

Draft Copy. Forthcoming in *Philosophia Christi*

God and Necessity. By Brian Leftow. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 575 pages. \$ 110.00.

Leftow's mammoth *God and Necessity* is a tour de force thru the labyrinth of modal metaphysics. It is a work that takes seriously the reality and supremacy of God in all things and thus seeks to assign a chief role to God in accounting for modal reality. While not for the faint-hearted, philosophers and theologians, theists and atheists, will find many fruitful avenues of exploration in this work. Leftow's thesis—developed, elaborated, and defended over 550 pages—is simple: God's existence, nature, and mental life provide the best explanation for modal reality.

Leftow begins by noting an apparent tension between necessary truths and God's ultimacy. Consider, God is first in duration: (FD) "before all else existed, God existed, alone, or God and only God did not begin to exist" (4); and, God is the ultimate causal explanation of all reality distinct from himself: (GSA) "for all x, if x is not God, a part, aspect or attribute of God..., God makes the creating-*ex-nihilo* sort of causal contribution to x's existence as long as x exists" (20). Now, consider a necessary truth such as $2+2=4$, a truth presumably not about God. If necessary truths have an ontology, and some necessary truths (such as mathematical truths) are not about God, it follows that there has always been something outside God, hence \sim (FD). Further, it seems that $2+2=4$ is so independently of God, hence \sim (GSA). Leftow's aim is to show that there is no *actual* tension between necessary truths (and modal truths more generally) and God's ultimacy by sketching a theistic modal metaphysics within the bounds of God's being and activity.

In Chapters 2-3 Leftow considers ways one could block the argument for the conflicts between necessary truths and God by (a) denying that necessary truths not about God have an ontology, (b) attempting to restrict the scope of (FD) and (GSA) to exclude the ontologies that necessary truths have, or (c) by giving necessary truths ontologies that do not conflict with (FD) and (GSA). Leftow's preferred solution is a version of (c): God, His acts, or His products supply the requisite ontology for all necessary truths (Chapter 3) as well as the truth and modal status of all modalized truths (Chapters 4-5).

Traditionally, theist theories of modality have sought to account for all modal truths by appeal to the divine nature. In Chapters 6-8 Leftow considers these so-called deity theories and argues the divine nature does not provide enough resources to yield the full panoply of creaturely kind-concepts in which to ground modal truths not about God (he calls these 'secular' necessary truths). And even if they did, such theories ought to be rejected because they conflict with God's ultimacy: if the truthmaker for 'water = H₂O' is God's nature, then God's existence depends on facts about water since God exists iff He has His nature.

Leftow's plan is to offer a non-deity modal theory, and he finally begins to set out his own view in Chapter 9. The general secular truth that *possibly there is something non-divine* and some modal facts involving God and are determined by the divine nature, hence it is a thin partial deity theory. But, no *substantial* secular necessary truth has deity as its truthmaker, so there is no conflict with the ultimacy concern. To explain the theistic ontology for secular necessary truths, Leftow makes a distinction between natural and non-natural powers. Natural powers are part of God's nature; general powers to create or not, to imagine or not, and so on. Such powers are modal in nature—S is able to do act A only if possibly S does A—yet, present logically prior to possible worlds in order of explanation. God uses his natural powers to image or conceive to think up some secular state of affairs X. If X is possible at all, it is so as soon as

God conceives of it. Still in order of explanation, *Qua being thought up by God*, X is neither possible nor impossible. Rather, God (eternally) decides whether X is possible: “God’s decision renders an amodal state of affairs modally determinate” (264). In this way, God sets the range of his power by deciding whether the product of his conceiving is possible or impossible; it is in Him to give Himself power to bring X into being or not and the power does not exist (logically) unless and until He has it. Importantly, “the divine nature alone does not fill out the content of any possible world....God has indefinite powers by nature. Secular modal facts emerge from His rendering His powers fully definite—giving himself specific powers He does not have by nature” (260).

Talk of divine conceiving is to introduce divine concepts into the picture. Leftow’s desire is to provide a theory that has as one of its chief advantages ontological economy. Hence, while talk of divine concepts is a useful *façon de parler*, there are in fact no divine concepts. Instead, Leftow argues in Chapters 11 and 12 that the reality behind divine concept-possession talk is divine mental events and powers: God’s K-concept is about K’s because He produces a mental event that gives God the power to create K’s. In the same way, we can speak of God’s thoughts as a complex of simple-content concepts which have been freely and creatively combined by God into the sort of thing we might call a Platonic proposition, as long as we understand that the reality behind such talk are mental events.

The stated aim of Chapters 13-21 is the development of Leftow’s positive proposal about modal truth. In the Biggest Bang, God conceives all secular SOFAs. God notes the good- or bad-making features they would have and takes attitudes toward their obtaining. Given his actual attitudes and preferences, God generates a complete set of permissions and preventions: impossible secular SOFAs are so because God prevents them and is disposed to; secular SOFAs are possible because God permits them or is disposed to. The explanatory chain begins with God and ends with S5 actualism: God spontaneously dreams up all secular SOFAs and decides which are permitted. The permitted SOFAs give God specific powers—or better, God empowers Himself—and his having the specific powers He has are the relevant from-eternity truthmakers for the modal status of secular SOFAs. *Ab initio* God has the chance and power to adopt other causally possible states for reality (perhaps shats instead of cats), but once God decides what powers to give Himself (what SOFAs are permissible) and what preventions he might effect, His general powers are specified and “there are not alternative possible sets of divine from-eternity powers and preventions” (406), hence, an S5 absolute modality.

Since there can be in reality only God or things God conceives, and because God has the GSA-property, God’s concepts shape the world; and because he has the GSA-property necessarily, God and God’s concepts shape all possible worlds. Leftow’s theory of modality thus accounts for the modal status of all secular truths as well as modal facts about non-secular truths (i.e., those involving pure logic and mathematics and those involving God or divine attributes). For the latter, God by nature so thinks that pure logic or mathematical theses come out true (or false) and the necessity of their truth can be traced to the necessity of God’s having His nature; the truthmaker for the claim that necessarily, God exists consists in God’s having all His powers but lacking the power to bring it about that He does not exist.

Leftow’s theistic modal metaphysics supplies a semantics in terms of powers and preferences, an account of divine freedom in which God spontaneously thinks up all secular SOFAs and assigns them a modal status, and does so with perfect rationality, fewer primitively modal entities (just one) and bedrock modal facts (just God’s few primitive natural powers) than deity theories. Thus, for reasons theological and philosophical, Leftow concludes his account is

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preferable to deity theory. In Chapters 22-23 Leftow argues for the rational superiority of his modal metaphysics over all competitors. Whatever work Platonic abstracta, Lewisian or Meinongian possibilia do, so too can God and God's concepts. Hence, Ockham's Razor bids us to get rid of such otiose entities. Since God is already on the ontological books, the theists ought to be a nominalist. Further, we also find a new argument for God if one accepts a realist account of modality.

Reading *God and Necessity* is heavy-going. The structure of the book isn't immediately obvious, and at times Leftow tends toward overkill, trying the patience of the reader (six arguments in support of the claim that deity is essential to whatever has it when a couple would do). Still, the payoff is well worth it if one follows him to the end. Leftow ably demonstrates the wealth of resources and potential to be found in a theory of divine conceptualism. I do not, however, think Leftow has successfully closed the door on all versions of Platonic theism. For starters, the motive provided for (FD) is weak. Leftow's tack is to invoke conceptual simplicity and to apply Perfect-being considerations to the Biblical claim that God is 'first', 'last', greatest, and divine to argue that God is first in duration and alone eternal. Such arguments are not unassailable. The Biblical witness is clear that *God* is eternal, but it is silent on whether there are co-eternal objects distinct from God. The door is left open for Platonic abstracta, especially if Platonic abstracta do work divine concepts cannot do. One thing Platonic properties can do that Leftowian divine concepts cannot is provide a uniform theory of predication, human and divine. Leftow rejects a Platonic assay of the attribute deity because "its existing and being as it is are explanatorily prior to God's having it" (234) and God's ultimacy is then sacrificed. To preserve God's ultimacy, Leftow eliminates deity and argues that God's essence is His existence. In his desire to protect God's ultimacy, I worry that Leftow has thrown out the baby (God's nature) with the bathwater (all theories of attributes for deity). If the resultant metaphysical picture appears too bizarre, then perhaps a closer look at Platonic theories of substance-property possession is warranted. Why not maintain that God is the creator of all reality (including abstracta) distinct from Himself and that God's (Platonic) properties exist *a se* within the divine substance, which is a fundamental (Aristotelian) unity that is the final cause of its constituent metaphysical parts? This line appears promising and seems to avoid Leftow's ultimacy worry. But then, it could turn out that realism's explanatory simplicity outweighs any (putative) gains in ontological simplicity given Leftow's nominalism. The above worry stated, I highly recommend Leftow's book to anyone interested in theistic metaphysics.

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