

Theistic Activism

A New Problem and Solution

PAUL GOULD
Faculty Commons
Durham, North Carolina

Platonism is the view that, in addition to the concrete and contingent universe, there are necessarily existing abstract entities. A Platonist regarding properties endorses the view then that there are necessarily existing abstract properties. One of the primary motivations for Platonism regarding properties, it is argued, is its *explanatory superiority* over its nominalistic competitors in accounting for so-called resemblance facts, subject-predicate discourse, and abstract reference.¹ A further motivation for Platonism regarding properties, it is argued, is its *usefulness*—Platonic properties do all kinds of work in explicating the relationship between mind, language, and world. This fact is especially evident with contemporary philosophers of religion, who almost unconsciously employ Platonic entities, including properties, in theory construction and in defending various claims.² If one is a theist, chances are that she will be a Platonic theist.

Whether or not Platonic properties are fundamental, admitting of their own basic category, or are further reducible to some other category is often left as an open question. For those who do consider the question, the move of choice is to identify properties with something else, usually divine concepts. One prominent Platonic account of God's relationship to abstract objects, that of Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel, suggests that their Absolute

ABSTRACT: Platonic theists have fallen on hard days. Theologically, it is argued that Platonism is unacceptable for the traditional theist, violating the aseity-sovereignty doctrine. Philosophically, Platonic theism suffers from an unforgiveable sin—incoherence. Understandably, the arguments in the literature are advanced as generically as possible, seeking metaphysical thinness in order to achieve clarity. I argue that this way of engaging the debate over the possibility of Platonic theism will only take one so far. What is needed is a bit of serious (and substantial) metaphysics. I engage in such serious metaphysics on behalf of one kind of Platonic Theist, the Theistic Activist, arguing that a new problem and solution surfaces when considering the substance-property nexus. Further, the solution on offer to this new problem shows promise in addressing more generic arguments against the possibility of Platonic theism.

1. See e.g., Michael Loux, *Substance and Attribute* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1978), 1–106; and *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 17–83.

2. Witness, e.g., Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), where his free-will defense and modalized ontological argument utilize Platonic properties—individual essences, maximal greatness, and more—on almost every page.

Creationism should be understood as “simply an updated and refined version of Augustine’s doctrine of divine ideas.”³ According to the Augustinian view, Platonic properties are identical with divine concepts:

Contemporary philosophers now typically refer to this Augustinian view as “theistic activism”, since according to it, the existence of properties and propositions is due to the *activity* of the divine intellect: properties are divine concepts resulting from God’s acts of conceptualizing and propositions are divine thoughts due to God’s acts of thinking or considering.⁴

Depending on how properties are understood, a Platonic theist can either be a Theistic Activist or not. If properties are fundamental, admitting their own ontological category, then the Platonic theist is not a Theistic Activist. If the Platonic theist identifies Platonic properties with divine concepts, then she is a Theistic Activist. Thus, Theistic Activism can be understood as one kind of Platonic Theism.

It is often argued that Platonic theism is theologically unacceptable for the traditional theist because it violates the aseity-sovereignty doctrine. A strong reading of the aseity-sovereignty doctrine states that (a) God is the uncreated creator of all things, and (b) all things other than God depend upon God and God depends on nothing whatsoever. Platonic theism is typically understood to be in tension with this strong reading of the aseity-sovereignty doctrine for Platonic entities are usually understood as either independent or (at least) uncreated. To avoid this tension, the move of choice for the Platonic theist is (often) to somehow locate the Platonic horde in the being of God. My concern in this paper is not to render Platonic theism theologically acceptable to the traditional theist. I shall assume, for purposes of argument, that the move to identify abstract objects with various constituents and activities of the divine mind helps to render Platonic theism theologically acceptable to the traditional theist. I want to focus our attention on the knottier charge of incoherence. Typically, the worry is advanced generically (that is, without taking a stand on the ontology of properties): “God has properties. If God is the creator of all things, then God is the creator of his properties. But God can’t create properties unless he already has the property of *being able to create a property*. Thus, we are off to the races, ensnared in a vicious explanatory circle.”⁵ As if *that* were not problem enough, I think a new ver-

3. Christopher Menzel, “God and Mathematical Objects,” in *Mathematics in a Postmodern Age*, ed. Russell Howell and James Bradley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 71.

4. Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey Brower, “A Theistic Argument against Platonism (and in Support of Truthmakers and Divine Simplicity),” *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 2, ed. Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), 363.

5. I think the most rigorous argument against the compatibility of Platonism and traditional theism is Bergmann and Brower’s, “A Theistic Argument against Platonism (and in Support of Truthmakers and Divine Simplicity).” Other incompatibility arguments can be found in William Lane Craig and Paul Copan, *Creation Out Of Nothing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic,

sion of this general problem surfaces for the Theistic Activist when identifying properties with divine concepts. One begins to wonder if the metaphysical benefits to Platonism are purchased at too high a price—charges of incoherence can always be avoided by stipulation. While having no appetite for desert landscapes, it seems that much of contemporary philosophy of religion hungers for metaphysical *thinness*, that is, explaining as much as possible without engaging in substantive metaphysical spadework. But such a methodology comes at a cost—often important distinctions are blurred, overlooked, or simply underappreciated. So I ask, can a metaphysically *attractive* account of substance be blended with Platonism in order to avoid the incoherency charge? In what follows, I will engage in metaphysical spadework related to the logic of property exemplification in order to highlight a new problem and possible solution for the Theistic Activist regarding properties. An additional benefit will be the outline of a solution to the more generic incoherency charge: The Platonic theist should be an Aristotelian regarding substance. The upshot: the Platonic theist, at least with respect to this new problem, *can* be a Theistic Activist. Whether or not she *should* be is left as an open question.

Property Exemplification: Two Platonic Approaches

Minimally, to exemplify a property is to possess or have a property. This much, most philosophers can agree on. Broadly speaking, two distinct styles of metaphysical explanation can be discerned for understanding property possession by substances. Aristotle tells us that the items (intuitively) had or possessed by sensible particulars can be understood to exist either “separate from the sensible things” or “present in them.”⁶ More recently, Nicholas Wolterstorff speaks of relational and constituent ontologies.⁷ Aristotle’s and Wolterstorff’s distinction is meant, it seems, to mark out the same contrast. The expressions “in” and “separate” can be used to mark a variety of contrasts, but the operative contrast in these two distinct styles seems to be as follows: to be in a thing is to be a proper constituent of the thing, whereas to be separate is to exist apart from the thing. As Loux points out, the force of “separate” here is parasitic on its opposition to “in.”⁸

2004), 167–95; Matthew Davidson, “A Demonstration against Theistic Activism,” *Religious Studies* 35 (1999): 277–90; Scott Davison, “Could Abstract Objects Depend Upon God?” *Religious Studies* 27 (1991): 485–97; and Brian Leftow, “Is God an Abstract Object?” *Noûs* 24 (1990): 581–98.

6. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 996a15–16, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1574.

7. Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Bergmann’s Constituent Ontology,” *Noûs* 4 (1970): 109–34; “Divine Simplicity,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 540–41 and 547–48.

8. Michael Loux, “Aristotle’s Constituent Ontology,” *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 2, ed. Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), 207n2.

Both approaches tell us that substances exhibit whatever character they have in virtue of properties had by it. Thus, we find the following framework constraint in play for both metaphysical styles:

Principle for Character Grounding (PCG): Properties explain the character things have.

God's being divine is partially explained by the property *being divine*; Socrates' being wise is partially explained by the property *being wise*. In some sense, then, properties are explanatorily prior to the things that have them.⁹ The explanatory relation PCG picks out is a logical relation as well: if x is explanatorily prior to y , then x is logically prior to y (and vice versa). Thus, properties are explanatorily and logically prior to the things that have them.

How is logical priority to be understood? According to Michael Bergmann and Jeff Brower, logical priority is associated with a special kind of dependence. To cite a couple examples: the parts of a watch are logically prior to the whole (that is, the watch); the thinker is logically prior to its thoughts. Bergmann and Brower state: "If an object a is logically prior to an object b , then b depends for its existing on a (in a way that a doesn't depend on b)."¹⁰ The important point is that logical priority is an asymmetric relation that cannot be mutual. As such, logical priority must be sharply distinguished from *being a necessary condition of*, which is not necessarily asymmetric (for example, any pair of necessary truths is such that each is a necessary condition of the other) and *entailment* (for example, the existence of any necessary being entails the existence of any other necessary being) since, again, logical priority cannot be mutual. With respect to property exemplification, the property *being divine* is logically prior to the state of affairs "God's exemplifying being divine," the property *being wise* is logically prior to the state of affairs "Socrates' being wise." PCG highlights what we shall call the primary role for Platonic properties: that of *making* or structuring reality. As George Bealer observes, "[properties] play a fundamental constitutive role in the structure of the world."¹¹

So, both approaches endorse PCG. However, the two approaches differ in their account of how character exhibition is to be further analyzed. Those who endorse the constituent approach tell us that the familiar substances of our everyday experience exhibit their character in virtue of their constituent metaphysical and physical parts (where a metaphysical part is meant to range over properties that are in the substance). On the relational approach, by contrast, familiar substances exhibit their character through objects that are not

9. I say "in some sense" to allow for the possibility of different kinds of explanation and hence, different senses of logical priority. More on this in the third section.

10. Bergmann and Brower, "A Theistic Argument against Platonism," 368.

11. George Bealer, "A Theory of Concepts and Concept Possession," *Philosophical Issues* 9 (1998): 268.

immanent in those substances. Rather, as Aristotle puts it, they exist “apart from the sensibles,” and it is in virtue of standing in some nonmereological relation to those objects that the familiar substances exhibit the character that they do.

Proponents of the two strategies differ, then, in their characterization of familiar substances. Those who follow the constituent approach endorse a view of familiar substances in which the whole is more than its commonsense mereological parts. The relational ontologist, on the other hand, will argue that familiar substances exhibit a commonsense mereological structure—the only parts that familiar substances have are their commonsense parts. In general, we can characterize these two distinct styles of metaphysical explanation as follows:¹² a constituent ontology

aims at a general characterization of substances in terms of various types of constituents which are in some straightforward sense intrinsic to them and compatible with their status as unified wholes

whereas a relational ontology

aims at a general characterization of substances in terms of their relations to entities (e.g., Platonistically conceived universals or properties, including essences and natures) that have their being and reality independently of those substances. These natures and characteristics of substances are in some obvious way extrinsic to them and linked to them by the relation of exemplification or participation. On such a view all individuals are in some sense lacking in intrinsic composition at any level other than that of material parts.

Wolterstorff claims that the medievals worked within the style of the constituent approach, whereas the majority of twentieth-century philosophers (especially those working in the analytic tradition) assume a relational approach. “The pattern is clear,” says Wolterstorff: “twentieth century ontology is relentlessly relational in its style. We don’t think of entities as being composites of constituents but as standing in multiple relationships with other entities.”¹³ When Wolterstorff made these comments in 1991, they might have been true. In any case, I do not think they are accurate today. In fact, there seems to be a bit of a pendulum swing towards a constituent approach in ontology. Contemporary defenders of the constituent approach to property

12. The following characterization of constituent and relational ontologies is from Barry Smith, “On Substance, Accidents and Universals: In Defense of a Constituent Ontology,” *Philosophical Papers* 27 (1997): 106–7. Smith’s characterization as quoted above is (said by Smith to be taken) from Alfred J. Freddoso, “Introduction to Ontology” lecture notes, Notre Dame University.

13. Wolterstorff, “Divine Simplicity,” 548.

exemplification include *inter alia* Gustav Bergmann, David Armstrong, Andrew Newman, J. P. Moreland, and Barry Smith.¹⁴

Are there decisive reasons in favor of one approach instead of the other? Certainly, proponents of either view think so. But, knockdown arguments rendering one view conclusively better than another remain elusive. Both sides offer familiar charges against the other: the relational ontologist charges the constituent ontologist of a category mistake;¹⁵ in the same spirit, the constituent ontologist charges the relational ontologist with failing to properly ground the character of familiar substances and with failing to specify how beings like us can acquire knowledge of nonspatiotemporal entities.¹⁶ Fortunately there is no reason to decide this issue here, for, as it turns out, there are able philosophers who employ both ontological styles and have attempted to work out theories of substance and property amenable to (a) a theory of Platonic properties and (b) a commitment to a broadly Aristotelian account of substance.¹⁷

On either approach, how is property possession to be understood for the divine substance? Consider the following atomic sentence:

- (1) God is divine.

On the Platonist schema (assuming a unified theory of predication; see the next section), (1) can be further analyzed as:

- (2) God exemplifies *being divine*.

On the relational approach, (2) is assayed as follows: The divine substance (that is, God) stands in a nonmereological relation or tie to the property *being divine*. The divine substance is a metaphysical simple that stands in various relations to other entities including its properties.¹⁸ This standard account of the relational approach to property exemplification can be found *inter alia* in Plantinga, van Inwagen, Wolterstorff, and Loux.¹⁹

14. See Gustav Bergmann, *Realism: A Critique of Brentano and Meinong* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967); David Armstrong, *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1989); Andrew Newman, *The Physical Basis of Predication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); J. P. Moreland, *Universals* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); and Smith, "On Substance, Accidents and Universals."

15. As Loux does in "Aristotle's Constituent Ontology," 209.

16. As Aristotle argues against Plato (who separated the Forms from their instances) in *Metaphysics*, 1079b11–1080a10.

17. The philosophers I have in mind are Loux and Moreland. For more on the possibility of combining Platonism regarding properties with an Aristotelian substance see my "How Does an Aristotelian Substance Have Its Platonic Properties? Issues and Options," *Axiomathes* (forthcoming).

18. Obviously, for material objects, the substance will not be a physical simple—it will have all of its common sense physical parts.

19. See, e.g., Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*; Peter van Inwagen, "A Theory of Properties," *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 1, ed. Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 107–38; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *On Universals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); and Loux, *Substance and Attribute*.

On the constituent approach, things are a bit more complicated. According to Moreland, who as far as I am aware is the only Platonist who has articulated and defended a robust constituent approach to substance, (2) is true in “a loose and popular sense” but false in a “strict and philosophical sense.”²⁰ Rather, (1) can be further analyzed as:

(3) *Being divine* inheres in God as a constituent.

and

(4) God’s bare particular exemplifies *being divine*.

Statements (3) and (4) are assayed as follows: the divine substance (that is, God) has as a constituent the property *being divine*. Hence, the property *inheres* in the divine substance and is *exemplified* by an individuator that is also a constituent of the divine substance (for example, for Moreland, a bare particular, perhaps it could be a thin particular or an individual piece of matter in material substances). The constituent ontologist adds another relation to her toolbox when explicating property possession by a substance. The property *inheres* in the substance and is *exemplified* by some individuator (which also inheres within the substance). Hence, Moreland (and other constituent ontologists who follow) makes a distinction between the way a substance has a property (properties *inhere* in substances) and the way that a substance’s bare particular has a property (properties are *exemplified* by the substance’s bare particular). Call the above characterization, with its commitment to PCG (and the *making* role for properties), the standard account of property exemplification for the Platonist (which can be expressed in two metaphysical styles). This rudimentary outline of property exemplification should be sufficient to underscore a new difficulty faced by the Theistic Activist. One more assumption regarding the existence conditions for properties is required before we can directly engage the central question of this essay.

Existence Conditions for Properties and Restrictions on Exemplification

What properties are there? It is natural to view the existence conditions for properties on a continuum with claims that the realm of properties is sparse on one end and claims that the realm of properties is plentiful on the other. Existence conditions to which the Platonist is not committed often lead one to endorse a sparse view of properties, such as (a) a strong principle of exemplification (that is, all properties are exemplified by things that exist in space and time); (b) the view that properties are contingent beings; (c) the

20. For a representative example of Moreland’s writings on the topic, see his *Universals*. For his most recent defense of his constituent realism, see “Exemplification and Constituent Realism: A Clarification and Modest Defense,” *Axiomathes* (forthcoming).

view that properties exist only if empirically detectable; or (d) that properties are fairly coarsely individuated.²¹ Those who endorse an abundant theory of properties argue that properties obey what Chris Swoyer calls a principle of plenitude: “every property that could possibly exist *does* exist.”²² And if one accepts, as the Platonist does, that properties are necessary beings, then it is a simple modal truth (of S5) that if a property is possible it is necessary, that is, the property exists. To me, it seems that a vast array of properties is possible, and even required to account for, *inter alia*, facts about predication and abstract reference; and this counts in favor of a plentiful theory of properties. Such a view of Platonic properties offers an incredibly rich ontology and a wealth of resources to explain all sorts of things.

Further, setting aside predicates leading to Russell’s paradox,²³ a unified theory of predication is to be preferred in virtue of theoretical unity, elegance, and explanatory power. As Richard Swinburne states, it is a “neater description of the world if we so understand ‘property’ that . . . every predicate designates a property, and every non-synonymous predicate designates a distinct property.”²⁴ Thus, I shall assume that a unified theory of predication is preferable, unless the demands of theory formation require this assumption to be rejected, or the benefits of rejecting the assumption outweigh the corresponding cost.

A New Problem for the Theistic Activist

Platonic properties, understood as necessarily existing abstract objects, can either be understood as fundamental or as capable of further reduction to another ontological category. Recent attempts to articulate a version of Platonic theism are decidedly in favor of the latter option. The Absolute Creationism of Morris and Menzel does not treat Platonic properties as funda-

21. For a discussion of these issues, see Chris Swoyer, “Properties,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/properties>, section 5.1.

22. *Ibid.*, sec. 5.2.

23. As is well known, there is no version of realism that can consistently endorse a completely unrestricted application of the Platonic schema. For, the assumption that there is a property corresponding to the predicate “is non-self-exemplifiable” immediately leads to paradox. But this does not entail the falsity of Platonism, nor an abundant theory of properties. As van Inwagen states, “In the case of . . . property-theories, the workable ways of dealing with the paradox are workable ways of saying that certain open sentences must correspond to . . . properties—and leaving it an open question which, if any, of the others do” (“A Theory of Properties,” 134). I shall ignore the complication related to Russellian paradox and seek a unified theory of predication in this sense: all predications *except those that lead to Russell’s paradox* can be uniformly explained. For the Platonism defended here, all predicates human and divine are explained in terms of properties (*except predicates leading to Russell’s paradox*). This preference for a unified theory extends to all accounts of divine and human predication—even the defender of divine simplicity ought to offer a unified theory if possible, as Bergmann and Brower in fact do in terms of truthmakers in “A Theistic Argument against Platonism.”

24. Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 10.

mental; rather, they are identified with divine concepts. As Morris states, “all properties and relations are God’s concepts, the products, or perhaps better, the contents of a divine intellective activity Unlike human concepts, then, which are graspings of properties that exist ontologically distinct from and independent of those graspings, divine concepts are those very properties themselves.”²⁵ Further, Plantinga, a theist and Platonist *par excellence*, has cautiously endorsed the view of Theistic Activism hinting that if something like it were true, then “abstract objects would be necessary beings that are nevertheless causally dependent upon something else.”²⁶

It is important to note that we are after a *Platonic* assay of things in terms of substances and properties which are exemplified by those substances. On the Platonic schema articulated in the first section above, properties partially explain the character of the substances that have them. There are non-Platonic versions of Theistic Activism such as William Lane Craig’s conceptualism in which properties are understood as mental abstractions and hence explanatorily posterior to the substances that possess them. Craig states:

Explanatorily prior to the abstraction of its properties, a concrete object does not exist as a characterless nothing, a bare particular, so to speak, but as an object replete with its various particularities. . . . God’s being omnipotent is not a matter of his exemplifying a property, since the property is only an idea that does not exist until God conceives it.²⁷

On Craig’s conceptualism, properties (that is, a divine concepts) do not partially explain the character of things that have them, instead, properties preserve the literal truth of atomic sentences of the form “*a is F*” as well as the universal nature of sentences such as “*a is F*” and “*b is F*.” The Platonist argues that such truths are preserved because the particular in question literally possesses a necessarily existing abstract object that confers character on the things that have it. That is, properties play a more substantive role for the Platonist—they help structure the world.

There is a new problem that surfaces for Morris/Menzel/Plantinga if properties are identified with divine concepts, given a unified theory of predication. Assume that divine concepts are necessary constituents of divine thoughts.²⁸ Further assume that the main role of concepts is that of *media-*

25. In Thomas Morris, *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 166.

26. Alvin Plantinga, “Augustinian Christian Philosophy,” *The Monist* 75 (1992): 309.

27. Copan and Craig, *Creation Out Of Nothing*, 193.

28. Cf. Dallas Willard, “How Concepts Relate the Mind to its Objects: The ‘God’s Eye View’ Vindicated?” *Philosophia Christi* 1, no. 2 (1999): 9–10, where he lists five widely agreed upon features of the concept of *concept*, including “Concepts are necessary (but not the sole and sufficient) constituents of human thought and knowledge.” I simply extended this standard account to range over all minds, human and divine.

tor between mind and world. As Dallas Willard states, “[concepts] form the ‘bridge’ that connects a thought and its object.”²⁹ How, then, should property possession (on the standard account) be understood for each metaphysical style, given Theistic Activism?

On a relational account of property exemplification, God’s possessing the property *being divine* means that God stands in a relationship of exemplification with the divine concept *being divine*. In the nondivine case, a substance exemplifies a property by standing in the exemplification relation to some separately existing property. In God’s case, however, he will stand in the exemplification relationship to properties that are not separate from the being of God. Divine concepts are already a proper part of God’s being, as constituents of divine thoughts, and while mysterious, it seems possible to endorse the claim that they are somehow also exemplified by the divine substance as traditionally understood (by the relational ontologist). As far as I can tell, there is nothing, apart from its unseemliness, to stop the Theistic Activist from employing a constituent approach to God’s concepts as well: God has a concept *being divine* (as a constituent of his thought), and this concept is also exemplified by the divine substance (or some individuator such as a bare substratum within the divine substance).

Importantly, on the standard account of property exemplification, the chain of explanation is in the right direction: God’s properties partially explain God’s character (given PCG). A concept cannot mediate between God’s thought that he is divine and the fact that he is divine unless the exemplification of the property is in some sense *prior* to the divine thinking. God’s *thinking* does not make reality; the Theistic Activist does not endorse what Willard calls a “Midas touch epistemology.”³⁰ Rather, it is God’s *exemplifying* of a property that makes God have the character that he has. Hence, there is a sense in which God’s properties are logically prior to God (that is, the divine substance).

The central problem for the Activist, however, is that (on either the relational or constituent approach) the view appears incoherent. For consider, it seems that thinkers are logically prior to their thoughts. In the case at hand, then, God (the divine thinker) is logically prior to the thought that he is divine. If thoughts have constituents, and if God is logically prior to his thoughts, then, surely, God must be logically prior to all the constituents of

29. There is much warrant for these assumptions. They represent part of what Willard calls the commonly accepted “‘grammar’ of the term ‘concept,’ within which elucidations of particular concepts, as well as elucidations of the concept of concept itself, must stand” (ibid., 13). One reason to deny these assumptions is to endorse the doctrine of divine simplicity. If God is simple, then divine thinking can only be understood in ways analogous to human thinking and we need not endorse the claim that concepts are necessary constituents of divine thinkings (after all, God has no constituent metaphysical parts). Minimally, to make such a proposal work, the Activist would be forced to adopt a nonunified theory of predication, a path I have suggested one ought not to follow if possible.

30. Willard, “How Concepts Relate the Mind to its Objects,” 8.

his thoughts as well. If so, then God is also logically prior to the concept *being divine* (after all, concepts are the raw material of thoughts). But, according to Theistic Activism, the concept *being divine* is identical to the property *being divine*. Hence, it follows that God is and is not logically prior to the property being divine, which is incoherent. Formally stated, the argument runs as follows:

- (5) The concept *being divine* = the property *being divine*. (Activist claim assumed for *reductio*)
- (6) The property *being divine* is logically prior to God (that is, the divine substance). (From PCG)
- (7) God (that is, the divine substance) is logically prior to the thought that he is divine. (Premise)
- (8) If God (that is, the divine substance) is logically prior to the thought that he is divine, then God is logically prior to any necessary constituents of the thought that he is divine. (Premise)
- (9) The concept *being divine* is a necessary constituent of God's thought that he is divine. (Premise)
- (10) Therefore, God (that is, the divine substance) is logically prior to the concept *being divine*. (From (7), (8), and (9))
- (11) Therefore, God (that is, the divine substance) is logically prior to the property *being divine*. (From (5) and (10) and the law of identity)
- (12) $\sim((6) \& (11))$. (From the fact that logical priority is asymmetrical)
- (13) Therefore, $\sim(5)$. (From (6)–(11) by *reductio*)

Premises (7), (8) and (9) need further elaboration and defense. Premise (7) seems plausible. The fact that thinkers are logically prior to their thoughts appears to be a paradigmatic example of logical priority. A thought depends on its thinker for its existence but not vice versa. Further, premise (8), upon reflection seems more plausible than its denial. God is logically prior to the whole (that is, the thought), and it seems to follow that God is logically prior to any necessary constituents of the whole as well. Finally, premise (9) is secure, given the assumption stated at the outset that concepts are necessary constituents of thoughts. On the face of it, then, premises (7)–(9) are more reasonable than their denial and the *reductio* goes through.

But there is one critical issue that remains and a possible way out of the *reductio* for the Activist. There are different senses of explanation, so it is reasonable to think that there are different senses of logical priority as well. For starters there seems to be *conceptual* explanation (for example, Thorsten's being my brother-in-law is (partially) explained by his being married to my sister), *metaphysical* explanation (for example, Socrates is (partially) explained by the property *being human*), and *causal* explanation (for example, the ball flying through the window (partially) explains why the

window is broken).³¹ Could it be that the sense of logical priority in (6) is different than that in (11)? Initially, the answer appears to be yes. The kind of explanation in view in (6) is *metaphysical*. And, it seems that the kind of explanation in view in (11) is *causal*: God (eternally) brings his thought into being in virtue of thinking. If so, then the senses of logical priority employed in (6) and (11) are in fact different and the *reductio* can be avoided (that is, premise (12) is false).

I am tempted to admit the two different senses of explanation and hence logical priority and the falsity of (12), thereby releasing the charge of incoherence. But there are further problems lurking in the neighborhood. If the Activist insists that the sense of logical priority (and explanation) in (11) is merely causal, then it is reasonable to think that God creates the concept being divine. After all, if God is the creator of his thoughts, then, surely, God must be the creator of all the constituents of his thoughts as well. But (on this story) since divine concepts are identical to divine properties, it follows that God creates the property *being divine*. That is to say, God creates his own nature, a hard pill to swallow.³² Many, as I noted at the outset, have argued that such a position suffers from its own incoherency—the bump in the rug is pushed down only to surface at another location on the rug. In order to avoid the incoherency charge, it could be maintained that God does not create/sustain in existence the concepts that apply to himself (or alternatively, the properties exemplified essentially by himself). Fair enough. But then, how is (11) to be understood? In what sense is God logically prior to the property/concept being divine?

I say, the Activist can endorse an abundant theory of properties and a unified theory of predication all the while avoiding the incoherency charge detailed above by endorsing the following two claims:

- (A) God's essential Platonic properties (that is, divine concepts that necessarily apply to God) exist *a se* (that is, they are neither created nor sustained by God, yet they inhere in the divine substance, the divine mind even);³³

31. For more on different kinds of explanation and logical priority, see my "How Does an Aristotelian Substance Have Its Platonic Properties?"

32. One, interestingly, Morris and Menzel do swallow. See, *Anselmian Explorations*, 172–6.

33. It is sometimes argued that restricting God's creative activity in this way is ad hoc to which I reply: It is ad hoc only if Platonism regarding properties is unmotivated. If there are good reasons to endorse Platonism and good reasons to endorse theism, then it is not ad hoc to modify one's account of Platonism in light of problems that arise in an initial formulation of the theory. This move is similar to those made in theory construction in science when new evidence leads to theory modification. Usually, the newly modified theory is isomorphic to some part of the original, modified in such a way as to maintain the virtues of the old (often the bulk of the old theory) while still accommodating the new evidence. At any rate, it is certainly not ad hoc to think that God does not create his own nature given the commonsensical assumption that no being is, or can be responsible for the nature it has. This latter point is discussed in William Rowe, *Can God Be Free?* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 151–2.

and

(B) Substances are Aristotelian.

Endorsement of claim (A) allows the Activist to avoid the unwanted view that God creates his own nature; claim (B) allows the Activist to maintain that the sense of explanation (and logical priority) in (6) and (11) are in fact different. The logical priority in view in (11) is, I say, a kind of *causal* explanation, and the causation at work here is an instance of final causation. God's essential properties partially explain God's character (hence they are logically prior in the *metaphysical* sense). Still, the divine substance is a fundamental unity that is the final cause of its constituents (including its concepts and essential properties) and in that sense explains them and is logically prior to them. I conclude that (12) is false and the *reductio* has been avoided.

The above suggests that a Theistic Activist who is a traditional theist can have it all: theological acceptability and philosophical respectability. God is the uncreated creator of all reality distinct from himself and depends on nothing whatsoever. All she needs to do is restrict God's creative/sustaining activity to entities distinct from God³⁴ and be an Aristotelian regarding substance. And if a Platonic theist *should not* be a Theistic Activist, instead allowing that Platonic properties admit their own category, the above suggests that she too can have that (*mutatis mutandis*), as long as she also is an Aristotelian regarding substance.³⁵

34. I have not taken a stand on whether the concept of God creating/sustaining properties in virtue of divine mental activity (as the Theistic Activist maintains) is plausible. I think it is a coherent position, even if less desirable than endorsing the alternative position that (say) properties are created/sustained in virtue of God's will (in which case they would not be identified with divine concepts, presumably).

35. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for many insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper.