

Theistic Activism and the Doctrine of Creation

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Theistic philosophers who wish to endorse Platonism face a dilemma. Either affirm uncreated abstract objects and risk theological unorthodoxy with respect to the doctrines of creation and divine aseity or somehow bring the Platonic horde safely within the bounds of theological orthodoxy but risk incoherency. William Lane Craig has fervently pushed this dilemma of late, arguing that Platonism should therefore be abandoned and theistic philosophers ought to be nominalists:

Platonism, the view that there are uncreated abstract objects, is . . . wholly unacceptable theologically for the orthodox Christian and on that ground alone should be rejected . . . One should like to have one's cake and eat it too, by embracing [theistic activism'] (see Morris and Menzel 1986), the view that God has created abstract objects; but the familiar bootstrapping objection has struck me as an insuperable obstacle to such an easy solution.²

Those Platonic theistic philosophers who are not willing to follow Craig down the nominalist path typically retrench and embrace one of the horns of the dilemma and seek to dissolve or minimize the apparent cost. For example, Keith Yandell, Peter van Inwagen, and Nicholas Wolterstorff embrace the first horn arguing on philosophical, exegetical, and theological grounds

ABSTRACT: This paper provides a plausible answer to the question of how God created. In addition, it explores an additional reason, beyond those related to the debate over God's relationship to abstract objects, for thinking theistic activism true. Specifically, a new model of God's creative activity—the activist model—will be offered that satisfies key desiderata with respect to the nature of God's perfect power to create.

1. Craig prefers the label "absolute creationism," coined by Morris and Menzel in their seminal 1986 essay "Absolute Creation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1986): 352–62. I shall use the more widely accepted label "theistic activism" for the view.

2. William Lane Craig, "Anti-Platonism," in *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul M. Gould (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 115. While Craig does consider conceptualism a fallback position, it is clear that nominalism is his theory of choice with respect to the problem of God and abstract objects. For more on that problem see Gould, "Introduction to the Problem of God and Abstract Objects," in *ibid.*

that the reality of uncreated abstracta poses no real threat to God, theism, or orthodoxy.³ Others embrace the second horn, arguing for the coherence of theistic activism and thus its viability. I have contributed to this discussion, both in raising problems for the theistic activist and in solving some of those problems.⁴ I think the so-called bootstrapping worry is not insuperable⁵ and have recently defended, along with Richard Brian Davis, a modified version of theistic activism that can be summarized as follows.

Abstract objects necessarily exist, are distinct from God, and, with the exception of God's essential properties, are the product of God's creative activity. Some abstract objects—concepts, propositions, sets, numbers, possible worlds—are to be identified with various constituents of the divine mind and are produced via God's intellectual activity. Others—properties and relations—exist wholly apart from God's being, in Plato's heaven even, yet are created by God in virtue of the divine will. Finally, God's essential (Platonic) properties exist within the divine (Aristotelian) substance *a se*. Much more can and has been said and I invite the reader to consult our full defense of this modified theistic activism for the details.⁶

Assume the coherence of (modified) theistic activism. In this paper, I wish to move beyond viability to rational preferability by showing a key benefit of theistic activism with respect to the doctrine of creation. Specifically, I shall advance an activist model of God's creative activity that satisfies key desiderata better than its competitors and thus, *ipso facto*, provides a reason to endorse (modified) theistic activism over its Platonistic competitors.

Let us begin by considering the world that God has created. Much of the world, things such as stars, planets, and electrons, are not God, exist, but need not have existed. Thus, there exists a contingent reality distinct from God. Further, there is a realm of necessary reality, what Tom Morris has called a "framework of reality"⁷ that comprises necessary truths (mathemati-

3. See Keith Yandell, "God and Propositions," in *Beyond the Control of God?*, 21–50; Peter van Inwagen, "God and Other Uncreated Things," in Kevin Timpe, ed. *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump* (London: Routledge, 2009), 3–20; and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *On Universals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), chap. 12.

4. See Paul M. Gould, "Theistic Activism: A New Problem and New Solution," *Philosophia Christi* 13 (2011): 127–39, where the boot-strapping problem is formulated with respect to divine concepts and an (inelegant and costly) solution is offered to the activist as a way out. See Paul M. Gould, "Can God Create Abstract Objects? A Reply to Peter van Inwagen," *Sophia* 53 (2014): 99–112, where the possibility of one necessary being (God) creating another necessary being (abstract objects) is explored and defended.

5. The boot-strapping worry can be summarized 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" (Gould, "Introduction to the Problem of God and Abstract Objects," in *Beyond the Control of God?*, 4).

6. Paul M. Gould and Richard Brian Davis, "Modified Theistic Activism," in *Beyond the Control of God?*, 51–79.

7. Thomas Morris, *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 162.

cal, logical, and modal) and essentialist facts (and essentialist truths) about creatures.⁸ As Morris puts it, this necessary framework of reality “is a structure that would have to be instantiated by any contingent created universe.”⁹

Taking stock, we have God and a distinct realm of necessary and contingent reality. Our chief question is *how* does God create this distinct reality? It will be helpful in the discussion that follows to be guided by certain desiderata plausibly derived from considerations related to the biblical doctrine of creation and reflection on the nature of God’s perfect *power* to create. The following will play a role then, functioning as controls, in guiding the dialectic of this project:

(D1) God’s creative act is sovereign.

Prima facie, a perfect being does not depend on anything distinct from himself for his existing and he exercises complete control over all that was, is, and will be. Further, the biblical doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* means that the universe came into being through the absolute and sovereign fiat of God’s word.

(D2) God’s creative act is rational.

The biblical doctrine of creation is decidedly teleological. God creates for a purpose; he imposes order and function within the cosmos; he creates with intention.¹⁰ The obvious result is that God’s creative activity is intelligent, hence, rational. Further, as a perfect being, God is ideally rational. Finally,

(D3) God’s creative act is free.

Freedom is an essential aspect of God’s sovereignty and power. As creator, God’s activity must be autonomous—not limited by any external constraints. Further, God is free in that he didn’t have to create *any* world, let alone *this* world if he chose to do otherwise.

In searching for a model of divine creation, I begin by considering what is sometimes called the “standard picture”¹¹ of divine creation—the *deliberative model* (DM). Recently, DM has come under attack, and I will consider objections to it as well as versions of a resultant model—the *spontaneous model* (SM)—that have been suggested in light of these objections. As we navigate the dialectic, guided our desiderata D1–D3, a new model of divine

8. Or so it seems to me. Granted, those in the grips of evolutionary science might chaff at the notion of essentialist facts about creatures, but Christians cannot dispense entirely with essentialist facts, say about human natures, otherwise, problems with respect to the incarnation arise. For what exactly did Christ “assume” if not a human nature—a numerically distinct yet qualitatively identical nature possessed by those of us who are merely human? Still, if one does not like admitting essentialist facts into her ontology, fair enough, jettison it and focus on those less controversial aspects of the framework—logical and mathematical (necessary) truths.

9. *Ibid.*

10. For more, see John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

11. Barry Miller, *A Most Unlikely God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 105ff.

creation will emerge, a view I shall call the *activist model* (AM) of creation.¹²

The Deliberative Model of God's Creative Activity

Desiderata D1–D3 have led, historically to the *deliberative* model of God's creative activity. The model is a familiar one: logically prior to creating, God surveys all possible worlds and chooses to actualize the one consonant with his will and purposes. In choosing which world to actualize, God exercises his sovereign control over all that he creates (satisfying D1).¹³ In deliberating over all possible options and selecting the one that serves his purposes, his creative activity is rational (satisfying D3).¹⁴ As long as there is no one best possible world—either because there is no best world but an infinite chain of upwardly progressing excellent worlds or because there are more than one equally best possible worlds—God's freedom in creating is preserved on the deliberative model as well (satisfying D2).¹⁵

12. Recently Walter Schultz has advanced an activist model similar in many respects to the one I shall offer in this essay. See Walter Schultz, "The Actual World from Platonism to Plans," *Philosophia Christi* 16 (2014): 81–100. We both agree that God creates according to a plan, and I can agree that the actual world is God's composite plan *for* the universe. We differ in that (1) his account succumbs to what is right about the "Inferior God Objection" and mine doesn't. According to Schultz, "God's omni-competence demarcates and defines the realm of possibility" (*ibid.*, 95). Such omni-competences are not voluntary for God and thus, the range of possible worlds over which God deliberates leave no room for spontaneity in creating. (2) It is not clear how God's omni-competence is supposed to entail or generate all the singular concepts that constitute the possible individuals of each possible world. Thus, it is not clear that his proposal works in the end. Finally, (3) his account focuses on one kind of abstracta—possible worlds—whereas mine is more comprehensive, accounting for God's creating of the whole Platonic horde.

13. There is a problem in the neighborhood that will need to eventually be addressed. God is self-sufficient, hence our account of God's creative activity must affirm *creatio ex nihilo* in this sense: God does not look to some distinct, uncreated, and coeternal reality to aid him in creating. Indeed, such a thought seems blasphemous. On the face of it, *creatio ex nihilo* doesn't rule out abstracta (such as possible worlds or possible individuals) from serving as a kind of "blueprint" for creation, but it does rule out *independently* existing abstracta that might serve in this role. Such abstracta need to either be located in God somehow or fall under God's creative activity (or both). For more, see Matthew Davidson, "A Demonstration against Theistic Activism," *Religious Studies* 25 (1999): 279.

14. For an excellent discussion of divine deliberation and the possible kinds of conditionals of deliberation on which God deliberates, see Jonathan Kvanvig, "Theories of Providence and Creation," *Res Philosophica* 90 (2013): 49–67.

15. For an excellent discussion of the problem of divine freedom on the deliberative model, see William Rowe, *Can God Be Free?* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004). For a helpful survey of responses to Rowe, see Hugh McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), chap. 8. McCann thinks that neither the "no best world" nor the "multiple best options" solution work as both save God's freedom by diminishing God in some way or other, the former because it entails an imperfection in God, the latter because it limits and trivializes divine freedom and makes God's choosing arbitrary and hence less than fully rational. Thus, McCann argues that God does in fact create the best possible world and

Recently, the deliberative model of creation has come under attack, not because it fails to satisfy our desiderata D1–D3, but rather, because the resultant picture is said to be inconsistent with the concept of creation itself. For example, Hugh McCann argues that

[I]f God truly *creates* the universe, then there is no plan from which it is created. If there were, his activity in producing the world would be reduced to rote, plodding execution, lacking both spontaneity and the instinctive grasp of how things should go that characterizes true creation.¹⁶

The idea is that true creation involves creating the plan as well as the end product, and on the standard deliberative model, the set of prior plans from which God chooses is a brute given independent of God's creative activity; God is the ultimate "window shopper" who surveys all the possible worlds and chooses one in which to actualize. "In the creation of the universe, there is no prior plan whatever because only an inferior God would need one."¹⁷ Call this the 'Inferior God Objection' to the deliberative model of creation. If God creates according to a prior plan, he is subject to the limits they define; "he is reduced to robotic existence" which is "out of keeping with God's perfection."¹⁸ Thus, only a less than perfect being, an inferior God, would need to deliberate over prior plans in order to bring the world into being.

Mark Robson argues that DM runs into further problems when considering the world that God has made. Robson asks, on DM,¹⁹

What exactly is it then for God to create something, for God to pick out X as a possible and then actualize it? What difference, in other words, does creation—that is, the actualization of possibilities—make? . . . He really would be simply copying from His mind. . . . [DM] seems to reduce God to merely a species of photocopier.

According to Robson, all that is happening on DM is duplication and relocation—divine ideas are duplicated and given extra-mental relocation. Call Robson's objection the "Xerox Copy Objection." How does the Xerox Copy Objection render DM suspect? *Prima facie*, it certainly seems that God's creation of the heavens and the earth and all that it contains is sufficiently distinct from God. So, what exactly is the problem? By way of reply, Robson argues that what God has in fact created is *qualitatively identical* with God's

freely does so by rejecting the deliberative model. For contemporary defense of the "multiple best options" solution, see Alexander Pruss, "Divine Creative Freedom," *Oxford Studies in the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 7, ed. Jonathan Kvanvig, forthcoming.

16. McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God*, 172.

17. *Ibid.*, 173.

18. *Ibid.*, 199, 201. Thus, the Inferior God Objection also calls into question desideratum D1.

19. Mark Ian Thomas Robson, *Ontology and Providence in Creation: Taking ex nihilo Seriously* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 11.

precreative determinate ideas (that is, the precreative determinate possible world which God actualized in creating the universe) and hence not sufficiently distinct from God. “There is, if you like, too much closeness between the divine idea and the created object to allow the created object enough room to be itself.”²⁰ What we have then, on DM is not a model of divine creation, but according to Robson, a model of divine *emanation* where God’s essence overflows and becomes diffused from the divine center.²¹ Granted, the “copies” lose certain properties along the way—eternity, abstractness and necessity—and take on others—contingency and temporality—as the emanation flows from the divine centre, but “the relationship between the original (the divine idea) and the copy (the creature) is too close to allow any real ontological distance.”²²

The Spontaneous Model of God's Creative Activity

What is needed, argues McCann and Robson, is a new model of divine creation. In place of the deliberative model, McCann and Robson offer a *spontaneous model* (SM) of divine creation. At the “moment” of creation, God spontaneously brings into being the plan as well as the product of creation (McCann) or God spontaneously brings into being the product of creation without a plan (Robson). Prior to creation there are no possibilities,²³ whether merely possible individuals or possible worlds, hence nothing for God to consider and no cost-benefit analysis to weigh when deciding what to create.

But does SM satisfy our desiderata D1–D3? The fact that there are no prior restrictions—no prior possibilities, for McCann, not even God’s own perfect nature is ontologically prior to any action of his—ensures God’s complete sovereignty and freedom in creation (satisfying D1 and D3). But, SM runs into problems with respect to desideratum D2 and the rationality of God’s creative activity. McCann admits, “That rationality should be a prior

20. *Ibid.*, 15.

21. The underlying principle of emanationism is summarized in the maxim “good diffuses itself.” In other words, perfect entities do not keep that perfection to themselves, but spread it abroad by generating an external image of their internal activity. See R. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London: Duckworth, 1995, 2nd ed.), 61. Usually, according to Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, emanationism implies that there is no reality other than the divine and that what emanates from it is either illusory or a degradation, blurring the distinction between creator and creature. See Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 15. Robson’s point seems to be that like emanationism, the mere duplication and relocation of divine ideas on the deliberative model of creation blurs the distinction between creator and creature. For a nice survey of early Christian thinkers widespread acceptance of *creatio ex nihilo*, and thus rejection of emanationism, see Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 95–8.

22. Robson, *Ontology and Providence in Creation*, 136.

23. Or at least, there are no precreative possibilities not *about* or *involving* God.

restraint on God's behavior is in itself an infringement on his sovereignty, which was supposed to be complete, placing him above any limitation whatsoever."²⁴ The suggestion is that divine perfection entails God's absolute sovereignty over all—including any prior constraints brought about by his own nature. Surely this is too strong a conception of sovereignty. Perfect sovereignty is consistent with prior restrictions due to the divine nature as long as God is ultimately, supremely, or maximally sovereign over all *distinct* reality.

Still, it could be argued that God's creative act is rational on SM, even if God is not bound by some prior standard of rationality. For example, McCann argues, "the reason lies in the thing itselfAs the perfect artisan, [God] sees and comprehends fully the good of the world, and his reason for creating it is above all its being what it is."²⁵ The idea is that the creation of *being* is an intrinsic good, an end in itself, and thus God has in whatever he makes an adequate reason for making it.

At worst this suggestion is incoherent, at best, it is inconsistent with SM. Consider, it is typically held that an agent A cannot act *for* reason R unless A is *aware* of R, and this awareness typically involves A's believing that the state of affairs which constitute R do in fact obtain.²⁶ But, if the reason for creating lies in the thing created, and God (or anyone) can only act for a certain reason if he is *aware* of that reason, then God is *aware* of the thing created prior to creating—an obvious absurdity. To avoid incoherence, one could argue that God is aware of pre-singular concepts—proxies—of the thing to be created. But this move is not open to the defender of SM since, on SM, prior to creation, God has no modal or I-facts about particular creaturely states.

Setting this worry aside, at best, this suggestion provides God with a sufficient reason for creating, but not a sufficient reason to create any particular determinate reality. The type-token distinction is relevant here. Given the intrinsic goodness of anything that God creates, the action type, *creating a distinct reality*, is rational. But, importantly, the action token is merely rationalizable.²⁷ Since God has no pre-creative singular concepts, God does not conceive of creatures and then intentionally bring them into being, rather, God spontaneously—and *arbitrarily*—brings creatures into being in the act of creation. He creates without being fully intentional, and thus, without

24. McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God*, 209.

25. *Ibid.*, 173. Compare James Ross: "God *has* in what he makes, an adequate reason for making it. Had he made something else, he would have had in *it* an adequate reason for making that" (James Ross, "Creation II," in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. by Alfred Freddoso (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 135).

26. See E. J. Lowe, "Free Will and Rational Choice," in *The Blackwell Companion to Science and Christianity*, ed. J. B. Stump and Alan G. Padgett (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2012), 424–5.

27. Robert Audi presses this distinction between rational types and rationalizable tokens in "An Internalist Conception of Rational Action," *Philosophical Perspectives* 4 (1990): 233–5.

being fully rational, about that which he creates.²⁸ In fact, since there are no (distinct from God) essences, and hence, no (distinct from God) truths, prior to God's creation of them, his creative will *cannot* be moved by any considerations of rationality whatsoever.²⁹ Again, the divine will is entirely arbitrary. I conclude that SM does not satisfy desideratum D3 and therefore, the spontaneous model of divine creation should be rejected.

The Activist Model of Divine Creation

The shortcoming of the spontaneous model of creation is not found in its spontaneity, but in its denial of precreative singular concepts. In order for God's creating to be fully rational, He must have intended to create *this* world. But, given God's freedom in creating it follows that God could have created some other world than *this* one. Had that happened, there would have been singular facts about the other world, and thus these singular possibilities are among the things that could have been. And as an omniscient being, God knows those possibilities prior to creating.³⁰ Thus, by intending to create *this* world instead of another, God would have deliberated among alternatives. So, it seems that some version of the deliberative model is in order.

Still, there is an intuitive plausibility to the idea that "real creation" is "spontaneous," "exuberant," and "unfettered."³¹ The mistaken assumption made by those who press the Inferior God Objection is in thinking that such adjectives can only be applied to God's creating if he creates without a plan. As McCann puts it, if God creates according to a plan, "his activity in producing the world would be reduced to rote, plodding execution, lacking both the spontaneity and the instinctive grasp of how things should go that characterizes true creation."³² But, why not split the difference and argue that God spontaneously creates all *possibilia* (the plan) and deliberately creates all *concreta* (the product)? In this way, the central intuition of the Inferior God Objection—that true creation is in some sense spontaneous—is maintained without sacrificing the rationality of God's creative activity. In short, why not endorse an activist model of creation? In the remainder of this section, I shall (i) describe the proposed activist model at a sufficient level of detail in order to (ii) show how it can accommodate our assumptions and desiderata. The resultant picture will provide us with a plausible answer to our question of *how* God created.

28. As McCann states, "what comes first in the order of creation is always the concrete" not "any prior, abstract conception" of something (*Creation and the Sovereignty of God*, 259n32).

29. See Harry Frankfurt, "Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths," *The Philosophical Review* 86 (1977): 41.

30. See Christopher Menzel, "Temporal Actualism and Singular Foreknowledge," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 476.

31. McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God*, 172.

32. *Ibid.*

According to the activist model I wish to advance, there are three logical moments within God's creative act. In the first logical moment of creation, call it the Biggest Bang, God freely, spontaneously, and eternally thinks up all possible creatures and all possible states of affairs. In this creative act, God delimits all modal facts—all possible individuals and possible worlds are set—in virtue of God's intellectual activity.³³ Concepts (and possible individuals) are divine ideas; propositions (and possible worlds) are divine thoughts. For those who balk at the notion of God creating his own ideas and thoughts, consider: the relation between a thought and a thinker is most naturally understood as a *productive* relation, thus, it is natural to think of divine ideas and thoughts as the product of God's creative activity.³⁴ God's creation of all *possibilia* is spontaneous and free because it is not determined by the content of the divine nature. Instead, God "invents" or "dreams up" possible creatures and in doing so, creates the very natures of things and delimits all modal reality.³⁵ This model, as I conceive it, is neutral with respect to God's temporal mode of being. If God is timeless, then God timelessly dreams up all possible creatures: all his thoughts are there at once; none are later than anything else. If God is temporal, he thinks up all possible creatures at once. Either way, God thinks up all possible creatures from eternity.³⁶

In the second logical moment of creation, God creates, of necessity and in virtue of the divine will, a Platonic horde of properties and relations that play the role of structure making in any actual physical universe God creates. This creating of the Platonic horde, let's call it the Bigger Bang, is logically

33. The concept of a Biggest Bang is from Leftow, *God and Necessity*, chap. 10. While Leftow is the genesis of this idea, I will develop and apply it differently. For starters, I endorse realism regarding abstracta whereas Leftow is an antirealist regarding abstracta, and an eliminativist regarding divine concepts and thoughts.

34. See also Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 291.

35. The activist model under suggestion here is not, then, a full-blown deity theory, where the content of the divine nature *determines* what God thinks up in the Biggest Bang. Aquinas, for example, endorses a deity theory: in virtue of conceiving all the ways in which his essence is imitable, God can be said to conceive all possible beings. For Aquinas, God's precreative singular concepts must be as they are since his cognitive perfection entails that he cannot fail to conceive every way in which his essence is imitable (see *Summa Theologica*, q.15, a.2). There are at least three problems with so-called deity theories. First, as Brian Leftow argues, they seem to conflict with a core theistic intuition, the intuition that God is ultimate in terms of explanation. For on deity theory, the truthmaker for secular modal truths is God's nature, but then God's existence depends on facts about the world since God exists if and only if he has his nature. See Leftow, *God and Necessity*, chap. 8. For a reply to Leftow, see Chris Tweedt, "Splitting the Horns of the Euthyphro's Modal Relative," *Faith and Philosophy* 30 (2013): 205–12. Second, it seems that God's nature is sufficient to specify only general *types* of individuals, not individuals, and we are after individuals. Finally, though, it eliminates any spontaneity in God's creative act. Of necessity God creates the *possibilia* and then God deliberately (and freely) chooses to bring a particular world into being. It succumbs to what is right about the Inferior God Objection.

36. See Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 276–8.

posterior to the Biggest Bang, and sets the stage for the Big Bang (that is, the creation of the physical universe).³⁷

As articulated, the Big Bang “moment” allows for both reductionist and antireductionist accounts of God’s creation of the physical universe. Broadly speaking, on the reductionist account, the goal of God’s creative activity is just the elementary particles and governing laws that eventually result in visible and finite individual substances. God’s aim is toward the infinitesimal—the hidden and truer elements that are the basis of all things—and the medium-sized objects that emerge are derivative objects, emergent individuals, the outworking of a deeper reality. On the antireductionist account, God creates “moderate-sized dry goods”³⁸ when he creates the physical universe. To express this insight in more philosophical language we would say: God creates “whole substances.”³⁹ Granted there are elements and other parts (physical and metaphysical) of individual substances, but in all cases the *goal* of God’s creative activity is substantial individuals, not their constituent parts (which are created by and used by God to achieve his goal of finite

37. The reader might wonder how the three logical moments of God’s creative activity are related, if at all, to the three logical moments of God’s knowledge according to Molinism. There are some interesting connections that warrant further exploration of the relationship between the proposed activist model of creation and the Molinist account of divine providence and knowledge. The Biggest Bang delimits all modal reality. Thus, the domain of God’s natural knowledge (first logical moment in Molinism) is populated in virtue of the Biggest Bang. Contrary to Molinism however, the content of this knowledge is not essential to God, since God could have freely dreamed up other possibilities. Skipping to the third logical moment of God’s creating and God’s knowledge, again we find the act of the Big Bang “moment” as the efficient cause of the truths known within the domain of God’s free knowledge (that is, God’s knowledge of the actual world that he has created). In agreement with Molinism, the activist model entails that that content of this knowledge is not essential to God, since God could have created otherwise. Is there any interesting connection between the Bigger Bang of creation and God’s middle knowledge of what free creatures would do in various possible worlds? Perhaps. Middle knowledge is knowledge of those possible worlds that God can make actual. Since, as I shall argue, the reality of the Platonic horde is a necessary condition to any concrete universe, it would seem that the Bigger Bang does indeed populate the domain of God’s middle knowledge. If, as Eric Baldwin has recently argued, uninstantiated human person essences do some of the work of grounding the truth of true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, then we do find a further connection between the activist model of creation and Molinism. See Eric Baldwin, “Putting Uninstantiated Human Person Essences to Work: A Comment on Davis and Craig on the Grounding Objection,” *Philosophia Christi* 15 (2013): 447–51. On the three logical moments of Molinism, see William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 138–45.

38. Katherine Sonderegger, “Creation,” in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 101. The phrase originates, in a different context, with J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 8.

39. In fact the Vatican I document *Canons of the Dogmatic Constitution of the Catholic Faith* states: “If anyone does not confess that the world and all things which are contained in it, both spiritual and material, were produced, according to their whole substance, out of nothing by God . . . let him be anathema” (The Vatican, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Councils/ecum20.htm>).

whole substances). Thus, the model advanced here is neutral with respect to the question of whether or not God's creative activity extends beyond the first moment in time of the physical universe. It is, of course, consistent with the distinct claim that God *sustains* the universe in being at all moments of time.⁴⁰

I think the resultant picture of creation can be motivated and as partial evidence I offer the following. I take it as a given that God's nature is not up to God. Further, if an attribute F is part of God's nature, it is no more up to him what it is to be F than what his nature is.⁴¹ Surely God's nature includes the property *being able to create a physical universe*. Further, it is plausible to think that a necessary condition of being able to create the physical universe is, given their essential role in structuring and characterizing the world, the existence and reality of Platonic abstract objects.⁴² If so, then God's creating (of distinct from God) properties and relations is not up to him; he creates them of necessity and they exist coeternal with God. Notice then, under AM, there is a sense, following Aquinas, in which the will is by

40. For more on the difference between God's creating and sustaining activity, see Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation out of Nothing*, 157–65.

41. Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 122.

42. Space provides me from going into detail here, but let me offer the following sketch of an argument for why Platonic properties (and relations) are a necessary condition for being able to create the physical universe:

- (P₁) Platonic properties (and relations) essentially play the structure-making role in the physical universe. [premise]
- (P₂) Platonic properties (and relations) are necessary beings. [premise]
- (P₃) Platonic properties (and relations) play the structure-making role in any possible physical universe. [from P₁, P₂, and definitions of essential property and necessary being]
- (P₄) For any x , x is able to create a physical universe only if Platonic properties (and relations) exist. [premise]
- (C) Therefore, a necessary condition of being able to create the physical universe is the reality of Platonic properties (and relations). [From P₃ and P₄]

Motivation for P₁ begins with our everyday observation that properties (and relations) are *qualitative*. We observe trees, balls, and candy. Then we notice that these are *types* of things. Further, these types are associated with the *resemblance* among things of that type. And so we plug these various resemblances into a One Over Many Argument, and argue that resemblance facts are best explained by postulating Platonic properties (and relations). Platonic properties (and relations) explain the character of things that have them; they are the objects that play the structure-making role in the physical universe (and they *essentially* play this role: it is what they do; it is part of their nature). Elsewhere I've argued for the triumph of Platonic realism as a solution to the One Over Many Argument. See my "The Problem of Universals, Realism, and God," *Metaphysica* 13 (2012): 183–94. P₂ is a common Platonist assumption regarding properties (and relations). Regarding P₃, since properties (and relations) possess their structure-making role essentially, and since they, as necessary beings, exist in all possible worlds, it follows that any possible physical universe will have them. P₄ seems plausible: if any physical universe must have Platonic properties (and relations) to provide its character, then for any being x to be able to create a physical universe, such properties (and relations) must exist. Hence, the conclusion: the existence of a Platonic realm of properties (and relations) is a necessary condition on being able to create a physical universe.

nature subject to the intellect. Every movement of the will is preceded by apprehension and God's willing into being the Platonic horde is preceded by the apprehension of the constituents of the divine intellect.⁴³ Still, divine freedom is preserved (or so it seems) since in the first logical moment of the Biggest Bang, God spontaneously and freely creates all possibilities and in the third logical moment of creation, God deliberately and freely creates all contingent reality. A summary of the three logical moments of God's creation of the world⁴⁴ can be seen in Figure 1.⁴⁵

| First: The Biggest Bang | Second: The Bigger Bang | Third: The Big Bang |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Eternal/Everlasting effect | Eternal/Everlasting effect | Temporal effect |
| Creation of <i>Possibilia</i> | Creation of (distinct from God) <i>Abstracta</i> | Creation of (distinct from God) <i>Concreta</i> |
| Spontaneous and Free | Necessary | Deliberate and Free |
| Via the Divine Intellect | Via the Divine Will | Via the Divine Will |

Figure 1: Three Logical Moments of Creation According to the Activist Model

The activist model can accommodate the intuition behind the Inferior God Objection—that creation is in some sense spontaneous—without sacrificing God's perfection with respect to his creative power.

43. Aquinas actually makes a stronger claim, to wit, every movement of the will *must* be preceded by apprehension. See *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.82, a.4.

44. I follow Reinhardt Grossmann in making a distinction between “the world” and “the universe.” The universe is, “the totality of matter and energy in existence . . . one giant spatio-temporal whole” (see Grossmann, *The Existence of the World* (London: Routledge, 1992), 8). Still, there are things that are not part of the universe in this sense: they are not spatio-temporal parts. Hence, there are things that exist which are not part of the universe, rather they belong to the world. God and the Platonic horde of properties and relations exist, but not as a part of the universe, rather they belong to the world.

45. What should be obvious by now is that the activist model under suggestion rejects the doctrine of Divine Simplicity. God's creative act is logically complex. Further (see the next footnote), God has properties and thoughts that are not identical to God. Since divine aseity and sovereignty are not sacrificed, the traditional motivation for divine simplicity remains intact, without the dubious doctrine itself. As an added bonus, the activist model can avoid succumbing to the following inconsistent triad whereas the Cartesian God (which has some affinity with the activist model) can't:

- (1) God created the world in time.
- (2) God created eternal truths from eternity.
- (3) God created all things by one perfectly simple act.

The activist model rejects (3). For a discussion of Descartes' commitment to each of (1)–(3), see E. M. Curley, “Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths,” *The Philosophical Review* 93 (1984): 569–97.

The activist model is consistent with the claim that God is the creator of all distinct reality whatsoever. All contingent reality and the part of necessary reality that is not part of God or God's nature exists in virtue of God's creative activity.⁴⁶ It would be a mistake to think that, on AM, either *universal possibilism*, the view that there are no necessary truths, or *limited possibilism*, the view that necessary truths could have been contingent, is the case. While it is true that *prior to creating* God *could* have brought it about that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " is false or that cats are contingently mammals, it is also the case that *prior to creating* there simply wasn't anything to be said about " $2 + 2 = 4$ " or cats. God was free to dream up cats and the mathematical truths in any way he saw fit, constrained of course by his perfect rationality. But, importantly, on AM, once God (eternally) thinks up the necessary truths and modal facts, all modal reality is set.⁴⁷ No modal collapse.

What of the Xerox Copy Objection? Recall the complaint is that on DM, God's "actualization of possibilia" is a kind of duplication, not a genuine creation, and thus, there is no "real ontological distance" between the proxies that serve as possibilia in God and the physical universe. The proposed activist model nicely sidesteps these worries. For according to AM, there *is* real ontological distance between God's ideas and thoughts and the physical universe. God creates substantial particulars modeled on the relevant ideas using the building blocks of the platonic horde. The universe is, as James Ross puts it, an *ens ab alio* (from-another) not an *ens per se* (of-another).⁴⁸ Still, creation remains genuinely *ex nihilo*: God does not confer existence on antecedently existing (or subsisting) possibilia, but rather spontaneously brings into being via his intellectual activity all possibilia in the first logical moment of creation and all physical reality in the third logical moment of creating.⁴⁹

46. And some necessary reality that is part of God also exists in virtue of God's creative activity, namely, the divine ideas and divine thoughts. Also recall, with respect to God's properties, I have defended elsewhere the view that God's Platonic properties (and relations) exist within the divine substance *a se*, as uncreated coeternal entities. See Gould and Davis, "Modified Theistic Activism," in *Beyond the Control of God?*, chap. 3.

47. See William Mann, "Modality, Morality, and God," *Nous* 23 (1989): 90; McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God*, 211; Leftow, *God and Necessity*, 272–98, and Morris, *Anselmian Explorations*, 168–72.

48. James Ross, "Creation II," 123. Elsewhere Ross states, "There is only one kind of causation that God exerts as creator, and that is to cause *being*" (ibid., 133).

49. Still the connection between mind and world is as tight as the creator-creature relation itself, and thus a strength of AM is that it helps explain the hitherto mysterious natural affinity between our mental representations of the world and the world itself. In fact, I've argued elsewhere that just as we find natural classes of objects in the world that motivate realism as a solution to the problem of universals, so too we find natural affinities between mind and world which motivate a kind of divine exemplarism as a way to explain the otherwise mysterious connection. See my "God and Intentionality: A Review Essay of Scott Smith's *Naturalism and Our Knowledge of Reality*," *Philo* 15 (2013): 97–105.

Further, on AM our desiderata are all satisfied. God exercises complete existential control over all distinct from God reality (satisfying D1). He creates with full intentionality and with perfect knowledge of alternative possibilities (satisfying D2). Finally, God's creative activity is sufficiently free (satisfying D3). Granted, in the Bigger Bang, God necessarily creates the Platonic horde of properties and relations that would structure any possible physical universe, but this represents no significant hindrance to God's freedom to create. Where divine freedom *is* relevant is in the matter of *what* possibilia there are and which if any of the infinitely many properties and relations that God must create in virtue of those (freely created) possibilia shall be *exemplified*.⁵⁰ That the Platonic horde is a necessary condition for God creating any contingent reality does nothing to render God's choice in which world to bring into being anything less than free.

We have then a plausible answer to our question of *how* God created, an answer that satisfies our desiderata. I have not argued for its truth. Still, given its explanatory power we have reason to think the activist model is on the right path. Further, our discussion regarding the doctrine of creation has important implications for the debate over God's relationship to abstract objects for the metaphysical realist. Typically, the complaint is that the Platonic theism of Yandell, van Inwagen, and Wolterstorff violates desideratum D1. While I think this complaint is in the main correct, the arguments advanced by those Platonic theists mitigate the force of the complaint and seemingly drive the debate into deadlock. Our exploration in this essay has found an additional reason to reject Platonic theism in favor of theistic activism: the God of Platonic theism is inferior to the God of theistic activism, lacking spontaneity, exuberance, and a joy that befits the creator of all.⁵¹

50. Cf. Menzel, "Temporal Actualism and Singular Foreknowledge," 480.

51. Thanks to Keith Loftin and the editors and reviewers of *Philosophia Christi* for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.