

God's Place in Logical Space

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Abstract: It has been argued recently that classical theism and Lewisian modal realism are incompatible theses. The most substantial argument to this effect takes the form of a trilemma. It argues that no sense can be made of God's being a necessary being in the modal realistic picture, on pain of, among other things, modal collapse. The question of this essay is: Is that so? My goal here is to detail the reasons that have been offered in support of this contention and then defend the coherence of theistic modal realism from the trilemma. I call my reply to the argument an "Anselmian-Thomistic" defense, since it appeals to resources from classical medieval philosophy, especially from Anselm and Aquinas.

1. Introduction

It has been argued recently that classical theism and Lewisian modal realism are incompatible theses (Davis 2008, 2009; Sheehy 2006, 2009; S. Lewis 2015; Vance 2016; Collier 2019). The most substantial argument to this effect takes the form of a trilemma. It argues that no sense can be made of God's being a necessary being in the modal realistic picture, on pain of, among other things, modal collapse. The question of this essay is: Is that so? My goal here is to detail the reasons that have been offered in support of this contention and then defend the coherence of theistic modal realism from the trilemma. I call my reply to the argument an "Anselmian-Thomistic" defense, since it appeals to resources from classical medieval philosophy, especially from Anselm and Aquinas.

The order of this essay is as follows. I'll first define "classical theism" and "modal realism," for the purposes of this essay (§2). I'll next describe the trilemma, paying special attention to the contended modal collapse consequence (§3). I'll then consider three ways of responding to the trilemma that I think are ultimately

unsatisfactory (§4), before introducing and motivating my own preferred response to it (§5). I'll conclude by responding to a few potential objections to my defense (§6).

2. Classical Theism

Classical theism is the thesis that God exists. Classical theism is monotheistic in that it supposes that one and only one god exists—namely God. According to classical theism, God is understood to be a personal agent who is perfectly spiritual, perfectly free, perfectly simple, perfectly essential,¹ omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omnipresent, omnitemporal, who is the creator, sustainer, and governor of everything that exists so long as it exists (excepting himself) (Swinburne 1993, 1; Bittle 1953, 3, 187ff; Parrish 1997, 3ff). Additionally and importantly for present purposes, God is also understood to be a necessary being (Anselm 1067; Pruss & Rasmussen 2018, 5–6).²

3. Modal Realism

Lewisian modal realism (hereafter just “modal realism”) is a cluster of theses in the metaphysics of modality. The modal realist supposes that there is a plurality of concrete, spatially, temporally, and—importantly—causally isolated possible worlds. Every way that the world might be or might have been is a way that some possible world is. These worlds are complete in that for every proposition and every world, either it or its negation is true at that world. In this way, the set of possible worlds exhausts logical space. Other worlds exist just as much as does the actual world, and every world (by its own lights and the lights of its inhabitants) is likewise actual.

There is provision for at least three sorts of beings in the modal realist's ontology: *concreta* (objects), *universals*, and *abstracta* (pure sets).³ *Concreta* are understood to be worldbound, as existing “in” worlds, as being proper parts of the worlds in which they reside. *De re* modality for *concreta* is understood in terms of counterpart relations. *Universals* exist “through” worlds. *De re* modality for *universals* is understood in terms of transworld identity relations.⁴ And *abstracta* do

¹ By this phrase I mean to indicate only that God has every real property that he possesses essentially (i.e., he has no accidents). Throughout this paper, I take a neutral stance with respect to varieties of religious classical theism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, or otherwise. It should be noted, however, that some self-styled “classical theists” deny that God is perfectly essential. They suppose he does have at least one accident, namely his contingent association with humanity in the person of Christ.

² That God is a necessary being is a tenet of classical theism. However, not all theists *qua* theists are committed to the necessity of God's existence (cf. Swinburne 2012).

³ Impure sets are sets with non-sets in their transitive closure. Pure sets, by contrast, are sets with only other sets in their transitive closure. The null set, \emptyset , is an example of a pure set, as are $\{\emptyset\}$, $\{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\}$, and so on. Lewis supposed that impure sets are located in logical space where the non-sets are located; pure sets, by contrast are not located anywhere.

⁴ Lewis (1983, 39-40): “If universals are to do the new work I have in store for them, they must be capable of repeated occurrence not only within a world but also across worlds. They would be an

not exist “in” or “through” any worlds, but rather are said to exist “from the perspective of” or “at” every world.⁵ They are necessary existents. As Collier (2019, 345) puts it, beings like this “exist from a world’s perspective, through being members of the most unrestricted domain that is considered, generally, suitable for evaluating the truth values of quantifications at worlds—i.e., non-individuals (e.g. pure sets...).” If an object does not exist “in”, “through,” or “at” any world, then it is said to be an impossible object and so does not exist at all.⁶

We say that two concreta are worldmates if they inhabit the same world, if they bear spatial, temporal, or causal relations to one another, if they are part of the same actuality. The worldmate relation is transitive such that if *A* is worldmates with *B* and *B* is worldmates with *C*, then *A* is worldmates with *C*; and it is symmetric, such that if *A* is worldmates with *B*, then *B* is worldmates with *A* too. Universals are usually exempted from worldmate relations since they have no contingent, non-relational properties. And sets are usually exempted too since the defining feature of abstracta is that they are non-temporal and non-causal.

4. The Trilemma

Now, the most substantial argument to the effect that theistic modal realism is incoherent takes the form of a trilemma.⁷ It argues that no sense can be made of divine necessity in the modal realistic picture. It runs like this (where “*w*_@” is used as a name designating our world):

- (1) God is a necessary being. [Premise]
- (2) There is a plurality of discrete concrete worlds (*w*_@, *w*₁, *w*₂, etc.), populated with individual objects. [Premise]

exception to my usual principle—meant for particulars of course—that nothing is wholly present as part of two different worlds. But I see no harm in that. If two worlds are said to overlap by having a coin in common, and if this coin is supposed to be wholly round in one world and wholly octagonal in the other, I stubbornly ask what shape it is, and insist that shape is not a relation to worlds . . . I do not see any parallel objection if worlds are said to overlap by sharing a universal. What contingent, nonrelational property of the universal could we put in the place of [the] shape of the coin in raising the problem? I cannot think of any.”

⁵ Lewis (1983, 40): “Provisionally, my ontology consists of iterative set theory with individuals... I take it that the part-whole relation applies to individuals, not sets. Then no set is in any world in the sense of being a part of it. Numbers, properties, propositions, event—all these are sets, and not in any world. Numbers et al. are no more located in logical space than they are in ordinary time and space.” Lewis (1986a, 94): “I would not wish to say that any sets are parts of this or other worlds.”

⁶ As Kraay (2008, 856) notes, “Theists often take God to be a necessary being: one who could not possibly fail to exist, or, equivalently, one who exists in all possible worlds. On this view, no sense can be made of the idea that God stands outside of the set of worlds . . . Since the possible worlds there are exhaust the way things could be, there simply is no vantage point, divine or otherwise, outside this set.”

⁷ The argument initially took the form of a dilemma in Sheehy (2006). Cameron (2009) then responded and introduced a third possibility. This was then turned into a third horn in Sheehy (2009), Vance (2016), and Collier (2019).

- (3) The best way to make sense of divine necessity is modally, as saying $\Box\exists x(x = \text{God})$. [Premise]
- (4) There are only three ways we might make sense of the claim $\Box\exists x(x = \text{God})$, relative to $w@$:
- (i) For all worlds, w , accessible via $w@$, either God or one of his counterparts exists in w .
 - (ii) For all worlds, w' and w'' , accessible via $w@$, God exists through w' and w'' via transworld identity relations.
 - (iii) For all worlds, w , accessible via $w@$, God does not exist in or through w but nonetheless exists at w .
- (5) But God cannot have counterparts, so he cannot exist per (i). [Contention]
- (6) God cannot enjoy transworld existence, and so he cannot exist per (ii). [Contention]
- (7) And God cannot merely exist “from the perspective of” every world, and so he cannot exist per (iii). [Contention]
- (8) Therefore, classical theism and modal realism are incompatible theses. [From (1)–(7)]

There are said to be two problems with understanding God's necessity via counterpart relations (like concreta); two problems via transworld identity relations (like universals); and only one problem in the manner of an abstract object.⁸ The latter problem is common to all three.

The special problem with (i) is that it would lead to a plurality of Gods and so would contradict (absolute) monotheism. Now, while it is true in this model that, relative to each world, there is only one god, from the perspective of logical space—“looking down on the set of worlds, as it were” (Collier 2019, 335)—there is clearly not one and only one god. Speaking absolutely, in this model, there are as many gods as there are worlds. But, the classical theist would want to say that absolutely there

⁸ Other arguments against (iii) have appeared in the literature, but only this one (modal collapse) has remained standing after critical scrutiny. For example, Sheehy (2009) complains that to accept (iii) is contrary to the explanatory parsimony of modal realism, but this has been rightly challenged (cf. Almeida 2017b). And Vance (2016) complains that to take tack (iii) would deny God's omnipresence, since the part-whole relation does not apply to pure sets, and so to treat God like a pure set would deny that he is wholly present anywhere. But, as Collier (2019) notes, this objection is no good, because the theistic modal realist is not committed to saying that God *is* a pure set, but rather that God *is like* a pure set (insofar as we are conceiving him like an abstract object), and so we may resist that God should be treated completely analogously with sets.

is one and only one god. And so, there cannot be any counterpart gods, on pain of contradiction.^{9, 10}

The special problem with (ii) is that God intervenes in our lives; but if so, then it would follow that he must have accidents, contradicting his perfect essentiality, as follows.¹¹ We are contingent beings, meaning that there are worlds at which neither we (nor any of our counterparts) exist. But then it would follow that whereas God has the property of intervening in our lives in $w@$, he doesn't have that property in another world. But then it would follow that God does have accidents, since there is at least one property that he possibly has and possibly does not, which is sufficient for accidentality. Now, it is true that accounting for divine intervention is in general a challenge. However, it is especially challenging for this account. The counterpart theorist can at least say that there is *some* sense in which God has every property he possesses invariably. This is simply because every object is a part of some world and no other. But then it would follow that God, our "God" of $w@$, does not exist in any other world. Consequently, he cannot have a property in one world that he fails to have in another. The account according to which God merely exists "at" every world can similarly circumvent this peculiar problem. If God exists in *no* world, strictly speaking, then, again, it is not the case that there are worlds in which he has some property and worlds in which he does not. What properties he possesses, he once again possesses invariably. On the other hand, if we presume that God exists across every world (being at the same time somehow fully present in each), then neither of these theoretical options are available: God in one world will have some property that he will not have in another.¹²

⁹ Some suppose that this objection is just a kind of Humphrey-objection to counterpart theory, only in this case applied to God (cf. Kripke 1972/1980, Lecture 1). Most, however, think otherwise and that, therefore, no theist ought to opt for counterpart theory for God's necessity on this ground alone (Cf. Wilson 1979 for a similar statement with respect to counterpart theory as applied to Leibnizian modal realism, and why Leibniz would want to deny this interpretation too). As Collier (2019, 335) notes, "Yes, on [counterpart theory], for [e.g.,] Bill to possibly *F*, there must exist otherworldly-Bill-like individuals (counterparts) who are *F*, this does not seem to threaten Bill's uniqueness . . . God, however, is different. For [classical theism], a God-like individual is unique; there should exist, in all of reality . . . only one God-like individual . . . Whilst it is permissible to see a plurality of Bill-like individuals... it is not permissible . . . to see a plurality of God-like individuals."

¹⁰ Less commonly, some think that this ought not be considered so much an objection, but rather as a starting point for the natural theologian; indeed, there are a plurality of Gods (at least in this sense), and so we ought to opt in for ordinal polytheism (cf. Steinhart 2013). Whatever we might think of this response, it is clearly not consistent with classical theism.

¹¹ Anselm (1066): "[W]hatever may be the correct analysis of the proper meaning of the word "accidents," it is certainly true that with regard to the supremely immutable Nature nothing can be said on the basis of which [this Nature] can be understood to be mutable" (*Monologion* XXV; trans. Hopkins 1986).

¹² I take this to be the most significant problem with the transworld identity account of divine necessity. But see Collier (2019, 342–345) for additional potential problems with it, including an objection to the effect that assuming God is a transworld individual would contradict divine simplicity.

And the common problem with all three options is that we risk modal collapse (i.e., the consequence that everything that is actually the case is necessarily the case), which is absurd. The argument to this effect goes:

- (9) Since there is a genuine plurality of worlds, let object α exist in w_1 and let object β exist in w_2 . [Consequence of (2)]
- (10) If w_1 and w_2 are distinct, then α and β are not worldmates. [Premise]
- (11) Creation is a causal relation such that if x creates y , then x and y bear a causal relation to one another. [Premise]
- (12) If two objects bear a causal relation to one another, then they are worldmates. [Premise]
- (13) The worldmate relation is symmetric and transitive. [Premise]
- (14) Now, God is the absolute creator of everything. [Premise]
- (15) And so, God creates α and God creates β . [From (9) & (14)]
- (16) And so, God bears a causal relation to α and God bears a causal relation to β . [From (11) & (15)]
- (17) And so, God is worldmates with α and God is worldmates with β . [From (12) & (16)]
- (18) But then α and β are worldmates with one another too. [From (13) & (17)]
- (19) Therefore, w_1 and w_2 are not distinct. [From (10) & (18)]
- (20) \perp . [From (9) & (19)]

From which it would follow that either God is not the absolute creator of everything (i.e., (14) is false), contradicting classical theism, or else there is not a genuine plurality of worlds (i.e., (9) is false), contradicting modal realism.^{13, 14}

5. Strategies of Defense

Some have attempted to defend the coherence of theistic modal realism in the past (Oppy 2009; Cameron 2009; Almeida 2011, 2017a, 2017b), but a fully satisfactory response to the trilemma has yet to appear. Several *prima facie* plausible strategies

¹³ Or, as Steffi Lewis (2015, 217–218) puts it: “To say that something out there in logical space can have causal impact on all the possible worlds, indeed, created them, but is itself a member of no single world, is profoundly, fundamentally, completely, and utterly inconsistent with [David Lewis’s] modal realist metaphysics of possible worlds.”

¹⁴ It might be thought that a better way of understanding this charge is not as a trilemma, but rather as a problem of holding three jointly inconsistent these: what we might call “divine necessity,” “divine creation,” and “plurality of worlds.” Alternatively, it might be thought that we do not have just one argument here, but rather two. If we replace (9) with (2) in the modal collapse argument, do we not have an independent argument against the coherence of modal realism and classical theism? I am sympathetic with both of these alternative representations. However, I think it best to represent the charge as I have done here primarily since it has previously been represented as a negative disjunctive argument, and there is some value to be had in preserving historical dialectical continuity; and also because I think this is the most forceful and interesting way of conceiving it.

of defense suggest themselves. The theistic modal realist could reject (3), (4), (11), or (12). My preferred response to the trilemma is to reject (11), which I will explain and defend momentarily. But before doing so, let's examine why denying (3), (4), or (12) is unwise.

5.1. God as a Necessary Being

It might be thought that the best strategy of defense is to reject premise (3), that we ought to understand the claim that God is a necessary being modally, as saying $\Box\exists x(x = \text{God})$. Indeed, this interpretation of divine necessity generated a great deal of controversy in the 1960s and '70s (cf. Hicks 1960; Penelhum 1960; Ross 1961; Miller 1974; White 1979; cf. also Parrish 1999: chapters 1–3). In this conversation, three options were considered for making sense of God's necessity. (a) Narrow logical necessity, such that "God is a necessary being" means that to deny the statement "God exists" is a logical contradiction; equivalently, that "God exists" expresses a tautology. (b) Factual necessity, by which it was thought that to say "God is a necessary being" is to say that God is "a being that has neither beginning nor end, that does not depend on anything else for its existence, and is the ultimate uncaused reality on which everything else depends" (White 1979, 178). And finally, (c) broad logical necessity (i.e., metaphysical necessity), such that "God is a necessary being" just means that, relative to $w@$, $\Box\exists x(x = \text{God})$. Premise (3) is a commitment to interpretation (c). One might therefore reject it by favoring interpretations (a) or (b) over (c).

However, this defensive strategy does not recommend itself. Interpretation (a) was thought inadequate within the aforementioned debate for two reasons: first, because most empiricists (theist or otherwise) are sympathetic with the supposition that no existential statement expresses a tautology; and second, because if one takes this route, then the theist will fall prey to Findlay's (1948) infamous ontological "disproof" of the existence of God. Interpretation (a), therefore, is no good (cf. also Hicks 1960 for further critique of this interpretation).

Interpretation (b) was very popular for a time. It was endorsed by Hicks (1960) and thought to find support in Aquinas (cf., e.g., Laughlin 2009). This was also sometimes called the "question-stopping" sense of necessity, since "God is a necessary being" was thought to explain why it makes sense to ask for the reason of the existence of everything else, but never for God. However, White (1979) argued that this interpretation is inadequate too, since if there are possible worlds, and we're not supposing that God exists in, through, or at all of them (i.e., existing as necessary via counterparts, transworld identity, or from the perspective of every world), then we in fact can ask an important question about the existence of God—namely, why doesn't he exist at all of them? And so, God's necessity as "question stopping" doesn't actually stop our questions at all. The defender of (b) might then attempt to stop this question by supposing that God does exist at every possible world. But if so, this is no help to the theistic modal realist, for then the trilemma starts anew. We will have

affirmed that God is a necessary being in the sense of premise (3) and will only now be quibbling about whether this is the best sense of understanding divine necessity according to classical theism.

5.2. Modal Mereological Fusion God

It might be thought instead that the best strategy of defense is to reject premise (4), that our only options for making sense of God's necessary existence is to understand him as existing in, through, or at every possible world. Here's another option. We might say that something like the counterpart picture is right, that in some sense there is a "God" in every world in logical space. However, instead of supposing that God is identical to any one of them, we should say that God is the aggregate of all of the worldbound God-like individuals. Interestingly, given Lewis's commitment to unrestricted composition, he seems to have already made provision in his ontology for existents like the mereological fusion of a worldbound individual and all of its counterparts. And so, the supposition that God is such an entity is at least *prima facie* consistent with the rest of his ontology.¹⁵

However, even if it is granted that this is a genuine fourth alternative for making sense of divine necessity, it is clear that this specific strategy of defense is no good either. Like (i), this option is inconsistent with classical theism. Whereas (i) is partially inadequate because it runs afoul of classical theism's commitment to absolute monotheism, this option runs afoul of it because it contradicts divine simplicity. According to classical theism, God is perfectly simple—he has no parts. But if God is a mereological sum of worldbound individuals, then he very obviously does have parts. Therefore, God cannot be a modal mereological fusion, on pain of contradiction.

5.3. Interworld Causation

Still, it might be thought that the best strategy of defense is to deny premise (12), that two individuals cannot form a causal relation with one another without being worldmates. Lewis (1986a, 69–81) initially individuates worlds spatiotemporally, which makes sense since the relation "is spatiotemporally related to" is an equivalence class and so is a good candidate for unifying objects into worlds. He only subsequently adds that they must be causally isolated too, for which he argues on the basis of his counterfactual theory of causation. But one can accept Lewis's first individuation condition while rejecting his second, perhaps by also rejecting his theory of causation. If this tack is taken, then the modal collapse consequence is

¹⁵ Thanks to my anonymous reviewers from *Journal of Analytic Theology* for mentioning this and the following point, and encouraging me to respond to these possible replies to the trilemma.

apparently circumvented, since we could then deny that causal relatedness is sufficient for worldmatehood and prevent the inference to (17) above.

However, this defense is shortsighted. One need not accept Lewis's full theory of causation in order for his argument against interworld causation to take effect. His argument against interworld causation still stands so long as we permit two plausible assumptions. The first is that certain causal interactions at least sometimes imply counterfactual dependence relations between their relata. Of particular relevance is that creation is a causal relation that plausibly entails counterfactual dependence relations. Ordinarily, if x creates y via action ϕ , then had x not ϕ ed, y would not have existed. And second, we presume the standard Stalnaker-Nute-Lewis semantics for counterfactual evaluation, according to which a counterfactual statement of the form " $p \square \rightarrow q$," relative to some world w , is true iff the closest world to w at which p is true is also a world at which q is true too (cf. Stalnaker 1968; Nute 1975; Lewis 1973a, 1973b, 1979, 1981, 1986a, 1986b). Lewis's point was just that if we allow for an event in one world to counterfactually depend on an event in another world, then our counterfactual semantics very quickly breaks down. As Lewis (1986a, 78–79) puts it, suppose that "[e]vent C occurs at world W_C , event E occurs at world $[W]_E$, they are distinct events, and if C had not occurred, E would not have occurred either. This counterfactual is supposed to hold—where? It means that at the closest worlds to—where?—at which C does not occur, E does not occur—where?—either." Whether we understood the closest worlds closest relative to W_C or to W_E , we reach a counterintuitive result. It is of no help to understand the counterfactual as saying, e.g., "at the closest worlds to W_C at which C does not occur at W_C , E does not occur at $[W]_E$," since that is like saying "in Auckland it rains in Melbourne, but in Wellington it doesn't rain in Melbourne," for which no sense can be made. Nor do any alternative evaluation schemes seem plausible. And so, our best option is to deny interworld causal relations so that we will have denied a class of relations which sometimes would imply interworld counterfactual dependence relations too.

6. The Anselmian-Thomistic Defense

I contend that a better, and viable, strategy of defense open to the theistic modal realist is to deny premise (11), that creation always implies causal relatedness. The defense is an equivocation objection and runs as follows:

- (21) "Creation" when applied to the activities of creatures means one thing; when applied to the activities of the creator, it means something else entirely. [Premise]
- (22) Whereas the first sort of creation plausibly always implies a causal relation between its relata, the second sort of creation does not. [Premise]

(23) Therefore, even though God is the absolute creator of everything that exists (*extra Deum*), this does not imply that he is causally related to everything that exists. [From (21) & (22)]

And once the inference to (16) is blocked, the rest of the modal collapse argument falls through. On the supposition that the argument falls through, then option (iii) opens up; we can suppose that God exists “at” every world, on the model of pure sets.

I’ll try now to motivate and defend (21) and (22) by showing that not only are both of these moves open to the classical theist, but they have in fact been endorsed by important classical theists like Anselm and Aquinas. This reply to the trilemma is in one sense novel, in another sense not. It is novel in that, whereas previous defenders of theistic modal realism have sought to block the trilemma by looking for resources in modal realism, I seek to block it by looking for resources in classical theism. This ensures that the response is not merely ad hoc. However, it is not novel in that it relies on theological moves that are well-known and well-trodden; it does not venture outside of classical theology. In this way, it should be acceptable to a great majority of theists, modal realist or otherwise.

6.1. *The Anselmian Move*

Premise (11) says that creation implies causal relation, such that if x creates y, then x and y bear a causal relation to one another. I submit that this premise is suspect because it equivocates on the term “creation.” “Creation,” when applied to the activities of creatures, means one thing; when applied to the activities of God, it means quite another.

This move is consistent with modal realism since modal realism implies nothing whatsoever about whether or not “creation” has one or several senses. Moreover, this move is not only consistent with classical theism but has been endorsed by historical classical theist Anselm (1066), among others. Anselm supposed that all relation terms that are applied to creatures take on a much different sense when applied to the creator, not just the usual causal ones:

Now, about relation [words]—no one doubts that none of them apply to the substance of the thing of which they are predicated relationally... Thus, although [The Supreme Nature] can be spoken of relationally as supreme over, or as greater than, all things that it made (or can be spoken of relationally in some other way), [these utterances] do not, it is obvious, designate its natural being . . . Now, that which reason teaches regarding ‘supreme’ holds equally true for similar relation [words]. (*Monologion* XV; trans. Hopkins 1986)¹⁶

¹⁶ Anselm (1066): Of “words which are predicated relationally[,] . . . none of them unqualifiedly exhibit the essence of anything” (*Monologion* XV).

In fact, for Anselm, all predicates that are applicable both to creatures and the creator are equivocal, both monadic and relational. Here's Anselm (1066) again:

And since of all natures this one [viz., God] alone has from itself, without the aid of another nature, its being whatever it is, how could it fail to be uniquely what it is and have nothing in common with its creatures? Hence, if it ever has some name in common with other things, without a doubt a very different signification must be understood [in this case]. (*Monologion* XXVI; trans. Hopkins 1986)^{17, 18}

It is of course not compulsory for a theist to accept this thesis. But if the theistic modal realist accepts it, then premise (11) may be resisted.

6.2. *The Thomistic Move*

If the theistic modal realist accepts the Anselmian move, then a challenge immediately presents itself—namely, to specify some alternative sense in which God is the absolute “creator” of everything that does not imply that he bears a causal relation to everything. I believe that this challenge can be met by, first, appealing to the medieval concept of asymmetric real relations, originally suggested by Aristotle (c. 350 BC) and most thoroughly developed by the late scholastics; and second, by following Aquinas in supposing that any putative real relation between God and a creature is at most an asymmetric real relation—the relation may be real for the creature but for God, it is merely conceptual. I'll first elucidate the doctrine of real relations; then I'll explicate what is meant by an asymmetric real relation; and finally I'll discuss Aquinas's

¹⁷ Anselm (1066): “The Supreme Being is so above and beyond every other nature that whenever something is predicated of it in words which are also applied to other natures, the meaning [of the words] is not at all the same in the two cases” (*Monologion* LXV)

¹⁸ How then, according to Anselm, can we speak of God? This is a difficult exegetical question. In *Monologion* LXIV, LXV, and LXVI, Anselm makes a distinction between signifying clearly and signifying “obliquely” (per aliud). Usually, we signify clearly when we make a statement about, or inquire into, some subject. However, we signify obliquely what we either “cannot or do not wish to express properly (e.g., when we speak symbolically)” (*Monologion* LXV). Anselm says very little about what precisely is meant by “signifying obliquely” (per aliud), but he provides one example of what *inquiry* per aliud is like. “Often,” he says, “we see a thing, though not properly (i.e., not as the object itself is) but rather by means of a likeness or an image (e.g., when we see someone's face in a mirror). Thus, we do and do not speak of one and the same thing . . . Therefore, since it is evident that something about this Nature can be perceived not with respect to its reality but (only) obliquely (per aliud), it is certain that one more closely approaches a knowledge of it through that which more closely approximates it in likeness. For among created things whatever is shown to be more similar to the Supreme Nature must be more excellent by nature. Therefore, by virtue of its greater likeness this [created thing] more greatly aids the inquiring mind to approach the Supreme Truth, and by virtue of its more excellent created being it more fully teaches what the mind ought to think regarding the Creator.” Anselm's explanation here is less than perfectly helpful, since earlier in the text he says that God relates to nothing else in any degree. So far as I can tell, Anselm says nothing else by way of clarification. I must therefore direct the reader to Visser & Williams (2007, 127ff), Barth (1960, 29ff), and McIntosh (2017, 232ff) for further exegesis.

remarks on God's asymmetric real relation to his creatures and why this move would block the problematic inference to (16).

6.3. *Real Relations*

The doctrine of real relations is partly a logical thesis and partly an ontological one. To elucidate it, consider the relational statement "Sally is the mother of Billy." In the post-Russellian tradition of analytic philosophy, we model the logic of relations as follows. There are three basic elements: two constants and one polyadic predicate. There is the name Sally, which we can represent with "s." There is the name Billy, which we can represent with "b." And finally there is the polyadic predicate "is the mother of," which we can represent with "R." Polyadic predicates are understood as "*n*-place propositional functions, which take names as arguments, such that a relation having *n* relata is represented as a *n*-place function" (Keele 2007, 398). Putting these elements together, we analyze the relational statement as a single statement in our formal language, represented as "R(s, b)." Corresponding to this logical analysis, we understand "s" and "b" to correspond to two individuals, and "R" to correspond to a polyadic property, which is jointly held between them. Our ontological theory of relations is that relations are polyadic properties, which are irreducible to monadic properties.

The medieval tradition of real relations, of which Aquinas can serve as a representative, understood the logic and ontology of relations much differently. Consider again the statement "Sally is the mother of Billy." The medievals modelled the logic of relations as follows. There are four basic elements: two constants and two monadic predicates. There is the name Sally, "s." There is the name Billy, "b." And finally there are two monadic predicates. The first is "is a mother," which we can represent with "M." And the second is the predicate converse, "is a son," which we can represent with "S." Putting these elements together, we analyze the relational statement as two statements in our formal language, represented as "M(s)" and "S(b)," respectively. Corresponding to this logical analysis, the medievals understood "s" and "b" to correspond to two individuals (substances), and "M" and "S" to correspond to two monadic properties, which are held separately by each of their respective subjects. The medieval theory of relations was reductive: they held that relations are ultimately sets of monadic properties.¹⁹

There is more to the doctrine. Sally is not just a mother simpliciter. She is the mother of Billy. Similarly, Billy is not just a son, but the son of Sally. And so, to account for the inherently relational element in Sally's being a mother of Billy and Billy's being a son of Sally, the medievals employed the concept of respective accidents.²⁰ Respective accidents are features of properties that have inherent intentionality, in

¹⁹ For more on the history of real relations, especially within medieval philosophy, see Brower (2001, 2016, 2018), Craig (2010), Keele (2007), Mugnai (2016), Penner (2013), and Ward (2010).

²⁰ Respective accidents are also sometimes referred to as "respective entities" or simply "respectives."

the sense that Sally's being a mother points towards Billy (or his property of being a son) and Billy's being a son points towards Sally (or her property of being a mother). Not all monadic properties have respective accidents, but some do, and by appealing to the respective accidents of certain properties, so the thought goes, we can make sense of how Sally takes on a new property when she comes to mother a new child, Jane. In the first instance, Sally has the property of being a mother which itself has the respective accident of pointing towards Billy; and in the second, she has a property with the respective accident that points towards Jane. How exactly ought we understand respective accidents? For present purposes, that subject can be bracketed. We'll return to that topic shortly.

6.4. Asymmetric Real Relations

Aquinas and the medievals further distinguished between three categories of relations. There are symmetric real relations, symmetric non-real relations, and finally asymmetric real relations.²¹ Consider some relation, " R ," said to obtain between two objects, α and β . Properly analyzed, there is no polyadic property instantiated between the two—no road leading from one to the other—but rather there are two instances of monadic property instantiation with respective accidents: $F^\beta(\alpha)$ and $G^\alpha(\beta)$. The criteria for determining whether R is a real relation is controversial, but the thought seems to be this. R is a real relation iff its obtaining makes a substantial, qualitative, or quantitative difference to its relata. Alternatively, we might say that R is real iff its relata's substantial, qualitative, or quantitative profiles ontologically depend on, or are grounded by, R 's obtaining. A symmetric real relation is one such that R is real for both α and β (i.e., F makes such a difference for α and G makes such a difference for β). A symmetric non-real relation is one such that R is real for neither α nor β (i.e., neither F makes such a difference for α nor does G make such a difference for β). And an asymmetric real relation is one such that R is real for only one of the relata, α or β , but not for the other (i.e., F makes such a difference for α or G makes such a difference for β , but not both).²²

²¹ Extrinsic relations provide paradigmatic examples of symmetric non-real relations (e.g., my laptop is in front of me) (cf. MacBride 2016). Intrinsic relations provide paradigmatic examples of symmetric real relations (e.g., this paper is twice as long as its first draft). And as the following quote from Aquinas will illustrate, a relation like knowledge is a paradigmatic asymmetric real relation, as are plausibly all relations of representation: the representing is real for the *represens* but not for the *representum*.

²² This interpretation is open to challenges by critical doxographers of medieval philosophy. I think this is the best way of understanding what it means for a relation to be real for its relata, but if this description is not perfectly precise, note that nothing much in this defense hangs on this explication. (For Aquinas himself on the distinction between these three relations, see *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 7, corpus.; see also Brower 2018, esp. §5.2.)

6.5. *God's Non-Real Relation to the World*

Crucially, Aquinas (1259, 1264, 1268, 1274) thought that anytime we express a relation involving God as a relatum, we at most express an asymmetric real relation. The relation may be real for the creature but never for the creator. As he says:

Whenever two things are related to each other in such a way that one depends on the other but the other does not depend upon it, there is a real relation in the dependent member, but in the independent member the relation is merely one of reason—simply because one thing cannot be understood as being related to it. The notion of such a relation becomes clear when we consider knowledge, which depends upon what is known, although the latter does not depend on it . . .²³ Consequently, since all creatures depend on God, but He does not depend on them, there are real relations in creatures, referring them to God. The opposite relations in God to creatures, however, are merely conceptual relations; but, because names are signs of concepts, certain names we use for God imply a relation to creatures, even though, as we have said, the relation is merely conceptual. (*De Veritate* IV.5; trans. Craig 2000, 97)^{24, 25}

Now, the challenge was to specify some alternative sense in which God is the “creator” of everything that does not imply causal relation. My suggestion is that the theistic modal realist introduce a new kind of property into the usual modal realistic ontology—namely, real monadic properties with inherent respective accidents—which are only had and instantiated by creatures when they and God are putatively related to one another. Here’s the sense in which, for example, “God created α .” First, α has the real monadic property of being created, which has the respective accident of pointing towards God, the Creator. It is real for α , since α ontologically and substantially depends upon it. And second, God has the non-real monadic property of being the creator, which has the respective accident of pointing towards α . It is non-real for God since God ontologically and substantially depends upon nothing outside of himself whatsoever. This interpretation holds similarly for β . This interpretation satisfies Anselm’s requirement that all familiar relational terms that are applied to God should be understood to take on an unusual sense in that context. Whereas ordinary creaturely relations are rightly represented with polyadic predicates/properties, divine relations are not. And it also satisfies Aquinas’s requirement that God only relates to the world via, at most, asymmetric real relations.

This defense decisively blocks the modal collapse argument. God has the monadic property of creating α and the monadic property of creating β . But from this

²³ Cf. Aristotle (c. 350 BC, *Categoriae* VII 7b 25–35).

²⁴ Cf. also *Summa Theologia* 1a.13.7; *Summa Contra Gentiles* 2. 11–14; *De Potentia Dei* 3.3.

²⁵ In this way, following Anselm, Aquinas supposed that “[W]hat [the Supreme Nature] is, it is completely through itself and not through something other [than itself]” (*Monologion* XVI, trans. Hopkins 1986).

it cannot be inferred that he causally relates to α or causally relates to β . After all, the predicate “causally relates to” is applied to creatures, and so, per Anselm’s stipulation, it cannot with the same sense be applied to God too. We plausibly may infer from $\text{Creates}^\alpha(\text{God})$ and $\text{Created-By}^{\text{God}}(\alpha)$ that $\text{Causes}^\alpha(\text{God})$ and $\text{Caused-By}^{\text{God}}(\alpha)$. But again, even if this follows, we have no reason to suppose that God and α are worldmates. After all, the relational predicate ‘is worldmates with’ is applied to creatures, and so, per Anselm’s stipulation again, it cannot with the same sense also be applied to God. And if no polyadic worldmate relation obtains between God and α and God and β , then it does not matter that the worldmate relation is symmetric and transitive—we are no longer forced into saying that α and β must be worldmates too.

7. Objections and Replies

Like the Anselmian move, it is not compulsory for a theist to accept the Thomistic move. But if one accepts it alongside the Anselmian one, then not only may premise (11) be resisted, it may be positively denied. And if premise (11) is denied, the modal collapse argument itself collapses. Option (iii) opens up and the theistic modal realist is free to understand God on the model of abstracta—as existing “at” or “from the perspective of” every world, though existing neither in nor through any of them. Consequently, premise (7) of the trilemma is blunt and theistic modal realism has not been shown to be incoherent after all.²⁶

I will conclude this essay now by considering four plausible objections to my defense. The literature already abounds on the subject of whether we can speak literally of God or only analogically, and so I will bracket concerns relating to that particular controversy surrounding the Anselmian move. I will instead focus on the Thomistic move, which is less familiar and more interesting.

7.1. *Real Relations are Dubious*

First, one may worry about accepting this defense because it posits the existence of real relations. Presumably, real monadic properties with inherent respective accidents is not an item in the average contemporary metaphysician’s ontology. Moreover, one might worry, it is well known that Russell (1903) conclusively showed us that their existence is philosophically dubious. And so, the objection is my defense

²⁶ To be clear, there are other outstanding problems with theistic modal realism. Some pertain alike to theistic actualists; some do not; and some, while pertaining to both, are nonetheless more pressing for this account. For example, there remains the modal problem of evil (cf. Guleserian 1983); the modal problem of ugliness (cf. Robson 2011); and, recently presented, the modal problem of creatio ex nihilo (cf. Ho 2019; though cf. also Erasmus 2020). The solution of this paper may have some bearing on the latter problem but not likely on the former two.

comes with too high an ontological cost and that this is especially problematic as real relations are philosophically disreputable.

I'll offer this objection two replies. The first is that whether or not accepting real relations comes with too high an ontological cost depends on whether one understands real relations as being a new kind of entity in our ontology (as I have off-handedly suggested), or whether they are in fact just our ordinary monadic properties understood differently.

I have oversimplified in my previous description of real relations. The medievals understood every relation to consist of (at least) three parts (cf. Bittle 1939, 299–318).²⁷ First, there is the subject, the thing that is related to another. Second, there is the term, the thing to which the subject is related. And finally there is the foundation, the basis, ground, or reason why the subject is related to the term. As an example, consider the statement that a lump of snow is similar to a blank sheet of paper (in that both are white). The lump of snow is the subject; the sheet of paper is the term; and the property of being white in the two of them is the foundation. An important debate among medieval metaphysicians was the question: Where in these three elements, if among them at all, is the relation “is similar to” to be found? Some supposed that the relation is identical with none of these elements but is itself a new kind of emergent entity. Accordingly, there are two sub-categories of monadic properties—relations are one of them. (This is the proposal I have been tacitly assuming.) But others argued that the relation is ultimately identical with the foundation. And so, in this case, the relation “being similar to” is actually identical with the property being white as it is found in both the snow and the paper.²⁸ Accordingly it would be the monadic property of being white as it is exemplified by the snow which has the respective accident—presumably one for every other white object to which the snow is similar. The relation “is similar to” is chosen here as an arbitrary example. These approaches could presumably be generalized to cover other relations too.

The point in bringing up this historic debate is that whether or not admitting real relations into our ontology is too costly depends upon how we address this medieval dispute. If we agree with the former disputants, then the objection may be compelling. But if we agree with the latter, then it is not, since accepting real relations will not require accepting anything new into our inventory of the world.

And the second reply I offer in response to this objection is that it mischaracterizes Russell's critique of real relations. Russell objected to the philosophical project of reducing all relations whatsoever to monadic properties with inherent respective accidents. Russell argued that this cannot be done, and so we should accept irreducible polyadic properties and use them to model all relational

²⁷ Some also includes the two extremes of the relation as a fourth and fifth component to every relation. The “extremes” just refer to the subject and term again.

²⁸ Albert the Great is an example of a metaphysician of the first variety. Peter Abelard is an example of a metaphysician of the second (cf. Brower 2001, 2018).

statements. I am sympathetic with Russell's critique of the reductionist project, but I am not sympathetic with his recommendation that we eliminate real relations entirely. My defense only relies upon accepting that there is still some special work that real relations can do for us, and that Russell may have dismissed the entire class too hastily. In particular, I claim that real relations may still help us understand God's relation to the world.

7.2. Real Relations are Obscure

A second objection is that real relations are obscure. What does it mean exactly for a monadic property to have inherent intentionality? Russell (1903, §§212–216) considered two ways we might make sense of real relations. The first is similar to how I have represented them above. However, in my representation, I have been duplicitous by modeling the relation R between α and β with superscripts, as $F^\beta(\alpha)$ and $G^\alpha(\beta)$. Consider the statement that α is greater than β . A more neutral representation is simply $R_1(\alpha)$ and $R_2(\beta)$, since ultimately we are saying that α has one property and β has another. R_1 is supposed to be understood here as an adjective "greater than β ," just as R_2 is supposed to be understood as "less than α ." Now about R_1 Russell says:

[I]t is at once evident that it is complex: it consists, at least, of the parts *greater* and [β], and both these parts are essential. To say that [α] is greater does not at all convey our meaning, and it is highly probably that [β] is also greater. The supposed adjective of α involves some reference to β ; but what can be meant by a reference the theory leaves unintelligible . . .

Russell's second suggestion is unorthodox. It is that there is only one monadic property that is signified by the relational term, but it applies to the whole composed of α and β . The relational statement is thus better represented, using Russell's notation, as $R(\alpha\beta)$. Now, about this theory, Russell says that it is adequate when we are discussing symmetric relations, but its inadequacy becomes apparent once we consider asymmetric relations. For example, consider again the statement that α is greater than β . The suggestion is that we represent this as $R(\alpha\beta)$. But now suppose we wished to say that β is greater than α . Once again, it would seem we must represent this as $R(\alpha\beta)$. But these two statements are meant to express very different states of affairs. One might try to distinguish them by representing the second as $R(\beta\alpha)$, but as Russell says, "in order to distinguish the [first] whole from [the second], . . . we shall be forced back from the whole to the parts and their relation. For [$\alpha\beta$] and [$\beta\alpha$] consist of precisely the same parts, [α] and [β]" (225).

In reply to the objection that real relations are too obscure to merit serious consideration, I'll say that their obscurity in the past was largely the result of trying to understand them from within the confines of the reductionist project. But we are

here advising the acceptance of real relations while at the same time accepting polyadic properties, as well. And so, our options for understanding real relations are considerably expanded. Here are four alternatives for understanding respective accidents. First, we might consider respective accidents as being second-order polyadic properties that apply to each of the two monadic properties held separately by α and β . (This is my preferred response as of now.) Second, we might follow Russell's second suggestion and make use of polyadic properties to differentiate between $R(\alpha\beta)$ and $R(\beta\alpha)$, relying on the polyadic property structuring the whole to represent the asymmetry in the relation between the relata, as well.

Third, we might follow a model initially suggested by Bergmann (1979, 1981a, 1981b; cf. also Peña 1987) across a series of papers and try a different pure, monadic representation. We can distinguish between $R(\{\alpha, \{\alpha, \beta\}\})$ and $R(\{\beta, \{\alpha, \beta\}\})$ —the first could be used to represent that α is greater than β and the second, that β is greater than α .²⁹ Or finally, we might develop a suggestion from Brower (2001). Brower points to a passage in which Russell (1912, 126–127) discusses what he calls the “sense” or “direction” of a relation:

It will be observed that the relation of judging has what is called a “sense” or “direction.” We may say, metaphorically, that it puts its objects in a certain order, which we may indicate by means of the order of the words in the sentence. (In an inflected language, the same thing will be indicated by inflections, e.g., by the difference between nominative and accusative.) Othello's judgment that Cassio loves Desdemona differs from his judgment that Desdemona loves Cassio, in spite of the fact that it consists of the same constituents, because the relation of judging places the constituents in a different order in the two cases. Similarly, if Cassio judges that Desdemona loves Othello, the constituents of the judgment are still the same, but their order is different. This property of having a “sense” or “direction” is one which the relation of judging shares with all other relations. The ‘sense’ of relations is the ultimate source of order and series . . .

However, in his earlier work, when Russell (1903, §94) speaks of the sense of a relation, he says:

We may distinguish the term from which the relation proceeds as the referent, and the term to which it proceeds as the relatum. The sense of a relation is a fundamental notion, which is not capable of definition.

About Russell's remarks in these passages, Brower notes that Russell cannot suppose that the sense of a relation is itself a kind of relation, on pain of infinite regress. And

²⁹ Note that this is just Kuratowski's (1921) definition of the ordered pair $\langle \alpha, \beta \rangle$. Bergmann's suggestion is more nuanced than I have portrayed it here, but I leave a fuller investigation of those additional details to the reader.

so, Russell must be thinking of a relation's sense as ultimately monadic. But if that is so, then Russell himself seems to be thinking of relations as having indefinable inherent intentionality. Brower suggests that another way to understand respective accidents is in terms of Russellian "sense" or "direction." Ordinarily, only polyadic properties have direction; but we are envisioning here that real relations are monadic properties that have inherent sense or direction too. I think that all four options of making sense of real relations are promising, but I mean this defense to be neutral between the four.

7.3. Emergent Causal Relations

A third potential objection to my solution attempts to revive the modal collapse argument against theistic modal realism by citing the possibility of emergent causal relations. The original modal collapse argument attempted to establish that α and β must be worldmates with one another given that they were both created by God, creation is a causal relation, and causal relatedness implies worldmatehood too. God in that argument served as a mediator between α and β . However, an alternative modal collapse argument can be generated which entirely circumvents this mediation. Instead of appealing to God directly, it affirms two alternative premises. The first, following my earlier notation, is that, for any two objects, x and y , if Created-By^{God}(x) and Created-By^{God}(y), then Caused-By^{God}(x) and Caused-By^{God}(y) too. And the second premise is that, for any two objects, x and y , if Caused-By^{God}(x) and Caused-By^{God}(y), then x and y bear a causal relation to one another. The modified argument runs:

- (24) Since there is a genuine plurality of worlds, let object α exist in w_1 and let object β exist in w_2 . [Consequence of (2)]
- (25) If w_1 and w_2 are distinct, then α and β are not worldmates. [Premise]
- (26) For any two objects, x and y , if Created-By^{God}(x) and Created-By^{God}(y), then Caused-By^{God}(x) and Caused-By^{God}(y) too. [Premise]
- (27) For any two objects, x and y , if Caused-By^{God}(x) and Caused-By^{God}(y), then x and y bear a causal relation to one another. [Premise]
- (28) If two objects bear a causal relation to one another, then they are worldmates. [Premise]
- (29) Now, God is the absolute creator of everything. [Premise]
- (30) And so, Created-By^{God}(α) and Created-By^{God}(β). [From (24) & (29)]
- (31) And so, Caused-By^{God}(α) and Caused-By^{God}(β). [From (26) & (30)]
- (32) And so, α and β bear a causal relation to one another. [From (27) & (31)]
- (33) But then, α and β are worldmates with one another too. [From (28) & (32)]
- (34) Therefore, w_1 and w_2 are not distinct. [From (25) & (33)]
- (35) \perp . [From (24) & (34)]

Both (26) and (27) seem plausible, supposing we accept real relations. And so, even if my defense works to block the first modal collapse argument, a second one immediately arises to take its place.

In reply to this objection, I concede the possibility of both premises.³⁰ However, in that case, I deny the continued plausibility of premise (12)/(28).³¹ There are three types of causal relation. The first is the ordinary asymmetric relation that obtains between cause and effect. The second is the symmetric relation that obtains between joint effects of a common cause. And the third is the symmetric relation that obtains between joint causes of a common effect. We have not had to make this distinction until now because, ordinarily, if we know that a relation of joint effects of a common cause obtains between two individuals, we know also that two further relations obtain—namely, the relation between the cause and the first effect, and then, between the cause and the second. Now, if we are presuming that the relation of joint effects of a common cause does not imply that two additional relations of the first type of causal relations obtain, then we must re-examine the question: Does causal relatedness really suffice for worldmatehood? I believe the most plausible answer is, strictly speaking, it does not. Only the first sort of causal relation seems a good candidate for entailing worldmatehood; absent this core asymmetric relation, the relation of joint effects to a common cause is about as significant as a similarity relation obtaining between two individuals—it is no grounds for worldmatehood at all. And so, should we wish to allow that the relation of joint effects to a common cause may have emerged as the result of α 's being caused by God and β 's being caused by God, this is no problem, for this sort of causal relation would not entail a modal collapse. The inference to (33) is unsound.

7.4. *Creation, Schreation*

One final objection is worth consideration before concluding.³² Here is one way of summarizing the main points of this essay. It appears that it is not logically possible to hold that God is a necessary being and the creator of everything that exists while also accepting modal realism, without risking modal collapse, whereby everything that is actually the case becomes necessarily the case. In response, I have proposed as

³⁰ In fact, granting (27) may serve an additional function within my account. We want to say that divine creation and causation are in some way analogous to ordinary creaturely creation and causation. Otherwise, there would be no point in designating the members of both pairs with the same names, respectively. If (27) holds, then here we have at least one important point of similarity.

³¹ We earlier considered the possibility of denying premise (12) as a reply to the trilemma. But in that context, we were considering the possibility of allowing God to relate to two objects in two distinct worlds via two asymmetric cause-effect relations. I have claimed that this would be disastrous. However, we are now only considering the possibility of denying (12) by allowing two objects in two distinct worlds to be joint effects of a common cause (without, of course, their also separately relating to God in the ordinary cause-effect relation). This latter alternative would neither work as a reply to the trilemma nor lead to any disastrous results.

³² Thanks to my friend Ron Avni for offering me this objection.

a solution that God is not really the “creator” of everything, taken in the usual, problematic sense. Rather, it would be best to say that God is the “schreator” of everything that exists, and divine schreation is consistent with both God’s necessity and modal realism. Pressed to explicate what I mean, I say that divine schreation is best understood as an obscure kind of non-real monadic property with inherent intentionality that God possesses, and I cite medieval literature in my support. But, the objection goes, we can accept the Anselmian move in the defense without also accepting the (admittedly strange) Thomistic one. In fact, if we’re already willing to bite the bullet and deny that God is the genuine ‘creator’ of everything, would it not be better to simply introduce a new polyadic property into our ontology—the property of “is the schreator of”/“is schreated by”—rather than an entire new category of properties into it—real monadic properties with inherent respective accidents? After all, the Anselmian move, as I have elucidated it, is just that we ought not apply any predicates to God that are also applied to creatures. But that is no problem: we can simply suppose that schreation is an asymmetric polyadic property that holds only between God and his creatures. This would appear to be a much more ontologically and conceptually conservative response to the problem. Per Occam’s Razor, it is therefore preferable to my own solution, all things being equal.

In reply to this objection, I say that all things are not equal. My proposed solution is consistent with classical theism, whereas this suggested response is not. One reason that Anselm advised us to never apply any relational predicate to the creator that we also apply to creatures is because otherwise we could not maintain both divine necessity and divine essentiality. Even though this suggested solution does not apply a predicate to God that applies also to us, it nonetheless runs afoul of Anselm’s deeper concern. The argument that this proposed solution contradicts classical theism only relies on the core tenets of the thesis along with a handful of uncontroversial premises. It goes:

- (36) God is a necessary being. [Premise]
- (37) Every property that God possesses, he possesses essentially. [Premise]
- (38) If some object x essentially bears some relation R to some certain object y , then x could not exist without bearing relation R to y . [Premise]³³
- (39) If some object x could not exist without bearing some relation R to some certain object y , then x could not exist without y ’s existing. [Premise]
- (40) If some object x could not exist without some certain object y ’s existing, and y is a contingent being, then x is a contingent being too. [Premise]
- (41) Now, suppose that God bears the relation “is the schreator of” to some object α . [Premise]
- (42) And suppose α is a contingent being. [Premise]

³³ Whether a property’s being necessary for the existence of its bearer is sufficient for its being essential to it is a complex and vexed debate (cf. Fine 1994). Nonetheless, most meta-metaphysicians agree that a property’s being necessary for the existence of its bearer is at least necessary for essentiality.

- (43) It follows that God essentially bears the relation “is the schreator of” to α .
[From (37) & (41)]
- (44) Ergo, God could not exist without bearing the relation “is the schreator of” to α . [From (38) & (43)]
- (45) Ergo, God could not exist with α 's existing. [From (39) & (44)]
- (46) But then God is a contingent being. [From (40), (42), and (45)]
- (47) \perp . [From (36) & (46)]

My critic may be tempted to rejoin: Tu quoque? I have just argued that they cannot state that God created any contingent object without contradicting either divine necessity or divine essentiality. But I also want to say that God created some contingent objects, such as you and me. Does this argument, then, not cut both ways? It does not. On my analysis, we are only committed to attributing to God an asymmetric real relation to contingent existents by saying that he created everything. The defining feature of an object's possessing a non-real relation to another thing is that the relation does not affect its ontological profile. Essential properties do affect their bearer's ontological profile. Consequently, God's essence is in no ways bound up with his creations. Anselm is very likely right that the only predicate that genuinely designates God's substance is “the being than which no greater is conceivable.”³⁴

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