

# *The Problem of God and Abstract Objects* A Prolegomenon

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The problem of God and abstract objects did not make the cut in Bertrand Russell's 1912 *The Problems of Philosophy*. The Lord Russell knows that abstract objects are problem enough by themselves.<sup>1</sup> Of course, Russell did not believe in God, so it goes without saying that there is no problem of God and abstract objects for him.<sup>2</sup> It is only a problem for those philosophers who are also theists. Minimally, the problem is one of specifying the relationship between God and abstract objects. But, as we shall see, the problem runs much deeper. In this essay, I shall attempt to bring clarity to the debate related to God and abstract objects by first explicating as precisely as possible the problem of God and abstract objects and then by imposing some order into the debate by classifying various contemporary answers to the problem.

## *Statement of the Problem*

What exactly is the problem of God and abstract objects? The term "God," as traditionally understood, signifies a personal being who is worthy of worship. Stipulate that terms and predicates such as "property," "proposi-

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ABSTRACT: How does God relate to abstract objects, if there be any? Any adequate solution to this question quickly leads to deep waters philosophical and theological. In this essay, I attempt to bring clarity to the debate related to the problem of God and abstract objects by first explicating as precisely as possible the problem and then by imposing some order into the debate by classifying various contemporary answers to the problem.

1. Russell endorses Platonism in his 1912 work, arguing that "all truths involve universals" and even if qualitative universals are denied, relational universals must be admitted. In fact, he argues that it is the failure of many philosophers to realize that verbs and prepositions (in addition to substantives and adjectives) denote universals that has led to much confusion over the debate. See Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 91–100; this edition includes a helpful introduction by John Perry.

2. In his preface, Russell notes that he will confine himself to those problems of philosophy that he thinks it "possible to say something positive and constructive, since merely negative criticism seemed out of place" (*ibid.*, 5). Undoubtedly, given his belief in God's nonexistence, the problem of God and abstract objects is not a problem in which it is possible to say something positive and constructive (for Russell).

tion,” “relation,” “set,” “possible world,” “number,” and the like belong to the class “abstract object.” Suppose there are objects that satisfy the above terms and predicates. God exists and so do abstract objects. *Prima facie*, there is no problem here. So, we dig deeper: As a being worthy of worship, God’s nonexistence is reasonably thought impossible. That is, God is best understood as a necessary being. But, it is natural to think of abstract objects as necessary beings as well. Again, no obvious problem here—God is a necessary being and so are the members of the Platonic horde.

But, as we dig deeper problems begin to surface. As a being worthy of worship, God, a necessary being, is typically thought to exist *a se*. That is, God is an *independent* and *self-sufficient* being. Further, God is typically thought to be supremely sovereign over all distinct reality in this sense: all reality distinct from God is dependent on God’s creative and sustaining activity. Thus, a *traditional theist* will endorse the following aseity-sovereignty doctrine AD:

AD: (i) God does not depend on anything distinct from himself for his existing, and (ii) everything distinct from God depends on God’s creative activity for its existing.<sup>3</sup>

But the view that there are abstract objects that also exist necessarily seems to be a repudiation of AD. The reason is this. It is natural to think that if something exists necessarily, it does so because it is its nature to exist. Thus, abstract objects exist independently of God, which is therefore a repudiation of AD and traditional theism.

Call the view that there exists a realm of necessarily existing abstract objects *Platonism*. For many contemporary analytic philosophers, Platonism offers a theoretically attractive way to understand the relationship between mind, language, and reality. Interestingly, Platonism also continues to be the ontology of choice among many contemporary analytic representatives of traditional theism. Yet, as we can now see, there is a tension between traditional theism (which includes AD) and Platonism, a tension that has been noticed since at least the time of Augustine.<sup>4</sup> To state the tension explicitly, consider the following three jointly inconsistent claims (setting aside sets with contingent members):

3. Why think AD true? There are at least four sources of motivation to cull support for AD: (1) Perfect Being Theology, (2) Scripture, (3) tradition, and (4) the notion of worship worthiness.

4. When considering the nature of creation, Augustine notes “God was not fixing his gaze upon anything located outside Himself to serve as a model when he made the things he created, for such a view is blasphemous” (*On Eighty-Three Diverse Questions*, question 46, “*De Ideis*,” quoted in Wolterstorff, *On Universals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 280. Aquinas nicely states this tension between Platonism and the Christian faith as well: “it seems contrary to the faith to hold, as the Platonists did, that the Forms of things exist in themselves” (*Summa Theologiae* I, q.84, a.5).

## INCONSISTENT TRIAD

- (1) Abstract entities exist necessarily. [Platonism]<sup>5</sup>
- (2) Abstract objects distinct from God are created (by God) and hence, dependent (on God). [common understanding of traditional theism applied to the Platonic horde]
- (3) If abstract objects exist necessarily, then they are either independent or uncreated. [Platonist assumption]

All three claims can be independently motivated, but they form an inconsistent triad. At most only two of the three claims in INCONSISTENT TRIAD can be true. Which claim should go? This question is difficult because the rejection of any of (1)–(3) leads to further problems. If (1) is rejected, the best solution (to many) to the problem of universals is abandoned and the age-old nominalism-realism debate ensues. All is not the same however. With the inclusion of God as an entity on the ontological books, the debate is pushed further along and familiar objections to either view lose some of their original force. Brian Leftow, who defends a view he calls Theist Concept Nominalism, argues “if there were a God, this would have dramatic implications for the problem of universals. In particular, it would (I believe) blunt the force of all standard arguments for realism.”<sup>6</sup> Others are not so sure. Professor Weaver blames the fourteenth-century theist, William of Ockham and his nominalism, as the root of contemporary culture’s decline: “the defeat of logical realism in the great medieval debate [on universals] was the crucial event in the history of Western culture; from this flowed those acts which issue now in modern decadence.”<sup>7</sup> So, the rejection of (1), that is, Platonism, is difficult for many contemporary analytic philosophers of religion: Platonic entities do all sorts of work and (to many) seem to be required for the best theory of the mind-world-language relationship. Thus inclined, the theist will want to be a Platonic theist. Thus, the Platonic theist can either reject the common understanding of traditional theism (that is, reject (2)) or reject a common Platonist assumption regarding abstract objects (that is, reject (3)).

Claim (2) might sound odd initially, but it is well motivated given AD. If abstract objects exist (as the Platonist claims) and God is not an abstract object (that is, God is distinct from abstract objects), then it is natural to think God is the creator of abstract objects as well. The Platonic theist can reject claim (2) by arguing that traditional theism does not require the strong

5. Henceforth, the term “Platonism” shall be used to refer to the view that abstract objects necessarily exist (and have objective ontological status). Many Platonists understand their position to entail that such objects enjoy independent existence as well. I hope to show that such independence need not be thought to follow from such abstract object realism. Thus, as INCONSISTENT TRIAD makes clear, I draw a distinction between Platonism (that is, claim (1)) and a common Platonic assumption (that is, claim (3)).

6. Brian Leftow, “God and the Problem of Universals,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 2, ed. Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), 325.

7. Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 3.

aseity-sovereignty doctrine AD. Perhaps the notion of God creating abstract objects is incoherent or impossible. Or perhaps AD is not entailed by the teachings of Scripture, or it does not apply to abstract objects. Of course, the Platonic theist could simply opt to be a nontraditional theist as well in her rejection of claim (2).

But, if claim (2) is rejected, the Platonic theist runs into another problem, call it the *Ultimacy Problem*. Consider one kind of abstract object, property. If properties exist independently of God, and God has properties essentially, then God's nature is explained by some other entity, and God is not ultimate.<sup>8</sup> But, as Leftow states, "theists want all explanations to trace back to God, rather than *through* God to some more ultimate context."<sup>9</sup> The same problem surfaces when considering other Platonic entities as well. On the Platonic story (for example), possible worlds exist independently of God and God's existence is necessary because in each possible world, God exists. But then "this threatens to make God's existence derive from items independent from Him: the worlds are there independently, that He is in all of them entails God's existence."<sup>10</sup> It seems that the Platonic theist must bite a bullet and admit that God is not ultimate in explanation or existence if claim (2) is denied, yet this thesis appears to be a core intuition of the theist's conception of God.

What about a rejection of claim (3)? Perhaps Platonic entities depend on God in some way for their existence and nature. If so, a question that naturally arises is, How is the dependency relation to be understood between two kinds of necessary beings? The dependency relation cannot be mere logical dependence, where the existence of  $x$  entails the existence of  $y$ , but not vice versa. To see why, consider two necessary beings,  $x$  and  $y$ . Given that necessary beings could not fail to exist, then (necessarily)  $x$  exists and  $y$  exists are mutually entailing, in which case it is impossible for  $y$  to asymmetrically depend on  $x$  (again, if the dependency relation is merely a logical relation). Rather the relation between  $x$  and  $y$  is one of mutual logical dependence. Call this the *Dependency Problem*.<sup>11</sup>

The Dependency Problem has led some contemporary philosophers to the view that it is logically impossible for any necessary being to asymmetrically depend on another.<sup>12</sup> But, asymmetrical dependence need not be cashed

8. According to Plantinga, an entity  $x$ 's nature just is the conjunction of  $x$ 's essential properties. See *Does God Have A Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 7, and *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), chap. 5.

9. Brian Leftow, "Is God an Abstract Object?" *Noûs* 24 (1990): 587. See also Plantinga, *Does God Have A Nature?* 31–3.

10. Brian Leftow, "Necessity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology*, ed. Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 27.

11. For more on the Dependency Problem, see Richard Brian Davis, *The Metaphysics of Theism and Modality* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 1–6.

12. See Keith Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 343, and *Christianity and Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans,

out solely in terms of logical entailment. Taking our cue from AD, perhaps abstract objects are created by God.<sup>13</sup> The fact that creation is a causal relation suggests the following dependency relations: abstract objects are *causally* dependent on God. This causal dependency between God and abstract objects seems to be just what we are looking for—an ontologically significant, asymmetrical or one-way relation of dependence running from each nondivine object to God. So, the Platonic theist can maintain that God, as the creator of all distinct reality, eternally creates (that is, causes) properties and does so of necessity. Of course, in making this move, a hornet's nest of issues arises: Is it metaphysically possible for God, or anything else, to create abstract objects? Assuming that abstract objects are everlasting, is the notion of eternal causation coherent? What sense can be given to the notion of one necessary being (God) creating another necessary being? What analysis of causation is required to give sense to the notion of God creating abstract objects?

Worse, even if the above questions could find acceptable answers, it appears that the resultant Platonic theism, as many have suggested, is hopelessly incoherent, succumbing to the bootstrapping worry. Typically, the worry is advanced as follows: "God has properties. If God is the creator of all things, then God is the creator of his properties. But God cannot 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."<sup>14</sup> These questions and worries, and many more, reveal the apparent intractability of the dependency problem specifically, and the problem of God and abstract objects in general.

The problem of God and abstract objects is multilayered. Philosophy pushes many to Platonism regarding abstract objects. Theology pushes many to endorse a strong reading of the aseity-sovereignty doctrine AD. The conjunction of Platonism and traditional theism results in the tension described

1984), 49–55.

13. Another alternative not considered above is that abstract objects are uncreated yet sustained by God in existence.

14. 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)," in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 2, ed. Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), 357–86. Other incompatibility arguments can be found in William Lane Craig and Paul Copan, *Creation out of Nothing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 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; Brian Leftow, "Is God an Abstract Object?" 581–98; as well as Keith Yandell's contribution to this symposium, "God and Propositions," *Philosophia Christi* 13 (2011): 275–87. Bootstrapping worries can be generated utilizing other abstracta as well. See, e.g., Paul Gould, "Theistic Activism: A New Problem and Solution," *Philosophia Christi* 13 (2011): 45–57, where the bootstrapping worry surfaces when divine concepts (understood as abstract objects) are employed.

in INCONSISTENT TRIAD. Attempts to resolve the tension of INCONSISTENT TRIAD lead to additional problems:

- Reject claim (1) and the *problem of universals* is of central concern;
- Reject claim (2) and the *ultimacy* problem is of central concern;
- Reject claim (3) and the *dependency* problem and bootstrapping worry are of central concern.

Thus, the deliverances of theology and philosophy threaten to wreck the (would-be) traditional theist, or alternatively, the (would-be) Platonist, on the shoals of unorthodoxy or antirealism. For the traditional theist, it seems that realism must be rejected. For the Platonic theist, it seems that theistic orthodoxy must be redefined or rejected. It is not clear that anyone will be happy in the end. Still, hope dies hard. There have been a number of prominent contemporary attempts to navigate the waters of the problem of God and abstract objects. In the next section, I shall survey the contemporary literature and highlight recent efforts to place a stake in the sand on our central problem and its ancillary issues.

### *Some Contemporary Answers to the Problem*

Depending on which claim of INCONSISTENT TRIAD is rejected, at least four views can be discerned. The first three views are realist (maybe even Platonist if abstract object realism is endorsed), although for clarity, I shall only label the first view as Platonism proper. The fourth view is nominalistic and antirealist. According to (the view I shall call) *Platonic Theism*, at least some abstract objects exist wholly distinct from God and are either independent (that is, claim (2) is rejected, let us call it  $PT_I$  for “independent”) or are dependent on God in some way (that is, claim (3) and possibly claim (2) are rejected, let us call it  $PT_D$  for “dependent”). Hence, there will be at least two versions of Platonic Theism depending on which claim in INCONSISTENT TRIAD is rejected. *Theistic Activism* and *Divine Conceptualism* both reject claim (3)—Theistic Activism rejecting the second conjunct in the consequent (that is, the claim that abstract objects are uncreated) and Conceptualism rejecting the first conjunct of the consequent (that is, the claim that abstract objects are independent, even if uncreated). Finally, *Nominalism* rejects claim (1)—there are no abstract objects, only particulars. In what follows, I shall survey the contemporary literature with respect to these four views, highlighting arguments in their favor and attempts at resolving the resultant problems.

### *Platonic Theism*

The distinguishing feature of Platonic Theism is that there is a realm of abstract objects that exist wholly apart from God. Consider properties. Assuming an abundant theory of properties and a unified theory of predication (where all atomic sentences of the form “*a* is *F*” denote a particular “*a*” and a property “*F*”) then there will be two domains, or realms, of abstract objects: (within the) divine substance and Plato’s Heaven. Or again, consider propositions. According to the Platonic theist, propositions exist wholly apart from God and are not to be identified with ideas in the divine mind.<sup>15</sup> The advocate of PT<sub>I</sub> rejects claim (2) of INCONSISTENT TRIAD and those abstract objects wholly distinct from God are understood as independently existing beings. On the other hand, the advocate of PT<sub>D</sub> rejects claim (3) and those abstract objects wholly distinct from God are understood as either created (where the defender of PT<sub>D</sub> endorses claim (2)) or uncreated yet dependent on God (where the defender of PT<sub>D</sub> will also need to reject claim (2) and endorse a near cousin of AD which argues that all reality distinct from God is dependent on God even if not created by God).

Arguments against claim (2) and in support of PT<sub>I</sub> fall into three broad categories: (a) attempts to identify a token abstract object that *in fact* exists distinct from and independently of God; (b) attempts to show the impossibility or undesirability of created abstract objects; and (c) attempts to undercut the motivations for AD and thus show that the traditional theist is within the bounds of orthodoxy in denying claim (2). Minimally, the defender of PT<sub>D</sub> will need to (d) engage the arguments of the PT<sub>I</sub> defender and either refute them or show how they can be accommodated by the PT<sub>D</sub> position; and (e) provide reasons to motivate the claim that it is rationally preferable to think there is an abstract realm wholly distinct from God yet dependent on God. By my lights, this last requirement seems to be the most interesting and challenging. What should be clear is that such arguments quickly take one into deep waters metaphysical and theological.

In his 1970 book, *On Universals*, Nicholas Wolterstorff attempts to motivate the view that some properties must be excluded from God’s creative activity. He suggests that there exist properties such as *being either true or false* that are neither possessed by God nor created by God (that is, a category (a) type argument). And if so, there are (at least some) abstract objects that exist distinct from God and independently of God and claim (2) ought to be rejected. Wolterstorff begins:

Consider the fact that propositions have the property of *being either true or false*. This property is not a property of God. But is it pre-

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15. Keith Yandell defends a version of Platonic Theism of the PT<sub>I</sub> variety regarding propositions, which he calls Theistic Propositionalism in his article for this symposium, “God and Propositions.”



supposed by the biblical writers that not all exemplifications of this property were brought into existence by God, and thus that it was not brought into existence by God. For the propositions ‘God exists’ and ‘God is able to create’ exemplify *being true or false* wholly apart from any creative activity on God’s part; in fact, creative ability on his part presupposes that these propositions are true, and thus presupposes that there exists such a property as *being either true or false*.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, alethic properties are, according to Wolterstorff, problematic for the defender of claim (2)—they are distinct from God and exist apart from God’s creative activity.

It seems the defender of claim (2) is not without a response. The Platonic defender could argue that propositions (the possessors of alethic properties) are either uncreated but not distinct (from God) or distinct (from God) but created. Either way, claim (2) is upheld. On the first story, alethic properties are uncreated, yet always and only possessed by propositions, now identified as divine thoughts. If so, then alethic properties (at least) are not distinct from God’s being.<sup>17</sup> As Plantinga puts it: “truth is not independent of mind; it is necessary that for any proposition *p*, *p* is true only if it is believed, and if and only if it is believed by God.”<sup>18</sup> So, even if the properties had by propositions (now construed as divine thoughts) are uncreated, they are not distinct from God. On the second story, it could be argued that alethic properties are distinct from God, yet eternally created by God. If so (and assuming the notion of eternal causation coherent), then it seems reasonable to think that the truth of “God exists” and “God is able to create” is necessarily coextensive with the existence of the properties *being true* and *being either true or false*. But then it is not clear that we have a clear case of a property (or abstract object) that requires the denial of claim (2).

More recently, Peter van Inwagen has argued for the stronger (and more general) claim that (2) is metaphysically impossible—God, nor anyone else, can create abstract objects (that is, a category (*b*) type argument).<sup>19</sup> Abstract objects, says van Inwagen are not the kind of things that can enter into causal relations. Thus, the quantifier “everything” in the statement “God is the creator of everything distinct from himself” should be restricted to things that can enter into causal relations and the traditional theists need not endorse AD. Van Inwagen insists that abstract objects cannot enter into causal rela-

16. Wolterstorff, *On Universals*, 292.

17. That is, assuming divine thoughts are essentially possessed by God, then properties of divine thoughts are also essentially possessed by God.

18. Alvin Plantinga, “How to Be an Anti-Realist,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 56 (1982): 68.

19. Peter van Inwagen, “God and Other Uncreated Things,” in *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump*, ed. Kevin Timpe (London: Routledge, 2009), 3–20. Keith Yandell, in his contribution to this symposium is more restrained, suggesting that it is not clear how God or anyone could possibly create abstract objects—he stops short of arguing for its metaphysical impossibility. See his “God and Propositions.”



tions because no *sense* can be made regarding the notion of divinely created abstract objects. What he is after is the completion of

(S) God caused abstract object *P* if and only if . . .

in order to show what makes the causal fact both true and accessible enough for us to understand. Van Inwagen considers two possible completions of (S), the so-called Aristotelian view, which endorses the claim that all abstract objects exist *in rebus* and are created when God creates the concrete object in which they are a part; and the Theistic Activist view, which endorses the claim that abstract objects are caused by the divine activity of thinking. Since, according to van Inwagen, neither of these completions are successful, there is no acceptable completion of (S).

Is it the case that there is no acceptable completion of (S) or that abstract objects cannot enter into causal relations? Plantinga thinks that abstract objects can enter into causal relations. When considering the epistemological objection to abstract objects, Plantinga suggests that if “propositions are divine thoughts,” then

these objects can enter into the sort of causal relation that holds between a thought and a thinker, and we can enter into causal relation with them by virtue of our causal relation to God. It is therefore quite possible to think of abstract objects capable of standing in causal relations.<sup>20</sup>

Still, it is one thing to suggest how abstract objects could possibly stand in causal relations and quite another to provide an adequate completion of (S). Yet, even *that* seems possible. Consider: antireductionism regarding causation is plausible, enjoys independent motivation,<sup>21</sup> and has been ably defended recently by *inter alia* John Carroll and James Woodward.<sup>22</sup> Given antireductionism regarding causation, why not complete (S) as follows?

(S\*) God caused abstract object *P* if and only if God brought it about that *P* exists.

Whether or not antireductionism regarding causation is true need not be decided here. I am content with the possibility of its truth. Van Inwagen does not consider all possible conceptions of causation and thus it seems he has not ruled out the possibility that God could create abstract objects.

20. Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 121.

21. Typical arguments for antireductionism involve (i) detailing the repeated failures of reductive analysis; (ii) the fact that there is a sparse base of noncausal concepts that can be employed in providing a reductive analysis; and (iii) the case of preemption. See John Carroll “Anti-reductionism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Causation*, ed. Helen Beebe, Christopher Hitchcock, and Peter Menzies (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 279–98.

22. See Carroll, “Anti-reductionism,” and James Woodward, “Supervenience and Singular Causal Statements,” in *Explanation and Its Limits*, ed. D. Knowles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 211–46.

What the above shows is that  $PT_D$  is at least a contender—although Keith Yandell takes a hard line against such a Platonic Theism (labeled as *Theistic Emanationism*) in his symposium article.<sup>23</sup> Granted, as Yandell's discussion makes clear, a plausible way out of the bootstrapping worry is still required, but in theory, such a view seems possible, maybe attractive, even if (as far as I am aware) there are no takers yet. Perhaps there are reasons to think that abstract objects (or some kinds of them) are best understood as nonmental, in which case this new version of Platonic Theism might be an attractive position for the traditional theist who is also a Platonist.

But need the traditional theist accept AD? Does Scripture, and because of Scripture, tradition, require the traditional theist to endorse AD? Wolterstorff provides arguments for thinking that the biblical writers did not endorse a wide scope reading of the doctrine of creation, where God is the creator of everything distinct from himself full-stop (that is, a category (*c*) type argument). Wolterstorff advances two lines of thinking to undercut the motivation toward a wide scope reading of the doctrine of creation. First, he suggests that it cannot “plausibly be supposed that the biblical writers . . . had *universals* in view in speaking of ‘all things.’”<sup>24</sup> He rhetorically suggests that were universals in view, then they would have been mentioned. Wolterstorff's second approach is to claim that the creator-creature distinction is invoked in Scripture for religious reasons and not theoretical, or metaphysical, reasons and thus it does not rule out a narrower understanding of the doctrine of creation.

How strong are Wolterstorff's arguments? Regarding the first, I have some sympathy with the suggestion. But, as Matthew Davidson puts it, the biblical writers probably did not have quarks (or to use the most recent example, the strings of string theory) in mind when they addressed the subject of divine creation, still no traditional theists denies that quarks, or strings, if they exist, are distinct from God and created by God.<sup>25</sup>

But does such reasoning require that the theist ought to think the biblical writers had a wide scope in view, or merely that they *may* think it in view? Scott Davison thinks that this stronger (ought) claim is problematic since all the entities mentioned by Davidson are contingent physical things and we know how the biblical authors would respond if asked whether they should be included, but with respect to abstract objects, “there is no way to know exactly what they would say in response to this query.”<sup>26</sup>

Davison's agnosticism might be a bit too convenient. A look at the article “all” (Greek: *panta*) in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Tes-*

23. See Yandell, “God and Propositions.”

24. Wolterstorff, *On Universals*, 293.

25. Davidson, “A Demonstration against Theistic Activism,” 278–9. See also Thomas Morris, *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 164.

26. Davidson, “Could Abstract Objects Depend Upon God?” 488.

*tament* shows that while the meaning of “all things” is indeed religious, as Wolterstorff thinks, still its religious meaning seems to be dependent on the complete inclusion of all things whatsoever.<sup>27</sup> Thus, *prima facie*, the most natural, simple, and theoretically unified reading of the all things passage is seems to favor a wide scope reading and AD. Still, I do not see how the relevant Scripture passages require such a reading, as Yandell nicely points out in his symposium article.<sup>28</sup>

### *Theistic Activism*

Theistic Activism locates the Platonic horde within the mind of God as created, and thus dependent, entities. Properties and relations are identified with divine concepts, and the rest of the Platonic apparatus is built up from there. Propositions are just divine thoughts. Numbers, sets, and possible worlds are also explicated in terms of properties and relations (that is, divine concepts) and propositions (that is, divine thoughts). Importantly, God creates all reality distinct from God, including the entire Platonic horde.

The most prominent version of Theistic Activism is that of Morris and Menzel. On their view, called Absolute Creationism, “all properties and relations are God’s concepts, the products, or perhaps better, the contents of a divine intellectual 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.”<sup>29</sup>

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27. Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 5:886–96.

28. Yandell, “God and Propositions.” Other relevant passages include John 1:3, Rom. 11:36, Eph. 3:9, Col. 1:16–17, Rev. 4:11, Ps. 103:19–22, and 1 Cor. 8:6.

29. In Morris, *Anselmian Explorations*, 166. There is some confusion in the literature about just what the Theistic Activism of Morris and Menzel is and is not, as the following sampling makes clear. First, a proposed description of Theistic Activism:

Theistic Activism (TA) = the view that (1) necessary abstract objects exist; (2) depend on God’s creative activity and; (3) are identified with various constituents of the divine mind.

The question is whether or not (3) holds true. Next, a sampling of quotations from the literature regarding Theistic Activism, in addition to the quotation cited in the body of the text:

[A] From Menzel: “PRPs, as abstract products of God’s ‘mental life,’ exist at any given moment *because* God is thinking them; which is to just say that he creates them” (“Theism, Platonism, and the Metaphysics of Mathematics,” *Faith and Philosophy* (1987): 368).

[B] From Craig: “Morris and Menzel present their view as an updated version of the Augustinian theory of divine ideas and, hence, as a version of what we (below) call conceptualism. Nevertheless, although that is their intention, they continue to speak of the products of God’s intellectual activity as abstract entities, which suggests the interpretation that abstract objects are created things external to God and caused by divine intellectual activity” (*Creation out of Nothing*, 174–75n10).

Thus, divine creation of abstract objects is understood as eternal, necessary, and absolute: God necessarily and eternally creates all abstract objects whatsoever. Further, since God exemplifies a nature, understood as a bundle of essential properties, Absolute Creationism entails that God creates his own nature.

Not many have been willing to follow Morris and Menzel down the Activist road, or at least completely down the Activist road. Perhaps the closest thing to an endorsement of Theistic Activism is from Plantinga, a theist and Platonist *par excellence* who has cautiously endorsed the view hinting that if something like it were true, then “abstract objects would be necessary beings that are nevertheless causally dependent upon something else.”<sup>30</sup> More recently, David Baggett and Jerry Walls have appropriated the insight of the Activist to specify God’s relationship to goodness, and Richard Davis has argued for a kind of limited Activism with respect to propositions, but not properties and relations.<sup>31</sup> Most who consider it seem to think that Theistic Activism suffers from at least two minor problems and one major problem.

The first minor worry relates to the notion of creating eternal beings. Intuitively, creation seems to involve bringing something into being, and bringing something into being seems to involve temporal becoming, or an

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[C] From Bergmann and Brower: “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” (“A Theistic Argument against Platonism (and in Support of Truthmakers and Divine Simplicity),” 363).

[D] From Matthew Davidson: “Some have contended that (necessarily existing) abstracta depend on God for their existence and natures (their essential properties). Let’s call such a view ‘theistic activism’” (“A Demonstration against Theistic Activism,” 277).

The quote from Morris and Menzel cited in the text above, as well as [A] and [C], seem to support (1)–(3). [B] suggests that (3) is not actually the view of Morris and Menzel, and [D] restricts TA to (1)–(2) only and not the conjunction of (1)–(3). What this reveals is that there is some inconsistency in how TA is defined and utilized in the literature. For this symposium, we shall mean by TA the conjunction of (1)–(3) as this seems to most fully represent the views of Morris and Menzel. Thus, we have asked Keith Yandell to use the label Theistic Emanationism instead of Theistic Activism for the view he discusses in his article, even though it is a version of Theistic Activism on at least one account, namely, as Matthew Davidson defines it above in [D].

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

31. See David Baggett and Jerry Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), esp. chap. 5, and Richard Davis’s essay in this symposium, “God and the Platonic Horde: A Defense of Limited Conceptualism,” *Philosophia Christi* 13 (2011): 289–303. Davis identifies propositions with a particular mental object, namely, (concrete) divine thoughts. So technically, his view should not be classified as an Activist view as articulated in this section since he does not think abstract objects can be created. But propositions are not, on Davis’s account, abstract (contrary to our initial stipulation)—they are to be reduced to an entity within the category of “concrete object”—that is, divine thoughts. Still, on Davis’s view, God produces propositions, (as the Activist would argue) for they are simply the product of divine intellectual activity.

absolute beginning of existence. Plantinga shares this intuition: “a thing is created only if there is a time before which it does not exist.”<sup>32</sup> I too share this intuition when contingent beings are in view. However, my intuition is not as clear when considering necessary beings, which, if they exist, exist at all times (or timelessly exist). In general, to prove that one necessarily existent being could not asymmetrically depend on another would be a difficult task.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps there are two notions of creation that need explication: one for contingent beings and one for necessary beings. An explication of creation for necessary beings should not concern itself with issues related to coming into being (since God is not temporally prior to abstract objects and vice versa), but rather it should be causal or explanatory: for example, God is the eternal generating cause of abstract objects. For the Activist, God is the eternal generating cause in virtue of the divine intellect.<sup>34</sup> This first worry can be set aside.

The second worry for the Activist concerns the *necessity* of Creation. It is argued, for example by Bill Craig, that if

we expand the meaning of creation so as to make any dependent being the object of God’s creation, then we have radically subverted God’s freedom with respect to creating. . . . His freedom is restricted to creation of the tiny realm of concrete objects alone. The vast majority of being flows from him with an inexorable necessity independent of God’s will.<sup>35</sup>

Simply stated, the objection is that if we expand our explication of creation to include necessary beings, then God’s freedom in creation is *seriously* hindered. But this is not so clear. As Morris states, “the traditional view is that God is a free creator of our physical universe: He was free to create it or to refrain from creating it; he was free to create this universe, a different universe, or no such universe at all.”<sup>36</sup> Craig assumes without argument that the traditional account of divine freedom to create extends to all existent entities other than God, not just contingent entities. It should be no surprise that divine freedom is interestingly different than human freedom, and perhaps one of these interesting differences is that God is not free with respect to one aspect of his creation, that is, the necessarily existing abstract objects. God is not free with respect to the creation of abstract objects, but as creator, he is responsible for their existence. Still, Craig’s claim that these beings flow

32. Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 169.

33. See Peter van Inwagen, *Metaphysics* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993), 108.

34. But it need not be. It seems possible to argue that God is the eternal generating cause of abstract objects in virtue of the will, in which case Theistic Activism would be abandoned, but not the notion of God creating abstract objects. Or alternatively, it could be argued that abstract objects emanate from the divine being, in which case they are still the product of God, but not (obviously) in virtue of his intellect or will.

35. Craig and Copan, *Creation out of Nothing*, 175–6

36. Morris, *Anselmian Explorations*, 170.

with an “inexorable necessity independent of his will” does seem problematic since it is natural to think that the causal buck in creation stops with the divine will, not the divine intellect. This worry does not appear insurmountable for the Activist—for the intellect and will are tightly integrated in God—still, it might serve to steer the theist toward  $PT_D$  (where God is the creator of abstract objects in virtue of the will<sup>37</sup>) or Divine Conceptualism (where abstract objects are uncreated yet dependent on God).

The main problem with Morris and Menzel’s Theistic Activism is that it appears logically incoherent. In short, it succumbs to the bootstrapping worry. Many (including myself) think this problem fatal for the Absolute Creationism of Morris and Menzel. But I am baffled by their failure to take an obvious way out of the incoherency charge. Why not hold that it is only properties distinct from God that are created by God? On this suggestion, all of God’s essential properties (that is, divine concepts) exist *a se* as a brute fact within the divine mind, and it is only those properties that are not essentially exemplified by God (that is, necessarily satisfied in God) that are created by God. Morris’s answer is that “aside from the fact that no such selective exclusion would work in the first place, this move would amount to scrapping the whole project of theistic activism and abandoning the view of absolute creation.”<sup>38</sup> But, why would no such selective exclusion of God’s properties work in the first place? Craig makes this objection a bit more perspicuous when he claims that the move under consideration “would introduce an *ad hoc* selectivity concerning what properties are or are not created by God (especially evident with respect to properties shared by contingent beings).”<sup>39</sup>

Yet it seems that this move would be *ad hoc* only if there were no independent motivations for thinking abstract objects exist. Now, if there are independent reasons to think Platonism true and one is also a traditional theist, then it is not *ad hoc* to modify one’s account of Platonism (that is, Platonic theism) in light of problems that arise in an initial formulation of the theory (nor is it *ad hoc* to modify one’s understanding of traditional theism either). This move is similar to those made in theory construction in science where 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

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37. As Bergmann and Cover suggest, it is plausible to hold that God is not free, nor forced, but still responsible for his actions (and hence thankworthy) in virtue of being an agent cause. See Michael Bergmann and Jan Cover, “Divine Responsibility without Divine Freedom,” *Faith and Philosophy* 23 (2006): 381–408, esp. section 3.

38. Morris, *Anselmian Explorations*, 172.

39. In Craig and Copan, *Creation out of Nothing*, 176.

assumption that no being is, or can be, responsible for the nature it has.<sup>40</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, the bootstrapping worry can be avoided for the Platonic theist (who is a Theistic Activist) if the following two claims are endorsed: (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); and (b) substances are Aristotelian.<sup>41</sup>

In summary, while the Activist view has few adherents, it is still a viable option as long as the position of Absolute Creationism is abandoned. And it was never required, even for Morris and Menzel—as they repeatedly (and rightly noted)—it is only everything “distinct from” God that exists as a result of God's creative activity.

### *Divine Conceptualism*

According to Conceptualism, abstract objects are identified with various constituent entities of the divine mind and are uncreated yet dependent upon God. Just how the dependency relation is to be understood is an open question. As uncreated, abstract objects do not depend on God for their existence or nature. Still, taking our cue from what has been said above, it could be argued that the divine substance is the final cause of its constituent parts and thus abstract objects do causally depend (in one sense) on God. Or alternatively, abstract objects (understood as divine ideas or whatever) could simply be understood as constitutively dependent on God.

One interesting version of Conceptualism is that of Greg Welty.<sup>42</sup> According to Welty, abstract objects are those constituent entities of the divine mind that perform a certain function within the created order. For example, the concept of a “universal” is the concept of a thing that plays the ontological role of explaining attribute agreement and grounding the truth of atomic sentences of the form “*a* is *F*.”<sup>43</sup> The concept of a “proposition” is the concept of a thing that plays the role of bearer of truth-values and is what is asserted by the standard use of declarative sentences. Thus, realism holds at the human level and conceptualism at the divine level. That is, relative to finite minds, abstract objects exist as realistically as any Platonic entity—they exist apart from us and enjoy multiple-instantiability. But abstract objects do

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40. William Rowe, *Can God Be Free?* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 151–2, points out this assumption.

41. Paul Gould, “Theistic Activism: A New Problem and Solution,” 56–7.

42. See Greg Welty, “Theistic Conceptual Realism: The Case for Interpreting Abstract Objects as Divine Ideas” (DPhil diss., Oxford University, 2006), and “Truth as Divine Ideas: A Theistic Theory of the Property ‘Truth,’” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 47 (2004): 55–69. In his dissertation, Welty focuses on propositions and possible worlds. In the earlier article, he focuses on properties.

43. Welty, “Truth as Divine Ideas,” 57.



not exist realistically for God, in the sense that they exist apart from or over and above God. Rather, their existence is purely conceptual.

Considerations related to some kinds of abstract objects seem to push the theist toward endorsing Divine Conceptualism, whereas consideration of other kinds of abstract objects seem to push in the direction of Platonic Theism. As noted above, a common intuition is that truths are somehow connected to minds, and this fact pushes in the direction of thinking that propositions and possible worlds are best thought of as divine thoughts (or groupings of divine thoughts). As Plantinga says, the idea that abstract objects exist independently of minds and their noetic activity is “realism run amok.”<sup>44</sup> Perhaps numbers and sets too are best thought of as the product of God’s (mental) collecting activity.<sup>45</sup> Considerations related to these kinds of abstract objects push the theist in the direction of Divine Conceptualism.

On the other hand, considerations related to the nature of properties and property possession push toward Platonic Theism. Consider that a primary role of Platonic properties is that of *making* or structuring reality. As George Bealer observes, “[properties] play a fundamental constitutive role in the structure of the world.”<sup>46</sup> Alternatively, concepts are typically thought to play a *mediating* role between mind and world.<sup>47</sup> If this picture is correct, then the defender of Divine Conceptualism (and Theistic Activism) calls upon divine concepts to play at least two roles: that of mediator and maker. For the created realm, this does not appear problematic. But, when considering the divine substance, the needed account of how God both exemplifies the property *being divine* and possesses the (same) concept/property as a constituent of the divine thought that he is divine appears unlovely and forced.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps considerations of elegance, if nothing else, serve to push the theist toward Platonic Theism over Divine Conceptualism when properties are in view. And the dialectic continues: the defender of Conceptualism could, in turn, cry:

*Tu quoque!* Consider the picture as a whole. On Divine Conceptualism, the divine substance (and all its constituent metaphysical parts) exists *a se*, within the borders of God, and brings into being the entire created order at the “moment” of creation. Such a picture is theoretically simpler and more elegant than the Platonic view of reality in which the Platonic horde exists coeternal and distinct from God (created or not) *sans* contingent creation.

44. Plantinga, “How to Be an Anti-Realist,” 68.

45. A view argued for by Christopher Menzel in “Theism, Platonism, and the Metaphysics of Mathematics,” 365–82.

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

47. See, e.g., Dallas Willard, “How Concepts Relate the Mind to Its Objects: The ‘God’s Eye View’ Vindicated,” *Philosophia Christi* 1, no. 1 (1999): 5–20.

48. See Gould, “Theistic Activism: A New Problem and Solution,” 54, for an account of how this (unlovely) assay of the divine substance would be understood.

Perhaps the lesson is a familiar one: when working out one's mature metaphysical theory, a cost-benefit analysis will be required and each view will enjoy particular benefits and swallow particular costs.

### *Nominalism*

According to Nominalism, there are no abstract objects, only particulars. There are brown dogs, but not the property *being brown*; there are tables and chairs with the same number of legs, but not numbers; and so on. Thus, the problem of God and abstract objects is dissolved—there are no abstract objects (that is, claim (1) of INCONSISTENT TRIAD is rejected). God alone exists *a se* and creates all reality distinct from himself.

Nominalism's appeal is readily seen—it apparently offers a quick and happy solution to the problem of God and abstract objects. Peter van Inwagen goes so far as to argue that there is a presumption of Nominalism and thus one should be a Nominalist if one can get away with it.<sup>49</sup> So, *can* one get away with being a Nominalist? And further, is it really the case that if one can, one *should* to be a Nominalist? I say, a traditional theist *can* be a Nominalist—this much seems clear. What is not clear by my lights, is whether she *should* be a Nominalist. Specifically, it is not clear that Nominalism offers the best theory of the mind-language-world nexus.

Consider the case of divine predication. How is the atomic sentence “God is divine” nominalistically understood? One nominalistic friendly answer, articulated by Bergmann, Brower, and Leftow, is to endorse the doctrine of divine simplicity. The predicate *being divine* does not refer to an attribute that God exemplifies, rather it is truly ascribed to God on some other grounds.<sup>50</sup> But the Nominalist need not endorse the doctrine of divine simplicity to account for divine predication. For example, in his symposium essay, Bill Craig argues that there are a number of Nominalist options that can do the trick (without appeal to divine simplicity). The choices, argues Craig, center around the acceptance or rejection of Quine's metaontology, specifically Quine's criterion for ontological commitment—roughly, that one is ontologically committed to the value of any variable bound by the

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49. In Peter van Inwagen, “A Theory of Properties,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 1, ed. Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 107–38. Of course, as a Platonist, van Inwagen does not think you can get away with being a Nominalist.

50. Bergmann and Brower opt for a truthmaker theory of divine predication, where divine predications are explained in virtue of a truthmaker (that is, the divine substance), without requiring the positing of an exemplifiable; see Bergmann and Brower, “A Theistic Argument against Platonism (and in Support of Truthmakers and Divine Simplicity).” Leftow is more sanguine: “I suspect that no theory of attributes [can adequately account for the predicate *being divine*], and the proper conclusion to draw from this is that it is not an attribute at all. Whatever one makes of it, then, it will turn out to be something surprising” (Leftow, “God and the Problem of Universals,” 354).

existential quantifier in a first-order symbolization of a true, canonically-formulated statement. If one accepts the Quinean criterion, then the Nominalist can endorse Fictionalism. On the Fictionalist story, “abstract objects are more or less useful fictions”<sup>51</sup> and “God’s concrete condition [is] accurately described by the Platonist’s ascription of various properties to God”<sup>52</sup> without admitting abstract objects into one’s ontology. If the Nominalist rejects the Quinean criterion, then there are a number of options (Noneism, Neutral Logic, Substitutional Quantification, Figuralism)<sup>53</sup> that can be employed in explicating the existential quantifier and divine predication can (again, says Craig) be safely analyzed without postulating abstract objects.

Assume that a traditional theist can be a Nominalist along the above lines (or something like it). Ought she be a Nominalist? Arguments in support of this stronger claim fall into two broad categories: (a) theoretical considerations related to ontological economy (and often an appeal to Ockham’s razor); and (b) the claim that there is a presumption of Nominalism and thus Nominalism wins by default if one can get away with it.

Leftow has recently advanced an argument that Nominalism is the most attractive position for the theist since it allows her to economize on kinds of entities (that is, an argument from category (a)).<sup>54</sup> Leftow thinks that nontheistic versions of Nominalism (for example, trope theories, human concept-nominalism, human predicate-nominalism, likeness-nominalism and set-nominalism) are either obviously false or less plausible than Platonism. Platonism is a better theory—still, it is a strange theory, one that Ockham bids us to avoid if possible. Thus, if divine concepts are already within one’s ontology, as they are for the theist, she ought, in light of Ockham’s razor, allow them to do as much work as possible before introducing other entities into her ontology. If it can be established that divine concepts can do the work typically ascribed to Platonic entities, then “it is simple parsimony to let divine concepts do as much work as they can once they’re in one’s metaphysic.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, it is in virtue of *ontological* economy that Leftow thinks Theistic Concept Nominalism better than Platonism.

Assume Leftow’s Theistic Concept Nominalism is in fact as explanatorily adequate as Platonism. Does it follow that (because of Ockham’s razor) theists ought to be Nominalists? Not obviously so. *Ontological* economy (in terms of number of *kinds* of entities) would need to be balanced with *ideological* economy (in terms of the number of *primitive facts* within one’s theory). At every turn, Leftow appeals to brute facts in order to support his

51. Craig and Copan, *Creation out of Nothing*, 180.

52. *Ibid.*, 185.

53. See Craig, “A Nominalist Perspective on God and Abstract Objects,” *Philosophia Christi* 13 (2011): 305–18. For a more detailed discussion of each of these options, see also Craig, “Nominalism and Divine Aseity,” *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* 4 (2011): 44–65.

54. Leftow, “God and the Problem of Universals.”

55. *Ibid.*, 326.

Nominalism. Thus, at the end of the day, it could turn out that Platonism's explanatory simplicity outweighs any (putative) gains in ontological simplicity on Nominalism.<sup>56</sup>

Craig has recently advanced arguments of the category (*b*) type. Craig provides two reasons why there is a presumption of Nominalism (over Platonism) for the traditional theist. First, Craig expositis (and endorses) van Inwagen's argument from queerness:

For it is very puzzling that objects should fall into two so radically different and exclusive categories as abstract and concrete. It would be much more appealing to suppose that one of the categories is empty. But concrete objects are indisputably real and well-understood, in contrast to abstract objects. So we should presume that abstract objects do not exist.<sup>57</sup>

Secondly, an argument from theology:

The chief theological failing of Platonism and therefore the reason for its unacceptability for orthodox theists is that Platonism is incompatible with the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and so fundamentally compromises divine aseity. . . . An orthodox Christian theist, then, cannot be a Platonist . . . [Thus] we have very strong incentives, indeed, for rejecting [the claim that there are abstract objects] in favor of some sort of Nominalistic view of abstract objects.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, Craig thinks there is a presumption of Nominalism (in philosophy in general) and certainly for the traditional theist.

One is not sure what to think about Craig's argument from queerness against abstract objects. Certainly such arguments can go both ways: concrete objects such as trees, dogs, and chairs might not be queer to the man on the street, but they certainly can begin to sound queer in the hands of the metaphysician. Questions that quickly arise include: Do physical objects perdure or endure? Are they three-dimensional or four-dimensional? How does one solve the problem of material constitution? Attempts to provide a metaphysical assay of concrete objects quickly reveals that, *contra* Craig's claim, even concrete objects are not "indisputably real and well-understood." They might turn out to be rather queer themselves. Craig's first reason in favor of a presumption of Nominalism does not appear persuasive to the antinominalist.

The antinominalist would also push back on Craig's second argument. It could be argued that the presumption is not for Nominalism. Rather, the

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56. For a helpful discussion of how to balance ontological and ideological economy (with respect to explanatory adequacy) see Michael Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 61; and Alex Oliver, "The Metaphysics of Properties," *Mind* 105 (1996): 1–80.

57. Craig, "Nominalism and Divine Aseity."

58. *Ibid.*

biblical evidence (and the Nicene tradition) motivate, or provide *prima facie* support for, or entail a presumption for, AD. As we have seen, Platonism (of the PT<sub>D</sub> variety) can accommodate AD as well as Theistic Activism and Conceptualism. Thus, there is no presumption in favor of Nominalism. Nominalism does not win by default. It must be shown superior on other grounds. The open question then is this: Is Nominalism explanatorily superior (not merely equal) to realist accounts of various phenomena? It is not clear that it is and thus it is not clear that Nominalism represents the best option for the traditional theist, and certainly not the only option.

### *Conclusion*

There is no simple solution to the problem of God and abstract objects, as the articles in this symposium quickly demonstrate. Is it reasonable to think that a solution can be found? If certainty is the goal, then the answer is surely no. However, to hope that one can establish her own account of God's relationship to abstract objects as rationally preferable to its competitors is realistic. For it is reasonable to think that just as all of reality somehow points to the divine, so too all knowledge. And surely God has created us to know him (says the theist) and his created world, which (as it may turn out) includes abstract objects. So, there is reason to hope, following Anselm, that by faith we can come to understand the reality in question as well.<sup>59</sup>

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59. Thanks to Richard Brian Davis and Bill Craig for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.