists

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56 One reply to this line of argument might be to claim that although *It is false that Quine exists* does not predicate nonexistence of Quine, it does predicate *being the subject of the proposition Quine does not exist* of him. But this is mistaken. For it is not necessary that if the proposition *It is false that Quine exists* is true, then Quine has the property *being the subject of the proposition Quine does not exist.* In every world in which Quine fails to exist, *It is false that Quine exists* is true; and yet (given serious actualism) Quine lacks the property in question. For further details, see Alvin Plantinga, "Reply to John Pollock," pp. 320-323; "Two Concepts of Modality," pp. 194-195, 198-201.
is possible (according to (22a)) but not possibly true (contrary to what (23) tells us)?
The only answer I know of goes as follows. We begin by distinguishing strong from weak possibility. Roughly speaking, a proposition is strongly possible if it could have been true (possible truth); and it is weakly possible if it could have failed to be false (possible non-falsehood). Strong possibility is of course a familiar modal notion. The idea behind the notion of weak possibility is simply this: just as Quine could have failed to be wise either by being unwise or by failing to exist, so too a proposition could have failed to be false either by possessing truth or simply by not existing.

It is clear, I think, that (25) could not have been true; it is not possible in any strong sense. Still, perhaps (25) is possible in the sense that it could have failed to exist. But here there are problems. In the first place, why should we think that (25) could have failed to exist? I cannot see any reason at all for making this supposition. It is indeed true that defenders of weak possibility typically invoke the existentialist thesis — that singular propositions cannot exist unless the (contingent) individuals they directly involve exist — to explain how, for example, a proposition such as Quine is wise could have failed to exist. The proposition Quine is wise is ontologically dependent upon Quine himself, so that in worlds in which Quine fails to exist, Quine is wise does not exist (and therefore qualifies as weakly possible).

Well, suppose we concede, for purposes of argument, that the existentialist thesis is true. Are we to conclude that (25), like Quine is wise, could have failed of
existence? It is certainly hard to see why we should think so; after all, it is not just obvious that there is a contingent individual directly involved in (25). Perhaps, however, we can take the term ‘individual’ in a somewhat broader sense and say that (25) is directly about Nothing exists — a proposition of which the right conjunct of (25) predicates falsehood.

This suggestion, however, has its own problems. For if Nothing exists could have failed to exist, then there is at least one proposition which has merely contingent existence. And this contradicts the assumption underlying Zagzebski’s a priori argument for IIPs: that (necessarily) all propositions are necessary beings. Furthermore, the existentialist thesis coupled with the fact that there are contingent individuals leads to the following absurdity.\textsuperscript{57} Consider

(26) Quine is wise and Quine is not wise.

According to the existentialist, (26) would have failed to exist if Quine had; and since Quine could have failed to exist, it follows that (26) is weakly possible. But then if weak possibility is sufficient for possibility simpliciter, it turns out that (26) — an explicit contradiction — is possible. Surely this is a mistake.

But now suppose, on the other hand, that Nothing exists could not have failed to exist. Then it is not even weakly possible, in which case (25) is neither weakly nor strongly possible, so that Leftow is committed to the possibility of a proposition which is in fact impossible — a rather serious impairment for a theory of

\textsuperscript{57}See Alvin Plantinga, “De Essentia,” pp. 120-121; “On Existentialism,” pp. 18-19.
counterpossibles. Either way, then, it seems to me that Leftow's null world semantics is in trouble.

But there is a deeper and (for our purposes) more important difficulty with Leftow's theory; it does not provide us with a solution to the Dependence Problem. What it provides is a plausible ground for assigning nontrivial truth to

(27) God does not exist > p does not exist,

a proposition jointly entailed by

(2) God does not cause p > p does not exist.

and

(16) Necessarily, God does not create p if and only if God does not exist;

and nontrivial falsity to

(4) God does not exist > p exists.

And perhaps this does makes sense of the causal dependence of NTs on God; it does not follow, however, that it makes sense of an asymmetrical causal dependence between these relata. To do that, Leftow's null world semantics would have to assign trivial or nontrivial falsity to

(28) p does not exist > God does not exist.

But is this the case? I think not. The antecedent of (28) is clearly an impossible proposition; the question is whether it is of the ordinary or extraordinary variety. Now it seems to me that theistic activism underwrites the truth of the following proposition
(29)  Necessarily, God does not create p if and only if p does not exist.

But (28) together with (29) and

(16)  Necessarily, God does not create p if and only if God does not exist

entails

(30)  God does not exist > God does not exist,

which is clearly an extraordinary counterpossible on Leftow's way of reckoning things. It is also rather obvious that (30) is nontrivially true, since (as Leftow would say) its consequent does not entail that something exists. But then if both

(27)  God does not exist > p does not exist

and

(28)  p does not exist > God does not exist

are true, Leftow's theory cannot make sense of an asymmetrical causal dependence of NTs on God. Indeed, things are quite the reverse; if (27) and (28) are true, and if counterpossibles are needed to make sense of the dependence relation here, then we shall have to face the fact that God is no less causally dependent on NTs than they on him. This is not at all calculated to please the theistic modal realist who thinks there is a causal solution to the Dependence Problem.

2.  *Morris and Menzel: The Agent Causal Approach*

Suppose we turn now to M&M's drastically less complex view on the asymmetry of 'causal dependence' in the present case: this is the view that eschews a nonstandard treatment of counterpossibles and takes 'causal dependence' as an undefined
primitive concept. M&M are happy to embrace both (27) and (28), grounding the asymmetry of the relation of causal dependence in the fact that God creates NTs, but not vice versa. Consequently, it might be thought that M&M’s account will fare much better in securing the relevant asymmetry than those of Zagzebski or Leftow. Appearances, however, may be deceiving. It is true that M&M say that they accept the standard semantics for counterpossibles; perhaps, however, it does not follow that they are not committed to a nonstandard semantics. 58

John Pollock advises us that “in constructing a logical analysis, it is customary to make various proposals and test them directly against intuition ... [and] By looking at simple cases in which our intuitions are reasonably secure, we can defend a few formal principles regarding causation.” 59 One of these principles is:

\[(3.1) \ (P \text{ causes } Q) \Rightarrow (\neg P > \neg Q)\]

(where P and Q are states of affairs). 60 He comments that “there is considerable intuitive support for (3.1).” 61 The counterexamples which might be thought to defeat this principle all have to do with causal overdetermination (where two or more causes obtain, each of which is sufficient for the production of the effect), and hence

58 For more on the commitments of a theory, see Alvin Plantinga, “Two Concepts of Modality, pp. 221ff.


60 Pollock takes causation to be a relation between states of affairs rather than events. For discussion see ibid., pp. 151-152.

61 Ibid., p. 154.
drop out of consideration in the case of divine causation of NTs. A further constraint is:

\[(C4) \ (P \text{ causes } Q) \Rightarrow (\sim P \neq \emptyset).\]

That is, if \(P\) causes \(Q\), then \(P\)'s nonexistence is not impossible. \((C4)\), of course, rules out divine causation altogether. But Pollock does not introduce \((C4)\) to achieve that result (however much he might desire it). Rather, \((C4)\) is brought forward to block \((3.1)\) holding in the vacuous case. Pollock fails to say why this is a problem, but it is easy to guess what he has in mind. Without \((C4)\), both \((3.1)\) and

\[(3.1^*) \ (P \text{ causes } Q) \Rightarrow (\sim P > Q)\]

would be true. And the difficulty in having \((3.1^*)\) come out true is simply that it is wholly at odds with our clear intuitions about simple cases of causation. So in order to preserve \((3.1)\) but rule out \((3.1^*)\), Pollock stipulates that \((C4)\) is true.

Of course this is unacceptable to the theistic activist. Divine causation cannot be ruled out by fiat. Still, perhaps the core intuition is correct. We want \((3.1)\) to hold (setting aside issues of causal overdetermination) but not \((3.1^*)\). But if \(P\) is necessary, then there seems only way of securing this result: by looking for a nonstandard semantics for counterpossibles on which \((3.1)\) comes out true and \((3.1^*)\) comes out false. In other words, the only answer is to do the hard semantical spade work just as Zagzebski and Leftow have attempted to do.

What this shows, I think, is that by treating ‘causal dependence’ as a primitive notion and eschewing any counterfactual analysis of this relation, M&M may not be
taking seriously our clear intuitions about causation and causal dependence. In the case of divine causation of NTs, it is difficult to see how M&M could deny (3.1). But if they also affirm (3.1*), then the objection Leftow puts in the mouth of his imagined critic seems apt: "we can make no sense of the causality by which something would cause a necessary being to exist." So M&M are faced with either admitting that the concept of causality at work in theistic activism is nonsensical, or giving up their standard semantics for counterpossibles which commits them to the problematic (3.1*). Of course, if they do the latter, then it seems likely that some or all of the criticisms I have made of Zagzebski and Leftow will apply all over again.

B. Issues of Irreflexivity

Consider

(29)  God has an essence or nature.

Following Plantinga, we might say that $P$ is an essence of an object $x$ just in case (i) $P$ is a property, (ii) $x$ has $P$ essentially (that is, in every world in which it exists), and (iii) in no world is there an object distinct from $x$ that has $P$.

But recall that if theistic activism is true, then

(30)  Every proposition, relation, and property is the causal product of God's mental activity.

So

(31)  God causes God's nature.

Furthermore, (31) entails

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(32) God's nature causally depends upon God.

Moreover, it is also true that

(33) God ontologically depends upon God's nature

since it is impossible that God exist apart from his nature. But given (32) and (33), it seems to follow that

(34) God causally depends upon himself.

This inference has a fair bit of intuitive appeal; and if it turns out to be valid, it is but a short step to

(35) God causes himself to exist.

For existence is one of God's essential properties, and is therefore entailed by (or included in) his nature.\(^\text{64}\)

What is the theistic activist supposed to say at this point? M&M raise two objections to this inference, First, they say that "we have no good reason to think that transitivity always holds across these two relations [that is, the relations of causal dependence and ontological dependence]."\(^\text{65}\) In particular, (35) follows from (33) and (34) only if we make use of the further premise:

(36) God = God's nature

If (36) is true and God's nature has the property of being causally dependent upon God, then (by the indiscernibility of identicals) God has this property as well. (Of

\(^{64}\) Plantinga argues that existence is a property every object has essentially. See The Nature of Necessity, pp. 61, 72-73.

\(^{65}\) "Absolute Creation," p. 176.
course, if we add (36) to the mix, then (33) becomes superfluous; we can derive (34) from (32) and (36) alone.)

But Morris and Menzel think (36) is false, since it presupposes the doctrine of divine simplicity which they reject: "the doctrine has serious difficulties which render it unconvincing." This terse remark raises a number of questions. What is the doctrine of divine simplicity? How does it bear on the topic at hand? Are the alleged difficulties for this doctrine really sufficient to "render it unconvincing?"

Theistic activists claim that NTs are caused to exist by God, and are therefore causally dependent on him for their existence and truth. In terms of providing a solution to The Dependence Problem, there are two basic ways of construing the relevant relation of causal dependence here. Sadly, however, both of these appear to come to grief. Moreover, if (36) is true, the theistic activist model of God’s relation to NTs faces the dismal prospect of internal incoherence. In the next chapter, therefore, I shall turn to an examination of various attempts to solve the Dependence Problem which make use of (36) and its variants.

Chapter 3
The Simple Solution

In this chapter I shall explore a wholly different approach to the Dependence Problem. The Dependence Problem gets its lease on life by assuming that NTs (necessary truths) are ontologically distinct from God; it then assumes that since God and NTs stand to each other in a relation of a mutual logical dependency (in virtue of the necessary existence of the relata on both sides of the relation), there cannot also be a deeper ontological sense in which NTs depend, and depend in asymmetrical fashion, on God. Is this really so? Both brands of theistic activism answer this question in the negative, insisting that God is necessarily the creator of everything distinct from himself. Because NTs are distinct from God, they too are the outcome of his causally creative activity. Accordingly, NTs (and the rest of the Platonic horde) stand in an asymmetrical relation of causal dependence to God. As we saw in the previous couple of chapters, however, to secure the requisite asymmetry here — causal or not — it seems that we need a nonstandard account of counterpossibles, an account which has hitherto posed considerable metaphysical difficulties.

But is there not another way of tackling this problem? Why, after all, should we suppose that NTs are ontologically distinct from God? Rather than conceiving of NTs as the causal product of divine conceptual activity (and so treating them as distinct from God), why not see them instead as divine ideas, ideas identical with God’s nature and thus God himself? If this were the case, then there would be no
need to work at uncovering and articulating some deeper ontological sense in which NTs might depend on God. For perhaps, as William E. Mann suggests, "where there is no diversity, there can be no dependence."1 Things identical with the divine nature simply do not fall under the categories of being dependent on God or being independent of God; these categories only pertain to things ontologically distinct from God. (And if so, the theistic modal realist might well go on to insist that although there is a category of things independent of God, nothing distinct from God falls under this category; the category is "empty" so to speak.) The Simple Solution to the Dependence Problem, then, is to maintain that there is no problem so-called.

Still, the Simple Solution is perhaps not quite so simple as one could hope. In order to coherently advance the claim that NTs are divine ideas (themselves identical with God), it turns out that the Simple Solution must appropriate the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS), which, according to Mann, "has seemed obvious and pious to many, and incoherent, misguided, and repugnant to others."2 The heart of the DDS is the general claim "that God has no 'parts' or components whatsoever."3 This general claim can, in turn, be sorted into three specific theses: spatial simplicity (the thesis that God has no spatial parts), temporal simplicity (the thesis that God has no temporal parts), and property simplicity (the thesis that God exemplifies no

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properties ontologically distinct from himself). The contemporary debate over the DDS has understandably centered on the thesis of property simplicity, since as Thomas V. Morris has persuasively argued, property simplicity entails both temporal and spatial simplicity; if God exemplifies no properties ontologically distinct from himself, then neither does he exemplify any temporal or spatial properties.

In this chapter, I discuss three versions of the DDS. My aim here is to determine whether the DDS (in any of its present incarnations) is subject to a coherent formulation. I then explore how exactly the DDS figures in the Simple Solution, and ask whether this doctrine really "helps to unravel the knotty [problem] of God's relation to the necessary truths."" I conclude that the Simple Solution (taken alone) is unable to solve the Dependence Problem.

I. Divine Simplicity Explained: Three Views

There are substantially three views of divine simplicity: the property view (arguably held by Augustine and Anselm), the property-instance view (hinted at by Aquinas,

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7 See Mann, "Divine Simplicity," pp. 451-455.
and, among contemporary philosophers, championed with great ardor by William Mann in a series of inter-related articles in the 1980s), and finally what I shall call the *property-individual* view (recently advanced by William Valicella). In what follows, I shall not be concerned with issues of historical pedigree; instead I shall concentrate on the detailed and sophisticated treatment these views have received (both pro and con) in current philosophical literature.

**A. The Property View**

I turn first to the property view. The basic motivation for holding to the DDS, according to Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, is connected with the central theistic conviction that God is a perfect being:

> The doctrine that God is absolutely simple derives from the metaphysical considerations that have led philosophers and theologians to maintain that God is a being whose existence is self-explanatory, an absolutely perfect being, or pure actuality.\(^8\)

Brian Leftow joins Stump and Kretzmann in linking simplicity and perfection, while noting that:

> The medievals found divine simplicity important because they explained the concept of God by explicating the concept of a perfect being, and they considered simplicity a keynote of perfection.\(^9\)

And William Mann adds that:

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\(^8\)"Absolute Simplicity," p. 353.

The DDS ... is motivated by the consideration that God is a perfect being, and that *qua* perfect, he must be independent from all other things for his being the being he is, and he must be sovereign over all other things.¹⁰

There are at least three main ideas in these quotations. First and most obvious, there is the connection between simplicity and perfection. The idea here, apparently enough, is that simplicity is a necessary condition of perfection. Second, we have the interesting suggestion that to be perfect, a being must be sovereign *over*, as well as independent *from*, all things; in other words, the doctrine of divine perfection is taken to imply the *Sovereignty-Aseity Intuition* — that every nondivine object depends on God for its existence, whereas God does not depend on anything distinct from himself for his. And finally, there is the further (if vaguer) claim that perfection necessitates simplicity *via* considerations of sovereignty and aseity.

Suppose we begin our assessment of these ideas by conceding, for purposes of argument, that divine perfection does indeed require divine sovereignty and aseity. Questions still remain. How does it follow that God is simple from the fact that he is sovereign and exists *a se*? More specifically, how does the Sovereignty-Aseity Intuition establish the property view of simplicity?

1. *The Identity Thesis*

Our first problem is to get clear about just what the property view of simplicity *says*. There are at least two ways of construing this view. According to the first, "A simple being *is* nothing different from what it *has*" (where the ‘is’ at issue is that of

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¹⁰"Simplicity and Immutability in God," p. 268.
identity). A corollary of this claim is that a simple being has no accidental properties whatsoever. For consider the fact that if God is identical with his properties, then each divine attribute is identical with every other, so that (by the transitivity of identity) there is but a single property with which God is identical. Now this property cannot be merely accidental to God. For suppose that it were. Then God could have existed but lacked this property. But on the assumption that this is a property with which God is identical, it would then follow that God could have been identical with a property he did not even possess. Surely this is impossible; in which case God must be identical with a single essential attribute. Accordingly, if he has just what he is, it must be that he has no accidental properties.

Some simplicity theorists are uneasy about this conclusion. For example, William F. Valicella maintains that "The property of having created this world ... is arguably an accidental property of God." But if God is nothing different from what he has, then he will be identical with this accidental property, which, as we have just seen, is quite impossible. The way out of this difficulty, Valicella thinks, is to concede that God is identical with a single essential property, but deny that what

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11 Mann, "Divine Simplicity," p. 452.


God is is the same as what God has. And the simplicity theorist can avail herself of this position quite easily by maintaining that a simple being is nothing different, not from what it has, but from what it has essentially. On this second version of the property view, then, God has both accidental and essential properties; and he is identical only with the latter.

The crucial thing to see overall is that no matter which version of the property view we take, God is understood as being identical with his essential properties. Let us call this the Identity Thesis.\(^{15}\) The question now confronting us is why we should think that this thesis follows from the Sovereignty-Aseity Intuition. Here, not surprisingly, there are fundamentally two answers: first, there is the argument from sovereignty, an argument that finds its most explicit contemporary formulation at the hands of Brian Leftow\(^{16}\); and second, the argument from aseity, which, in Mann’s opinion, has some “presumption” in its favor.\(^{17}\)

\((a)\) The Argument from Sovereignty

According to Brian Leftow, the following Western theistic belief is “well-entrenched” and “carries strong warrant”:

\[(1) \text{ Necessarily, for any } x, \text{ if } x \text{ is God, } x \text{ creates and maintains in existence whatever is not identical with } x.\] \(^{18}\)

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\(^{15}\) So dubbed by Brian Leftow. See his “Is God an Abstract Object?,” p. 582.

\(^{16}\) See “Is God an Abstract Object?,” pp. 582-583. Leftow’s argument has been endorsed by William Valicella. See Valicella’s “Divine Simplicity: A New Defense,” p.50.

\(^{17}\) See “Divine Simplicity,” p. 454.

\(^{18}\) “Is God an Abstract Object?,” pp. 582-583.
It is in virtue of (1) that theists typically endorse the Sovereignty Intuition, namely,

\textbf{SI:} Everything distinct from God is entirely dependent upon him.\(^{19}\)

Notice too that (1) implies the existence of a non-empty set \(S\) of properties each member of which must be possessed by any being to whom the title ‘God’ applies. And from this it follows that God is identical with his essential properties, that is, with each member of \(S\) (assuming, of course, that God cannot create part of his nature). For suppose that God is \textit{not} identical with his essential properties. Then there must be some property \(P\) such that \(P\) is a member of \(S\) and \(P\) is not identical with God. But then by (1) it follows that God creates \(P\), in which case God creates part of his own nature. And this, as Leftow rightly says, “seems flatly impossible”,\(^{20}\) therefore (contrary to our supposition), it is false that God is not identical with each member of \(S\); God is identical with each of his essential properties, which is just to say that the Identity Thesis is true.

We could put this point yet another way. Assuming that God cannot create part of his nature, if one of God’s essential properties were diverse from him, then there would be something distinct from God which he did \textit{not} create and therefore which was \textit{not} entirely dependent upon him.\(^{21}\) But then by (SI) it would follow that God is

\(^{19}\)The wording of this proposition is Mann’s. See his “Review of Does God Have a Nature?, by Alvin Plantinga,” p. 625.

\(^{20}\)“Is God an Abstract Object?,” p. 583.

\(^{21}\)“\textit{did not create and therefore ... not} entirely dependent”: here I am assuming that (SI), if true, is necessarily so; in which case (1) and (SI) are broadly logically equivalent.
not sovereign. But surely this is unacceptable; hence none of God's essential properties is diverse from him.

(b) **The Argument from Aseity**

The doctrine of God's aseity, according to William Mann, is the doctrine "that the nature of God is utterly independent of everything else";\(^2^2\) that is to say, God exists \textit{a se} just in case

\begin{quote}
\text{AI:} \quad \text{God is not dependent in any way upon anything distinct from himself.}^{2^3}
\end{quote}

(Call this the \textit{Aseity Intuition}.) There is a relatively straightforward argument from (AI) to the Identity Thesis. Assume once more that there is a set \(S\) of properties such that no individual can be God without having each member of \(S\). Now suppose that there is an essential property exemplified by God but which is distinct from him. There must be a member of \(S\) which is distinct from God and on which he depends. For if God is a necessary being and exemplifies the members of \(S\) in every world in which he exists, then each member of \(S\) will itself be a necessary being. Accordingly, there will exist a two-way relation of logical dependency running between God and \(S\)'s members, in which case God will depend (in some fashion at least) on something distinct from himself. But this contradicts (AI); hence the Identity Thesis is true: none of God's essential properties is distinct from him.

2. **Plantingean Protests**

\(^2^2\) "Divine Simplicity," p. 470.

\(^2^3\) See Mann, "Review of \textit{Does God Have a Nature?}, by Alvin Plantinga," p. 625.
These arguments are so straightforward that it is difficult to see them (at least *prima facie*) as anything but decisive. Nevertheless, Alvin Plantinga has raised serious and searching objections to the Identity Thesis, objections which come not by way of a direct attack on the premises of either of the arguments just canvassed, but rather by way of identifying certain unacceptable consequences thought to follow from the Identity Thesis itself. According to Plantinga, the DDS "seems entirely unacceptable ... [It] begins in a pious and proper concern for God's sovereignty [and asentity]; it ends by flouting the most fundamental claims of theism."24 Well, how so? What leads Plantinga to this bold conclusion?

His argument is twofold. To begin with,

if God is identical with each of his properties, then each of his properties is identical with each of his properties, so that God has but one property. This seems flatly incompatible with the obvious fact that God has several properties; he has both power and mercifulness, say, neither of which is identical with the other.25

Perhaps so; and then again, perhaps not. Plantinga tells us that God's having several properties is an "obvious fact." As a response to the DDS, however, this is rather anemic. There is no attempt here to show that the Identity Thesis is false; what we have instead is the mere assertion that this is the case. But in the present context, it


25 *Does God Have A Nature?*, p. 47.
is difficult to see that such an assertion amounts to anything more than a simple begging of the question against the DDS. The salient question, of course, is whether (in light of the sovereignty and aseity arguments) it really is an “obvious fact” that God has more than one property. This is a question Plantinga fails to address.

It seems to me, therefore, that it is not at all obvious (pace Plantinga) that this first difficulty for the Identity Thesis is all that “substantial.” There is a second difficulty to be faced, however — this one said to be “truly monumental”:²⁶

if God is identical with each of his properties, then, since each of his properties is a property, he is a property — a self-exemplifying property. Accordingly God has just one property: himself. This view is subject to a difficulty both obvious and overwhelming. No property could have created the world; no property could be omniscient, or, indeed, know anything at all. If God is a property, then he isn’t a person but a mere abstract object; he has no knowledge, awareness, power, love or life.²⁷

Here we have an objection far more powerful and probative than the first. The central complaint is this: the Identity Thesis, if true, implies that God is identical with his properties. This, of course, is not quite right; we have just seen that the Identity Thesis only requires that God is identical with his essential properties. No doubt this is something of a minor quibble; for, after all, if God’s essential properties are not diverse from him, then God is identical with some property or other. And this is problematic. For

²⁶ Does God Have a Nature?, p. 47.
²⁷ Ibid.
(2) If there is a property with which God is identical, then God is a property.\textsuperscript{28}

Now (2), Plantinga says, is a "truth of logic."\textsuperscript{29} True enough: if, say, omniscience is one of God's essential properties, and omniscience has the property being a property, then the same goes for anything identical with omniscience. Thus if God has omniscience essentially, then (on the Identity Thesis) he is identical with this property and is therefore himself a property. Here Plantinga's line of reasoning clearly relies upon

(3) For any property $P$ and any objects $x$ and $y$, if $x$ is identical with $y$ and $x$ has $P$, then $y$ has $P$.

This principle — also known as 'The Indiscernibility of Identicals' — is in fact an axiom of second-order quantification theory with identity. Being a simple substitution instance of (3), therefore, (2) is indeed a "truth of logic" and is therefore on solid footing.

But there are other premises in Plantinga's argument. There is, for example, the claim that no property is a person. If this is so, then

(4) If God is a person, then God is not a property.

But here there is trouble. For if

(5) The Identity Thesis is true

is true, then so is

(6) There is a property with which God is identical;

\textsuperscript{28} See *Does God Have A Nature?*, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
and from (2) and (6) it follows that

(7) God is a property.

However, it is necessarily true, or at least essential to theism, that

(8) God is a person;

and from (4) and (8) it follows that

(9) God is not a property

which contradicts (7). In order to avoid this unhappy consequence, it appears that at least one of the premises of this argument must be given up. But which exactly?

(2) and (8) are certainly secure. The question, then, is whether (4) and (5) are acceptable, and whether (6) follows from (5). Here Plantinga immediately assumes (without argument) that the problem must lie with the Identity Thesis; accordingly, we are counseled to reject

$$IT_1: \quad \text{For any properties } F \text{ and } G, \text{ if, necessarily, God exists only if God has } F \text{ and God has } G, \text{ then } ((F = G) \land [(F = \text{God}) \land (G = \text{God})])$$

and therefore (5) on the grounds that $IT_1$ is entailed by (5). He then sets out to discover whether there is not some preferable way of formulating the Identity Thesis. Although Plantinga is not perfectly pellucid on this score, I take it that what he has in mind is some revision of $IT_1$, which, together with the fact that there are some properties God has essentially, fails to imply (6). The basic idea here is that the defender of the Identity Thesis can avoid commitment to the contradictories (7) and (9) by removing (6) from the mix, a feat accomplished by some suitable
reformulation of the Identity Thesis. No doubt there are several possibilities.

Plantinga, however, settles on just one:

Perhaps the idea is that God is identical, not with power and knowledge, but with *his* power and *his* knowledge. The view [that is, the identity Thesis] would thus imply, not that power and knowledge are identical, but that they are, we might say, identical in God; his knowledge is identical with his power.30

But now the question arises: How are we to understand such expressions as ‘God’s power’ or ‘the power of God’? Plantinga, not implausibly, takes these expressions as picking out one and the same state of affairs: God’s *being* powerful. In general, this suggests the following refinement of the Identity Thesis:

\[
\text{IT}_2: \quad \text{For any properties } F \text{ and } G, \text{ if, necessarily, God exists only if God has } F \text{ and God has } G, \text{ then } ((\text{God’s having } F = \text{God’s having } G) \& [(\text{God’s having } F = \text{God}) \& (\text{God’s having } G = \text{God})]).
\]

So suppose that God has both *being omniscient* and *being omnipotent* essentially.

According to IT₂, *God’s being omniscient* is then identical with *God’s being omnipotent*; and both of these states of affairs (hereafter, SOFAs) are identical with God.

Now this way of stating the Identity Thesis certainly has its advantages. In the first place, it spares its proponent the expense of having to say that *being omniscient* is the very same property as *being omnipotent*; in which case God, too, is a property given his identity with one or the other of these properties. Secondly, unlike IT₁, IT₂

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30 *Does God Have A Nature?*, p. 48.
is free from commitment to the view that each of God's essential properties is identical with each of the others; it does not say, for example, that omniscience is identical with omnipotence, but only that God's being omniscient is identical with God's being omnipotent. This may be perplexing; it is not, for all that, just obviously absurd.

But the defender of divine simplicity is not out of the woods yet. First, notice that if God has any essential properties at all, then IT$_2$ does not rule out the possibility that these properties are distinct from him. But if they are, then assuming that God cannot create (even part of) his nature, there will be a plurality of uncreated, necessary beings existing independently of God. And this compromises God's sovereignty — at least if (SI) is correct.

A second problem: the first conjunct of IT$_2$'s consequent makes a claim about the identity of certain SOFAs. It tells us, for example, that God's being disembodied is the same SOFA as God's existing. This sort of claim seems initially to presuppose or endorse a specific criterion of identity for SOFAs. The idea, presumably, is this.

Consider the fact that if God exists is logically necessary, then each of God's essential properties is necessarily exemplified and therefore has necessary existence. Then for any properties F and G essential to God, the SOFAs God's having F and God's having G will obtain in the same possible worlds. Accordingly, the

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$^{31}$ See Plantinga, Does God Have A Nature?, p. 52. If we add a clause or two to counter this implication, stipulating (perhaps) that these properties are identical with one another and God, then IT$_2$ collapses right back into IT$_1$, and we are no better off than before.
proposition \textit{God's having F obtains} will be necessarily true and will entail the very same propositions as \textit{God's having G obtains}, a proposition that is also necessary.

And how can this be if these two propositions are not in fact one and the same proposition? Furthermore, if these propositions are identical, then it is hard to see how the SOFAs \textit{God's having F} and \textit{God's having G} could be diverse. This line of reasoning suggests the following general criterion of identity for SOFAs:

\text{CI:} \quad \text{State of affairs } x's \text{ having } F \text{ and } y's \text{ having } G \text{ are identical if and only if } x's \text{ having } F \text{ is equivalent to (obtains in the same possible worlds as) } y's \text{ having } G \text{ and } x = y.

By this criterion, however, \(7 + 5\)'s equaling 12 comes out to be the very same SOFA as \textit{God's not being identical with Mann}. Plantinga finds this only "mildly annoying",\textsuperscript{32} others, however, are incredulous.\textsuperscript{33} And there is a deeper and more devastating difficulty: CI\textsubscript{1} implies that God is identical with a SOFA; and since, for Plantinga, SOFAs are paradigmatically abstract, it follows that God is an abstract object and therefore (contrary to traditional theism) not a person at all.

Now instead of examining further versions of the Identity Thesis, Plantinga drops the matter at this point, concluding that "while [the DDS] does indeed have a certain intuitive grounding, it scouts intuitions much firmer than those that support it."\textsuperscript{34} But is this really so? Recall that (2), (4), (6), and (8) comprise a formally

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Does God Have A Nature?}, p. 51.


\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Does God Have A Nature?}, p. 61.
contradictory set; we can derive an explicit contradiction from this set of propositions using the laws of logic alone. One of these propositions must go. (2) and (8), we have said, are beyond reproach. That leaves (4) and (6). As far as Plantinga is concerned (4), like (2), is "about as obvious as anything could be."\(^{35}\)

There is no alternative, then, but to reject (6) and whatever entails it, in particular, (5) and its supporting intuitions. And what are these intuitions? Fundamentally, those finding expression in the Sovereignty and Aseity Intuitions: (SI) and (AI).

Respecting the former, Plantinga asks whether it is obvious that if God is sovereign, then he has created everything distinct from himself — even his own properties and the fact that he has always existed? I think not. This requires further discussion and isn't obvious — not nearly as obvious, anyway, as that no properties are persons.\(^{36}\)

In short, faced with a choice between (1) and (4), we ought to reject (1) and therefore its logical equivalent — (SI). And with respect to the Aseity Intuition, Plantinga simply inquires: "Is it really clear ... that if God has properties distinct from himself, then he is dependent upon them?"\(^{37}\)

The answer to this question is by now quite easy. Assuming that God is a necessary being and has essential properties which are distinct from him, a two-way relation of logical dependence will obtain between each such property and God in

\(^{35}\) *Does God Have a Nature?*, p. 60.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., p. 61.

\(^{37}\) Ibid.
virtue of the logically necessary existence of the relata on either side of this relation.

According to Eleonore Stump, however, this answer is misconceived. For it does not follow that God is dependent on [necessary] truths unless we can show some sort of conceptual priority of these truths over God; and it is hard to see how we could do so since God is a necessary being.38

If anything, this objection only makes matters worse. Stump seems to equate ‘dependence’ with ‘asymmetrical dependence’: God depends on NTs (or his essential properties) only if these truths (properties) are conceptually prior to God in some way, thereby grounding a one-way relation of dependence running from God to the truths (properties) in question. But this, so it seems to me, does away with the distinction between symmetrical and asymmetrical relations of dependence altogether. Surely this is too drastic. And even if it is not, there is an even less tractable problem here. Stump confesses that it is “hard to see” how God could asymmetrically depend on another necessary being. For, she says, “God is a necessary being.” This is quite true; but the same compliment must be paid to any necessary being, including your favourite necessary truth and each of God’s essential properties. But then will it not be equally as “hard to see” how these items could asymmetrically depend on God? It certainly seems so.

The general point, in brief, is this. In order to deny that God depends on his essential properties if they are distinct from him, we must (on something like

Stump's view) deny that God asymmetrically depends on these properties. And the suggestion is that we can do so on the grounds that God is a necessary being. Necessary beings, presumably, cannot stand in relations of asymmetrical dependence. Accordingly, if there are any necessary beings distinct from God, and if dependence *just is* asymmetrical dependence, then there is no solution at all to the Dependence Problem: every necessary being distinct from God will exist independently of him.

Perhaps we should say, following Thomas Morris, that there is a mutual logical dependence existing between God and each of his (distinct) essential properties, but that from this "it need not be thought to follow that he is in any *unacceptable* way ontologically dependent on [these] propert[ies]?"39 Certainly this is one attractive possibility. But this possibility, I take it, still implies that (AI) is need of revision: if God logically depends on his properties, then there is at least one way in which God is dependent upon something distinct from himself; and this contradicts (AI). Morris claims that this sort of dependence does not necessarily impugn God's perfection. But this follows only if the Dependence Problem does not go unsolved.

As I said earlier, the simplicity theorist attempts to solve the Dependence Problem by pointing out that each item of the Platonic horde is in some way identical with God; accordingly, none is appropriately classified as either divinely dependent or divinely independent: these categories only pertain to things ontologically distinct from God. Morris, however, is no simplicity theorist; so he cannot avail himself of

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39 "Dependence and Divine Simplicity," p. 164, emphasis mine.
this solution to the Dependence Problem. Instead, he must show that, in addition to sustaining this two-way relation of logical dependence with other necessary beings, God is on the receiving end of a one-way relation of dependence with NTs (and beings). But this brings us full circle: there stills seems to be the thorny problem of spelling out an appropriate nonstandard account of counterpossibles to “make sense of” this relation (to borrow a phrase from Brian Leftow).

Revising (AI), therefore, is no easy matter. What about (SI)? Should we follow Plantinga in rejecting this intuition on the grounds that the Identity Thesis is hopelessly flawed whereas (4) is “about as obvious as anything could be”? Here we must be careful. For at the end of his discussion of the Identity Thesis, Plantinga hedges his bets to some extent. He admits that he may not have “completely understood” the Identity Thesis; perhaps the proponent of this thesis “doesn’t mean to identify God with a state of affairs at all, but with something quite different. If so, it isn’t easy to see what sort of thing it might be.”\(^{40}\) Perhaps not; but even if not, it does not follow that the Identity Thesis could not be developed in such a way that God turns out to be identical with something wholly different than an abstract state of affairs. Before rendering a final judgment on Plantinga’s case against the DDS, therefore, we must examine the main candidates for filling the role of this “wholly different something”: property-instances and property-individuals.

B. The Property-Instance View

\(^{40}\) *Does God Have A Nature?*, p. 53.
According to Eleonore Stump, "the views Plantinga expresses [on the DDS] have been elaborately and convincingly rebutted by William Mann in 'The Doctrine of Divine Simplicity'." Let us see whether this is so. Mann claims that a small syntactical adjustment in the expression of the DDS is all that is needed to get us around Plantinga's protests. Mann finds in Aquinas' expression of the DDS two types of identities: Deity-instance identities (e.g., 'God is his F-ness') and instance-instance identities (e.g., 'the F-ness of God is the G-ness of God'). Thus, he says, the DDS is more accurately expressed in terms of descriptive phrases of the form 'the F-ness of God'. But such descriptions do not denote SOFAs; they denote property instances. Hence 'the wisdom of God' does not designate God's being wise — an abstract SOFA; it refers, instead, to a singular instance of the property being wise. Accordingly, an instance-instance identity such as

(10) The omniscience of God is identical with the omnipotence of God

asserts that

(10*) Property instances the omniscience of God and the omnipotence of God are identical.

And the Deity-instance identity

(11) God is identical with his omniscience

claims that

(11*) God is identical with the property instance the omniscience of God.

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42 See Mann, "Divine Simplicity," p. 457.
A bit more fully, (11*) tells us that God is identical with a specific instance of the property *being omniscient*. It follows from this that God himself is a property instance. But then the question naturally arises: Which property is God an instance of? And how does this go toward undercutting Plantinga's objections to the Identity Thesis?

Take the first question first. According to Mann, God is an instance of his *rich property*:

For anything whatsoever, there is an appropriate rich property. Therefore, everything is a property instance of some rich property or other.

Therefore, every person is a property instance ... 43

Here we need the notion of a rich property. As Mann describes it, this is “a conjunctive property which includes all and only the essential and accidental properties of some individual thing.” 44 Now God, like everything else, is a property instance. The rich property of which God is an instance, however, differs from all others in that it contains no accidental properties:

Unlike the case of created persons, whose rich properties are complex and chock-a-block with accidental properties, the rich property appropriate to God has none of these features ... [it] has but one element — *being a* 

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43 "Divine Simplicity," p. 467.

44 Ibid.
Godhead, which is the same property as being omniscient, being omniscient, and all the rest.\footnote{"Divine Simplicity," p. 467.}

So on Mann's property-instance view of simplicity, God is identical, not with a single essential property (as on the property view), but with an instance of his rich property — a conjunctive property containing but a single conjunct: being a Godhead. These considerations suggest a new version of the Identity Thesis:

\[ \text{IT}_3: \quad \text{For any properties } F \text{ and } G, \text{ if, necessarily, God exists only if God has } F \text{ and God has } G, \text{ then } (\text{the } F\text{-ness of God} = \text{the } G\text{-ness of God}) \land (\text{the } F\text{-ness of God} = \text{God}) \land (\text{the } G\text{-ness of God} = \text{God}) \].

As a complement to this thesis, Mann goes on to propose a new criterion of identity for property instances:

\[ \text{C}_2: \quad \text{Property instances } \text{the } F\text{-ness of } x \text{ and the } G\text{-ness of } y \text{ are identical if and only if (1) the property } \text{being } F \text{ is necessarily coextensive with the property } \text{being } G \text{ and (2) } x = y. \footnote{See ibid., p. 465.} \]

This new view of divine simplicity is a marked improvement over those Plantinga considers. According to Mann, Plantinga's charge against \( \text{IT}_2 \) — that it fundamentally involves God's possession of a plurality of distinct essential properties — is "simply irrelevant"\footnote{Ibid., p. 457.} to \( \text{IT}_3 \). Still further, \( \text{C}_2 \) does not imply that two states of affairs are identical just in case they are logically equivalent.

Suppose we concede as much for the purposes of argument. There is still the matter (on Mann's view) of God's being identical with a property instance. If
property instances are abstract objects, then the property-instance view of simplicity will be no better off than its late, lamented ancestor — the property view. Well, it turns out that, for Mann, property instances “can be concrete and as independent as substances.” Hence, he sees “nothing untoward or embarrassing” about identifying God — surely a concrete particular — with a property instance. Mann is therefore perfectly willing to accept

(12) No property is alive, knowledgeable, capable of action, powerful or good.

(Thus he would affirm (4) above.) But it does not follow, he says, that

(12*) No property instance is alive, knowledgeable, capable of action, powerful, or good

is true. The reason is simple: some property instances are persons, and thus alive, knowledgeable, capable of action, and so on. Mann’s way out of Plantinga’s “truly monumental” objection to divine simplicity is not to deny (4), but rather to deny that (5) entails (6). What (5) entails is

(6*) There is a property instance with which God is identical which, unlike (6), is consistent with (2), (4), and (8).

1. **Mann versus Plantinga**

Is Stump right? Has Mann “elaborately and convincingly rebutted” Plantinga’s protests? Not obviously. We are still without an argument for CI₂ — Mann’s criteria

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of identity for property instances. Here we must note that \( C_{12} \) is the conjunction of two claims:

\[ C_{12A} \text{ If the } F\text{-ness of } x = \text{the } G\text{-ness of } y, \text{ then (1) being } F \text{ is necessarily coextensive with being } G \text{ and (2) } x = y \]

and

\[ C_{12B} \text{ If (1) being } F \text{ is necessarily coextensive with being } G \text{ and (2) } x = y, \text{ then the } F\text{-ness of } x = \text{the } G\text{-ness of } y \]

(where two properties are necessarily coextensive just in case, necessarily, whatever exemplifies the one exemplifies the other.) Now \( C_{12A} \) looks secure enough; \( C_{12B} \) is quite another matter. In support of this claim, Mann appeals to the following thesis:

\( (T1) \) Necessarily coextensive properties are necessarily identical.

Suppose that being \( F \) and being \( G \) are necessarily coextensive properties. Then, by \( (T1) \), it follows that being \( F = \text{being } G \). And if so, then a property instance of being \( F \) is a property instance of being \( G \). Furthermore, \( (T1) \) together with

\( (T2) \) The divine attributes are necessarily coextensive

is "sufficient to underwrite such identities as that the omniscience of God = the omnipotence of God."\(^{49}\)

As far as establishing \( (T1) \) is concerned, Mann simply informs us that there is no good reason for thinking it false. The usual argument against \( (T1) \), he says, goes as follows. Consider, say, the property being the square of 2 and the property being the square root of 16. Plantinga argues that although such properties are no doubt

\[ ^{49} \text{Mann, "Simplicity and Immutability in God," p. 269.} \]
necessarily coextensive, it is not the case that they are identical.\textsuperscript{50} But, says Mann, "Plantinga does not tell us why he thinks the properties in his examples are distinct even though necessarily coextensive."\textsuperscript{51}

We are then asked to envision theories of property identity as forming a spectrum with fine-grained theories (e.g., predicate synonymy theories) at the one end and course-grained theories (e.g., set-extensional theories) at the other. According to predicate-synonymy theories, every syntactically well-formed predicate expression expresses a property; and nonsynonymous predicate expressions express different properties. Hence, supposing, for example, that 'is the square of 2' and 'is the square root of 16' are nonsynonymous predicates, they express different (though no doubt necessarily coextensive) properties. This is a very fine-grained account of property individuation.

At the other end of the spectrum, then, are coarse-grained theories, the paradigm of which is the set-extensional theory of property individuation. On this theory, a property is a set-theoretical entity; more exactly, a property $P$ is identical with the set of objects exemplifying $P$. Thus, the property \textit{being the square of 2} is identical with the set of objects exemplifying this property; but the property of \textit{being square root of 16} is necessarily coextensive with \textit{being the square of 2}, so that the


\textsuperscript{51} "Divine Simplicity," p. 462.
same set of objects exemplifies both properties. Accordingly, since properties are
sets, and sets are determined by their extensions, it follows that

(13)  The property of being the square of 2 = the property of being the
square root of 16.

Since Plantinga rejects (13), it must be that his theory of property identity is less
course-grained than the set extensional view. In addition, Mann reports that in
correspondence Plantinga has rejected the predicate synonymy view. He concludes
that Plantinga's view lies somewhere to the right of center.

True enough. But Mann is very much mistaken in his claim that Plantinga does
not have a theory of property identity. For in "The Boethian Compromise," which,
incipiently, antedates Mann's paper by four years, Plantinga clearly relies on the
following principle of property identity:

(14)  Property P = Property Q iff. $\Box (S)(A)(X)((S \text{ is a person } \& A \text{ is a}
propositional attitude } \& X \text{ is an object}) \supset (S \text{ has } A \text{ to } X \text{ has } P \iff S
has A to X has Q)).$ 53

For example, he says that being the square of 2 does not express the same property
as being the square root of 16, "despite the fact that anything having one of these
properties is obliged to have the other." 54 The reason is that I could know of the first

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53 This principle is the property analogue of a principle of propositional identity to which

property that 4 has it without knowing this of the second. (Perhaps I do not have the concept of a square root.) So, by Leibniz's Law, these properties are not the same.

Mann thinks that his own position (which, he claims, "would be some kind of causal theory of properties")\textsuperscript{55} were it developed) has two advantages over Plantinga's. First, it avoids the predicate synonymy view, and thus "matches perfectly Aquinas' own explicit doctrines [cf. SCG, I, 35; ST, I, 13, 4] ... predicate expressions such as 'is omnipotent' and 'is omniscient' signify different concepts ... But although the concepts are diverse, they correspond to exactly the same property in God."\textsuperscript{56} Perhaps so; this does not show, however, that necessarily coextensive properties are identical, but only (at best) that this thesis is consistent with Aquinas' expression of the DDS. Secondly, Mann notes that his view "explains the intuitions we find in Plantinga's remarks without accepting Plantinga's conclusion [namely, that necessarily coextensive properties are not identical]."\textsuperscript{57}

To investigate this claim, we must take a closer look at Mann's view. Here he invites us to consider two necessarily coextensive properties: \textit{being an equilateral triangle} and \textit{being an equiangular triangle}. These properties, Mann affirms, are expressed by the respective predicates 'is an equilateral triangle' and 'is an equiangular triangle'. Clearly, however, these are nonsynonymous predicates. But it

\textsuperscript{55} "Divine Simplicity," p. 464.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p. 463.
does not follow that they express distinct (but necessarily coextensive) properties.

For

the structural property which is a particular triangle's being equilateral =
the structural property which is that triangle's being equiangular. The
identity is necessary but not typically known a priori, just as the identity
between heat and kinetic energy is necessary but not known a priori.
From the fact that one can discover that a triangle is equilateral without
thereby discovering it to be equiangular, nothing follows about the
distinctness of the properties in question.\(^{58}\)

For Mann, then, (13) is a necessary a posteriori truth, and thus not only consistent
with his own theory of properties (however inchoate in its development and
expression), but a counterexample to Plantinga's (14). Hence Plantinga's principle of
property identity is impotent against Mann's theory of properties.

Perhaps there is a further point in Mann's favor here. For Plantinga allows that
properties can have proper names.\(^{59}\) So, for example, 'being composite' is admitted
as a name of the property being composite. One supposes, then, that Plantinga would
permit something like

\[(15) \quad \text{Being water is identical with being } H_2O \]

\(^{58}\) "Divine Simplicity," p. 464.

as a well-formed identity statement. Now many philosophers, no doubt under Kripke's influence, will be anxious to say that

(16) Water is H₂O

expresses a necessary a posteriori identity. But perhaps it is not clear that Plantinga can say this. For being water and being H₂O are epistemically inequivalent; someone could very well grasp the first and yet fail to grasp the second. (Perhaps she knows nothing at all about atoms, molecules, and the like.) But then, by (14), it follows that (15) is false. Thus it seems that Plantinga is committed to denying that (16) is a necessary a posteriori proposition. For surely this is the sort of proposition we come to know on the basis of a posteriori evidence — the sort of evidence acquired through the process of learning that water has a molecular constitution of 2 hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom.

But here things have gone awry. First, from the fact that Plantinga denies that (15) is a necessary a posteriori proposition, it does not follow that he must pay the same compliment to (16). For it might be argued that (16) is not properly understood as making the identity claim that

(16*) Water is identical with H₂O.

Instead, it expresses the predicative proposition

60 After all, if 'being water' and 'being H₂O' are proper names, then (15) consists of the identity predicate flagged by two nonempty proper names.


62 My discussion here is indebted to some unpublished notes of Plantinga's entitled "Properties and Propositions" (2 December 1992).
(16**) Water has a molecular constitution of 2 hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom.

Now if Plantinga takes (16) as (16**), there is no reason for him to deny that (16) is necessary *a posteriori*; for (16**) is necessary, not in virtue of (15), but rather the agreed upon fact that *being water* and *being made of 2 hydrogens and one oxygen* are necessarily coextensive properties. Furthermore, since these properties are epistemically inequivalent, (16**) is also an *a posteriori* proposition.

Second, consider Mann’s claim that the fact someone can grasp *being water* without grasping *being H₂O* shows not that (15) is false, but only that it is a necessary *a posteriori* identity. This would follow, of course, if (15) were an identity statement. But what evidence does Mann have of that? So far as I can tell, just the fact that *being water* and *being H₂O* are necessarily coextensive. That necessarily coextensive properties are identical, however — that (T1) is true — is precisely the thesis at issue. Evidently, Mann’s view can explain the intuitions in Plantinga’s remarks while avoiding his conclusion only at the expense of begging the question against him.

2. *Mann versus Morris*

So far, then, we appear to have no adequate defense of (T1): that necessarily coextensive properties are necessarily identical. In his “*On God and Mann: A View of Divine Simplicity*”, Thomas Morris goes on to pose three problems for Mann’s theory of properties, problems which cut right at the heart of Mann’s commitment to (T1). First, there is the problem of *divine modal uniformity*. If God is identical with
the instantiation of a single rich property, then "God's properties cannot differ among themselves in modal status." This brief remark does not wear its meaning on its sleeve. What Morris has in mind, I think, is something like the following.

According to Mann, each of us is identical with a special sort of property instance—the instantiation of our rich property. Further, for every rich property \( R \) and property instance \( I \), if \( I \) is an instance of \( R \), then surely \( I \) has \( R \). After all, how could I possibly be a property instance of my rich property without individually exemplifying each of its conjuncts? Surely this is not possible.

Now something similar goes for God. If \( (T1) \) and \( (T2) \) are true, then God's rich property has but a single conjunct: being a Godhead. And God is simply a property instance of being a Godhead. But then if God's rich property cannot contain accidental properties, being a Godhead is a property God has essentially. (If God did not have this property, then he would not be God.) So on Mann's view, God has a single essential property. But this is clearly false, says Morris; it is perfectly obvious that God has such contingent (nonessential) properties as having called Abram out of Ur.

The second problem Morris raises is the so-called problem of supervenient properties. According to Anselmian theism, God is essentially omniscient. But consider the property being omniscient; this property supervenes on infinitely many properties— for example, it supervenes on the property knowing that Morris left

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Notre Dame in 1996. God is omniscient in virtue of knowing (among other things) that Morris left Notre Dame in 1996. God has both of these properties; but they are clearly not identical; after all, they are not even necessarily coextensive, so how could they be identical? Hence, God has more than one property and is therefore not simple.

Finally, there is the problem of divine uniqueness. According to the DDS, the property of existing a se is unique to God. Hence God’s instance of existing a se will have the property being an instance of a unique divine property. From this it follows that God shares no property with any other individual. For suppose that he did. Then his instance of that property would be identical with his instance of existing a se. But the latter has the property being an instance of a unique divine property; therefore, by Leibniz’s Law, his instance of the shared property in question must have this property as well. But this is impossible; for if the property is shared, it is not a unique divine property. Hence either God’s single rich property is shared or it is not; it cannot be shared since it is essential to God; so it is not shared at all. And this, says Morris, is coherent only “on a non-standard and extremely restricted view of what counts as a property.”

64 Notice that Morris’ criticism sticks here only if it is not the case that God has accidental properties. For if God has accidental properties (with which he is not identical), then it is perfectly reasonable to suppose that some of these properties might be shared.

65 “On God and Mann,” p. 188.
The important thing to see in each of these problems, says Mann, is how Morris assumes (without argument) that there are such properties as having called Abram out of Ur, knowing that Morris left Notre Dame in 1996, and being an instance of a unique divine property. This apparently requires something like ‘The Gerundive Assumption’ for property individuation:

\[(GA) \text{ Almost any well-formed gerundive construction refers to a property, and nonsynonymous gerundive constructions refer to different properties.}^{66}\]

Mann thinks that the alleged properties that function in Morris’ counterexamples are mere-Notre Dame properties ― “that is, not properties at all.”\(^{67}\) And he goes on to argue that there are no compelling reasons to think they are properties. Neither Morris nor Mann, however, offers us a detailed, general account of properties and property instances.

We can think of things this way: if the DDS is true, then (GA) is false. Of course, it would be question-begging to argue that Morris’ mere-Notre Dame properties are not properties on the grounds that the DDS is true. For the present dialectical context concerns Mann’s defense of (T1), which, together with (T2), entails Mann’s unique version of the DDS. On the other hand, if (GA) is true, then the DDS is incoherent. So which is it? It seems to me that neither party to this debate

\(^{66}\) Mann, “Simplicity and Properties,” p. 347. Notice that (GA) is remarkably similar to the predicate synonymy view described above (p. 111).

\(^{67}\) Ibid., p. 348.
has succeeded in overturning his opponent’s position at the level of a theory of properties. For example, Morris says:

I suppose my conclusions could be resisted by denying that there are any such properties at all. But this seems to me almost too drastic a course to mention. For it would take quite a bit of argument to dislodge the sort of standard and powerful view of properties which countenances my examples. And neither Mann nor anyone else has succeeded in overturning this sort of view. So I think the foregoing arguments are secure. 68

But Morris never argues for what he takes to be the "standard view," nor does he point us to such arguments. So it is difficult to say what would count against the "standard view" he has in mind. For his part, Mann objects that "There is no 'standard' view of properties held by philosophers." 69 Well, perhaps so. Unfortunately, Mann gives us little in place of Morris' "standard view"; for Mann is without a positive defense for his own view of properties and property instances. What he offers is the mere fact that his theory is consistent with Aquinas' expression of the DDS, and that it is not undermined by Plantinga's (and now Morris') arguments. Neither of these considerations, however, goes toward establishing the truth of (T1).


So wholly apart from any evaluation of (T2) — which, like Morris, I am not inclined to reject\textsuperscript{70} — I think we can safely conclude that Mann’s case for the property-instance view of the DDS is not clearly successful.

C. The Property-Individual View

We are still apparently without an adequate response to Plantinga’s charge that if there is a property with which God is identical, then God is himself a property and so not a person. Recall that Mann’s way around this difficulty is not to deny

\begin{align*}
(4) & \text{ If God is a person, then God is not a property,} \\
& \text{but rather to reject the inference from} \\
& (5) \quad \text{The Identity Thesis is true} \\
& \quad \text{to} \\
& (6) \quad \text{There is a property with which God is identical.} 
\end{align*}

This is accomplished by reinterpreting the Identity Thesis in such a way that God turns out to be a property instance.

There is still another (though no doubt less obvious) way of dealing with Plantinga’s charge. Why not deny (4) itself? Plantinga thinks that (4) is perfectly obvious. But is that perfectly obvious? Not according to Brian Leftow:

To Plantinga, that God is a person is non-negotiable for theists, [but] it is obvious (why?) that a property cannot be a person ... Plantinga’s move from God’s identity with a property to God’s not being a person is a bit fast.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{70} See “On God and Mann,” p. 107.

\textsuperscript{71} “Is God an Abstract Object?,” p. 593.
The problem with this move, says Leftow, is that while the Identity Thesis does entail that there is a property with which God is identical, "it does not follow that God is [just] any sort of abstract object." In particular, it does not follow that if God is a property, he cannot have any concrete-entity features.

In his fascinating and highly original paper "Divine Simplicity: A New Defense," William Valicella picks up on this idea and asks whether it is really the case that

\[(12) \text{ No property is alive, knowledgeable, capable of action, powerful or good}\]

expresses a necessary truth. Not so, says Valicella:

Properties, although ingredients of the real, are inert ingredients thereof. They neither act nor react; they neither do nor suffer. Given that God is an agent, he cannot be a property unless (and this is an important qualification) he is a property that is identical with an individual\(^7\).

If God is a property identical with an individual, and if some individuals (say, conscious agents) are alive, knowledgeable, capable of action, and the like, then the defender of divine simplicity can identify God with a property, but reject Plantinga's unpalatable conclusion. For if some properties are individuals, then (12) is false, in which case Plantinga's conclusion no longer follows. Of course, in order to "bridge the gap" between properties and individuals, Valicella needs some revised

\(^{72}"Is\text{ God an Abstract Object?}," \text{ p. 593.}\)

\(^{73}"\text{Divine Simplicity: A New Defense}," \text{ p. 512.}\)
definitions of 'property' and 'individual'. In particular, these terms must be defined in a way that permits some properties to be individuals. To this end, he offers:

(D1) \( x \) is an individual iff (i) \( x \) exemplifies properties, (ii) \( x \) is not multiply exemplifiable, and (iii) \( x \) is not exemplifiable by anything distinct from itself\(^74\)

and

(D2) \( P \) is a property iff \( P \) is possibly such that it is exemplified.\(^75\)

These definitions, he says, "seem intuitively adequate: they capture what we mean by 'individual' and 'property' across the entire range of normal cases ... [without enforcing] a dichotomy between individuals and properties."\(^76\) Furthermore, they are not "merely ad hoc or epicyclic"; on the contrary, the usual definitions of 'property' and 'individual' are question-begging in that they rule out divine simplicity \( a \) \( p \) \( r i o r i \).

Suppose we concede as much for purposes of argument. Does this now permit us to say that that God is a property identical with an individual? Perhaps not. For surely the property being a property is not the same property as the property being an individual. Even if something like (T1) were true, it still would not follow that

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\(^74\) In passing it is perhaps worth noting that clause (ii) appears superfluous; if \( x \) cannot be exemplified by anything distinct from itself, then if \( x \) is exemplified at all, it will be exemplified only by itself. Hence it will not be multiply exemplified. Fortunately nothing in Valicella's argument depends on this point.

\(^75\) It is not clear to me that Valicella needs (D2) to clear the way for his claim that some properties are individuals. Must every putative property be possibly exemplified in order for some properties to be individuals? I cannot see any reason at all for making this supposition. And Valicella offers us no supporting argument. At any rate, I am inclined to think that there are impossible properties and therefore that (D2) is false.

these properties were identical. For, obviously enough, something (say, the property
*being abstract*) could exemplify *being a property* without exemplifying *being an
*individual*. For example, given (D2), *being abstract* surely counts as a property,
since it is possibly exemplified. But it does not exemplify *being an individual*, since
it violates clause (ii) of (D1): *being abstract* is multiply exemplifiable; every abstract
object, for example, has this property. But if *being a property* and *being an
*individual* are distinct, then a proposition such as

(17) God is a property

expresses a different proposition than

(18) God is an individual.

For (17) predicates of God the property of being a property, while (18) predicates of
him the distinct property of being an individual. But then it seems to follows that
God has at least two distinct properties thus violating the DDS.

Valicella has a rather novel response here. First of all, the ‘is’ in (17) and (18)
is not the ‘is’ of predication, but rather the ‘is’ of identity. Instead of (17) and (18),
therefore, we have:

(17*) There is some property with which God is identical

and

(18*) There is some individual with which God is identical.

Now the conjunction of (17*) and (18*) is true only if

(19) Some property is identical with some individual.
This raises the obvious question: Are there any properties identical with individuals? There are indeed, says Valicella: “every property whose self-exemplification entails its identity with an individual.”\textsuperscript{77} In the end, this class of properties amounts to all and only those properties which are essentially conscious and uniquely self-exemplifying.

There is something initially perplexing about this claim. It implies, for example, that the property \textit{being omnipotent} is both omnipotent and conscious. Perhaps you think this is impossible because properties are not the sorts of things that \textit{could} be powerful or conscious. Valicella’s reply is that this is indeed the case \textit{unless the property in question is identical with an individual}. Indeed, he says that “if omnipotence is omnipotent, then it \textit{must} be identical with an individual.”\textsuperscript{78}

Here, no doubt, Valicella’s critic will remind us that we are yet a long way off having shown that God is a property identical with an individual. For that claim presupposes at least two things: first, that each divine attribute is in fact essentially conscious and uniquely self-exemplifying; and secondly, that the divine attributes are identical with \textit{exactly one} individual. Let us examine each of these claims in turn. Consider, first, the property of being omniscient. Why think that omniscience could be omniscient (let alone conscious)? Valicella points out that

\begin{quote}
[Omniscience] is not obviously self-exemplifying ... but it is not obviously non-self-exemplifying either (like the property of being married
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{77} “Divine Simplicity: A New Defense,” p. 514.\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.\end{flushleft}
to Heidegger). And so the theist is not barred by logic or any canon of coherence from taking the view that omniscience is self-exemplifying.\footnote{"Divine Simplicity: A New Defense," p. 514.}

I think we can agree that the proposition

\[(20) \text{ Omniscience is omniscient}\]

is not obviously true; but according to Valicella, (20) is not obviously false either.

Well, perhaps so. Still, why should we think that \textit{being identical with omniscience} and \textit{being omniscient} are coexemplifiable? Perhaps, after all, (20) is an Interesting Impossible Proposition (IIP) — an impossible proposition lacking a formally contradictory structure. If so, then from the fact that it is not obviously false, it would not follow that it is not broadly logically impossible.

Now if (20) were an IIP, then one of the central claims in Valicella’s defense of the DDS, namely,

\[(21) \text{ Every divine attribute is such that it is conscious and uniquely exemplifies itself}\]

would also be an IIP. Valicella’s critic must somehow prove that that (20) is an IIP without presupposing that no property is an individual. Given Valicella’s definitions of ‘property’ and ‘individual’, however, this might prove difficult. For example, the most obvious reason for thinking that (20) is false is that properties are simply in the wrong category for being considered candidates for possessing consciousness or knowledge; for \textit{being conscious} and \textit{being knowledgeable} are properties of persons; but properties are essentially nonpersons. As Valicella points out, however, this type
of response is question-begging; it simply genuflects "before the dogma, already rejected, that no property is an individual."\(^8^0\)

Nevertheless, there is something troubling about (21); it quantifies over every divine attribute whatsoever. But then what about such properties as being lord of the people of Israel and knowing that Morris left Notre Dame in 1996? Surely God has these properties; but it would be confused at best to claim that either of these is conscious or self-exemplifying. Clearly, if God has these properties at all, then they are among his accidental properties—properties he has but could have lacked. But then if (21) is allowed to encompass such properties, it will be an IIP.

There are at least two ways of remedying this problem. First, one might follow Mann in consigning these troublesome "properties" to mere-Notre Dame status. One would then be obliged, I think, to provide some rationale for doing so. So far as I can tell, Mann’s rationale is ultimately unsuccessful. Still, perhaps there are other reasons lurking in the nearby woods. But then again, perhaps not. Alternatively, one might allow that God has accidental properties. Such a move would minimally require a modification of (21) along something like the following lines:

(21*) Every essential divine attribute is such that it is conscious and uniquely exemplifies itself.

(21*) certainly improves on (21); it takes care of the problem of accidental properties rather nicely. But (21*) is false if God has essential properties which themselves are

\(^{8^0}\) "Divine Simplicity: A New Defense," p. 517.
not conscious and self-exemplifying. Does God have such properties? Vallicella is inclined to think so. For example, God has the property *knowing that* \(7 + 5 = 12\) and has it essentially — that is, in every world in which he exists. Nevertheless, the property *knowing that* \(7 + 5 = 12\) certainly does not know that \(7 + 5 = 12\); nor is this property conscious in any sense. In place of (21*), then, we might try:

\[
(21**) \text{ Every nontrivial essential divine attribute is such that it is conscious and uniquely exemplifies itself.}
\]

Upon reflection, (21**) seems to be what Vallicella requires; it rules out all accidental and trivially essential divine properties, while ruling in all the nontrivial (but essential) attributes we typically associate with the office of deity: omnipotence, omniscience, and the like.

The question now is whether (21**) is an IIP. If not, then since it is not formally contradictory, it must be broadly logically possible. But then there is a straightforward argument to the truth of (21**). For consider the fact that, necessarily, if (21**) is true, then it is a necessary truth.\(^81\) That is to say, (21**) entails

\[
(21') \text{ Necessarily, every nontrivial essential divine attribute is essentially such that it is conscious and uniquely exemplifies itself.}
\]

But if (21**) is possible, then

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\(^81\) If it were contingently true, then there would be possible worlds in which, say, omniscience, lacks the essential property *being conscious and uniquely exemplifying itself*. If it lacked that property, however, then omniscience would not exist (given that nothing can lose an essential property without failing to exist). But according to the defender of divine simplicity, this is not possible; for omniscience is necessarily exemplified (and so necessarily existent).
(22) It is possible that \((21')\)

is true. Assuming, however, that every proposition has its modality necessarily, it is also true that

(23) If \((21')\) is false, then \((21')\) is necessarily false.

And (22) and (23) jointly entail

(24) \((21')\) is true,

in which case \((21**\) is true, since \((21')\) entails \((21**\). Accordingly, if \((21**\) is possible, then it is true.

Now the inference of \((21')\) from \((21**\) is certainly secure. (23) is a necessary truth given a modal system at least as strong as S5; and (24) follows from (22) and (23) by modus tollens. That leaves (22). Valicella has two supporting points here. First, \((21')\) is not formally contradictory. Secondly, it seems likely that any proof of the falsity of (22) will ultimately require the question-begging assumption that no properties are individuals.

Valicella goes on to say that if \((21**\) is true, then so is

(25) Every \textbf{nontrivial essential} divine attribute is identical with some individual.

And this seems clearly correct. On Valicella’s definitions, only an individual could have the essential property of being conscious and uniquely exemplifying itself; a mere property — a property not identical with an individual — could not possibly exemplify such a property. So if each nontrivial essential divine attribute has the
essential property of being conscious and uniquely exemplifying itself, then each such attribute is identical with some individual or another. But, says Valicella, (25) together with

(26) Necessarily, the nontrivial essential divine attributes are coextensive yields

(27) There is exactly one individual with which each nontrivial essential divine attribute is identical.

As I said previously, I am not at all inclined to dispute (26). (Valicella claims that he's at least as justified in holding (26) as his critic is in holding to its denial.) As Morris puts it:

the theist may have a good deal of difficulty in trying to demonstrate the necessary coextensiveness of any conceptually distinct attributes, but what is important to note is that this is a position that many theists are inclined to adopt — at least with respect to such properties as omniscience, omnipotence, aseity, necessary goodness, and the like — and many have this inclination who would otherwise tend to shy away from any sort of simplicity doctrine.

Valicella’s defense of the property-individual view of divine simplicity is appealing. It is a rigorous and satisfying development of Leftow’s intriguing suggestion that

(4) If God is a person, then God is not a property

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is false. If the property-individual view is correct, then God is a property, but one of a very special sort: a property identical with an individual. But then Plantinga's claim that if God is a property, he is not a person simply does not follow. Furthermore, Valicella claims that his case for the property-individual view is free from commitment to (T1) — the dubious (and notoriously difficult to prove) thesis that necessarily coextensive properties are identical.\textsuperscript{84} Still further, Valicella avoids Morris' problems of modal uniformity and divine uniqueness by identifying God only with his nontrivial essential properties, while allowing that God has (but is not identical with) his accidental properties.\textsuperscript{85}

\section*{II. Divine Simplicity Examined}

Our discussion thus far has centered on describing the principal views of divine simplicity currently on offer. I turn now to an examination of just how these views might help in solving the Dependence Problem or, as Mann puts it, "the knotty [problem] of God's relation to the NTs."\textsuperscript{86} The basic idea here is simple enough: the only things that could fall under the categories of being \emph{divinely dependent} or being \emph{divinely independent} are things ontologically distinct from God. If NTs are just divine ideas, and if divine ideas are somehow identical with God, then so long as God is simple, we have a solution to the Dependence Problem. The problem so-

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{84} Valicella thinks this thesis is false. See "Divine Simplicity: A New Defense," p. 516.

\textsuperscript{85} Valicella's view also evades Morris' problem of supervenient properties. For extended argument, see chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{86}"Simplicity and Properties," p. 353.
called is a mere pseudo-problem because it assumes that something identical with God can stand in relations of dependence and independence to God himself—a category confusion. This is the Simple Solution to the Dependence Problem.

However, we are still left wondering how the claim that NTs are divine ideas and somehow identical with God is to be construed. The versions of the DDS so far considered say little or nothing about God’s identity with such things as divine ideas or NTs; they speak only of properties, property instances, and properties identical with individuals. So how are we to make sense of the simplicity theorist’s claim that NTs are identical with God? One way is this. According to Linda Zagzebski,

\[ \text{[necessary] truths are contained in the essence of each object. For example, each object is essentially such that } \, 2 + 2 = 4, \, \text{God is omnipotent, and so on for all the other necessary truths.}^{87} \]

Following Plantinga, Zagzebski thinks of the essence of any individual as the set of properties essentially unique to that individual. Now if an individual essence is a set of properties, then to say that every necessary truth is contained in the essence of every object is to say at least two things: first, that NTs are somehow reducible to properties;\(^ {88} \) and second, that the essence of every object entails (in an extended

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\(^ {88} \) Thus Roderick Chisholm: “we may introduce a notion of propositions as attributes of the form ‘being such that p’ ... We will therefore speak of the proposition that p as the referent of ‘being such that p’ rather than of ‘that p’” (*A Realistic Theory of Categories: An Essay in Ontology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], p. 24).
sense of ‘entails’) every necessary truth. But here a major qualification is in order. If God’s essence entails every necessary truth, then it will be no less true that NTs entail God’s essence, since, admittedly, they are no less necessary than God himself. This, of course, sets up the aforementioned two-way relation of logical dependence, which is not at all a desideratum of the DDS. The way around this difficulty, perhaps, is to hold that while NTs are entailed by every nondivine essence, they are identical with the divine essence; NTs are divine ideas which are reducible to properties, themselves identical with God.

This is an interesting suggestion; it appears to commit the proponent of divine simplicity to some sort of intentional analysis of properties — an analysis some philosophers find agreeable for independent reasons. Plantinga, no friend of the DDS, admits that it is

extremely tempting to think of propositions as ontologically dependent upon mental or intellectual activity in such a way that either they just are thoughts [or ideas], or at any rate couldn’t exist if not thought of. 89

Similarly, he says, “Properties seem very similar to concepts ... In fact many have found it natural to think of properties as reified concepts.” 90 And Chisholm holds that “talk ostensibly about propositions may be reduced to talk about attributes,” 91


90 Ibid.

91 A Realistic Theory of Categories, p. 23.
where an attribute (or property) is that which could be the content of an act of thought.

Unfortunately, there are residual questions and difficulties for the suggestion motivated by Zagzebski. The most debilitating difficulty has to do with the fact that it clearly endorses the unadorned property view of simplicity, which, as we have seen, is vulnerable to Plantingean objections. In what follows, therefore, I shall focus my attention on the question of whether the Simple Solution can be appropriated by the property-instance and property-individual views. I propose to argue that neither view is compatible with the heart of this solution.

A. Dependence and the Property-Instance View

Suppose we take it for granted both that necessarily coextensive properties are identical, and that the divine attributes are necessarily coextensive. In other words, let us suppose that the two crucial theses Mann offers in support of his view — namely, (T1) and (T2) — are true. We must now ask whether the property-instance view is of any help in solving the Dependence Problem. Recall that the general strategy of the Simple Solution involves identifying NTs with God. How is this supposed to work on the present view? Curiously, when Mann applies the DDS to the matter of God’s relation to NTs, he fails to supply any details on this score. But perhaps the main idea is clear enough. Consider God’s omniscience; that is, consider the property instance the omniscience of God. Surely the property instance theorist

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interested in availing herself of the Simple Solution will affirm that every necessary truth is identical with the omniscience of God. But then just as surely (given IT3), she will go on to argue that every necessary truth is identical with God himself.

But there are obvious problems here. The first is that on this way of looking at things there is only one necessarily true proposition. This is extremely difficult to accept. Surely there are many necessarily true but distinct propositions. Surely one could know, for example, that everything red is coloured without knowing that 4 is the square root of 16. But if so, then there are at least two distinct NTs. You might reply that this line of reasoning assumes a principle of proposition identity that Mann would almost certainly deny. Perhaps you are right. Still, there is a further (less tractable) problem. It is a necessary truth, for example, that $2 + 1 = 3$; hence, on the present view, this proposition is identical with God. But then (by Leibniz’s Law) the proposition that $2 + 1 = 3$ has such properties as having called Abram out of Ur and being Lord of the people of Israel. And is this not just obviously mistaken?

Mann has an answer to this line of criticism. For he maintains that these so-called properties are mere-Notre Dame properties — that is, not properties at all. For example, Mann writes off the so-called property of having called Abram out of Ur on the grounds that it does not explain the fact that God called Abram out of Ur. For Mann, the sentence ‘God called Abram out of Ur’ does not predicate the property having called Abram out of Ur of God; rather, it “reports an action of God’s, his
calling Abram out of Ur."\textsuperscript{93} It is this action which explains the truth of the sentence in question. This "doesn’t explain anything" strategy is also used to drum out being an instance of a unique divine property — a property crucial to Morris’ statement of the problem of divine uniqueness.

What shall we say about this? The basic idea seems to be that facts (not properties or the having of properties by objects) explain the truth of the relevant sentences here. It is not entirely clear, incidentally, what Mann takes a fact to be. Are facts abstract or concrete objects? We are not told. What is clear, however, is that facts are picked out by ‘that’-clauses. Thus, the following facts are said to explain the truth of ‘God is lord of the people of Israel’:\textsuperscript{94}

(F1) That God is necessarily sovereign

(F2) That the people of Israel exist contingently.

Mann’s claim, apparently, is that the conjunction of (F1) and (F2) is sufficient for explaining the truth of the sentence in question. That is,

\begin{equation}
\text{(28) Necessarily, if (F1) and (F2) obtain, then the proposition expressed by the sentence ‘God is lord of the people of Israel’ is true.}
\end{equation}

(Here I assume, with van Inwagen, that a sufficient explanation is one in which it is impossible for the explicans to obtain and the explicandum to fail to obtain.\textsuperscript{95}) Mann

\textsuperscript{93} "Simplicity and Properties," p. 349.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., p. 350.

also wants to say that God's having the property *being lord of the people of Israel* fails to explain the truth of the relevant sentence. But things get even worse for this mere-Notre Dame property. For it turns out that

(F3) That God has the property *being lord of the people of Israel* is doubly handicapped: not only does it fail as a sufficient explanation, it turns out that it is not an explanation at all; even if (F3) were to obtain, says Mann, it "would explain nothing." At the very least, this remark seems to imply that

(29) The obtaining of (F3) entails the truth of the proposition expressed by the sentence 'God is lord of the people of Israel' is false. But surely this is wrong: if it is a fact that an object x has a property P, then 'x has P' expresses a true proposition. Mann, for example, has the property *being a resident of Vermont*. But then how could the proposition that is in fact expressed by the sentence 'Mann is a resident of Vermont' be false? I say that it could not. Indeed, it seems that Mann is committed to the necessary falsehood of (29)'s antecedent. For according to Mann's version of the DDS, God is a necessary being, possessing just one rich (essential) property: *being a Godhead*. But then the only way God could have *being lord of the people of Israel* would be if this property were identical with *being a Godhead*. On Mann's view, however, these properties are not identical, since they are not necessarily coextensive. So although God is lord of the people of Israel, it is not possible that he possess the property *being lord of the people of Israel*!

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Thus, Mann is committed to the impossibility of (F3)’s obtaining, and therefore the impossibility of the antecedent of (29). But then he is also committed to the truth of (29) given that an impossible proposition entails any proposition. Someone might object, however, that since the antecedent of (29) is impossible, it is a poor candidate for the role of explicans. To be sure, (29) expresses a necessary truth; still, it does not explain anything. Perhaps this is Mann’s view. At one point, for example, he writes: “Trivial properties have no explanatory value whatsoever. They are causally inert and indetectable in principle by any kind of experimental means.”97 In short, the idea is that in order for God’s having some property or other to have explanatory value — to do some explanatory work — it cannot be that the state of affairs consisting in God’s having this property is impossible; for then this state of affairs would explain every other state of affairs. Here the explanatory scope is far too wide; for surely a desideratum of any analysis of the ‘explains’ relation is that the explicans be nontrivial.

So what does Mann mean when he says that (F3) does not explain anything? The throw-away remark about causal inertness suggests that Mann is thinking of explanation in some sort of quasi-causal terms. Perhaps, then, Mann’s claim is that (F3)’s obtaining fails to explain anything in virtue of the fact that

(29a) The obtaining of (F3) brings about the truth of the proposition expressed by ‘God is lord of the people of Israel’

is false. And now the question is: Why think that (29a) is false? A prior question:

What is it for a fact to bring about a proposition’s truth? Here, I believe, Hasker may be on the right course in suggesting that we understand the ‘brings about’ relation noncausally. He writes:

   By reading a newspaper I bring it about that “Hasker will read a newspaper tomorrow” was true yesterday, but I don’t think I cause that proposition to have been true yesterday.98

The same thing goes, it seems to me, in the case at hand. The relationship between a given fact and the proposition whose truth it brings about is noncausal — the truth of the relevant proposition obtaining because of or in consequence of the fact which brings it about.99 Of course, this raises yet another question: What is this noncausal bringing about? John Pollock has suggested that statements of the form “Q is made true by P” and “P brings it about that Q” express “necessitation conditionals,” which he symbolizes as “P ≻ Q”.100 Thus Pollock:

   there can be a connection between the antecedent and consequent so that the truth of the antecedent would bring about, i.e., necessitate, that the consequent would be true.101

The necessitation conditional is then defined as follows:

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Given this definition, (29a) is equivalent to

\[(29b) \quad (F_3 \text{ obtains } s \text{ is true}) \land [(\sim F_3 \text{ obtains } \sim s \text{ is true}) > (F_3 \text{ obtains } s \text{ is true})]\]

(where \(s\) is the proposition expressed by the sentence ‘God is lord of the people of Israel’). But then if (29a) is false, so is (29b). It seems to me, however, that Mann cannot say that (29b) is false — not unless he is prepared to defend a nonstandard semantics for counterpossibles. Let me explain.

(29b) will be false just if one of its conjuncts is. So consider the first conjunct of (29b):

\[(C_1) \quad F_3 \text{ obtains } s \text{ is true.}\]

Is (C1) false? As I argued previously, Mann is committed to saying that it is impossible that God exemplify the property \textit{being lord of the people of Israel}; thus he is also committed to the impossibility of \((F_3)\)’s obtaining. However, if the Trivial Truth Thesis is true, then (C1) is a trivially true counterpossible, in which case it is not false. The only viable escape route here, so far as I can see, is to claim that (C1) is a nontrivially false counterpossible. But then Mann owes us a nonstandard semantics for counterpossibles.

But perhaps it is not the first conjunct that is false but rather the second. So consider the second conjunct:

\[(C_2) \quad (\sim F_3 \text{ obtains } \sim s \text{ is true}) > (F_3 \text{ obtains } s \text{ is true}).\]

\(^{102}\textit{Subjunctive Reasoning}, p. 41, emphasis added. Pollock numbers this definition (6.14).\)
(C2), of course, is a counterfactual conditional. Unlike (C1), however, the antecedent of (C2) is not impossible. (Its first conjunct is the negation of \( F_3 \) obtains and thus a necessary truth, while its second conjunct is clearly contingent.) Thus on Lewis’ semantics, (C2) is equivalent to the unfortunately unwieldy:

\[
(C2^*) \quad \text{(i) There is a world } W \text{ such that both } [\sim F_3 \text{ obtains } \& \sim s \text{ is true}]
\text{ and } [F_3 \text{ obtains } > s \text{ is true}] \text{ are true, and (ii) there is no world } W^* \text{ as close or closer to the actual world in which } [\sim F_3 \text{ obtains } \& s \text{ is true}]
\text{ is true and } [F_3 \text{ obtains } > s \text{ is true}] \text{ is false.}
\]

Accordingly, if (29b) is false, then so is (C2*), in which case either (i) or (ii) — or both — must be false. Now if (i) were false, then \( \sim F_3 \text{ obtains} \) and \( \sim s \text{ is true} \) would be noncompossible. That is, in every world in which God failed to have the property being lord of the people of Israel — which, on Mann’s view, is every world whatsoever, since God could not have this property — he would be the lord of the people of Israel. But surely this is false; for as Mann himself admits, “the people of Israel exist contingently.”\(^{103}\) Thus (i) is true.

That leaves (ii). Is it false? (ii)’s denial entails that \( F_3 \text{ obtains } > s \text{ is true} \) is possibly false. Now Mann is committed to the impossibility of \( F_3 \)'s obtaining. But then by the Trivial Truth Thesis, \( F_3 \text{ obtains} \) entails \( F_3 \text{ obtains } > s \text{ is true} \). Hence, if it is possible that \( F_3 \text{ obtains } > s \text{ is true} \) is false, then it is also possible that \( F_3 \) obtains, in which case being lord of the people of Israel is no mere-Notre Dame property; on the contrary, it is a property.

\(^{103}\)“Simplicity and Properties,” p. 350.
It is far from obvious that Mann can admit this. For he is working, you recall, with a *causal* theory of properties. To be sure, "Much work needs to be done to elaborate and defend"\(^{104}\) such a theory; still, some of the essential elements are clear. One of these is:

\[(30) \quad \text{P is a property of an object, } x, \text{ only if } P \text{'s presence in } x \text{ confers some causal power(s) on } x.\]

Given (30) it seems that *being lord of the people of Israel* is a property of God only if it confers some causal power or powers on God. Well, what is it for a property P to confer a causal power on an object x? This is not, after all, just obvious. Mann is a little short on the details here, saying only that "*Being triangular* is a property of some objects, since it confers certain causal powers on those objects."\(^{106}\) The intuitive notion of conferring a causal power, however, seems to amount to the following: a property P confers a causal power C on an object x if and only if (x has P) \(\iff\) (x has C).\(^{107}\) Mann, I believe, is committed to something like this sort of analysis: "Properties," he says, "are causal powers."\(^{108}\) What this means, of course, is that properties confer causal powers just because they *are* causal powers. Hence,


\(^{105}\) Ibid.

\(^{106}\) Ibid.

\(^{107}\) Here is use \(\iff\) to express mutual entailment.

\(^{108}\) Ibid.
on a Mannian view of propositional identity, (30) is necessarily equivalent to, and thus identical with

\[(31) \quad P \text{ is a property of an object } x \text{ if and only if } P \text{ is a causal power of } x.\]

And given (31) it is extremely difficult to see how being the lord of the people of Israel could be a causal power at all. As Nicholas Wolterstorff points out, by ‘causal powers’, Mann likely has in mind “those capacities which objects have for causing one and another event. Water, for example, has the causal power of dissolving sugar.”\(^{109}\) Hence, by (31), water has the property being such that it dissolves sugar. But what causal capacity would ‘being the lord of the people of Israel’ pick out? What event or events would God have the capacity to bring about in virtue of having the putative property in question? None presumably.

The situation, therefore, is this. In order to deny (29b), Mann must reject (C2\(^*\)) and therefore (ii), given that (i) is indisputably true from Mann’s perspective. But the denial of (ii) entails that \(F3 \text{ obtains } > s \text{ is true}\) is possibly false, and therefore that there is a possible world in which God has being the lord of the people of Israel. And this, of course, implies that there is such a thing as the property of being the lord of the people of Israel. But Mann denies this.\(^{110}\)


\(^{110}\) Of course, in the present context, this denial is strictly question-begging, since he offers no reason whatsoever for thinking that nothing is a property unless it is a causal power. In effect, then, Mann rejects the putative properties which figure in counterexamples against his view by stipulating that they are not properties.
Well, what are the alternatives? Here the possibilities are but few. First, Mann could deny that the ‘brings about’ relation featured in (29a) is to be understood as a noncausal bringing about. Clearly enough, facts bring about the truth of the propositions associated with them, but perhaps the bringing about is causal in nature. But there are problems here in connection with backwards causation.

Hasker’s example is instructive. Suppose we agree that the fact of Hasker’s reading a newspaper today brings it about that the proposition Hasker will read a newspaper tomorrow was true yesterday. Then if ‘bringing about’ is a causal relation, what we have here is a case of backwards causation; it is not obvious, however, that backwards causation is broadly logically possible, nor even that this correctly represents what is going on in Hasker’s example.

Alternatively, Mann could perhaps hold that ‘brings about’ can indeed be analyzed as a noncausal bringing about, but that this latter relation is not accurately captured by Pollock’s necessitation conditional. Well, perhaps so. I do not have a perfect general strategy for dealing with alternative definitions of ‘noncausally brings about’; these I would have to handle on a case-by-case basis. That said, however, it seems to me likely that any analysis of ‘noncausally brings about’ which permits Mann to say that (29a) is false will either be question-begging (in that it rules out a priori such properties as being lord of the people of Israel) or false (in that it contains elements which are incompatible with our intuitive notion of ‘noncausally brings about’). At all events, it seems to me that in light of Pollock’s
carefully-worked-out analysis, the burden of proof here must surely rest on Mann’s shoulders; he must show that Pollock’s analysis is defective in some fashion. And this, of course, he has not done. So, at least for the present, I think we can accept Pollock’s analysis with equanimity.

But then if it is plausible to suppose that ‘brings about’ can be analyzed in noncausal terms, then how can Mann consistently maintain that being lord of the people of Israel is not a property? The answer, so it seems to me, is that he can do so only by denying the Trivial Truth Thesis. This means, of course, that Mann must deny one of the premises of the argument based on the concept of entailment. And the most plausible candidate for denial, naturally enough, will be PLACE from chapter I. This brings us right back to the question Zagzebski and Leftow were themselves obliged to face: On what semantic basis are we to separate nontrivially true from nontrivially false counterpossibles? Similar remarks apply to Mann’s dismissal of having called Abram our of Ur and being an instance of a unique divine attribute; for he dismisses these properties in the very same manner in which he dismisses being the lord of the people of Israel.

Returning to our original criticism of Mann: as we saw, a consequence of conjoining the property-instance view of divine simplicity with the Simple Solution is that there is only one necessary truth, which truth is identical with God. This seems to imply that the proposition that \(2 + 1 = 3\) is identical with God, and therefore has such properties as being the lord of the people of Israel and having
called Abram out of Ur. Mann's attempt to side-step this conclusion by denying that these are properties places his property-instance view (taken together with the Simple Solution) squarely in the train of solutions to the Dependence Problem which require a nonstandard account of counterpossibles. This is a rather unexpected result. For in the previous couple of chapters, the need for denying the Trivial Truth Thesis has gone hand-in-hand with treating NTs as distinct from (but nevertheless dependent upon) God. Could it be that Mann's property-instance view is the same boat? The answer, I believe, is that this is exactly where it is.

There is a strain, a tension in Mann's thinking about God and property instances. On the one hand, he thinks that if God had properties with which he was not identical, then he would depend on them for what he is. But he also thinks that God is a property instance, an instance of his rich property: being a Godhead. As Morris points out, however, this allows that there is at least one property existing distinct from God as an abstract object on which God is, in some sense, dependent for what he is — an instance of that property.

But if NTs are divine ideas and identical with God, then they, too, will stand in a relation of dependence to being a Godhead. Here things have gone awry. For the whole thrust of the Simple Solution is to equate NTs with God, so that the simplicity theorist can avoid specifying the nature of the dependence relation in question:

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111 See "Simplicity and Immutability in God," p. 269.

“where there is no diversity,” says Mann, “there can be no dependence.”

Unfortunately, the simplicity theorist now finds herself in the embarrassing position of having to explain how it is (on her view) that these truths turn out not to depend on God, but rather on something distinct from God, something on which God himself depends. Not only does this compromise God’s aseity — at least as it is construed on (AI) — but it apparently substitutes for the Dependence Problem a problem of an even less tractable sort.

We are now in a position to grasp an important fact. Either NTs are identical with God on Mann’s view or they are not; either way there is trouble as far as solving the Dependence Problem is concerned. If they are not distinct from God, then the property-instance view implies that there is something distinct from God on which both God and NTs depend. On the other hand, if NTs are distinct from God, then the property-instance view cannot invoke the Simple Solution, leaving Mann to specify the sense (if any) in which these truths might depend on God.

B. Dependence and the Property-Individual View

I turn now to William Valicella’s carefully crafted property-individual account of divine simplicity. His main claim, you will recall, is that God is identical, not with his essential properties simpliciter (as on the property view), but rather his nontrivial essential properties; that is to say, he is identical with being omniscient, being omnipotent, and the like. Thus although God has being lord of the people of Israel,

knowing that \(2 + 1 = 3\), and being such that \(2 + 1 = 3\), these properties are not identical with him. (The first is among God’s contingent properties, while the second and third are trivially essential to God.)

How does all of this fit with the Simple Solution? The idea, I take it, would be to identify NTs with God via these nontrivial essential divine properties. But it is easy to see, I think, that this maneuver is not going to work. If, for example, \(2 + 1 = 3\) is identical with God, then it seems to follow that this proposition (like God) will have the property being lord of the people of Israel. And this is too much to take. Mann, of course, denies that we have a real property on our hands here, and in the process of arguing this point winds up committing himself to a nonstandard account of counterpossibles. But Valicella quite clearly counts being lord of the people of Israel as a genuine property, one that truly characterizes God (albeit accidentally). But then (on the present view) it follows that this property characterizes every other necessary truth as well. So the property-individual view (taken at face value) seems to be incompatible with the Simple Solution.

Perhaps Valicella would reply that a proposition such as \(2 + 1 = 3\) is indeed necessarily true but only trivially so. The view under consideration, it might be argued, is better understood as making the claim that every nontrivial necessary truth is identical with God. But this reply does not really help; for there will still be countless numbers of trivial NTs which are distinct from God, leaving us to wonder
whether they depend on him in some deeper way than he depends on them
(assuming that they depend on him at all).

By way of conclusion then: the prospects for the Simple Solution look rather
bleak. This solution clearly requires some version of the DDS. Unfortunately, the
property view of divine simplicity faces grave Plantinean objections, while the
property-instance and property-individual views appear to be incompatible with the
essence of the Simple Solution. It is therefore difficult to avoid the impression that
(at least some) NTs are not identical with God. It does not follow, however, that
these truths fail to depend on God (and in asymmetric fashion no less). In the next
chapter, I shall argue that there is a solution to the Dependence Problem. I propose to
argue that the key to this solution lies in combining the Simple and Causal Solutions.
Chapter 4
A Simple-Causal Solution

It is time to take stock. We noted at the outset that The Dependence Problem gets its philosophical legs by assuming that since God and any necessary truth you please each possess logically necessary existence, it is impossible for either to stand in an asymmetrical relation of dependence to the other. The challenge for the theistic modal realist is to offer a plausible account of how NTs (necessary truths) could depend on God in a way that God did not depend on them — to spell out, in other words, the sense of this one-way dependence relation.

I. The Counterfactual Solution Revisited

In chapter 1, we examined the possibility that the requisite asymmetry might be secured by way of counterfactual dependence. The suggestion (very briefly) was that in order for necessary truths (NTs) to counterfactually (but asymmetrically) depend on God, the counterpossible

(1) God does not exist > NTs do not exist

would have to come out true, while its converse

(2) NTs do not exist > God does not exist

would have to come out false. Here we noted that this alethic consequence requires a rejection of the standard semantics for counterpossibles. For *that* semantics embraces the Trivial Truth Thesis, according to which every counterpossible — and hence both (1) and (2) — is trivial true.

A. Zagzebski’s Semantics

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As we saw earlier, David Lewis’ arguments in favor of this thesis are indeed “less than decisive.” Accordingly, the whole case for the standard semantics rests on Zagzebski’s own argument in its support:

(P1) For all propositions \( p \) and \( q \), if \( p \) is impossible then \( p \) entails \( q \).

(P2) For all propositions \( p \) and \( q \), if \( p \) entails \( q \) then \( p \) counterfactually implies \( q \). [PLACE]

Thus

(C) For all propositions \( p \) and \( q \), if \( p \) is impossible, then \( p \) counterfactually implies \( q \). [Trivial Truth Thesis]

Zagzebski’s point of attack is (P2) — the Principle of Logical And Counterfactual Entailment (PLACE), which, according to Wierenga,\(^2\) is jointly entailed by

(P2a) For all propositions \( p, q, \) and \( r \), if \( p \) counterfactually implies \( q \), and \( q \) entails \( r \), then \( p \) counterfactually implies \( r \)

and

(P2b) For every proposition \( p \), \( p \) counterfactually implies \( p \).

If entailment is strict implication, says Zagzebski, then PLACE is not unrestrictedly true. As we saw in chapter 1, this claim very likely commits her to a denial of (P2a), so that the question is which has the greater warrant. (P2a) — a proposition enjoying a certain amount of intuitive support — or Zagzebski’s grounds for denying PLACE?

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Now Zagzebski, you recall, offers both theological and nontheological counterexamples to PLACE. Consider

(E1) God does not exist;

(E2) God is not good;

and

(E3) Zagzebski travels back in time and changes her lecture last week.

If entailment is strict implication, then each of these propositions entails every proposition whatsoever. But (E1)-(E3) do not counterfactually imply, respectively,

Matter exists;

There is less evil in the world than there is;

and

Zagzebski does not reach the same moment of time twice.

They do, however, counterfactually imply, respectively,

Matter does not exist;

There is more evil in the world than there is;

and

Zagzebski does reach the same moment of time twice.
The reason, in part, is that although self-contradictory propositions might counterfactually imply every proposition,\(^3\) (E1)-(E3) are IIPs: impossible propositions which are not self-contradictory. So all bets are off.

It seems to me that whether Zagzebski’s counterexamples to PLACE are more strongly warranted than Wierenga’s (P2a) is going to depend on two considerations. First, it will depend (as we said before) on whatever evidence she can muster in favour of her own nonstandard semantics — a semantics crucially involving the assumption that not all ICPs are trivially true. Now the reason given for thinking that ICPs — Interesting Counterpossibles: counterpossibles whose antecedents are IIPs — can be partitioned into the nontrivially true and nontrivially false is that necessary states of affairs (propositions) can stand in causal relations to one another. But notice that this consideration, taken by itself, is far too general to provide a principled basis for assigning truth-values to specific counterpossibles. For example, it does not automatically follow from the fact that necessary propositions can stand in causal relations that (1) is nontrivially true and (2) nontrivially false. What follows, at most, is that (1) and (2) are not trivially true; and this does not rule out the possibility that (on the present view) both (1) and (2) might be nontrivially true.

Secondly, the relevant warrant possessed by Zagzebski’s counterexamples will depend on whether necessary propositions can stand in causal relation to one

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another. And this is not just obvious; after all, the current shibboleth has it that
propositions are abstract, and therefore incapable of engaging in causal relations of
any sort. Now of course (necessarily) if propositions were causally related to the
same thing — God, say — then they would be causally related to one another. In this
connection, it is interesting to note that both of the concrete examples Zagzebski
gives to show that theists are “probably committed to this view” turn out to be
consequences (or plausible extensions) of central theistic activist beliefs. For
example, she says it is “no doubt” true that God’s being good is causally related to
Its being the case that the world exists. She also notes that (according to the theistic
activist) God’s existing is causally related to Its being the case that numbers exist.

So perhaps the thing for Zagzebski to do in attempting to fill in some of the
missing details in her theory is to bring theistic activism on board in the hope of
securing a principled basis for making the appropriate truth-value assignments to (1)
and (2), as well as the counterpossibles figuring in her counterexamples. It is initially
doubtful, however, that Zagzebski’s theory can be developed in this way. For the
division of impossible propositions into those which are self-contradictory and those
which are not depends on there being IIPs. But Zagzebski’s a priori argument for
IIPs (appropriately revised) requires the strong assumption that (necessarily)
propositions are necessary beings. Sadly enough, however, we found that Leftow’s

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brand of theistic activism (as it stands) entails the possibility that some propositions are contingent beings.

Still, it may be that with a bit of ingenuity theistic activism could be developed so as to avoid this outcome. Even then, however, there are (as I see it) problems having to do with the truth-values that would be assigned to Zagzebski’s counterpossibles were she to assimilate something like Leftow’s theistic activism to her informal semantics. On Leftow’s view, remember, it is a consequence of theistic activism (and other obvious truths) that impossible propositions fall into two groups: the ordinary and the extraordinary. Extraordinary impossibilities are impossible propositions which involve God’s nonexistence; ordinary impossibilities are, consequently, those impossibilities which do not. Ordinary impossibilities entail and counterfactually imply everything whatsoever. Extraordinary impossibilities, on the other hand, are a different animal; they entail anything you please, but fail to counterfactually imply anything which implies that something exists.

B. The ZL Semantics

So just how is this merger of Leftow’s theistic activism with Zagzebski’s nonstandard view of counterpossibles to be accomplished? The most plausible answer goes as follows. Since Zagzebski’s self-contradictory propositions logically and counterfactually imply every proposition, we can see them as necessarily

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5 We need not seriously consider the compossibility of Zagzebski’s nonstandard semantics and M&M’s theistic activism, since the latter stipulates that all counterpossibles are trivially true.
coextensive (if not identical) with Leftow's ordinary impossibilities. And perhaps something similar goes for IIPs and extraordinary impossibilities. If these two classes of impossibilities are also necessarily coextensive (or identical), then Zagzebski need only add to her semantics the proviso that any ICP whose consequent implies that something exists is nontrivially false; otherwise, it is nontrivially true. Let us call the merger of the two views under discussion the Zagzebski-Leftow semantics (ZL, for short).

The question at once arises: How do Zagzebski's counterexamples to PLACE fare on this new semantics? Take (E1) first. Does it counterfactually imply Matter exists? It does not. For (E1) clearly involves God's nonexistence, and Matter exists entails that something exists; hence, the counterpossible

(C1) God does not exist > matter exists

is nontrivially false. On the other hand,

(C2) God does not exist > matter does not exist

is nontrivially true (given that its consequent does not entail that something exists). And these are just the truth-value assignments for which Zagzebski is looking. So far, then, so good.

Now consider Zagzebski's (E2). On theistic activist principles, necessarily, God is not good if and only if God does not exist. Accordingly, (E2) involves God's nonexistence and is therefore an extraordinary impossibility. But then notice that on
our new ZL semantics (E2) counterfactually implies neither There is less evil in the world than there is nor There is more evil in the world than there is; thus, both

(C3)  God is not good > there is less evil in the world than there is

and

(C4)  God is not good > there is more evil in the world than there is

are nontrivially false; for the consequents of these counterpossibles each entail that something exists. Here we encounter a certain defect in the ZL semantics. For it seems to me that Zagzebski is perfectly correct in her claim that, pretheoretically, we are “strongly inclined” to say that (C4) is true. And if our aim is to have our semantics for counterpossibles reflect what we pretheoretically know, then the ZL semantics falls short: it does not assign the (intuitively) correct truth-value to (C4).²

When we turn to (E3) additional difficulties arise. Does (E3) involve God’s nonexistence or not? At first glance, it would appear not. But then (E3) must be an ordinary impossibility, in which case

(C5)  Zagzebski travels back in time and changes her lecture last week >
      Zagzebski does not reach the same moment of time twice.

and

(C6)  Zagzebski travels back in time and changes her lecture last week >
      Zagzebski does reach the same moment of time twice.

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²This is not at all question-begging. After all, this is precisely what David Lewis attempts to do in constructing his (standard) view of counterpossibles. The only difference between Lewis and Zagzebski is that they disagree as to what we know about counterpossibles, prior to theory.
come out trivially true. And this is problematic. First, as Zagzebski notes, there is a certain pretheoretical impulse to say that (C5) is false, and false in a nontrivial way. The ZL semantics fails to honour this impulse. Second, and more importantly, if (E3) were an ordinary impossibility, then (on the present view) any counterpossible which had (E3) as its antecedent would be trivially true. But then (E3) could not function in any counterexample to PLACE, since PLACE is rendered false only if at least some counterpossible or other is false.

What this suggests, I think, is that (E3) is no ordinary impossibility; in point of fact it is an extraordinary impossibility — an impossibility involving God’s nonexistence. Of course, much depends here on what it is for an impossible proposition to “involve” God’s nonexistence. It turns out that, for Leftow at least, an impossible proposition p involves God’s nonexistence just in case p entails (and is entailed by) the proposition God does not exist. Now if entailment is strict implication, then — Zagzebski’s pretheoretical impulses notwithstanding — (E3) does not counterfactually imply Zagzebski reaches the same moment of time twice; for (necessarily) if that were the case, then something would exist, in which case (C6) would be nontrivially false.

As for (C5), its truth-value on the ZL semantics (and assuming that (E3) is an extraordinary impossibility) depends on whether the proposition Zagzebski does not

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reach the same moment of time twice is predicative with respect to Zagzebski or not.

That is to say, if we read this proposition as

(E3a) Zagzebski has the property of not reaching the same moment of time twice

then it ascribes a certain property to Zagzebski, which, given serious actualism, entails that Zagzebski (and therefore something or other) exists. On this reading, then, Zagzebski does not reach the same moment of time twice entails that something exists; consequently, (C5) is nontrivially false, a finding consistent with what Zagzebski thinks we know pretheoretically. If, however, we take this proposition as

(E3b) It is false that Zagzebski reaches the same moment of time twice

then it is impredicative with respect to Zagzebski, so that Zagzebski does not reach the same moment of time twice does not entail that something exists and (C5), as a result, is nontrivially true. As Zagzebski sees things, though, if she were to go back in time and change her lecture last week, then she would reach the same moment of time twice; she is inclined, therefore, to think (C5) is nontrivially false.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counterpossible</th>
<th>Pretheoretical Intuition</th>
<th>ZL Semantics(^8)</th>
<th>Truth-Value Match?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>©</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>©</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5</td>
<td>©</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>× or ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T or F</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^8\) Truth-value assignments are made here on the assumption that (C1)-(C6) are extraordinary counterpossibles.
Table 4.1 summarizes our findings thus far. Here we can see more clearly just where the ZL semantics gets things right (and wrong). The counterpossibles marked with “©” — namely, (C1), (C3), and (C5) — are those which must come out false in order for the counterexamples to PLACE to be successful. Notice that for each of these counterpossibles, there is a truth-value match\(^9\) between what we know prior to theory and what we know given the ZL semantics. This is certainly an attraction. Were she to adopt this hybrid semantics, Zagzebski could avail herself of a far more principled basis for rejecting PLACE, overturning Wierenga’s (P2a), and finally, eschewing the Trivial Truth Thesis itself. Part of the price of this move, however, is that she will have to revise her intuitions about the truth-values of other counterpossibles — in particular, (C4) and (C6) — in light of the theoretical restraints imposed by theistic activism. Of course, this is not necessarily fatal; for perhaps Zagzebski would reply that she finds herself more strongly inclined to assent to the central claims of theistic activism, a consequence of which is that (C4) and (C6) are nontrivially false, than to the nontrivial truth of (C4) and (C6) themselves. The proper thing to do in this case, she might well say, is to revise one’s intuitions accordingly.

Suppose we grant the point for purposes of argument. There are additional difficulties on the horizon. Following G.E. Moore, let us say that ‘entails’ expresses

\(^9\)Here I assume, for purposes of argument, that Zagzebski does not reach the same moment of time twice is a predicative proposition, and therefore that (C5) is nontrivially false.
the converse of 'is deducible from' or 'follows from'. Now, according to Zagzebski, "to say that a proposition is not self-contradictory is to say that no proposition of the form 'p & not-p' can be derived from it and truths of logic in some adequate formal system." Further, to say that there are IIPs is to say that there are impossible propositions which are not self-contradictory. But here there are problems. For if entailment is strict implication, then every impossible proposition entails every proposition and, therefore, every contradiction. But then from every impossibility, a proposition of the form p & ~p is deducible. So it turns out that every impossible proposition is self-contradictory, in which case there are no IIPs. Indeed, if every impossible proposition has its entailments essentially, there cannot be any IIPs. Thus, if entailment is strict implication, Zagzebski's partitioning of impossible propositions into the self-contradictory (those which entail contradictions) and the non-self-contradictory (those which do not — namely, the IIPs) collapses. This effectively guts her nonstandard semantics and, along with it, her counterexamples to PLACE. But then will it not follow that Wierenga's (P2a) enjoys the greater warrant, so that the Trivial Truth Thesis is on solid ground, and therefore that (1) and (2) are trivially true counterpossibles? What, then, of the counterfactual solution to the Dependence Problem?

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11 I owe this point and its corollary — that every impossible proposition entails and is entailed by the proposition God does not exist — to Paul Martin.
Here the attentive reader will remind us that Zagzebski (at least as we have been representing her) is most charitably interpreted as a proponent of something like the ZL semantics. And it is by no means certain that the aforementioned difficulties apply to this semantics. This reply, however, does not help. It must be remembered that on the ZL semantics the class of IIPs is necessarily coextensive (or identical) with the class of extraordinary impossibilities; so if there cannot be any IIPs, there cannot be any extraordinary impossibilities. Here, it seems to me, there are two fundamental difficulties. First of all, if entailment is strict implication, and if a given proposition involves God's nonexistence just in case it entails (and is entailed by) the proposition *God does not exist*, then the only impossible propositions there are are those involving God's nonexistence. Thus every impossible proposition turns out to be an extraordinary impossibility.

Second, if an impossible proposition has it entailments essentially, and there are only extraordinary impossibilities, then there cannot be any ordinary impossibilities. But then if Zagzebski's class of self-contradictory, impossible propositions is necessarily coextensive (or identical) with Leftow's class of ordinary impossibilities, and it turns out that it is impossible for there to be any ordinary impossibilities, then there cannot be any self-contradictory propositions. And this, it seems safe to say, is plainly false.

C. Leftow's Semantics
So there seems to be a flagrant internal incoherence in the ZL semantics if entailment is taken as strict implication. Well then, what is Zagzebski supposed to do at this point? Clearly, one thing she could do would be to abandon her distinction between interesting and noninteresting impossible propositions in favor of Leftow's distinction between ordinary and extraordinary impossibilities. Of course, this raises certain difficulties of its own. For, on Leftow's official view, there most certainly are ordinary impossibilities. Further, he seems to endorse a variant of what I shall call Lewis' Intuition about Counterfactual Entailment (LICE). According to David Lewis,

it seems that a counterfactual in which the antecedent logically implies the consequent ought always to be true; and one sort of impossible antecedent, a self-contradictory one, logically implies any consequent.\(^\text{12}\)

The core intuition here is that for impossible propositions there is a conditional connection between a given proposition's *entailing everything* and its *counterfactually implying everything*. Leftow endorses a restricted version of LICE, one specified to ordinary impossibilities:

Because an ordinary impossibility entails everything, we usually assign trivial truth to all [subjunctive] conditionals with ordinarily impossible antecedents.\(^\text{13}\)

And again

\(^\text{12}\)*Counterfactuals*, p. 25.

\(^\text{13}\)"God and Abstract Entities," p. 197. The material in square brackets is intended by Leftow, a fact that he has confirmed in personal communication.
From an ordinary impossibility, anything whatsoever follows. Thus if any ordinary impossibility were actual, all other states of affairs would be actual and possible.\textsuperscript{14}

In other words, since an ordinary impossibility entails everything, it counterfactually implies everything; and this is just to say that PLACE is a true principle for ordinary impossibilities. But the point seems perfectly general. For ordinary impossibilities are not the only sorts of impossibilities which entail everything; if entailment is strict implication, then each and every extraordinary impossibility entails everything as well. Accordingly, we appear to be equally justified in holding that every extraordinary impossibility counterfactually implies everything — that is, that every extraordinary counterpossible is trivially true. (What’s sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander!) If so, then PLACE is a true principle for every impossibility (ordinary or extraordinary).

So what we have so far is that there neither are nor can be any ordinary impossible propositions if entailment is strict implication. That means that every counterpossible is extraordinary. Now either LICE holds for counterpossibles or it does not. If it does, then every extraordinary counterpossible is trivially true, including both (1) and (2), so that the Dependence Problem has no counterfactual solution. On the other hand, if LICE does not hold for counterpossibles, we are faced with the following classification scheme for counterpossibles:

\textsuperscript{14}"God and Abstract Entities," p. 197.
Notice that this still counts as a nonstandard account of counterpossibles.

Furthermore, it assigns the same truth values to (C1), (C3), and (C5) — the counterpossibles employed by Zagzebski in her counterexamples to PLACE — as did the ZL semantics. As far as I can tell, its drawbacks are threefold. First, on this scheme, which is really just the ZL semantics shorn of Zagzebski’s contributions and the category of ordinary counterpossibles, we get the same flouting of our pretheoretical intuitions with regard to (C4) and (C6). This is a mild annoyance. In addition, even a restricted version of LICE — say, one specified to self-contradictory propositions — has to be abandoned. But Leftow’s remarks betray the fact that LICE (suitably restricted) does seem to enjoy a certain intuitive backing. Surely some counterpossibles are trivially true. (Here it is interesting to note that none of Zagzebski’s counterexamples to PLACE involves a counterpossible whose antecedent she considers to be self-contradictory.)

A second drawback. Even if this nonstandard account of counterpossibles is the correct one, it is inadequate for present purposes. For consider the fact that

(1) God does not exist > NTs do not exist

and
(2) NTs do not exist > God does not exist

are nontrivially true on the present view. Both (1) and (2) are extraordinary counterpossibles, since their antecedents involve God’s nonexistence. Further, their consequents do not entail that something exists; hence, they are nontrivially true. As we said above, however, (2) must come out false if we are to secure a counterfactual asymmetrical dependence between God and NTs.

But the most important difficulty with the present view is that it is hard to see how there could be a division between nontrivially true and nontrivially false counterpossibles if every counterpossible is extraordinary. Leftow’s suggestion is that if the consequent of an extraordinary counterpossible entails that something exists, then that counterpossible is nontrivially false. But then won’t every extraordinary counterpossible be nontrivially false? If entailment is strict implication, every proposition whatsoever entails the proposition Something exists. The reason is that Something exists is a necessary truth if there is at least one necessary truth (which, of course, there is); and one of the consequences of the strict implication account of entailment is that any proposition entails any necessary truth. It seems to me, therefore, that what we have here is a total collapse of the distinction between types of counterpossibles; all of Leftow’s extraordinary counterpossibles turn out to be nontrivially false.

The upshot of all this is that it is far from obvious that Zagzebski’s theory of counterpossibles can be developed in such a way that her counterexamples to
PLACE possess a greater degree of warrant than Wierenga's (P2a) and, in addition, that nontrivial truth gets assigned to (1) and nontrivial falsity to (2), as the Counterfactual Solution requires. At this point, one might truly despair of there being any solution to the Dependence Problem. For, as we noted in chapter 2, it seems that if there is an asymmetrical relation of *causal* dependence between NTs and God, then it is susceptible of counterfactual analysis or explanation. And in the preceding chapter, we saw that the Simple Solution requires some version of the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS). But Mann's property-instance view of the DDS, we argued, is also committed to a nonstandard account of counterpossibles. Valicella's property-individual view, on the other hand, is perhaps not so obviously committed. However, while it would identify God with every *nontrivial* necessary truth, it leaves unanswered the question of how the vast horde of *trivial* NTs might asymmetrically depend upon God.

In what follows, I shall attempt to construct a solution to the Dependence Problem which avoids some of the difficulties associated with previous solutions. My aim is to show that one who holds that the Dependence Problem is insoluble is not wholly justified in her position.

**II. The Simple and Causal Solutions Consolidated**

It seems to me that if there is going to be an asymmetrical relation of dependence between God and NTs, then something like theistic activism must be true. Let me explain. It is plausible to suppose that if NTs *asymmetrically* depend upon God, then
this is the case in virtue of some real relation they bear to God. Here I appeal to Mann’s Geach-inspired distinction between real relations and mere-Cambridge relations.\textsuperscript{15} The fact that God and the proposition $7 + 5 = 12$ exist in every possible world establishes that the relevant propositions expressing the existence of these objects strictly imply one another. But this underwrites nothing more than a mere-Cambridge relation between them; that is to say, the relation here is entirely trivial, consisting (as Morris aptly puts it) “in nothing more than the mutuality of the necessity of the relata on each side of the relation.”\textsuperscript{16} There is a real relation between God and NTs, on the other hand, if a “deeper ontological” and nontrivial relation obtains between them — say, one of causation. And indeed, it is difficult to avoid the impression that such a real relation would be causal in nature. For as Plantinga points out, propositions are (perhaps) best thought of as intentional objects of some sort; they

\begin{quote}
Represent reality or some part of it as being thus and so. This \[is\] crucially connected with their being true or false ... [But] Representing things as being thus and so, being about something or other — this seems to be a property or activity of minds or perhaps thoughts. \textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{15} It should be noted that I do not concur with Mann in his judgment that mere-Cambridge relations are not relations at all. From the fact that a putative relation is trivial, it does not follow (pace Mann) that it is not a relation.


So it is extremely tempting for the theistic philosopher to see NTs as standing "to God in the way in which a thought stands to a thinker: this relation involves among other things their being produced by the divine thinker. But being produced by seems to be a paradigmatic causal relation." Accordingly, some (suitably revised) version of theistic activism seems apropos here.

Now according to theistic activist belief,

(TAB) Necessarily, God exists and God creates and maintains in existence everything distinct from himself

is necessarily true. But given (TAB), it seems to follow not only that

(1) God does not exist > NTs do not exist

and

(2) NTs do not exist > God does not exist

are nontrivially true, but also that

(3) God does not exist > NTs exist

and

(4) NTs do not exist > God exists

are nontrivially false. Here the truth-value assignments do not stem from semantical considerations, but rather from reflection on what Morris calls the "intrinsic metaphysical content" of each of these conditionals, which, I take it, is supposed to

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19 "Dependence and Divine Simplicity," p. 170.
be the metaphysical content supplied to (1)-(4) by (TAB). So, pace Morris and Menzel, theistic activism is at first glance committed to a nonstandard semantics for counterpossibles, one which would preclude a counterfactual solution to the Dependence Problem. But then does this not pose an insuperable difficulty for the theistic activist who wants to forge an asymmetrical causal dependence between God and NTs? Perhaps not. Perhaps all that follows is that counterfactuals cannot serve to capture the desired asymmetry. How does it follow from that, however, that there neither is nor can be a relation of asymmetrical dependence here?

The fact of the matter, I think, is that it does not follow at all. To see this, it will be helpful to consider the following example due to David Sanford:

When the sun is at a certain angle [A] above the horizon, a vertical flagpole of a certain height [H] standing near a sufficiently large horizontal area casts a shadow of a certain length [L]. Given that light travels in straight lines but not through flagpoles, the laws relevant to calculating shadow length belong to plane geometry or trigonometry. These laws ... license inferences in all directions, from angle and height to length, from angle and length to height, and from height and length to angle.21

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20 The idea, I take it, is something like this. If (TAB) is true, then God necessarily causes NTs to exist. Hence, if God had, per impossibile, failed to exist, then there would not have been any NTs (since he is their necessitating cause). Thus, (1) is nontrivially true and (3) is nontrivially false. Further, if the existence of NTs is the necessary outcome or effect of God’s necessary causal activity, then if NTs had, per impossibile, failed to exist, then this would have been in consequence of God’s having failed to exist to produce them. (2), therefore, is nontrivially true and (4) nontrivially false.

On the basis of these laws, therefore, we seem to be warranted in asserting the following biconditional:

\[(A & H) \text{ if and only if } L.\]

As Sanford observes, however, while the conditional here is two-way, there is nevertheless a one-way dependence of \(L\) on \((A & H)\): for while "the length of the shadow depends on the height of the flagpole and the angle of the sun ... The angle of the sun and the height of the flagpole do not depend on each other, and neither depends on the length of the shadow."\(^{22}\) What this shows is that a one-way relation of dependence can obtain even though it is not reflected in the relevant biconditional. And something similar goes, I submit, in the case of God and NTS. A one-way dependence relation can obtain here despite the fact that we cannot display the requisite asymmetry by way of the relevant strict or counterfactual conditionals.

A. The R Semantics

The first order of business, then, is to lay out a nonstandard semantics for counterpossibles that has the following features: (a) the truth-values it assigns to (1)-(4) match those assigned on the basis of \((\text{TAB})\), (b) the truth-values it assigns to (C1)-(C6) match those assigned on the basis of Zagzebski's pretheoretical intuitions, and (c) it licenses some (suitably restricted) version of \(\text{LICE} -\) that is, it permits some counterpossibles to be trivially true.

\[^{22}\text{If } P, \text{ Then } Q, \text{ p. } 217.\]
Here what I want to propose is a sort of judicious blending of Zagzebski's and Leftow's central insights. In order to ensure that there is at least one class of trivially true counterpossibles, we need a notion of entailment for necessary propositions, which, unlike the strict implication (or strong) account, does not have the result that all impossible propositions are created equal (with respect to their logical and counterfactual entailments). Following David Lewis, I am strongly inclined to endorse LICE for self-contradictory propositions; but of course if we adopt a strong notion of entailment, such as

\[(S) \quad \text{For any necessary propositions } p \text{ and } q, \ p \text{ entails } q \text{ if and only if } p \text{ strictly implies } q,\]

then every impossible proposition turns out to be self-contradictory\(^{23}\) and so, by LICE, trivially true. What is needed, therefore, is a more discriminating notion of entailment. Perhaps the following will suffice:

\[(R) \quad \text{For any necessary propositions } p \text{ and } q, \ p \text{ entails } q \text{ if and only if } p \text{ strictly implies } q \text{ and either (i) } q \text{ is formally derivable from } p \text{ or (ii) } q \text{'s truth conditions constitute all or part of } p \text{'s truth conditions.}^{24}\]

\(^{23}\) Argument: a self-contradictory proposition is one from which a proposition of the form \(p \& \neg p\) can be deduced. But surely it is plausible to suppose "that to say that \(q\) is deducible from \(p\) is to say that it is logically impossible for \(p\) to be true and \(q\) false" (G.E. Hughes and M.J. Cresswell, *A New Introduction to Modal Logic* [London: Routledge, 1996], p. 203, emphasis added). That is, \(q\) is deducible from \(p\) if and only if \(p\) strictly implies \(q\). Now every impossible proposition is such that its conjunction with any proposition is logically impossible; hence, every impossible proposition strictly implies every proposition of the form \(p \& \neg p\), in which case a proposition of the form \(p \& \neg p\) is deducible from every impossible proposition, in which case every impossible proposition is self-contradictory.

\(^{24}\) Clause (ii) is adapted from some remarks of Keith Yandell. See his *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, p. 341.
A word of explanation is in order with regard to clauses (i) and (ii). To say that \( q \) is formally derivable from \( p \) is just to say that \( q \) is derivable from \( p \) by some valid principle(s) of deductive inference. Clause (i) is designed to allow the Lewis proof of *Ex Falso Quodlibet* to go through. The idea behind clause (ii) is intuitive. Suppose, for the moment, that *God exists* and *All bodies are extended* are NTs. Then, on (S), these propositions are mutually entailing, since each strictly implies the other. But, intuitively, the truth conditions for the proposition *All bodies are extended* fail to express all (or even part) of the truth conditions for *God exists*. And since, furthermore, *All bodies are extended* is not formally derivable from *God exists*, it is not — given (R) — entailed by that proposition either.

Now perhaps something similar goes for impossible propositions. Although *Socrates is a married bachelor* and *9 is a prime minister* are both impossible propositions, the (not possibly obtaining) truth conditions for the latter do not constitute part of the (not possibly obtaining) truth conditions for the former. On (R), therefore, *9 is a prime minister* is not entailed by *Socrates is a married bachelor*.

Now if the notion of entailment among necessary propositions is adequately characterized by (R) — call the relevant notion here ‘R-entailment’ — then we are in a position to divide the counterpossible terrain as follows:
Counterpossibles

Uninteresting

Antecedent: 
\( p \& \sim p \) (trivially true)

Interesting

Antecedent: 
an IIP (not trivially true)

Ordinary

\( A \otimes \rightarrow C \) (nontrivially true)
\(~ (A \otimes \rightarrow C) ~\) (nontrivially false)

Extraordinary

\( A \otimes \rightarrow C_e \) (nontrivially false)
\(~ (A \otimes \rightarrow C_e) ~\) (nontrivially true)

(where ‘\( A \)’ stands for the antecedent of the counterpossible, ‘\( C \)’ for its consequent, and ‘\( \otimes \rightarrow \)’ for the R-entailment connective. The subscript ‘\( e \)’ in ‘\( C_e \)’ is used to indicate that \( C \)’s truth conditions are existence entailing.) This classification retains the primacy of the interesting/uninteresting distinction among counterpossibles. The antecedents of uninteresting counterpossibles are self-contradictory impossibilities which R-entail every proposition whatever. Accordingly, by appeal to LICE (specified to self-contradictory propositions), we can attribute trivial truth to every uninteresting counterpossible. Interesting counterpossibles, then, are those counterpossibles whose antecedents are not self-contradictory and which do not R-entail every proposition.
Now among interesting counterpossibles, perhaps there is also a distinction to be made between those whose antecedents involve God’s nonexistence (extraordinary interesting counterpossibles) and those whose antecedents do not (ordinary interesting counterpossibles). This distinction, as Leftow says, is meant to capture "the unique status God’s non-existence must have among impossibilities" given theistic activism. For (TAB) appears to underwrite what I shall call the null world hypothesis: the idea that if God did not exist, nothing whatsoever would exist. For example, according to Thomas Morris:

from the perspective of any thoroughgoing theism — any theism according to which God is necessarily the creator of anything that might exist distinct from himself ... if God were, per impossibile, to fail to exist, nothing else would exist either.

Leftow makes substantially the same claim:

To activism, if God does not exist, nothing else necessary or contingent exists either ... This renders God’s non-existence unlike any other impossible state of affairs.

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26 It should be noted that there is nothing about the null world hypothesis which presupposes a metaphysics of possible worlds, according to which there is a null world (as Leftow defines it).

27 "Dependence and Divine Simplicity," p. 170.

What these remarks suggest is that extraordinary counterpossibles whose antecedents R-entail propositions, the truth conditions of which involve the existence of this-or-that object, are all nontrivially false; otherwise, such counterpossibles are nontrivially true. These special considerations do not apply to ordinary counterpossibles, which are nontrivially true if their antecedents R-entail their consequents and nontrivially false otherwise.

As the nonstandard semantics we have developed for counterpossibles is based on the notion of R-entailment, let us refer to it as the R semantics. We already have it that the R semantics allows that some counterpossibles are trivially true. So what we now want to know is whether it assigns the intuitively correct truth-values to metaphysically important counterpossibles — namely, (1)-(4) and (C1)-(C6).

Consider, therefore, the first of these groups:

- (1) God does not exist > NTs do not exist.
- (2) NTs do not exist > God does not exist.
- (3) God does not exist > NTs exist.
- (4) NTs do not exist > God exists.

Earlier we said that, as far as theistic activism goes, (1) and (2) ought to come out nontrivially true, while (3) and (4) should come out nontrivially false. And this is just what the R semantics guarantees. Each of (1)-(4) is an extraordinary counterpossible. (1) and (3) are clearly so. Of (1) and (3), however, only the consequent of (3) R-entails that something exists; hence, on our newly constructed R semantics, (3) is nontrivially false and (1) nontrivially true.
Perhaps not so obvious is the fact that (2) and (4) also express extraordinary counterpossibles. For it seems that the proposition *There are no NTs* R-entails the proposition *God does not exist;* the truth conditions for the latter proposition constitute at least part of the truth conditions for the former, since, on the present view, if God did exist, there would be at least one necessary truth: *God exists.* But then since the consequent of (4) R-entails that something exists, it follows (by the R semantics) that (4) is nontrivially false. The consequent of (2), however, does not R-entail that something exists, given that the truth conditions for *God does not exist* do not involve the existence of any particular object. Hence (2) is nontrivially true.

So far, so good; the truth-values assigned to (1)-(4) on the basis of the R semantics are precisely those which, intuitively speaking, we would expect given (TAB). What about (C1)-(C6)? How do they fare on the R semantics? Consider, first, the counterpossible pair:

(C1) God does not exist > matter exists.
(C2) God does not exist > matter does not exist.

Each of these propositions is an extraordinary counterpossible. Furthermore, since the consequent of (C1) R-entails that something exists, (C1) is nontrivially false. Not

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29 Here I assume that the term ‘God’ abbreviates the definite description ‘the necessarily existing, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent being’.

30 This, incidentally, is the reason that the consequent of (1) does not R-entail the existence of any particular thing.
so for (C2). Its consequent fails to R-entail the existence of something; thus (C2) is nontrivially true.

Next consider Zagzebski’s second counterpossible pair:

(C3) God is not good > there is less evil in the world than there is.
(C4) God is not good > there is more evil in the world than there is.

Here we must note that the proposition *God is not good* is ambiguous between *God is nongood* — a proposition predicating of God the complement of *being good* — and *It is not the case that God is good* — a proposition that merely predicates falsehood of the proposition *God is good*. Fortunately, Zagzebski says some things which make it relatively clear that she intends the former reading.31 So taken, neither (C3) nor (C4) is an extraordinary counterpossible; for if the proposition *God is nongood* predicates a property of God, then (given serious actualism) it R-entails *God exists*. (C3) and (C4), then, are just ordinary counterpossibles. But then it seems to me that of the two counterpossibles, only (C4)'s antecedent R-entails its consequent. Accordingly, on the R semantics, (C3) is nontrivially false and (C4) is nontrivially true.

And finally, consider this pair:

(C5) Zagzebski travels back in time and changes her lecture last week > Zagzebski does not reach the same moment of time twice.

(C6) Zagzebski travels back in time and changes her lecture last week > Zagzebski does reach the same moment of time twice.

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31 See “What If,” p. 177.
The antecedent of these counterpossibles does not R-entail God's nonexistence, which means that (C5) and (C6) are mere ordinary counterpossibles. Furthermore, a moment's reflection reveals that while (C6)'s antecedent does R-entail its consequent, (C5)'s antecedent does not; thus, on the R semantics, (C5) must be classed as nontrivially false and (C6) as nontrivially true.

### Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counterpossible</th>
<th>Pretheoretical Intuition</th>
<th>R Semantics</th>
<th>Truth-Value Match?</th>
</tr>
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<td>F</td>
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<tr>
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Table 4.2 summarizes the results yielded by the R semantics thus far. For present purposes, the important thing to see is that there is an exact match between the truth-values assigned to (C1)-(C6) on the basis of pretheoretical intuition and those assigned on the basis of the newly developed R semantics. In sum, then, the R semantics seems to deliver on a number of desiderata. It is lenient enough to permit some counterpossibles to come out trivially true; and for those which are not, it apparently gets things right as far as truth-value assignments go — at least for a few of the more metaphysically important counterpossibles.

### B. An Argument for Asymmetrical (Causal) Dependence
I now want to argue that anyone claiming that NTs cannot asymmetrically depend on God is not entirely justified in her position. The argument begins from a rather modest fact: it is possible, for all we know, that God is the creator and sustainer of everything distinct from himself. So the proposition

\[(\text{TAB}) \text{ Necessarily, God exists and God creates and maintains in existence everything distinct from himself}\]

is at least epistemically possible. Furthermore, (TAB) seems clearly to R-entail

\[(5) \text{ Necessarily, for any proposition } p \text{ such that } p \text{ is a necessary truth, and } p \text{ is distinct from God, } p \text{ is asymmetrically dependent on being caused by God}\]

(where a necessary truth \(p\) is asymmetrically dependent on being caused by God if and only if God causes \(p\) to exist, but it is not the case that \(p\) causes God to exist). The one-way causal dependence here is justified in view of the fact that God is a causal agent but propositions, presumably, are not. But assuming that

\[(6) \text{ Necessarily, for all propositions } p \text{ and } q, \text{ if } p \land q \text{ and } \bar{0} \land p, \text{ then } \bar{0} \land q\]

(where \(\bar{0} \land p\) is read as ‘it is epistemically possible that \(p\)’) it follows that (5) is epistemically possible. Now consider the following instance of (5):

\[(7) \text{ If } 2 + 2 = 4 \text{ is a necessary truth, and } 2 + 2 = 4 \text{ is distinct from God, then } 2 + 2 = 4 \text{ is asymmetrically dependent on being caused by God.}\]

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But surely

(8) \[ 2 + 2 = 4 \] is a necessary truth.

And it is also plausible to suppose (is it not?) that

(9) \[ 2 + 2 = 4 \] is distinct from God.

But then it follows from (7), (8), and (9) that

(10) \[ 2 + 2 = 4 \] is asymmetrically dependent on being caused by God.

And from (10) it follows that

(11) God causes \( 2 + 2 = 4 \) to exist

and

(12) It is false that \( 2 + 2 = 4 \) causes God to exist.

Since (5) is epistemically possible and R-entails the conjunction of (11) and (12), that conjunction is also epistemically possible. So perhaps (for all we know) NTs *can* stand to God in an asymmetrical relation of causal dependence.

But here we must consider an objection that runs as follows. If the above line of reasoning is sound, then it would also seem to warrant the conclusion that

(13) God causes *God exists* to exist

is epistemically possible. But surely this is impossible (both epistemically and logically). For (13) seems to imply

(14) God causes himself to exist

which is blatantly false. Therefore, so the objection goes, we must reject (TAB) as not just false but impossible. Perhaps (TAB) is plausible when specified to
nondivine contingent objects; it is wholly implausible if its universal quantifier ranges over every nondivine object (contingent and necessary). But if so, then the present attempt to solve the Dependence Problem fails.

Is this criticism in fact sound? It is not obvious that it is. A Morris and Menzel type response here would be to claim that (14) follows from (13) only if it is also true that

(15) God is identical with the proposition God exists.

And (15), I suspect they would say, is true only if some version of the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS) is correct; as we saw in the last chapter, however, Morris (at least) considers the DDS deeply flawed. Now there is certainly something to be said for this reply. It will strike some philosophers, however, as rather unconvincing, especially in light of Leftow's proof, which we surveyed in chapter 2, that the DDS logically follows from (TAB) together with the fact that God cannot create his own nature (and therefore, by extension, any (intentionally construed) NTs identified with God via his nature).

Of course, Morris and Menzel deny that God cannot create his own nature. In a nutshell, the basis of their claim is that God's creation of his nature follows from (TAB) and the falsity of the DDS. Since all parties to the debate endorse (TAB), the crux of Morris and Menzel's case must rest on their denial of the DDS. But, as we saw in chapter 3, not one of the three problems Morris himself poses for the property and property-instance views of the DDS — namely, the problems of modal
uniformity, supervenient properties, and divine uniqueness — carries over to Valicella's property-individual view. Furthermore, Brian Leftow has argued repeatedly that there are independent reasons for thinking that God cannot create his nature (hereafter, N). These reasons can be conveniently summarized into a single argument. According to theistic activism, God causes N to exist. From this it follows that God's causing N is explanatorily prior — that is, prior in the order of explanation — to N's existing. But surely it is also the case that N's existing is explanatorily prior to God's instancing N, in which case (by the transitivity of 'explanatory priority') it follows that God's causing N is explanatorily prior to God's instancing N. Surely this is absurd.

For philosophers such as Leftow, therefore, there will be an impulse (in the present context) towards accepting, say, Valicella's property-individual view of divine simplicity, while rejecting Morris and Menzel's idea that God could create his nature. Such philosophers will no doubt incline towards accepting (15) and therefore the inference of (14) from (13). It does not follow, of course, that they are thereby committed to the outrageous impossibility expressed by (14) — not unless there is an associated commitment to (13). But is that the case? Not necessarily. The way to set things right is to develop an account of what it is for a necessary truth to be


distinct from God, an account on which a proposition such as *God exists* is not
distinct from God. Well, given our definition of R-entailment, a plausible first try
might be:

\[(D) \text{ Proposition } p \text{ is distinct from God } = \text{ df. It is not the case that } p \text{ mutually R-entails } God \text{ exists.}\]

It is not the case that *God exists* mutually R-entails such paradigmatically NTs as 2
+ 2 = 4, *Red is a colour*, and *All bodies are extended*; thus, by (D), God is distinct
from each of these propositions. On the other hand, *God exists, God is omniscient*,
and *God is omnipotent* are just some of the propositions with which God turns out to
be identical on (D), since each mutually R-entails the proposition *God exists*.

Now in order to accommodate this identification of NTs with God, we can
appeal to something like Valicella's property-individual view of simplicity.
According to Valicella, you recall, God is identical with his nontrivial essential
properties, properties such as *being omnipotent, being omniscient*, and the like; he is
not identical, however, with such trivial essential properties as *being such that* 2 + 2
= 4 and *knowing that* 7 + 5 = 12. Now perhaps, as some philosophers suggest,\(^{36}\)
propositions are reducible to properties; if so, then we can carry out the proposed
identification by reducing every necessary truth with which God is alleged to be
identical on (D) to one of God's nontrivial essential properties, which, on Valicella's
view, are jointly identical with God.

\(^{36}\) See Roderick M. Chisholm, *A Realistic Theory of Categories: An Essay on Ontology*
The view sketched here might be dubbed 'simple theistic activism'. It is *simple* in the sense that it invokes a particular version of the DDS, according to which God is identical with every necessary truth which mutually R-entails the proposition *God exists*. It is also a form of *theistic activism* in that God is held to be the creator and sustainer of whatever NTs remain — namely, those failing to mutually R-entail the proposition *God exists*. The claim here is a modest one: that this state of affairs (however sketchy) is at least epistemically possible, and therefore that the claim that NTs *cannot* asymmetrically depend on God is not justified.

C. Objections

In what follows, I shall present some of the more plausible (and hitherto unanswered) objections which might be brought against the Simple-Causal Solution.

(1) "The Simple-Causal solution is vulnerable to the following Morris-style objection. On your view, God is identical with *God is omniscient*. But the truth of *God is omniscient* supervenes on the truth of such propositions as *God knows that 7 + 5 = 12* and *God knows that Morris left Notre Dame in 1996*. Accordingly, it seems that God (on the present view) is identical with both a necessary truth and a contingent truth; and surely this is impossible.

Reply: this *is* impossible; but it is not a consequence of the Simple-Causal Solution. It is true that *God knows that 7 + 5 = 12* is identical with God. For this proposition mutually R-entails the proposition *God exists*. But it is important to see that *God exists* and *God knows that Morris left Notre Dame in 1996* are not mutually
R-entailing and so, by (D), are not identical. For although *God exists* does R-entail *God is omniscient*, it is not the case that *God is omniscient* R-entails *God knows that Morris left Notre Dame in 1996*. And the reason is that the former proposition does not strictly imply the latter (as the definition of R-entailment requires); there are possible worlds in which God is omniscient but fails to know that Morris left Notre Dame in 1996 — worlds, say, in which Morris does not exist at all.

(2) "Even if the proposal to identify God with those propositions which mutually R-entail God's existence should turn out to be a coherent one, there are (on this view) countless NTs distinct from God, and which stand to him in a relation of mutual *logical* dependence. This contradicts the Aseity Intuition (AI) of chapter 3, according to which God is not dependent *in any way* upon *anything* distinct from himself."

Reply: is there anything objectionable about God's standing in this sort of relation to NTs? Well, I don't think so. As I said earlier, we must be careful to distinguish between *real* dependence and *mere-Cambridge* dependence when we talk about dependence relations between necessary beings. From the fact that *God exists* and (say) 9 *exists* strictly imply one another, it follows only that there is a two-way, mere-Cambridge relation of dependence between God and the number 9. It does not follow that God is "in any unacceptable way"\(^{37}\) dependent on the number 9. It would be unacceptable, of course, if God turned out to depend asymmetrically on

the number 9; but that is not the case on the proposed solution. Quite the contrary.

On the Simple-Causal Solution, there is a real, one-way relation of dependence of the number 9 on God.

These considerations do suggest, however, that (A1) is in need of revision. Perhaps the needed qualification is captured by:

(A1*) God does not stand in any relation of real dependence to anything distinct from himself.

It seems to me that there is nothing inherently objectionable about this sort of procedure — namely, appropriately qualifying theistic doctrine in the light of philosophical reflection. After all, this is just the sort of thing philosophers have always done when asked to give an account of what it means to say that God is omnipotent. At any rate, the qualifications of a given doctrine are not necessarily concessions (to the theologian, process theologian, or whomever); rather, they are clarifications of what is meant by that doctrine. As long as (A1*) squares with traditional theism, and I think it does, the Simple-Causal Solution is no worse off for being committed to it.

(3) "According to the proposed solution, every necessary truth distinct from God owes its existence to God's (necessary) causal activity. But then logically prior to God’s decision to create the NTs which he has in fact created, there were no modal constraints preventing God from choosing to create different NTs. Hence, the Simple-Causal Solution is committed to universal possibilism with respect to those NTs which are distinct from God."
Reply: as Morris and Menzel point out,\textsuperscript{38} this sort of objection is conceptually confused and (I might add) probably question-begging. To say that God \textit{could have done otherwise} — logically prior to his creation of every necessary truth distinct from himself — is to assume that it was \textit{within God’s power} to have done otherwise here, which, in turn, assumes that it was \textit{possible} for God to have done otherwise. In other words, the assumption is that there some broader modal framework within which God’s creative act takes place. But, of course, this is precisely what theistic activism denies; God is \textit{solely} responsible for the modal framework of reality (MFR). The charge that God’s creation of the MFR (since it is necessary) is not \textit{free} fails for similar reasons.

(4) “The Simple-Causal Solution endorses the theistic activist proposal that NTs are caused to exist by way of God’s conceptual activity. Thus, for example, the proposition $2 + 2 = 4$ necessarily exists and is true because God necessarily produces the concepts of 2, 4, addition, and equality, and conceptually relates them such that $2 + 2 = 4$. But what about necessarily false propositions? Take the proposition $2 + 2 = 5$. This proposition also has necessary existence. But in virtue of what? God’s thinking or conceiving that $2 + 2 = 5$? Surely this is impossible.”

Reply: it is interesting to note that although Morris and Menzel maintain that God’s “responsibility for necessary truths and falsehoods consists in the nature of his concepts,”\textsuperscript{39} they omit any discussion of the sense in which God is causally

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{38}See “Absolute Creation,” pp. 168-170.
\textsuperscript{39}“Absolute Creation,” p. 167.
responsible for the existence of necessary falsehoods. Here, I think, the theistic activist must admit that the existence of (say) the proposition $2 + 2 = 5$ cannot be accounted for in just the same way as the proposition $2 + 2 = 4$. God does not cause $2 + 2 = 5$ to exist by forming the concepts of $2$, $5$, addition, and equality, and then (in a second-order conceptual act) relating them as in the false proposition. Rather, necessarily, God causes the existence (and therefore truth) of the proposition $2 + 2 = 4$ by his conceptual activity; and in so doing, he brings it about that $2 + 2 = 5$ has the property of being necessarily false and so, by serious actualism, the property of necessarily existing.

(5) "The Simple-Causal Solution is committed to a nonstandard semantics for counterpossibles — the R semantics — which essentially depends on the null world hypothesis, the claim that if God did not exist, then nothing else would exist either. But this claim is false if serious actualism is true.”

Reply: there are two questions to be addressed here. First, is the Simple-Causal Solution committed to the R semantics, and, more generally, to a nonstandard account of counterpossibles? And second, is the null world hypothesis really contradicted by serious actualism? Suppose we take these questions in reverse order. Sadly enough, I think serious actualism does pose an insuperable problem for simple theistic activists (and theistic activists, in general) who hold that

(NH) If God had not existed, then nothing would have existed
is nontrivially true. On the R semantics, of course, (NH) is an extraordinary
counterpossible; furthermore, it is supposed to be nontrivially true in virtue of the
fact that the truth conditions for its consequent (i) do not require the existence of any
particular object, and (ii) constitute all of the truth conditions of its antecedent.

But I think it can be shown that this suggestion is wholly problematic. For it
is difficult to see precisely what the truth conditions for negative existentials (such as
Nothing exists) might be. Consider, for example, Plantinga’s favourite singular
negative existential:

(16) Socrates does not exist.

Taken predicatively, (16) says that

(16*) Socrates has the property of nonexistence.

And, given serious actualism, (16*) expresses a necessary falsehood. Taken
impredicatively, however, (16) amounts to the claim that

(16’) It is false that Socrates exists

which merely ascribes the property being false to the proposition Socrates exists.

The question arises: what are the truth conditions for (16’)? Well, on one
plausible way of looking at things, a proposition such as (16’) “is made true or made
false by the way things happen to be arranged.”40 Here, I take it, the idea is that a
proposition such as Socrates exists is true because of some specific (existing)

40Peter van Inwagen, “Two Concepts of Possible Worlds,” Midwest Studies in
Philosophy XI: Studies in Essentialism, edited by Peter A. French, et al (Minneapolis:
concrete arrangement of objects — in this case, the existence of Socrates himself. Presumably, then, if Socrates had failed to exist, *Socrates exists* would not have been true, in which case it would have been false, so that (16') would have been true. So perhaps in specifying the conditions under which *Socrates exists* is true, we have (in effect) also specified the conditions under which *It is false that Socrates exists* is true.

But if the truth conditions for a proposition are what make it true, then it is difficult to avoid the impression that (16') has no (existing) truth conditions at all. If a particular concrete arrangement of objects C is the truth-maker for *Socrates exists*, then (on the present suggestion) *It is false that Socrates exists* is true in virtue of the nonexistence of C. For, after all, if C had existed, then *It is false that Socrates exists* would have been false, in which case *Socrates exists* would have been true. Given serious actualism, however, it is impossible that any proposition be made true by something which fails to exist. There cannot be any nonexistent truth-makers; truth-makers (whatever they turn out to be in the end) must exist in order to stand to anything in the relation of truthmaking.

What this suggests, in general, is that the R semantics fails to successfully assign nontrivial truth to (NH). The basic reason is that *God does not exist* fails to R-entail *Nothing exists*; for if we think of truth conditions in terms of truth-makers, then *Nothing exists* cannot have any (existing) truth conditions. For given serious actualism, if it had any, they would have existed; and if they existed, the proposition
Nothing exists would not have been true. But then, of course, the question is: if they do not exist, how could the truth conditions for Nothing exists possibly constitute all or part of the truth conditions for God does not exist?

It is also worth noting that the difficulty here cannot be easily sidestepped, say, by abandoning the idea that truth conditions are truth-makers or even by producing an entirely new restricted notion of entailment. For, presumably, on all accounts, entailment (strict or otherwise) is a relation that obtains between truth-bearers. But, of course, in order to stand in such a relation, the serious actualist will insist that a truth-bearer must be an existent. No matter how you look at the matter, then, if you are going to divide the counterpossible terrain by means of some relation $F$ which God does not exist bears to Nothing exists but not to (say) Matter exists, it follows (given serious actualism) that the propositions $F$ relates must exist. But then surely

(17) If God had not existed, then Nothing exists would have existed

is true. And from (NH) and (17) it follows that

(18) If God had not existed, then Nothing exists would have existed and nothing would have existed

which, in turn, implies

(19) If God had not existed, then something would have existed

(at least on the assumption that the consequent of (18) entails that of (19)). No problem arises here for the Trivial Truth Theorist, however; for on her way of looking at things, both (NH) and (19) are trivially true.
For the sake of convenience, let us call any nonstandard semantics for counterpossibles, according to which the null world hypothesis is assigned nontrivial truth, a 'null world semantics'. Then the general moral is this: every null world semantics is incompatible with serious actualism. Since serious actualism is necessarily (and obviously) true, it follows that there cannot be any coherent null world semantics. Both Leftow's semantics and the R semantics, therefore, are fatally flawed. Furthermore, the prospects for repair do not look promising. For in order to carve out a class of extraordinary counterpossibles, the proposition God does not exist must enjoy some sort of special status among impossible propositions. But if we are theistic activists, surely we will attempt to ground this special status in God's causally creative activity, which activity (if (TAB) is correct) seems to underwrite the null world hypothesis.

Accordingly, if it is plausible to suppose that theistic activism is required to forge an asymmetrical relation of dependence of NTs on God, and theistic activism entails some sort of null world semantics, then it looks as though NTs cannot asymmetrically depend on God. On the other hand, if theistic activism does not entail a nonstandard account of counterpossibles, then I cannot see what would prevent us from holding on the basis of the Simple-Causal Solution that it is epistemically possible that (i) all counterpossibles are trivially true, and (ii) there is a one-way, causal dependence of NTs on God. In other words, if the complaint is that the Simple-Causal Solution fails simply because it entails a incoherent null world
semantics, then our solution is back in business (if it turns out that there is no such entailment).

Is there really an entailment relation between simple theistic activism and some null world semantics or another? I think not. First, although Morris says that it is preferable to assign truth to metaphysically important counterpossibles on the basis of their “intrinsic conceptual or metaphysical content” rather than from considerations due to the standard semantics for counterpossibles, he never once says we should assign falsity to a counterpossible for this or any other reason. For all Morris has said, therefore, it might be the case that every counterpossible is trivially true, and yet for certain counterpossibles there are additional conceptual or metaphysical reasons — nonsemantical reasons — for asserting their truth.

But suppose you, like Zagzebski, think that reasons such as these also exist for assigning falsity to some counterpossibles. What then? Well, if you are a theistic activist, your theistic activism is no doubt going to play a central and important role in charting the counterpossible territory before you. Indeed, as I argued above, your theistic activism will inevitably push you in the direction of some null world semantics or another. But if serious actualism is true, then you will have been pushed into necessary falsehood. So what we have here is a clash of intuitions. And it seems to me that serious actualism has the more powerful intuitive backing; it is much more obvious that no object could have exemplified a property without existing than, say, that (19) is nontrivially false. So here the proper thing to do (as I
see it) is to reject the relevant null world semantics; in which case you should deny that your theistic activism entails such a semantics.

Someone might object that we can no longer “give content to” or “make sense of” claims of divine causation of NTs by appealing to counterpossibles. Indeed, it might be said that having all counterpossibles come out trivially true undermines our firm intuitions about simple cases of causation. According to Pollock, for example, there is considerable intuitive backing for this principle of causation:

\[(3.1) \quad (P \text{ causes } Q) \Rightarrow (~ P > ~ Q). \]

On the other hand, there is little or none for

\[(3.1^*) \quad (P \text{ causes } Q) \Rightarrow (~ P > Q).\]

And yet if the counterfactuals here are counterpossibles, then given the Trivial Truth Thesis, both (3.1) and (3.1*) are true. Were the theistic activist to take seriously our clear intuitions about simple cases of causation (so the present objection goes), she would see that divine causation of necessary truth entails that some counterpossibles are true and others false.

Is there really an objection here? I think not. It is important to note that Pollock’s principles of causation were drafted without any consideration of divine causation of NTs. This is evident from the fact that one of Pollock’s pretheoretical constraints on his analysis of causation is

\[(C4) \quad (P \text{ causes } Q) \Rightarrow (~ P \neq \emptyset)\]

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which rules out divine causation *a priori*. But if so, then I cannot see that his principles of causation (which are based on this *a priori* assumption) can be legitimately employed in an attempt to show that theistic activism entails a nonstandard account of counterfactuals with impossible antecedents.

So I think there is considerable room for the simple theistic activist to hold that her view is compatible with the standard account of counterpossibles. Of course, in embracing such an account, the simple theistic activist rules out the possibility of giving a counterfactual analysis of divine causation; but, so far as I can see, her position is not (for all that) incoherent. Many philosophers are unhappy with such analyses of nondivine causation; perhaps it is not surprising that this is also the case for causation of the divine variety. The theistic activist analysis of divine causation will simply have to take some other form. (Just what this analysis might look like is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this work. It is, however, a fruitful area for further philosophical study, one which contemporary philosophers of religion (such as Brian Leftow) are just now starting to explore.)

Now there is one further issue requiring our attention. With the demise of the R semantics and its concept of R-entailment, we are no longer in possession of a proper account of what it is for a necessary truth to be distinct from God. Our earlier account, you will recall, made use of R-entailment:

\[ (D) \quad \text{Proposition } p \text{ is distinct from } \text{God} = \text{df. It is not the case that } p \text{ mutually } R\text{-entails } \text{God exists}. \]
This definition, it will be remembered, played an important role in our case for the asymmetrical (causal) dependence of NTs on God. To make the appropriate repairs, we need a fresh notion of entailment, one that will replace the one in (D); further, it must permit us to say (as before) that such propositions as *God exists*, *God is omniscient*, and *God is omnipotent* are not distinct from God, and therefore (by (5)) not asymmetrically dependent on God. Here we can adapt some of Chisholm's work in defining (conceptual) entailment among necessary propositions:

\[(C)\quad \text{For any necessary propositions } p \text{ and } q, p \text{ entails } q \text{ if and only if } p \text{ strictly implies } q \text{ and (necessarily) whoever conceives that } p \text{ conceives that } q.\]  

Since this definition has a conceptual clause, let us call the relevant notion of entailment here 'C-entailment'. We can now revise (D) as follows:

\[(D^*)\quad \text{Proposition } p \text{ is distinct from } \text{God} = \text{df. It is not the case that } p \text{ mutually C-entails } \text{God exists}.\]

A moment's reflection (well, a few minutes' anyway) reveals that on (D*) such trivial NTs as \(2 + 2 = 4\) and *All bodies are extended* are distinct from God and so by (5) asymmetrically dependent on him. This is just as it should be. Moreover, nontrivial NTs such as *God exists* and *God is omnipotent* come out identical with God on (D*); and this, as we said before, relieves us of a number of conceptual burdens.

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By way of conclusion then: taken alone, neither the Counterfactual, Causal, nor Simple Solutions is sufficient for the purposes of conquering the Dependence Problem. The Simple-Causal Solution, however, does seem to have some merit. Furthermore, it avoids a number of the difficulties connected with rival solutions. Therefore, in the absence of any relevant defeaters, I believe we are justified in claiming that the present solution is possible for all we know. And so, for the time being, the Simple-Causal Solution emerges victorious from the philosophical fray.
Bibliography


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