

Routledge Studies in the Philosophy of Religion

CLASSICAL THEISM

NEW ESSAYS ON THE METAPHYSICS OF GOD

Edited by

Jonathan Fuqua and Robert C. Koons



Classical Theism

This volume provides a contemporary account of classical theism. It features 17 original essays from leading scholars that advance the discussion of classical theism in new and interesting directions.

It's safe to say that classical theism—the view that God is simple, omniscient, and the greatest possible being—is no longer the assumed view in the analytic philosophy of religion. It is often dismissed as being rooted in outdated metaphysical systems of the sort advanced by ancient and medieval philosophers. The main purpose of this volume is twofold: to provide a contemporary account of what classical theism is and to advance the scholarly discussion about classical theism. In Section I, the contributors offer a clear and cutting-edge account of the nature and existence of God and the historical and theological foundations of classical theism. Section II contains chapters on a variety of topics, such as whether classical theism's doctrine of simplicity needs revision, whether simplicity is compatible with the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, and whether the hypothesis of a multiplicity of divine ideas is consistent with divine simplicity, among others.

Classical Theism will appeal to scholars and advanced students in the philosophy of religion who are interested in the nature of God.

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Introduction

Jonathan Fuqua and Robert C. Koons

This is a book about classical theism. Theism is of course the thesis that God exists, but what does the modifier *classical* add? There is a family of conceptions of God, drawing largely from Platonic and Aristotelian sources and quite prominent among Jewish, Christian, and Islamic philosophers and theologians in the Middle Ages. This conception is largely negative in content, emphasizing the ways in which God is different from all created things. In particular, this tradition asserts that God is uncaused, independent, immaterial, simple (not composed of parts), beginningless, timeless or atemporal, impassive (not subject to being affected intrinsically), and immutable (lacking any potentiality for internal change). In its most extreme form (as represented by Avicenna and Thomas Aquinas) it claims that God is identical to His own nature, and that this nature and God are identical to God's existence. The process theologian Charles Hartshorne (1984, p. ix) applied the term 'classical theism' to this tradition in the 20th century.

This conception of God has always been somewhat controversial among adherents of the Abrahamic religions, although it had almost certainly become the dominant view among Christian theologians in the High Middle Ages. It is fair to say that it has become much more controversial in the last century, being challenged by process theologians and by defenders of theistic personalism or "neo-classical" theism, including Richard Swinburne, William Lane Craig, Peter van Inwagen, and Alvin Plantinga, as well as by open theists and process theologians. At the same time, classical theism has also drawn many prominent defenders in recent years. Given the rise of non-classical versions of theism in recent philosophy and theology, it seems fitting to produce a volume on classical theism: what it is; its various versions; what can be said for it and, in some cases, against it; how it looks from within various theological perspectives; and why it matters. This volume is just such a volume: we here present seventeen essays by leading scholars of classical theism, at various stages of their career, on the contours, merits, and demerits of various versions of classical theism. As an updated presentation, exposition, argument for, and criticism of classical theism and

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its various versions, it fills a serious lacuna in the recent literature on the nature and existence of God, most of which focuses on arguments for God's existence, criticisms of classical theism, defenses of non-classical theism, and isolated defenses of one or two elements of classical theism, such as divine foreknowledge or divine timelessness.

As this volume will make clear, the tradition of classical theism is not a uniform or homogeneous one. Many contributors defend a strictly Thomist conception of divine simplicity (Feser, Koons, De Haan, Tomaszewski, Dodds, and Dolezal), but others offer less extreme versions, including Anselmian (Rogers) or Scotistic (O'Connor) models. Timothy O'Connor considers four options, a strict Thomistic one, Duns Scotus's inseparability thesis (which requires only that God's existence and His intrinsic attributes be inseparable, rather than identical), Eleonore Stump's theory (which limits God's contingent intrinsic properties to those constituting His free activity, while retaining the thesis that God cannot be acted upon), and his own, relatively modest account, which permits God to have contingent intrinsic properties caused by the free choices of God's creatures, so long as those creatures and their choices are wholly dependent on God for their existence. Katherin Rogers builds on Anselm's perfect being theology, emphasizing God's eternity or "isotemporality," while admitting that God's internal state can be counterfactually dependent on the free and contingent choices of creatures. Gyuala Klima's chapter includes the perspective of both Augustine and some later scholastic thinkers (including Scotus and Ockham) on the questions of how we can refer to God, what we can mean by "being God," and the relationship between the conceptual and real orders. James Rooney argues for the compatibility of classical theism with the account of divine essence and energies propounded by the Eastern Orthodox theologian Gregory Palamas.

Classical theism is by no means limited to the field of Christian theology. It has roots in the Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neo-Platonic traditions and has gained thereby a foothold in Jewish and Islamic thought, as the chapters by Samuel Lebens and by Enis Doko and Jamie Turner exemplify. Tyler McNabb and Erik Baldwin make a strong case for the value of classical theism in developing inter-religious dialogue with religious traditions from the south and east Asia, including Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist, and Advaita Vedānta traditions.

The most central question, of course, is that of truth. What reason do we have to accept that any version of classical theism is true? Our authors offer a wide range of answers to this question. First, there is the authority of particular traditions. Edward Feser and Christopher Tomaszewski cite both Scriptural and patristic support for divine simplicity and immutability, and Feser points also to conciliar statements by Lateran IV and Vatican I. In the Jewish tradition, the authority of Moses Maimonides was considerable, as Samuel Lebens indicates. Lebens also cites support from the Torah, and Saadya Gaon and Hasdai Crescas

provided non-Aristotelian arguments for divine simplicity. Lebens draws a distinction between the strong doctrine of simplicity advocated by Maimonides and the more modest version defended by Crescas. Lebens concludes by developing a form of idealism, drawing on Kabbalistic and Hasidic sources, arguing that Jews ought to embrace a modest version of divine simplicity and atemporality as applied to the transcendent “face” of God. Enis Doko and Jamie Turner trace the development of divine simplicity and impassibility from the Quran and scriptural theology to the early scholastic Mu’tazilite school to ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) within the *falsafa* tradition.

The second reason for embracing classical theism is purely philosophical. Rob Koons and Daniel DeHaan develop in some detail some Aristotelian and Thomistic arguments for the tenets of classical theism, working from the thesis that God is the uncaused cause of everything else. Koons relies on new versions of three Thomistic arguments: the First and Second Ways, and the argument in *De Ente et Essentia* from creaturely essences and existence. Koons takes the arguments to presuppose an Aristotelian account of change and Thomas’s novel account of actuality in terms of acts of existence. Koons argues that absolute simplicity, including God’s identity with His own act of existence, follows from the conclusions of these arguments. He sketches how God’s perfection and intelligence can be seen as further corollaries. Daniel De Haan focuses on the “triplex” character of Thomas’s overall approach to natural theology: the way of causation, the way of negation, and the way of super-emminence. He develops and defends the Bergmann-Brower truthmaker account of divine simplicity. The triplex method explains why existence, perfection, and simplicity are the fundamental attributes of God, from which the other divine characteristics follow. Rogers, Lebens, and O’Connor also consider this Thomistic strategy and find it wanting. Katherin Rogers defends an alternative philosophical route, that of Anselm’s perfect being theology, a route criticized in turn by De Haan.

Finally, there are reasons that might be described as religious but not traditional, including appeals to religious experience or the nature of religious attitudes like worship. Alex Pruss offers twelve arguments in favor of classical theism based on intuitions of God’s transcendence and worthiness of worship. Pruss defends a moderately strong version of divine simplicity, in which God is identical to each of His attributes, while remaining agnostic on the still stronger Avicennan-Thomistic claim that God is identical to His own existence.

There are also, of course, powerful objections to classical theism, especially in its strongest form. As we have mentioned, Rogers, Lebens, and O’Connor all offer such objections, asking whether a strong doctrine of divine simplicity and impassibility is consistent with God’s knowledge of and concern for contingent creatures. How can God know multiple things if He is identical to a simple act of knowing? Can we have a

personal or covenantal relationship with an impassible being? If God's knowledge is identical to His will, how can God know our free actions without also willing them, including our sins? Rogers, Lebens, and O'Connor all seek to resolve these problems by relaxing some of the strictness of the Thomistic model.

Other contributors, however, argue that no such relaxation is necessary. Gregory Doolan argues that divine simplicity is compatible with the existence of many divine "ideas" or universals. Doolan identifies ideas with productive concepts, and he explains why Thomas takes such ideas to be essential to an account of creation as an intentional act. God knows His own essence as imitable in many different ways. The divine ideas are these different ways, and so they are objects of God's understanding, not distinct internal vehicles by which God understands them. A multiplicity of intentional objects is compatible with the internal simplicity of God's understanding.

Christopher Tomaszewski takes up a common objection to divine simplicity: the claim that this entails the necessary existence of all created facts (a "modal collapse" of created contingency into the necessity of the divine nature). Although Tomaszewski demonstrates that the common objection commits a fallacy of modal reasoning, he constructs a further objection that is more difficult to dismiss. This new objection turns on the following questions: How can God be intrinsically indiscernible in all possible worlds, while intentionally creating different things in each of them? How can the effects of God's volition vary if the volition itself cannot vary intrinsically? Tomaszewski argues that this is a problem for any theist, independently of the doctrine of divine simplicity and impassibility. If God's volition is in an intrinsically contingent state, then this state would have to be one of the things that God intentionally causes to exist. If we are then to avoid an infinite regress, we must admit that two divine volitions can differ in their content without differing intrinsically.

James Dolezal defends divine impassibility from two challenges: that from God's knowledge of creation, and that from God's love of creatures. Dolezal argues that God can perfectly know the character of our experiences without undergoing those experiences Himself. God knows these experiences, along with everything else in creation, simply by being their principal cause. Classical theism does not posit God as distant from creation: to the contrary, it puts God in the most intimate possible relationship to us. God's love for us is not stirred up in Him by us but consists in His willing for us every good.

Finally, there is the question of the compatibility of classical theism with particular Christian doctrines, in particular, with divine action in the world, with the Trinity, with the Incarnation of Christ, and with the Palamite doctrine of divine energies. These issues are taken up in the chapters by Michael J. Dodds, Mark Spencer, Timothy Pawl, and James Rooney.

Michael Dodds argues that the revival of Aristotelian concepts of causality in recent philosophy creates new room for divine action in the

world, setting aside worries about violating supposed laws of nature. In addition, this Aristotelian model enables us to distinguish divine “primary” causality from creaturely “secondary” causation, which distinction can enable us to explain how chance and freedom can exist in creation without any limitation of divine power or providence.

Mark Spencer mentions several promising strategies for reconciling the distinctness of the three Divine Persons with the absolute simplicity of God. In his chapter, he seeks to do something more ambitious: to argue that the truth of classical theism entails the multiplicity of divine persons. Spencer makes use of the concept of *beauty* as his middle term. He argues that beauty should be counted among the transcendentals, along with being, unity, goodness, and truth. As Thomas Aquinas argued in the Fourth Way, the first cause must possess every perfection to a superlative degree. Hence, God must be absolutely beautiful. Spencer contends that one of the essential characteristics of beauty is the coexistence of both communicability and incommunicability. Hence, there must be a distinction within God between beauty as communicated and beauty as incommunicable, corresponding to the Son and the Father. Spencer argues for the reality of the Spirit along traditional lines.

Timothy Pawl defends the orthodox two-nature account of the Incarnation and demonstrates its consistency with divine simplicity, properly defined. Pawl argues that we must replace a naive definition of simplicity with one that makes explicit reference to natures: something is simple if it has (or is) a nature that has no parts. Since Christ has both a divine nature and a human one, He can be both absolutely simple with respect to the one nature and complex with respect to the other.

James Rooney considers the problem of reconciling absolute divine simplicity, in which God is identical with each of His properties, with the theory of divine energies, as formulated by Gregory Palamas. Divine energies, in this account, are multiple, uncreated manifestations or activities of God. Rooney argues that, contrary to first impressions, classical theism is not only compatible with but actually entails the existence of such energies. Rooney notes that Palamas himself was in no doubt of the compatibility of the two doctrines. Palamas explicitly rejects the idea that God has accidents or distinct properties. Rather than being intrinsic modifications of God, the divine energies are the truthmakers for extrinsic, relational predications involving God, including His relation as Creator of the world. Rooney then considers the question of how these relational properties could be said to be uncreated and fundamental to God. Rooney argues that we should interpret the activities as involving logical rather than “real” relations (using Thomistic terminology), as long as we recognize that some logical relations are fundamental to God. He proposes that the fundamentality involved is ideological rather than ontological, reflecting a deep fact about our modes of predicating properties of God. By

incorporating the Palamite distinction between essence and energies, Rooney extends the defenses of absolute simplicity and impassibility made by Tomaszewski and Dolezal.

The debate over classical theism should be of interest even to those belonging to no religious tradition at all. As the contributors to this volume make clear, the possibility of God as classically conceived raises deep questions about the nature of consciousness, knowledge, and will. If intentionality is a fundamental feature of reality, then the existence of representations, whether internal or external, cannot be a necessary concomitant of consciousness, since any representation must derive its content from some prior act of an intellect. Hence, taking intentionality seriously should open us to the possibility of a simple God who is able to know and to will many things, some necessarily and some contingently. Conversely, if we believe that intentionality is reducible to the causal roles of the internal states of a cognitive agent, then such a simple God would be a contradiction in terms.

Similarly, if we conceive of the will as consisting in the causation of action by the agent (rather than by some event in the agent's mental life), this renders a simple free agent possible, since the existence of a prior, internal change within the agent is not essential to the agent's acting voluntarily and freely.

Human agents require internal representations, both for the sake of consciousness and for the sake of voluntary action, but these internal representations are needed only for the sake of enabling ratiocination, and ratiocination in turn is needed only as a result of the limitations of our knowledge. A hypothetical being with complete and unmediated knowledge would require no such internal representations, and so could be consciously aware of and intentionally affect an external, contingent world without any internal modification.

Considering the possibility of a simple God also sheds light on the nature of phenomenology. If changing and contingent facts are immediately present to such a God, without the intermediation of internal representations, then whether such a God's phenomenology could take on changing and contingent coloration depends on whether we accept a purely intentionalist conception of phenomenology in general. If a conscious being's phenomenology is entirely determined by the intentional content of its cognitive states, then there is no bar to our attributing a rich and varying phenomenology even to the simplest of beings.

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Section I

What is Classical Theism?



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1 What is Classical Theism?

Edward Feser

1.1 Its Content and Proponents

Theism, generically understood, is the thesis that there is a God who created the world.¹ It is the common core conviction of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But there are different ways of developing this basic thesis—of spelling out exactly what is the nature of God and of his relationship to the world. *Classical* theism is the approach to doing so that has dominated Western philosophy and theology for most of their history. Its roots are in scripture and in Greek philosophy, especially the Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian traditions. Its great exponents in ancient and medieval thought include Philo of Alexandria and Moses Maimonides in the context of Judaism; Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas in the context of Christianity; and Al-Kindi and Avicenna in the context of Islam. In contemporary philosophy of religion its most prominent advocates are Thomists, both Catholic and Protestant.² But it is also represented by non-Thomist Scholastics, Eastern Orthodox theologians, and contemporary philosophers who do not fall into any of these camps but who are nevertheless sympathetic to Neo-Platonic or Aristotelian philosophical theology.³ Though the expression “classical theism” is not, as far as I know, to be found in any of the works of the ancient and medieval thinkers referred to, it has in recent decades come to be fairly commonly used as a label for the distinctive conception of God and his relationship to the world that those thinkers hold in common, both by defenders of that conception and by its critics.⁴

So far, of course, I have said *who* endorses classical theism, but not *what* classical theism itself amounts to. Here is one way to approach that question. Consider the distinction traditionally drawn in philosophy between the *ordo essendi* or order of being, and the *ordo cognoscendi* or order of discovery. The order of being comprises all the things that exist, which in classical and medieval philosophy were commonly understood to be arranged in a hierarchy – inorganic things, vegetative forms of life, animal life, and so on. The order of discovery concerns the sequence by which we arrive at an ever deeper understanding of reality—initial

sensory experience, inference to the causes of things experienced, knowledge of the natures of these causes, and so forth.

Classical theism, I propose, can to a first approximation best be understood as the thesis that God is to be conceived of *first and foremost* as the ultimate reality in the order of being, and the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery. It is worth emphasizing that the thesis is biblical no less than it is philosophical. That God is the ultimate reality in the order of being is expressed in Anselm's famous definition of God as *that than which nothing greater can be conceived* (*Proslogium*, Chapter II). But it also finds expression in God's description of himself as "I Am He Who Is" in Exodus 3:14, at least if we follow Aquinas in taking this to imply that God is the unique thing whose essence is identical to his existence.⁵ For this in turn entails that God stands at the apex of the hierarchy of reality, insofar as he alone need not and cannot have his existence imparted to him by another (*Summa Theologiae* I.3.4). That God is the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery is expressed in arguments like the one Aquinas gives for the claim that there must indeed be something whose essence is identical to its existence, to serve as the first uncaused cause of the existence of everything else (*De Ente et Essentia*, Chapter 4). But it also finds expression in the very first line of scripture: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

The two components of the thesis (the one referring to the order of being and the other to the order of discovery) parallel the two methods by which philosophical theologians have proposed fleshing out the concept of God: *perfect-being theology* and *first-cause theology*.⁶ Perfect-being theology starts with the idea that God is the most perfect being there could be, and then goes on to deduce, in a "top-down" fashion, what else must be true of him given that he is supremely perfect. First-cause theology starts with the idea that God is the ultimate cause of the world, and goes on to deduce, in a "bottom-up" fashion, what else must be true of him given that the world is his effect. Classical theists typically regard both methods as legitimate but tend to emphasize one over the other. For example, Anselm would certainly not deny that God is the first cause and ultimate explanation of the world, but in his best-known arguments he emphasizes instead the implications of the idea that God is the greatest conceivable being. Aquinas would certainly not deny that God is the most perfect being possible, but in spelling out the divine nature he tends to emphasize instead what follows from his being the first cause of the world.

Now, *non-classical* theists also typically take God to be the ultimate reality in the order of being, and the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery. Classical theists, meanwhile, make several further claims about the divine nature which are widely regarded as characteristic of their position, and which nonclassical theists reject. But recall

that what I said is that for the classical theist, God is to be conceived of *first and foremost* as the ultimate reality in the order of being, and the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery. The notion of God's *ultimacy* has a *regulative status* in classical theism that it does not have in nonclassical forms of theism. It puts strict constraints on what else we can say about God, and on how we ought to interpret the other things we say about him.

The other, and more controversial, things that classical theism says about God are taken by the classical theist to be nothing less than the ineluctable implications of taking God to be the ultimate reality in the order of being and the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery. For example, classical theism famously insists that God is simple or non-composite, impassible, immutable, eternal in the sense of atemporal, omniscient in a sense that entails complete knowledge of the future, and omnipotent in the sense that there can be nothing that exists or occurs independently of his causal power. Classical theists hold that these attributes follow from God's being the ultimate reality in the order of being and the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery. Hence, it is claimed, to deny any of them is at least implicitly to deny God's ultimacy.

The critic of classical theism rejects one or more of these attributes, and typically does so on the grounds that they conflict with some desideratum the critic takes to be non-negotiable. For example, some critics claim that one or more of these attributions conflict with what is said about God in scripture; or that they conflict with God's being a person with whom we can have a relationship; or that they conflict with our having free will; or that they are problematic in light of some metaphysics to which the critic is committed. From the point of view of classical theism, such objections entail that the nonclassical theist takes the desiderata in question, rather than God's ultimacy, to have fundamental regulative status in spelling out the concept of God, or at least that these desiderata have significantly weakened the nonclassical theist's commitment to divine ultimacy.

I have indicated that classical theism involves distinctive views not only about the divine nature but about the relationship between God and the world. One of them is the doctrine of *divine conservation*, according to which the world could not persist in being even for an instant unless God were conserving it in being. Another is the doctrine of *divine concurrence*, which holds that created things could not exercise causal power even for an instant unless God were concurring with their activity by imparting causal power to them. The basic idea is that if things could exist or operate independently of divine causality, even for a moment, then God would not be the ultimate reality or ultimate explanation of things. A world that could in some sense exist independently of God would to that extent be equally ultimate in the order of being, and a

world that could act independently of God would to that extent have an explanation that is equally ultimate in the order of discovery.⁷

With all of these considerations in hand, we are now in a position to suggest a more adequate characterization of classical theism, which I would put as follows:

Classical theism: the thesis that God is to be conceived of first and foremost as the ultimate reality in the order of being and the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery; that when followed out consistently this entails that the divine attributes must include simplicity, immutability, impassibility, atemporality, complete knowledge of the future, and causal involvement in everything that exists or occurs; and that as corollaries we ought to affirm the doctrines of divine conservation and concurrence.

There is also a strong tendency among classical theists to emphasize apophatic or negative theology as crucial to a proper understanding of at least many of the divine attributes, and related to this is a further tendency to insist that theological language must not be given a univocal interpretation (where an especially influential alternative to such an interpretation is the Thomistic position that theological language is to be understood analogically). This is a natural position to take given some of the attributes classical theists ascribe to God. However, there are some classical theists (in particular, Scotists) who regard theological language as univocal. Hence a rejection of such an account of theological language cannot be taken to be essential to classical theism, even if it is often a concomitant of it.

1.2 A Thesis of Both Natural and Revealed Theology

I emphasized above that classical theism is a thesis as biblical as it is philosophical. This is important because its critics often accuse it of allowing considerations deriving from Greek philosophy to trump the deliverances of divine revelation. The accusation is unjust in several respects.

First, and as I have noted, there are prominent scriptural passages like Genesis 1:1 and Exodus 3:14 that express the basic principles that the classical theist claims ought to regulate all our theorizing about the divine nature. There are also passages that can be taken to support the ascription to God of certain controversial divine attributes that classical theists affirm and their critics reject.⁸ For example, Christ is said in scripture not only to have life but to *be* life (John 14:6), he is said not only to have divine power and wisdom but to *be* the power and wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24), and God is said not merely to have love but to *be* love (1 John 4:8). Such statements imply an identity of God with

his attributes, which is one of the components of the doctrine of divine simplicity.⁹ There are also passages asserting that God does not change (Psalm 101:26-27; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17), which in the view of classical theists support the attribution of immutability to God.¹⁰ Naturally, scriptural prophesies imply divine knowledge of future events. And so on.

Of course, critics of classical theism would reject its interpretations of such scriptural passages, and they would appeal to other scriptural passages in defense of their denial of some of the attributes classical theists ascribe to God. For example, in criticizing the claim that God is immutable and impassible, they would appeal to passages that seem to imply that petitionary prayer can cause God to change his mind (Genesis 18:23-33; Exodus 32:11-14). But this brings us to a second point. Even critics of classical theism do not themselves hold that every biblical passage should be taken at face value. Again, they would say that the passages that seem to imply that God does not change do not really mean that. In other contexts, they would even agree with classical theist readings that take certain scriptural passages to be metaphorical. For example, there are passages that on a straightforward reading seem to imply that God has legs (Genesis 3:8), that he has eyes (Psalm 11:3), that he breathes (Job 4:9), and so on. Most critics of classical theism would agree with classical theists that these anthropomorphic verses should not be taken literally. They would agree that, since scripture itself tells us that God is the creator of the material world, it follows that he cannot himself be material, and thus cannot literally have a body.¹¹ It is precisely scriptural teaching that entails that certain passages of scripture must be interpreted metaphorically.

But this is precisely the sort of thing classical theists would say about those passages that seem to imply that God can change, or that God lacks some attribute ascribed to him by classical theists. They would say, for example, that if God were capable of change, then he would have potentialities as well as actualities, and would therefore be composed of parts rather than simple or non-composite, and would therefore require a cause of his own. In that case, he would not be the creator of everything other than himself—contrary to what scripture itself teaches. Accordingly, scriptural teaching itself entails that God cannot be changeable, just as it entails that he cannot be material. Therefore, it entails that passages that seem to imply that God can change, no less than passages that seem to imply that he has a body, must not be interpreted literally.¹²

Critics of classical theism will, naturally, disagree with this line of reasoning. The point, though, is that it simply will not do to pretend that the dispute between classical theists and their critics has to do with whether or not to allow extra-biblical philosophical doctrines to trump the teaching of scripture. Classical theists, no less than their

critics, can claim to be merely consistently working out the implications of scriptural teaching.¹³

A third problem with the claim that classical theism pits purely philosophical doctrines against the deliverances of special divine revelation is that it presupposes too narrow a conception of special divine revelation. Or at least it does so from the point of view of non-Protestant Christians. For Eastern Orthodox Christians, in order to understand what God has specially revealed to us, we need to look not only to scripture, but also to tradition, and in particular to the teaching of the Fathers of the Church and the first seven councils of the Church. For Catholics, we need to look not only to scripture, the Fathers, and the first seven councils, but also to the later councils and to the authoritative teaching of the Magisterium of the Church.

But the key claims of classical theism are clearly taught in these other authoritative sources. For example, the doctrine of divine simplicity is taught by Fathers of the Church such as Athanasius and Augustine, and by councils such as Lateran IV (1215) and Vatican I (1869–1870). Of course, some critics of classical theism will deny that these sources really are authoritative. But the point is that the disagreement between classical theists and their critics in that case is not over whether we should allow philosophical ideas to trump the deliverances of divine revelation. Rather, it is a dispute over whether certain claims (such as the doctrine of divine simplicity) really have been divinely revealed or not.

Having said all that, it is certainly true that classical theists *also* insist that their position follows from sound philosophical reasoning about God no less than it follows from special divine revelation. Nor would they deny that the Greek philosophers in particular developed key insights about how natural theology ought to spell out the divine nature. In a rudimentary form, these insights can be found even before Plato and Aristotle, in Pre-Socratic reflection about what ultimate reality must be like.¹⁴ As Lloyd Gerson notes, especially crucial in this connection was the gradual development in Greek philosophy of the notion of an *archē* or first principle from which all else derives, which is radically unlike the mundane reality it explains, causes without being caused, and exists of necessity (Gerson 1990, pp. 5–14). In Anaximander, this insight takes the form of the thesis that the first principle of all things must be *apeiron*—“unbounded” or “unlimited,” unlike the bounded or limited things it explains; in Xenophanes, it is evident in the refusal to ascribe any creaturely attributes to God; in Aristotle, it is conveyed in the judgment that the prime unmoved mover must be devoid of potentiality; in Plotinus, in the idea that the One must be utterly simple or non-composite. The idea is that anything that was bounded, or had creaturely attributes, or potentiality in need of actualization, or parts in need of combining, would require a cause of its own, and thus simply would not *be* the *archē* from which all else derives.

To make use of such ideas in articulating and defending the conception of God deriving from the sources of special revelation by no means entails corrupting the latter by reading alien elements into it. On the contrary, the traditional Christian interpretation of the significance of Greek philosophy is that it was a crucial part of the “preparation for the Gospel,” bringing the Gentile world into a position from which the central claims of Christianity could be properly understood. As St. Paul famously noted, the idea that God incarnate died on the cross was a stumbling block for the Jews, and seemed foolishness to the Greeks (1 Corinthians 1:23). Why would that have been?

It is clear enough why a Jewish audience of the day would be scandalized by it. A commitment to God’s unicity and absolute distinctness from the creation had been cemented into the psychology of the people of Israel over the course of centuries, as a long series of prophets and divine punishments gradually purged the nation of any vestige of idolatry. The claim that there are three Persons in the one God, and that one of them took on flesh and died on a cross, was therefore bound to be shocking. But these ideas would not have been properly understood if they were *not* shocking. If God is one, how can he be tripersonal? If he is the creator of the material world, how could he take on flesh? It was essential that the Jewish people, the first recipients of the Gospel, understood that however these doctrines are to be spelled out, they are *not* to be interpreted in terms of the idea that the God of Israel is merely part of some pantheon of corporeal deities—as they very easily would have been interpreted had a horror of idolatry not taken deep root among the Jewish people by the first century A.D.

Now, the Gentiles too needed a proper conception of the divine nature if they were correctly to understand the central claims of Christianity. Suppose your understanding of the divine were molded entirely by stories about the gods of Olympus, or by myths about dying deities like Adonis, Attis, Osiris, or Dionysus. Then the Trinity will sound like just another pantheon, the virginal conception of Jesus will be interpreted as comparable to Zeus’s impregnation of various mortal women, and the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus will be reminiscent of a dying and rising fertility god. In other words, they will seem to be mere variations on familiar pagan themes. However, if instead you conceive of God as the purely actual prime unmoved mover of the world, or as the non-composite One from which all else derives, then the claims of Christianity will sound as shocking as they did to the Jews of the first century. How could that which is pure actuality take on flesh and suffer? How could that which is utterly simple or non-composite be three divine Persons?

Naturally, the Christian theologian does not think that the central claims of Christianity *are* indeed scandalous or foolish. The point, though, is that they are so subtle and difficult—and indeed, they are

claimed to be *mysteria* in the sense that we could not have learned of them apart from special divine revelation—that a proper initial understanding of them *should* be jarring. Aquinas argues that what we can know about God by way of unaided reason we know by inference from the created order to its creator. But since creation is the work of the Persons of the Trinity together, such inference is bound to reveal to us the unity of God while obscuring his tripersonal nature (*Summa Theologiae* I.32.1). The Trinity is, accordingly, bound to be a surprising doctrine, and if it were not surprising, that would likely reflect some serious misunderstanding of it (for example, in terms of a reading that would divide the divine substance and yield polytheism, or confound the Persons and yield modalism).

So, natural theology of the kind that developed in the Greek philosophical tradition provided a preparation for Christian revelation supplementary to that of the Old Testament. Gentile audiences no less than Jewish ones needed preexisting conceptual resources in terms of which the Gospel could be correctly understood. To borrow an expression from Protestant theologian Emil Brunner, natural theology provided a “point of contact” between Christian revelation and Gentile culture.¹⁵

Another objection to classical theism related to its allegedly excessive deference to philosophy is that it yields a conception of God that makes him too cold and distant to attract our religious sentiments. One problem with this claim is that it presupposes too great a bifurcation between our rationality and our affective lives. Suppose someone becomes convinced through philosophical argument that he is (say) sustained in being at every moment by an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent uncaused cause, apart from whose action one would instantly lapse into nothingness. Perhaps someone could be convinced of this and yet remain emotionally unmoved by it, but it is hardly implausible to suppose that someone *could* be moved by it. Certainly it seems quite implausible (and contrary to the experience of those of us whose conversion to Christianity was mediated by philosophy) to stomp one’s foot and insist that one *could not* be moved by it. It is also contrary to the facts of the history of natural theology, which include Aristotle’s conviction that the best life must include the contemplation and service of God,¹⁶ and Plotinus’s conception of the One as a father we have forgotten (*Enneads* V.1.1).

Then there is the fact that one could certainly arrive at a belief in the reality of God, conceived of in the remote and forbidding manner ascribed to classical theism by its critics, precisely as a result of religious experience rather than a dry syllogism. Rudolf Otto’s (1923) famous analysis in his book *The Idea of the Holy* illustrates the point.¹⁷ Otto characterizes the fundamental religious experience as one of a sense of radical dependence on that which is *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. That is to say, it involves an awareness of being the creature of

something which is, first of all, “wholly other” than us and which cannot entirely be captured via ordinary concepts. So radically different is it from the mundane world that attempts to describe its nature inevitably have the air of paradox. Second, we are, accordingly, left in a kind of stark wonder, and indeed an awe and dread of it as something overwhelming, majestic, and unapproachable. But third, at the same time this awe and dread are mixed with a fascination and attraction for this wholly other ground of our being.

Whatever one thinks of Otto’s phenomenological analysis, what it captures is something far closer to the classical theist’s conception of God than it is to, say, the way open theists or theistic personalists conceive of him. It is, for example, clearly more consonant with most classical theists’ tendency to emphasize apophatic theology and non-univocal accounts of theological language than with the nonclassical theist’s predilection for univocal descriptions of God. Yet Otto’s account is not the result of a bloodlessly rationalist approach to theology, and indeed his aim was precisely to avoid such an approach. It also gives the lie to the assumption that the supposedly remote and forbidding God of classical theism could not be religiously attractive.

1.3 The Centrality of Simplicity

Though the critics of classical theism are typically opposed fairly vehemently to several of its components, its doctrine of divine simplicity is perhaps the central target of their criticism. Other crucial divine attributes are taken by classical theists to follow from divine simplicity. It is the attribute that nonclassical theists often take to be the one that most makes God seem to be abstract and impersonal. They also often evince puzzlement at the emphasis classical theists put on it. So the doctrine of divine simplicity seems worthy of special comment in a general characterization of classical theism.

What the doctrine says is that God is devoid of parts of any kind. Naturally, that includes parts of the sort physical objects have, whether understood in terms of the particles posited by modern physics, in terms of the substantial form and prime matter posited by the Aristotelian, or in some other terms. About that much, classical theists and most of their critics are in agreement. But the doctrine also denies that God has parts of a *metaphysical* kind. For instance, according to Thomists, the essence of each kind of created thing comprises a *genus* and a *specific difference*. The essence of a human being, for example, is to fall under the genus *animal*, and to differ as a species from other animals in being *rational*. *Animality* and *rationality*, our genus and specific difference, are metaphysical parts of our nature. According to the doctrine of divine simplicity, God does not have parts of this kind. He does not fall under some genus, and thus there is no specific difference that sets him apart from

other things in a genus. In a created thing, there is also a distinction between its *essence* and its *existence*, and these too amount to metaphysical parts. But God has no parts of this kind either. His essence *just is* his existence rather than something distinct from it. Nor is there any distinction in God between his substance and the attributes of that substance. God *just is* his power, *just is* his knowledge, *just is* his goodness, and so on. Nor is there any distinction in God between actuality and potentiality. He is pure actuality, with no potentialities that might be actualized.¹⁸

Now, the reason God is said to be simple or non-composite in these ways is that nothing that is composite can be *ultimate* in the manner that classical theism insists God is. One way to understand why is in terms of the Thomistic thesis that anything that is composed of parts will of necessity possess potentiality that must be actualized in order for that thing to exist. But what is like that will, accordingly, require a cause, and thus will not be the *first* cause of things—it will not be the ultimate reality in the order of being or the ultimate explanation in the order of discovery. Since being ultimate in these ways is just what it is to be God, it follows that God must be simple or non-composite.

The *uniqueness* of God is also taken by classical theists to be closely connected to his simplicity. Anything in which there is a distinction between its genus and specific difference, or between its essence and its existence, is such that it is of a kind of which there could at least in principle be more than one member. In particular, it will be one member of a genus of which there could in principle be other members, and one instance of an essence of which there could in principle be other instances. Accordingly, to place God within a genus or to affirm a distinction between him and his essence is implicitly to allow that there might in principle be more than one God. It is to affirm at most that there *happens to be* one God, not that it is *necessary* that there be only one God. David Bentley Hart (Hart 2013, p. 127) suggests that to reject classical theism is implicitly to adopt a kind of “monopolytheism.”

So, divine simplicity is not some mere curiosity, the classical theist’s attachment to which is either inexplicable or at best derives from some fixation on abstract philosophical principle. Rather, the classical theist takes it to be a necessary implication of the biblical affirmation that there is one God who is the creator of everything other than himself.

It is in part on the basis of divine simplicity that the classical theist ascribes to God further attributes of which nonclassical theists are critical. For example, if God is pure actuality and lacks potentiality, then he cannot undergo change but is immutable. If he is immutable, then he must be eternal in the sense of being atemporal. Moreover, if he is immutable, he cannot be said to gain or lose any intrinsic attributes. If he does not gain any intrinsic attributes, then he cannot come to learn things he did not previously know, and must in general be impassible.

If he is atemporal and does not know things by learning them, then he must know what he knows in a single timeless act. His knowledge of the future as well as of the past and present must be part of this one act, in which case he knows everything that *will* happen in just the way that he knows what *has* happened. And so forth. (Obviously, this is all very quick, but I am not trying here to present a detailed case for these various divine attributes. I am simply indicating how the classical theist takes divine simplicity to have a number of significant implications.)

Through divine simplicity, then, much of the rest of the classical theist conception of God is claimed to follow from the fundamental thesis that God is the ultimate reality in the order of being and the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery. Classical theism and divine simplicity thus arguably stand or fall together, which accounts for the central place the debate over divine simplicity has had in the larger dispute between classical theists and their critics.

1.4 Neo-Theist Rivals

In order to try thoroughly to understand a view, it is always useful to consider the rivals to that view and how they differ from it. You can better grasp the significance of a claim when you see what happens in the thinking of those who reject it. Norman Geisler uses the apt umbrella term “neo-theism” to characterize the different varieties of nonclassical forms of theism that have arisen in reaction against classical theism.¹⁹ There are four main varieties: *deism*, *process theism*, *open theism*, and *theistic personalism*. Let’s consider each of these in turn.

The word “deism” is used in different ways, but for present purposes I will take it to be the view that once God creates the world, it is capable of continuing in existence without him. This is a significant departure from classical theism because it implicitly denies that God is the ultimate reality and the ultimate explanation of the existence of things, at least in the strongest possible sense of “ultimate.” For if the world might exist *now* without God conserving it in being, why could it not have existed *always* without him conserving it in being? A divine first cause becomes, as Laplace would say, a hypothesis of which we have no need. The world is at least equally as fundamental as God, insofar as it could in principle exist without him. Indeed, it may even itself be the fundamental reality, at least insofar as if we deny divine conservation, we thereby undermine the main grounds we have for affirming God’s existence in the first place.²⁰

Now, I mentioned above that classical theism affirms divine concurrence as well as divine conservation. Here is one way to understand why. Thomists are committed to the principle *agere sequitur esse*, or “action follows being.” The idea is that the manner in which a thing acts reflects the manner in which it exists. When the implications of this are

worked out, it arguably supports the conclusion that if a thing can at least in principle exercise causal power apart from divine concurrence, then it can also at least in principle exist apart from divine conservation. In short, to reject divine concurrence is implicitly to accept deism. Hence the classical theist must affirm divine concurrence no less than divine conservation.²¹

Process theism (also known as “panentheism”) holds that God possesses potentiality as well as actuality, and is therefore changeable and passible.²² It takes the world to be continuous with God, in a manner analogous to the relationship of the body to the mind.²³ Process theists also reject any conception of omnipotence on which everything that happens involves divine concurrence.²⁴ *Open theism*, meanwhile, rejects the conception of omniscience according to which God knows what we will do in the future.²⁵ Accordingly, it holds that God can learn, and therefore is changeable, and therefore has potentialities as well as actuality, though it does not share process theism’s blurring of the distinction between God and the world. Process theism’s qualification of divine omnipotence and open theism’s qualification of divine omniscience are motivated by the supposition that left unqualified, these attributes would conflict with the reality of human free choice.

The basic thesis of *theistic personalism* is that whatever else God is, he is an instance of the genus *person*, alongside other instances such as human persons, angelic persons, and any other species of persons that there might be (such as, according to some views, extraterrestrials and artificial intelligence). Now, Brian Davies (2004, chapter 1) introduced the term “theistic personalism” to characterize a variety of positions in contemporary philosophy of religion that depart from classical theism in various ways, including process theism and open theism. Hence he uses it more or less as a synonym for “neo-theism.” However, it seems to me more apt as a label for a *species* of neo-theism that differs from the ones already considered. Each species has a different fundamental motivation or characteristic. Deism is arguably motivated more by considerations about the ontological independence of the created order rather than about the divine nature *per se*. Open theism is motivated primarily by concerns about human free will. Process theism is motivated by that concern too, but also by a commitment to a general process metaphysics (especially the version developed by Alfred North Whitehead). Adherents of the view that I am suggesting we reserve the “theistic personalist” label for those who do not necessarily share any of those concerns. Their fundamental motivation is instead, again, the conviction that whatever else we say about God, we must first and foremost take him to be a *person* of a certain kind, albeit a person who does not have the limitations that human persons have.

When introducing the notion of theistic personalism, Davies (2004, p. 9) cites as representatives of the view two contemporary

philosophers of religion who could not be more prominent: Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne. It is important to emphasize, though, that the view is *implicit* in their writings rather than explicit. Nor, as far as I know, have they applied the “theistic personalist” label to themselves. Again, that is Davies’s term for a tendency that he claims (correctly, in my view) to be present in their work. Plantinga (2011, p. ix) takes theism to be “the thought that there is such a person as God: a personal agent who has created the world and is all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good.” Swinburne suggests that “that God is a person, yet one without a body, seems the most elementary claim of theism.” Plantinga (1980, p. 47) rejects the doctrine of divine simplicity on the grounds that if it were true, then, he alleges, it would follow that God “isn’t a person but a mere abstract object.” Swinburne (1977, p. 99) suggests that we can easily conceive of what it is to be an “omnipresent spirit” of the kind he says God is by simply imagining what it would be like for us gradually to come to have a kind of knowledge and control over the rest of the material world that is similar to the knowledge and control we have over our bodies (moving other things about by way of a kind of telekinesis, etc.). Swinburne claims to accept a version of divine simplicity, but he rejects the traditional understanding of it, according to which the divine attributes are identical to each other and to God (Swinburne 1994, pp. 160–3). Moreover, his interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity is so remote from the Christian classical theist’s understanding of it that Swinburne posits *three* divine individuals (Swinburne 1994, chapter 8; Feser 1997, pp. 175–84), which clearly implies that there are parts in the Godhead (and arguably amounts to polytheism to boot).

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that what the classical theist objects to in theistic personalism is *not* that the view takes God to be personal, as opposed to an impersonal force or principle. Most classical theists agree that God is personal, since they attribute intellect, knowledge, will, love, and other personal attributes to him. When the classical theist objects to the statement that “God is a person,” the problematic word is not “person” but “a.” There are two main problems with it, one philosophical and the other having to do with what Christians take us to know through special divine revelation.

The philosophical problem is that to say that God is *a* person, and then go on to suggest that we can understand what kind of person he is by comparing and contrasting him with human persons, suggests that God falls into the species *divine person*, where that species sits alongside the species *human person* under the common genus *person*. That would entail in turn that the species God falls under has a specific difference that sets it apart from human beings and whatever other species might fall under the genus *person*, and that God is a particular instance of the essence defined by the genus and specific difference of

the species he falls under. But all of this conflicts with divine simplicity. If God falls under a species, then he has metaphysical parts, namely a genus and a specific difference. If he is an instance of the essence that defines this species, then he has further metaphysical parts, namely essence and existence.

That their views imply such composition of parts in God is in any event clear enough from the fact that Plantinga explicitly denies divine simplicity and that Swinburne qualifies simplicity to the point of effectively denying it, at least from a classical theist point of view. But if God has such parts, then, the classical theist argues, he cannot be unique *in principle* but at most only in contingent fact (since there could always in principle be something else that instantiates his essence). Moreover, if he has such parts, then he will require a cause of his own. In these ways, he just will not be the ultimate reality in the order of being or the ultimate explanation in the order of explanation.

The problem that special divine revelation poses for theistic personalism is that the claim that “God is a person” seems to conflict with the doctrine of the Trinity. As Davies (2006, p. 59) points out, the first time that formulation appears in English appears to be from a seventeenth-century trial in which a Unitarian was accused of heresy precisely for claiming that God is a person. The doctrine of the Trinity maintains, of course, that God is *three* Persons in one substance, not *a* person. To say flatly that “God is a person” seems to insinuate either that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are mere guises under which this one person appears (which would be the heresy of modalism) or that God is to be identified with one of the Persons of the Trinity, presumably the Father, and that the other two Persons are lesser deities of some kind (which would suggest a kind of polytheism).

What process theism, open theism, and theistic personalism all have in common, despite their different motivations, is (the classical theist holds) a tendency toward an excessive anthropomorphism—toward what Geisler (1997, chapter 3) calls “remaking God in our image.” From the point of view of classical theism, neo-theism in these various guises marks a falling away from the hard-won wisdom of millennia—from the Old Testament tradition’s long and difficult purging from the people of Israel of any tendency to conceive of God in creaturely terms; from the Greek and medieval philosophical tradition’s consistent working out of the implications of God’s ultimacy; and from the Christian theological tradition’s insistence that the divine and human natures of the Person of Christ must be understood to be utterly distinct and unmixed. Key elements of classical theism like the doctrine of divine simplicity became part of Christian orthodoxy precisely because they are safeguards of other components of orthodoxy, and not because of some purported insinuation into Christianity of alien pagan philosophical elements.

Notes

- 1 Used even more generically, the term “theism” would cover any view that holds that a god or gods of some kind or other exist, which would include polytheism and views that affirm the existence of God but do not take the world to have been created. But in contemporary philosophy of religion, the term is commonly used in a narrower sense to connote the familiar monotheistic belief in a single creator God.
- 2 An influential contemporary exposition of classical theism written from a Catholic Thomist point of view can be found in (Davies 2004, chapter 1). A contemporary Protestant Thomist defense can be found in (Geisler 1997).
- 3 Non-Thomist varieties of Scholasticism would include Scotism and Suarezianism. A recent Eastern Orthodox defense of classical theism can be found in David Bentley Hart (2013). A recent presentation of a Neo-Platonic brand of philosophical theism can be found in Lloyd P. Gerson (1994). A recent defense of a broadly Aristotelian philosophical theism can be found in David Conway (2000).
- 4 For example, the label is used in this sense both in Davies’ *An Introduction to Philosophy of Religion* (2004), which is sympathetic to classical theism, and in Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (1984), which is hostile to it. Unfortunately, though, contemporary usage is not as uniform as these examples might indicate. For example, in their book *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, Moreland and Craig (2003) appear to adopt “classical theism” as a label for their favored conception of God (e.g., at p. 573). But they are also critical of divine simplicity as traditionally understood and significantly qualify divine atemporality, and as we will see, this would put them outside the boundaries of classical theism as thinkers like the ones I’ve mentioned would understand it.
- 5 *Summa Theologiae* I.13.11 and *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.22. Of course, this interpretation of Exodus 3:14 is controversial. For discussion and defense, see (White 2016, pp. 35–44 and 292–304).
- 6 I borrow the labels from (Leftow, 1998). Thomas Morris (1991, p. 32) i refers to the second of these methods as “creation theology” rather than “first-cause theology.” I prefer Leftow’s label, since Morris’s might give the uninformed reader the false impression that the distinction has something to do with whether or not one accepts “creationism” in biology.
- 7 In this article I am primarily concerned to explain what classical theism is rather than to argue for it. But naturally, the claims about God’s nature and relationship to the world that I have been describing call for further exposition and defense. Cf. (Feser 2017), especially chapter 6.
- 8 For a recent discussion of the scriptural evidence favoring several attributes ascribed by classical theists to God, see (Geisler, House, and Herrera 2001).
- 9 For recent discussions of the scriptural foundations of the doctrine of divine simplicity, see (Duby 2016, chapters 3 and 4; Barrett 2017, chapter 5; Dolezal 2017, pp. 44–50).
- 10 For recent discussions of the scriptural foundations of attributing immutability to God, see (Duby 2016 pp. 133–43; Baines et al., 2015, Part II).
- 11 Of course, Christian classical theists would agree that in becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ, God took on a body. But the point is that though Christ had a body in his *human* nature, he did not have one in his *divine* nature.
- 12 Cf. (Davies 2004, pp. 170–72).
- 13 For a recent detailed defense of the compatibility of classical theism with scriptural teaching about the nature of God, see (Stump 2016).
- 14 Cf. (Jaeger 1947; Gerson 1990).

- 15 That is not to imply that Brunner would agree with everything I and other Thomists would say about what can be known about God via purely philosophical arguments. His own position lay somewhere in between what Thomists would say, on the one hand, and what his critic Karl Barth, who was hostile to the very idea of natural theology, would say on the other. Cf. their famous debate in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002).
- 16 *Eudemian Ethics* 1249b16–23. Cf. the discussion in (Kenny 1992, chapter 7).
- 17 As with Brunner, I am not claiming that Otto, who was a Protestant, would agree with everything that Thomists and other Scholastics would say about matters of natural theology.
- 18 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.3 for a classic defense of the claim that God must lack parts of any of these kinds.
- 19 Cf. (Geisler 1997) and (Geisler, House, and Herrera, 2001) Geisler himself doesn't use the hyphen, but I prefer it.
- 20 Or at least some classical theists (like Thomists) might hold this, since many of them hold that it is the idea that God conserves the world in being at every moment, rather than the idea that he caused it to begin to exist at some point in the past, that provides the surest avenue of demonstrating the existence of a first cause.
- 21 Cf. (Feser 2017 pp. 232-38) for more detailed discussion of these issues.
- 22 Cf. (Hartshorne 1967, pp. 71f.; Hartshorne 1964, p. 298).
- 23 Cf. (Hartshorne 1964, p. 185).
- 24 Hartshorne 1984, pp. 10–26. Hartshorne wrongly characterizes Aquinas's position on this issue as a version of the soft determinist thesis that determinism is true but that free will is compatible with it. In fact, Aquinas's position on free will does not correspond exactly to any of the positions usually considered in contemporary discussions of the topic. Cf. (Stump 2003, chapters 9 and 13; Hoffmann and Furlong 2016)
- 25 Cf. (Pinnock et al., 1994).

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