

## **ANOTHER LOOK AT THE MODAL COLLAPSE ARGUMENT**

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**Abstract.** On one classical conception of God, God has no parts, not even metaphysical parts. God is not composed of form and matter, act and potency, and he is not composed of existence and essence. God is *absolutely* simple. This is the doctrine of Absolute Divine Simplicity (ADS). It is claimed that ADS implies a *modal collapse*, i.e. that God's creation is absolutely necessary. I argue that a proper way of understanding the modal collapse argument naturally leads the proponent of ADS to reject a particular premise of the argument: namely, "the same identical cause brings about the same effect." However, I argue that the rejection of that premise leads to a deeper problem for ADS. It leads to an explanatory gap: how can we explain the relevant type of indeterminism in an absolutely simple God?

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

On one classical conception of God, God has no parts, not even metaphysical parts. God is not composed of form and matter, act and potency, and he is not composed of existence and essence. God is *absolutely* simple.<sup>1</sup> This is the doctrine of Absolute Divine Simplicity (ADS).

The absolute simplicity of God raises all kinds of puzzles.<sup>2</sup> The puzzle we are interested in is whether ADS implies a *modal collapse*, i.e. that the actual world is the only possible world. The argument can be stated in the following way:<sup>3</sup>

1 A form of this conception can be traced as far back as Plotinus's *Enneads*. We see a more developed conception in Augustine and Aquinas, among other scholastics. See, Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.3; and St. Augustine, "City of God", in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series, Volume II St. Augustine: City of God, Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff (Cosimo Classics, 2007), XI, 10. For contemporary philosophers on divine simplicity, see Eleonore Stump, "God's Simplicity", in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford Univ. Press, 2012); Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (Routledge, 2003), 92–130; Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity", *Faith and Philosophy* 2, no. 4 (1985); Alexander R. Pruss, "On Two Problems of Divine Simplicity", in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jonathan Kvanvig (Oxford Univ. Press, 2008); Brian Leftow, "Divine Simplicity", *Faith and Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2006). It is important to note that this is one particular, though widespread, understanding of the classical notion of God. On another reading of the classical conception, there is a distinction in God between his essence and his energies. On this reading of the classical conception, God is not absolutely simple. For more on this conception, see David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Lightning Source, 2010); Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2013); and St. Gregory of Palamas' *Triads*. Also, for the so-called harmonism take on divine simplicity, see Frederik G. Immink, *Divine simplicity* (J.H. Kok, 1987); Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2007). For criticism of harmonism, see James E. Dolezal, *God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Pickwick Publications, 2011).

2 For examples, see Christopher Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God: An Investigation in Aquinas' Philosophical Theology* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1989); Gerard J. Hughes, *The Nature of God* (Routledge, 1995); Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Marquette Univ. Press, 2003). For some responses, see Brian Leftow, "Is God an Abstract Object?", *Noûs* 24, no. 4 (1990); Katherin Rogers and Kate Rogers, "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity", *Religious Studies* 32, no. 2 (1996); W. M. Grant, "Divine Simplicity, Contingent Truths, and Extrinsic Models of Divine Knowing", *Faith and Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (2012); William E. Mann, "Epistemology Supernaturalized", *Faith and Philosophy* 2, no. 4 (1985); William E. Mann, *God, Modality, and Morality* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2015); Robert C. Koons, "Divine Persons as Relational Qua-Objects", *Religious Studies* 54, no. 3 (2018).

3 See R. T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2016), 137–43, for another version of the Modal Collapse argument. Christopher Tomaszewski, "Collapsing the Modal Collapse Argument: On an Invalid Argument Against

- (P1) God is intrinsically identical in all possible worlds, i.e. God does not intrinsically change (implied by ADS).
- (P2) The same identical cause brings about the same effect (premise).
- (P3) God is the cause of this universe (premise).
- (C) Therefore, God causes this universe in all possible worlds.

According to theists, God is the cause of our universe. For the purposes of this paper, divine causality can be understood in one of two ways: either with an intrinsic model or with an extrinsic model.<sup>4</sup> According to the intrinsic model, God bringing about some effect produces some type of intrinsic change in God. For example, in causing this universe to come into being, God intrinsically changes by *willing* to bring about this universe. This model is incompatible with ADS because it implies that God can intrinsically change. According to the extrinsic model, the truth of the proposition that God causes our universe only requires the following:

- (1) God,
- (2) our universe, and
- (3) the cause-effect relation between God and our universe.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to note that this extrinsic model of divine causality aims to tell us what makes claims of the form, “God causes E,” true. It does nothing to *explain* why God causes E in one world, but causes something else in another world, or why God does not bring about anything in other worlds.

We still need an answer from the proponent of ADS to the following question: if the same identical cause is present in other worlds, then how can it be that this universe is not present in other worlds? The answer has to be that the same identical cause can bring about different effects. Thus, the heart of the disagreement between ADS and its opponents is premise two. The modal collapse argument gets off the ground only if premise two can be defended. I will argue that rejecting premise two leads to an explanatory gap. And insofar as we want to avoid such an explanatory gap, we should accept premise two.

To see why rejecting premise two leads to an explanatory gap, we will consider a series of cases. These cases are presented as “intuition pumps.” They show that if the same identical cause brings about different effects, then this fact cries out for an explanation. Likewise, if the cause of this universe is the same in all possible worlds, but it can bring about different effects in different worlds, then this fact too cries out for an explanation.

## II. AN INTUITION PUMP

Consider an ordinary case of cause and effect, call it *Ordinary Dwight*. Dwight decides to murder his next-door neighbor with a gun. Dwight knows that if he wills to pull the trigger and his fingers pull the trigger, the bullet would exit the gun and likely kill his neighbor. Dwight pulls the trigger, the bullet exits the gun, and it kills his neighbor. The next day, Dwight finds out that his other neighbor suspects that

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Divine Simplicity”, *Analysis* 79, no. 2 (2019) argues that Mullins’ version and others like it are either invalid or question begging. I prefer my version of the argument because it avoids Tomaszewski’s objections.

4 For those who defend the extrinsic model of divine causality, see Timothy O’Connor, “Simplicity and Creation”, *Faith and Philosophy* 16, no. 3 (1999); Jeffrey E. Brower, “Making Sense of Divine Simplicity”, *Faith and Philosophy* 25, no. 1 (2008); Jeffrey E. Brower, “Simplicity and Aseity”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford Univ. Press, 2009); W. M. Grant, “Must a Cause Be Really Related to Its Effect? The Analogy between Divine and Libertarian Agent Causality”, *Religious Studies* 43, no. 1 (2007); W. M. Grant, “Can a Libertarian Hold that Our Free Acts are Caused by God?”, *Faith and Philosophy* 27, no. 1 (2010); W. M. Grant, *Free Will and God’s Universal Causality: The Dual Sources Account* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

5 Grant, “Can a Libertarian Hold that Our Free Acts are Caused by God?”, 28.

Dwight is the murderer. Dwight decides to murder his second neighbor too in order to ensure that no one finds out about his first murder. Dwight takes the same gun, takes the same stance and aims the same way, then he wills to pull the trigger. However, this time his fingers do not pull the trigger. Dwight's experience resembles the following experience: suppose unbeknownst to you, there is a quarter glued to the ground. You go to pick it up, but the quarter doesn't move. In other words, you *will* to pick up the quarter, but you could not bring about the intended action of actually picking up the quarter. Similarly, Dwight willed to pull the trigger, but he could not bring about the intended action of actually pulling the trigger.

Here is a reasonable question to ask: why did the same identical cause (willing to pull the trigger) not bring about the same effect (the pulling of the trigger)? Whatever the explanation might be, it has to refer to something that impeded Dwight's willing to bring about the intended act. Let us suppose that what actually happened was that the trigger was jammed. This explanation makes perfect sense, and the situation cries out for it.

Now let us change the case in the following way. Call this new version of the case, *Deterministic Possible World Dwight*. Instead of talking about two separate incidents where Dwight shoots two of his neighbors at different times, let us talk about two possible worlds that are identical in every way up to the instance in which Dwight wills to pull the trigger. However, in one possible world, Dwight brings about the intended effect of pulling the trigger. In the other possible world, Dwight does not bring about the intended effect of pulling the trigger. In the first possible world, Dwight murders his first neighbor by shooting him. In the second world, Dwight wills to pull the trigger in order to murder his first neighbor, but his fingers do not pull the trigger.

In this second world, the trigger is *not* jammed. Remember, the two worlds are identical in all respects up to the instance in which Dwight pulls the trigger. Given this stipulation, it cannot be the case that in one world the trigger is jammed but not in the other world. How does that make sense? If the relationship between the cause and effect is deterministic, then the identically same cause should bring about the same effect, unless there is something external that is impeding the link between cause and effect. However, if there is something impeding the cause, then the two worlds are not identical, which is contrary to the stipulation. Like the Ordinary Dwight case, the Deterministic Possible World Dwight case also cries out for an explanation. In the Ordinary Dwight case, the explanation for why the two identical causes did not bring about the same effect is that the trigger was jammed. This makes perfect sense. In the Deterministic Possible World Dwight case, there is no explanation of why the same cause brings about a different effect. This does not make much sense because there should be some type of explanation about why the trigger is pulled in one world *rather than* the other world.

Whether the relationship between the cause and effect is causally deterministic is irrelevant to this explanatory requirement. To see why, suppose the relationship between the cause and effect is nondeterministic. Let us call this version the *Nondeterministic Possible World Dwight* case. Let us stipulate that the *objective probability* of Dwight pulling the trigger given that Dwight wills to pull the trigger in the context he is in is .99.<sup>6</sup> Now suppose in the first possible world Dwight wills to pull the trigger, and he succeeds in pulling the trigger. In the second identical world, Dwight wills to pull the trigger, but he does not succeed in pulling the trigger. In this nondeterministic case, there is still an explanation of why Dwight's willing to pull the trigger did not bring about the intended effect: it is explained, in part, by the probability distribution.<sup>7</sup> There is a .01 chance that the same identical cause does not bring about the same effect.

6 By objective probability, I have the *propensity* interpretations in mind. This interpretation does not locate the probability in our head or in abstractions. Rather, it locates it in the world. For a quick summary of the view, see Alan Hájek, "Interpretations of Probability", <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/probability-interpret>, section 3.5. For more on this interpretation of probability, see Karl R. Popper, "The Propensity Interpretation of the Calculus of Probability and the Quantum Theory", in *Observation and Interpretation a Symposium of Philosophers and Physicists*, ed. Stephan Körner (Butterworths, 1957); Ian Hacking, *Logic of Statistical Inference* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974); David Miller, *Critical Rationalism: A Restatement and Defence* (Open Court, 1994).

7 Some have argued that a proponent of 'chance-incompatibilism' should reject that agential actions have an objective probability distribution (cf. Lara Buchak, "Free Acts and Chance: Why The Rollback Argument Fails", *The Philosophical Quarterly*

In the nondeterministic case, the explanation is simply that we should not expect the effect to follow the cause a hundred percent of the time. Moreover, a deeper explanation can point to what the underlying mechanisms in the relation between the cause and effect that ground the indeterminism. This is the sort of thing that certain (indeterministic) interpretations of quantum mechanics can perhaps explain.

The important thing to see here is that whether the relationship between the cause and effect is deterministic or nondeterministic, the same identical cause bringing about a different effect calls out for an explanation.

### III. THE EXPLANATORY GAP

These series of cases show that the type of explanation that is required depends on whether the link between the cause and effect is deterministic or nondeterministic. Notice that when the link between the cause and effect in the deterministic Dwight case is deterministic, there is a *cross world contrastive explanation*. By this, I mean the type of explanation that answers the question: why  $x$  at  $t_2$  in world  $w_1$  rather than  $y$  at  $t_2$  in  $w_2$  when  $w_1$  and  $w_2$  are identical possible worlds up to  $t_1$ ?<sup>8</sup> The request for a cross world *contrastive* explanation in deterministic cases is legitimate because it is metaphysically impossible for two identical deterministic worlds to diverge at  $t_1$ .<sup>9</sup>

If the link between God, the cause, and the different effects across possible worlds is deterministic, then there must be a difference across possible worlds either in the cause or in something external from the cause that impedes the cause. However, according to ADS, there cannot be an intrinsic difference in God across possible worlds, and there is nothing external from God that can provide the relevant explanation, especially since there are worlds with nothing in them but God, and surely nothingness cannot provide the relevant explanation. Thus, the proponent of ADS should reject a deterministic link.

ADS should accept an indeterministic link. If the link is indeterministic, then the *indeterminism itself* cries out for an explanation. In the Dwight cases, it is easy to explain the indeterminism by pointing to the structure of the universe and its many metaphysical and integral parts. With God on the ADS conception, we cannot provide the same type of explanation. The proponent of ADS needs to explain not only the indeterminism but the relevant type of indeterminism. Consider logical space. There are many worlds in which God creates different things and many worlds in which God does not create anything at all. How do we explain these differences? It is not enough to merely explain *some* level of indeterminism in God because the different effects across logical space are not merely random. A proponent of ADS must find room in God for *the relevant type* of indeterminism. At the heart of the modal collapse objection is the request for an explanation of how an absolutely simple God, who cannot intrinsically change, can make room for this type of indeterminism.

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63, no. 250 (2013)). What I am saying here is compatible with this claim. I am not talking about the reasons for an agent's willing. Rather, I am talking about the relation between what the agent has already willed and the effect of what is willed. I can agree, for example, that there is no objective probability distribution about the following: Dwight willing to pull the trigger. What I am interested in is what happens *once* Dwight in fact wills to phi.

8 See Alexander R. Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 148–55.

9 When I am speaking about the deterministic relation between Dwight's willing to pull the trigger and the trigger being pulled or comparing deterministic worlds, I mean deterministic to be read as causally deterministic. According to standard definitions of causal determinism, the laws of nature and the history of the world imply one particular state of affairs. Thus, in identical worlds, with the same laws of nature and history, divergence is impossible. For more on defining causal determinism, see Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Clarendon Press, 1983), 65. Causal determinism cannot, by definition, apply to the relation between God, the cause, and this universe, the effect, because God is the creator of the laws of nature. In those cases, it is best to understand determinism in terms of what Kane calls the "core notion of determinism," where "Any event (including a choice or action) is determined, according to this core notion, just in case there are conditions (such as the decrees of fate, antecedent physical causes plus laws of nature, or foreordaining acts of God) whose joint occurrence is (logically) sufficient for the occurrence of the event. In other words, it *must* be the case that, if these determining conditions obtain (e.g., physical causes and laws of nature), *then* the determined event occurs" (Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), 8). On ADS, the determining condition is the agent, God.

Note that if the link between the cause and effect is indeterministic, the cry for an explanation is not a cry for a *contrastive* explanation. Consider the nondeterministic Dwight case again. The question that arises from this nondeterministic case is the following: why did the same identical cause in world  $w_1$  and  $w_2$  did not bring about the same effect? Although this is a request for a cross world explanation, it is not a request for a cross world *contrastive* explanation. Consider the following two questions to see why:

(Q1) Why did the same identical cause in world  $w_1$  and  $w_2$  not bring about the same effect?

(Q2) Why did Dwight successfully pull the trigger when he willed to pull the trigger in  $w_1$ , but he didn't successfully pull the trigger when he willed to pull the trigger in  $w_2$ ?

These two questions are asking different things because an answer to the first question is not a full answer to the second question. The answer to the first question points to something about the relation between the cause and effect that explains why the relation is nondeterministic. The relationship between Dwight willing to pull the trigger and Dwight pulling the trigger has a probability distribution that is less than 1, and this is why we shouldn't expect the same cause to always bring about the same effect. We can even provide a deeper explanation by pointing to the underlying features of the world that ground the relevant probability distribution. However, these considerations would answer the first question, but not the second question.

Merely pointing to the nondeterministic relation between the cause and effect does not explain the following: what is it about the second possible world that explains why the improbable occurred *rather than* the probable? This question is another way of asking (Q2), and merely pointing to the probability distribution does not answer that question. The explanatory gap problem relies on (Q1) and not (Q2). In the indeterministic case, we are asking ADS for a cross world *non-contrastive* explanation. The explanatory gap objection is not requesting an explanation of why God brought about this universe *rather than* another universe. This contrastive question is asking for a reason that would show why God *prefers* to create this universe over another universe (or no universe at all).

One classical answer to this contrastive question is that God created the best possible world.<sup>10</sup> This is not the type of explanation that we are after here. In fact, I do not think such an explanation is even required. Rather, the explanatory gap objection is merely asking the following cross world non-contrastive question: why is it that the same identical cause in  $w_1, w_2, \dots, w_n$  bring about a host of different effects or no effects at all? The difference between the contrastive and non-contrastive questions is subtle, but very important. Asking for a contrastive explanation is too demanding and unfair to require because not even a non-ADS conception of God can satisfy this contrastive explanatory requirement.

To recap, either the relation between God and this universe coming into being is deterministic or nondeterministic. If it is the former, then there must be an explanation that points to a difference. However, according to ADS, there are no differences in God, and pointing to a difference outside of God is not a proper explanation, especially in worlds with nothing in them but God. If the relation is nondeterministic, then there must be an explanation that allows for the relevant type of indeterminacy. The proponent of ADS, lacks the resources to provide this type of explanation.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> This classical answer by Leibniz does answer the contrastive question of why God created this universe rather than a different one, but it does not answer the contrastive question of why God created the best possible world rather than not create anything at all. Even if we grant that there is a best possible world, this too would not be sufficient to fully answer the contrastive question.

<sup>11</sup> Some might reject that God lacks all potency. Rather, they claim that God lacks all passive potency, but God does have active potency. And God's different decisions in different worlds can be explained by these active potencies. However, given that God is pure act, more must be said about how God could have active potency. What explains the fact that God has active potencies, and how are active potencies compatible with a being who cannot intrinsically change? How many active potencies does God have? Are they distinct from each other? Is God's active potencies identical with God? Moreover, do the active potencies result in an intrinsic change in God across possible worlds? These questions need answers, and it is difficult to see how they can all be answered properly without there being tension between the answers. At any rate, it is not enough to merely state this distinction. More needs to be said about whether the distinction is compatible with a God that has absolutely no parts and is said to be pure actuality.

## IV. THE TU QUOQUE OBJECTION

### IV.1 A Non-ADS Conception: The Reasons Account

The proponent of ADS might object that this explanatory gap is not only a problem for ADS, but it is also a problem for a non-ADS conception of God. Before I explain the objection more fully, let me explain what I take a non-ADS conception of God to be. As I am using the term, a non-ADS conception is a general conception that captures any conception of God that is incompatible with the essential distinguishing features of ADS. I take it that ADS, at minimum, is the view that God has no parts of any kind, and the following claim is one implication of ADS:

- (i) Anything intrinsic to God is identical to God

In the background, we are assuming that God cannot essentially change and what is identical to God is essential to God, which is typically accepted by the non-ADS conception as well.

If there are things that are intrinsic to God but are not identical to God, then God would cease to be absolutely simple. For example, according to a certain panentheistic view — where we are ideas in the divine mind — we are intrinsic to God but we are not identical to God.<sup>12</sup> This view implies that God has non-physical parts. If there are things intrinsic to God but are not essential to God, then God can intrinsically change. ADS rejects that God can intrinsically change.

A non-ADS conception, at the very least, rejects (i). Undoubtedly ADS has more implications than (i), and a non-ADS conception of God would reject some of those implications as well. However, I want to simply concentrate on (i) as the key feature that a non-ADS conception of God rejects. In what follows, I will go beyond this general take on a non-ADS conception, and make some specific claims that some proponents of a non-ADS conception might not accept. This should not be a problem as long as the specific claims are not in tension with the general version of a non-ADS conception, i.e. a version that rejects (i). Henceforth, I will stop saying, “a non-ADS conception,” and instead start saying, “the non-ADS conception.” By the latter, I mean the specific version of a non-ADS conception that I will be discussing and elaborating on.

On the non-ADS conception, God is understood on the model of a rational creature. With human beings, we will different things for different reasons. Intrinsic change occurs in us when we will different things and when we do so for different reasons. Although we intrinsically change when making mundane choices, we do not essentially change; we stay human. The same could be said about God. God intrinsically changes on this non-ADS conception, but he does not essentially change.

The non-ADS conception explains the differences across possible worlds by the differences in the cause. God intrinsically wills to create different things or he doesn't will to create anything at all. The link between his willing to create and the effect is deterministic. God can never fail to bring about what he wills.

God's willing to create different things also has an explanation on the non-ADS conception. It is explained in terms of God's reasons. God wills for different *reasons* in different worlds. I don't know what the actual reasons are, but for the sake of argument, let us stipulate what they might be. Perhaps in the actual world, God wills to create this universe in order to share his goodness with his creation. God's reason, to share his goodness with his creation, explains why God wills this universe. The non-ADS conception rejects the claim that God's reasons deterministically cause God to bring about this universe.<sup>13</sup> Rather, God's reasons make God's willing to create *intelligible*. Here is a helpful illustration:

Non-ADS Conception

<sup>12</sup> Berkeley and Jonathan Edwards are possible candidates for this type of view. Edwards seems to think that his view is compatible with divine simplicity, but it is not at all clear that it is compatible with *absolute* divine simplicity, a much stronger thesis. For more on Edwards and Berkeley's panentheism, see Joshua R. Farris, James S. Spiegel, and S. M. Hamilton, eds., *Idealism and Christian theology* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Famously, Donald Davidson, “Actions, Reasons, and Causes”, *The Journal of Philosophy* 60, no. 23 (1963) argues that explaining actions in terms of reasons is a form of causal explanation. I disagree. For criticisms of this view, see Jonathan Dancy, *Moral Reasons* (Blackwell, 2010); Eric Marcus, *Rational Causation* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2012).

1. God's Reason<sub>1</sub>  $\supset$  God Wills<sub>1</sub>  $\rightarrow$  This Universe
2. God's Reason<sub>2</sub>  $\supset$  God Wills<sub>2</sub>  $\rightarrow$  Another Universe
3. God's Reason<sub>3</sub>  $\supset$  God Doesn't Will (anything outside himself)

The horseshoe represents the intelligibility relation (or the for-relation), which I take to be a non-causal relation. The arrow represents a deterministic causal relation. The first possible world should be read as follows: God wills<sub>1</sub> this universe *for* reason<sub>1</sub>. Reason<sub>1</sub> is present in the second (and third) possible world(s), but in the second possible world, God does not will<sub>2</sub> another universe for reason<sub>1</sub> and reason<sub>2</sub>. Rather, God wills<sub>2</sub> another universe for reason<sub>2</sub>. So although reason<sub>1</sub> is present, it is *not operative* in the second possible world. Now there might be a possible world in which reason<sub>1</sub> and reason<sub>2</sub> are operative in the sense that God wills<sub>1, 2</sub> some universe for reasons<sub>1, 2</sub>. However, for the sake of simplicity, we'll stipulate that reasons in one world are present but not operative in other worlds.

God has the same reasons in all worlds, but there is a relation that he bears to some reasons in some worlds and to other reasons in other worlds. You might call this relation the *for-relation*. God wills A *for* reason X in one world and God wills B *for* reason Y in another world, and so on. A reason enters into the for-relation just in case God *takes* it that that reason is the reason he acts on.

One might press the issue further and ask the following non-contrastive question: why does God take reason X to be a reason for willing to A? We can answer this question by providing further reasons. For example, we can say that God shares his goodness with his creation because doing so is a great good. At some point, reasons for action have to stop somewhere. Otherwise, we would have an infinite regress. The fact that there is a stopping point for reasons for action is natural and has nothing to do with an explanatory gap between a cause and effect relation because reasons for action are not causal relations.

Consider this analogous series of questioning: why did the artist create this painting? She created it in order to share her artistic perspective with others. Why is she sharing her artistic perspective with others? Because she recognizes that it is a great good to do so. Why is it a great good to do that? Because it is a great good to create beauty and objectively improve other people's lives with it. Well why is that good? This would be a natural stopping point. There is no special pleading here from the proponent of the non-ADS conception. When it comes to reasons and agents, there are natural stopping points, and they typically occur when the reason is basic and can be directly grasped by the intellect.

On this non-ADS picture, there are *basic reasons*. Call a view that asserts such a claim, *Reasons Foundationalism*. This view is, of course, analogous to foundationalism in epistemology. According to the epistemic version, some beliefs are basic beliefs. Basic beliefs are non-inferential, and they can justify non-basic beliefs. Analogously, reasons foundationalism asserts that there are basic reasons. Basic reasons make other (non-basic) reasons justified without thereby needing further reasons to make the basic reasons justified. These reasons can be directly grasped by the intellect and hence do not need to be further justified or explained by other reasons. Here are some possible candidates of basic reasons: x is a great good, x is constitutive of *eudaimonia*, all things considered x is the best course of action, and so on.

To ask why a perfectly rational agent (not just God but any perfectly idealized rational agent) understands basic reasons to justify other reasons is to ask something that has no answer, and it has no answer for good reasons. Other than reasons foundationalism, either the chain of reasoning goes back ad infinitum or it circles back around. If it goes back ad infinitum, then it is not clear that anyone can act intelligibly if each reason requires another reason to explain it or make it intelligible. If the chain goes in a circle, then it is not clear that any real explaining has been done.<sup>14</sup>

There are at least two relevant intrinsic differences in God that explain the different effects in different possible worlds: (1) God's *willing* to A, and (2) God *taking* X to be a reason for willing to A. If X is a non-basic reason, then what *justifies* God's taking X to be a reason for willing to A is some further reason, but eventually we'll run into a basic reason.

<sup>14</sup> Analogous arguments for foundationalism in epistemology have been defended by contemporary philosophers, but this style of argumentation goes all the way back to Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*.

This justificatory relation is importantly different than the for-relation, and to illustrate the difference, we'll introduce a new symbol. The final chain of explanation looks like this:

God's Basic Reason<sub>1...n</sub> ► God's Reason<sub>1...n</sub> ⊃ God Wills<sub>1</sub> → This Universe

The bold arrow on the far left represents the justificatory relation. This relation is similar to the for-relation represented by the horseshoe in that the two relations are not causal relations. They are also different in an important way. In order for a non-basic reason *X* to enter the for-relation, God simply must take it that *X* is a reason for willing to *A*. By contrast, a basic reason *Y* can justify God without God having to *take* *Y* to be a basic reason that justifies God in taking *X* to be a reason for willing *A*.

There is another analogy here from epistemology between doxastic and propositional justification that will be helpful to discuss. Suppose I believe the following three propositions: (1) *P*, (2) if *P*, then *Q*, and (3) *Q*. However, I have not yet made the connection in my head between these three beliefs. Perhaps I have not thought carefully about whether I'm entitled to believing *Q* on the basis of (1) and (2). Let us further suppose in fact I believe *Q* on the basis of wishful thinking instead of on the basis of (1) and (2), which I do in fact believe. In this type of situation, I am propositionally justified but I am not doxastically justified. The latter requires the right type of basing, whereas the former only requires that I have the relevant justification even if I have not made the connection yet.

The bold arrow on the far left is *like* propositional justification in some sense and not like it in other senses. It is not like it in the sense that God does not need to in fact base his non-basic reasons on the basic reasons. Moreover, God is aware of all the basic reasons and the fact that they automatically justify these non-basic reasons as reasons for acting. The bold arrow relation is like propositional justification in that God does not have to take this or that basic reason to be a justification for this or that non-basic reason. It is just a hypothetically necessary truth that this set of basic reasons always justify this set of non-basic reasons as reasons for acting. Not all basic reasons automatically justify all the non-basic reasons as reasons for acting. But some basic reasons automatically justify some non-basic reasons as reasons for acting and some other basic reasons automatically justify other non-basic reasons as reasons for acting.

For example, let us suppose that reason *X* is God sharing his creation with people made in the image of God, and that *X* is a non-basic reason. Let us further suppose that reason *Y* is the basic reason that sharing in God's glory is a great good, and *Y* automatically justifies *X* as a reason for creating. If so, then when God takes it that *X* is a reason for willing to create our universe, the justificatory relation between *Y* and God taking *X* to be a reason for creating automatically holds. There is no world in which God's taking it that sharing his creation with people made in the image of God is a reason for creating is not justified by the basic reason that sharing in God's glory is a great good. Thus, on this picture, God's taking *X* to be a reason for willing to *A* is automatically justified in virtue of a basic reason *Y*.

It is important to note that because some basic reasons have a justificatory relation to some non-basic reasons as reasons for acting by hypothetical necessity, God does not need to undergo an intrinsic change in order to *take* those basic reasons to be reasons for justifying God's willing to *A* for non-basic reasons *X*. In other words, only the for-relation requires something from God. It requires that God *take* a reason to be a reason for willing to *A*, and this makes it the case that the reason in question becomes an operative reason. The basic reasons do not require something from God. The basic reasons are *hypothetically necessary*. This means that *if* God takes it that some non-basic reason *X* is a reason for willing to *A*, *then* God's taking it as such is automatically justified by the relevant basic reason. However, if the antecedent is false, then we don't have the consequent. So whether these basic reasons in fact do the relevant justificatory work depends on what God does and for what reasons. Of course, God being a supremely rational being would never do anything that would not be justified.

### §3.2 A Dialogue about the *Tu Quoque* Objection

Now that we have spelled out the non-ADS conception of God in some detail, we are in a better position to state the *tu quoque* objection. The *tu quoque* objection asserts that the non-ADS conception has an explanatory gap problem too in the sense that there is something that is left unexplained that should be

explained. The following dialogue between a proponent of ADS and a proponent of non-ADS discussing the issue will help us to see whether there is an explanatory gap for the non-ADS conception of God.

*Non-ADS:* According to your view, the same identical cause can bring about different effects. But since this cause is absolutely simple, it is difficult to see what type of resources we have to explain how this cause can stay the same, but bring about different effects in different worlds. My view does a better job of explaining it. On my view, there are different effects across worlds because there are different causes (i.e. God's willing different things). For example, in the actual world, the universe exists because God wills it.

*ADS:* That might be true, but you have a similar problem. You can't explain why God wills to create this universe.

*Non-ADS:* I can explain that too. God wills to create this universe because he has a reason X for willing to create this universe.

*ADS:* This pushes the issue back a step. You can't explain why God takes reason X as a reason for willing this universe. In other words, you can't explain why reason X is operative for God in this world.

*Non-ADS:* I can explain that too. God is justified in taking reason X as a reason for creating because of some basic reason that justifies X as a reason for creating.

*ADS:* But again, this pushes it back another step. What about those basic reasons. You can't explain why these basic reasons justify God in taking this non-basic reason X as a reason for creating.

*Non-ADS:* There are two problems here. First, the justificatory relation is not a causal relation. As such, if there is a problem here it is not like the problem for ADS because ADS's problem is one about providing the relevant *causal* explanation — the type that would satisfy our intuitive demand for an explanation in the Dwight cases. Remember, the Dwight cases show that cases of these types cry out for a causal explanation. The for-relation and the justificatory relation are not causal relations and as such do not offer a causal explanation. They explain by justifying why God takes x as a reason for creating, and they make God's creating intelligible. The intrinsic change that is caused in God by his creating is what provides the causal explanation that the Dwight cases cry out for. Second, this request is too demanding. If there are no basic reasons, then no agent can act rationally because the agent's reasons for acting cannot go back ad infinitum or go in a circle. This is why there is no special pleading here for God because reasons foundationalism is independently plausible.

*ADS:* If the justificatory relation is hypothetically necessarily, then what explains why God takes these non-basic reasons *rather than* other non-basic reasons as reasons for acting?

*Non-ADS:* This question is asking for a contrastive explanation. We should reject the request for a contrastive explanation here.<sup>15</sup> And as I have argued earlier, the explanatory gap problem is not asking for a contrastive explanation, so there is no double standard here.

This dialogue illustrates the different steps at which the *tu quoque* objection might arise. It also illustrates the responses of the non-ADS conception at each step.

Strictly speaking, there cannot be a *tu quoque* objection because the explanatory gap problem against ADS is asking for a *causal* explanation. The problem arises because we have the strong intuition from the Dwight cases that there needs to be an explanation of why the same cause does not bring about the same effect. On ADS, the same identical cause brings about different effects. The connection is direct. On the non-ADS conception, it is false that the same identical cause brings about different effects. On the non-ADS conception, there is only one causal relation in the chain of explanation. The causal relation is between God's willing to create this universe (i.e. the cause), and this universe (i.e. the effect). The other items in the chain of explanation play no causal role. The non-basic reasons make the cause of the

<sup>15</sup> Rejecting the need for contrastive explanations is not something unique to the issues we are considering in this paper. As such, there is no special pleading here. Some proponents of a particular view of free will, for example, also reject the need for a contrastive explanation. Consider the following type of situation in which a contrastive explanation is rejected: suppose I will to open the door at time  $t_1$  in  $w_1$  and I do this because of the following reason, call it reason x: I want to go inside to talk to my wife. According to a certain view of free will, reason x does not deterministically lead me to open the door. If so, then now suppose in an identical world,  $w_2$ , I do not will to open the door at  $t_1$ , but I still have reason x. Then I can ask: why did I open the door in  $w_1$  but not open the door in  $w_2$ ? Here I wouldn't be able to answer the question because, by stipulation, reason x, which explained why I will to open the door in  $w_1$ , is present in both worlds (Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 35–36). With these types of questions, one should reject the need to provide a contrastive explanation.

universe *intelligible*. The basic reasons *justify* God's taking the non-basic reasons as reasons for creating. Thus, the *tu quoque* objection fails.

## V. TRUTH-MAKER AND EXTRINSIC REASONS

In this section, I will consider one last objection on behalf of the proponent of ADS. According to this objection, the ADS conception can accept a version of the reasons account. It might be argued that God can have reasons for acting on ADS, but however we understand this, God's acting for reasons cannot produce an intrinsic change in God. One way to make sense of this is by adopting the Truth-Maker account of ADS.

The Truth-Maker interpretation of ADS has received some traction among proponents of the doctrine.<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Brower summarizes the view in the following way:

God is identical with the truthmakers for each of the true (intrinsic) predications that can be made about him. Thus, if God is divine, he is identical with that which makes him divine; if he is good, he is identical with that which makes him good; and so on in every other such case. Now, since nothing can be regarded as identical with anything other than itself, this interpretation just amounts to the claim that God is the truthmaker for each of the predications in question.<sup>17</sup>

For example, claims of the form, "God is his goodness," are made true by God himself, and not some intrinsic property that is part of God. Someone might argue that the truth-maker account of simplicity can make sense of God willing different things in different worlds for different reasons. If such claims can be made sense of, then the non-ADS conception and the ADS conception are back on the same footing.

There are two ways for claims like, "God wills A for reason X," to be made true. On the one hand, God, the truth-maker, makes the claim that God wills A for reason X true by necessity (similar to the claim, "God is his goodness"). The problem here is that this would imply that the claim, "God wills A for reason X" is true in all possible worlds. If so, then we get a modal collapse because this means A exists in all possible worlds.

Another possibility is to understand claims of the form, "God wills A for reason X," and "God wills B for reason Y," to be contingently true. The difficulty here is that this way of understanding the matter makes the problem arise in a different way. It's as if we pushed a bump in the carpet to see it come up in a different place. How is it that claims of the form "God wills to A for reason X," and "God wills to B for reason Y," are true in different worlds and their truth-maker is identically the same in those worlds? Hence, we are back at the same problem: how can the same identical cause bring about different effects across possible worlds? Or put differently: how can the same identical truth-maker make different claims true in different worlds? Thus, the truth-maker account does not seem to answer the explanatory gap problem.

There is another mystery surrounding this proposal to accept the reasons account. What are divine reasons on the ADS conception?<sup>18</sup> And how can (1) God have *distinct* reasons, and (2) act *for* those reasons in some worlds but not others. Divine reasons cannot be *parts* of the divine nature because this would be inconsistent with ADS. They cannot be real qualities of the divine nature because it would be difficult to distinguish between different reasons if these reasons are identical with each other. One option is that they're not intrinsic to the divine nature. Of course, we would want to postulate that although they are not intrinsic and their existence is necessary, their existence depends on the divine nature. This dependence relation can be understood in terms of grounding or truth-making perhaps.

<sup>16</sup> See Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Divine Simplicity", *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991); Graham Oppy, "The Devilish Complexities of Divine Simplicity", *Philo* 6, no. 1 (2003); Pruss, "On Two Problems of Divine Simplicity".

<sup>17</sup> Brower, "Making Sense of Divine Simplicity", 19.

<sup>18</sup> Proponents of ADS are happy to talk about God willing this or that, and God having reasons for willing this or that (cf. O'Connor, "Simplicity and Creation", 408–11; Grant, "Can a Libertarian Hold that Our Free Acts are Caused by God?", 26–30. However, it is not at all clear what it means for God to have different reasons for willing different things in different worlds. More specifically, it is not clear what these reasons are. Are they abstract objects? And it is not clear how or why they make God's actions purposeful.

Let us assume that they are not intrinsic to the divine nature, and that God bears different relations to these extrinsic reasons in a similar way that God on the non-ADS conception bears different relations to his beliefs or intrinsic reasons. I say, “similar” instead of “same” because unlike the non-ADS model, when God *takes* it that this or that extrinsic reason is a reason for creating, God does not undergo an intrinsic change. Rather, somehow the content of the extrinsic reason influences God enough so that his creating is purposeful and without thereby causing real change in God.

On the ADS conception, God has extrinsic reasons — i.e. propositions or content like things that are not intrinsic to God that enter into the for-relation — for causing this universe to come into being. Perhaps there can also be non-basic and basic extrinsic reasons. The non-basic extrinsic reasons make God’s actions intelligible, and the basic extrinsic reasons justify God’s taking these non-basic extrinsic reasons as reasons for creating.

One difficulty with this ADS account of reasons is that it seems to imply that God’s creation is dependent on or, at least in part, is explained by something that is not intrinsic to the divine nature. Remember on the non-ADS conception, God’s non-basic and basic reasons play a role — although it is not a causal role — in explaining God’s willing to create this or that universe (or not creating at all). However, on the non-ADS conception, these reasons are parts of God, so all the explanatory work is done by items intrinsic to the divine nature. This is not the case on this ADS account of reasons because these reasons, as we are understanding them, are not intrinsic to God nor are they parts of God. Thus, if the proponent of ADS is willing to adopt the reasons account, they have to deal with this difficulty or provide another account of reasons that doesn’t face this problem.

Even if this notion of extrinsic reasons is coherent and does not raise serious worries, the notion of intrinsic reasons has more explanatory power. The proponent of ADS should not, at all, be surprised by this. In fact, they should expect that the non-ADS conception explains more than the ADS conception. After all, traditionally the classical conception of God was meant to show that God transcends everything. There is nothing like God. God is absolutely unique on the ADS conception. This can explain why some (not all) in this classical tradition, the apophatic tradition for example, think that we can only speak of God’s essence, as it really is, in the negative.

The non-ADS conception has an *internal* and *personal* explanation of God’s creative acts. We explain God’s causing this universe or that universe in different worlds by looking inside the mind of God, so to speak. The reason why this type of internal and personal explanation explains more is because it is based on our own understanding of internal reasons and willing. We do not have to further explain those notions because we are already acquainted with them. Of course, this does not imply that we are good at producing systematic accounts of reasons or acts of will. But this fact does not detract from the claim that we are more familiar with these notions because of our knowledge of them by acquaintance. We can reflect internally and understand how internal reasons make our acts intelligible. So we are explaining something by reference to something we know very well. In fact, we know it so well we have direct access to it.

The ADS conception, on the other hand, appeals to impersonal items. It appeals to an explanation from the outside so to speak: extrinsic causation, truth-maker relation, extrinsic “reasons,” and so on. We are not directly acquainted with such notions, and they require further explanations, especially a further explanation about how they ground contingency and how they can be “reasons” in the relevant sense. If God is absolutely simple and does not intrinsically change, then we cannot go inside of God, so to speak, to find an explanation, which is what we typically do when we try to find an explanation of why a rational human being performs some action. Rather, we have to appeal to something *impersonal* and *external* from God. Something not intrinsic to God that bears a special relation to God that plays the relevant explanatory role. It is difficult to see how these types of extrinsic and impersonal explanations can explain more than the personal and internal explanations that we personally know so well.

When we look at God from the outside, because there is no inside, so to speak, then we are only left with impersonal things to appeal to for an explanation. The same is true when we try to explain the action of a human being from the outside. What are we left with? The movements of the agent’s body. The agent’s surroundings. Perhaps the neural firings of the agent’s brain, and so on. These things provide

some type of explanation in some circumstances, but they cannot provide a full personal explanation. Likewise, these things outside of God are not personal, and as such are by definition further away from things we are personally and directly acquainted with. The non-ADS story, on the other hand, put in terms of intrinsic and personal reasons, does a better job of explaining things because it uses notions that we are directly and personally acquainted with to explain God who is an agent much like us. Thus, the non-ADS conception explains more than the ADS conception, and this should not surprise anyone.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In summary, the explanatory gap problem for the ADS conception of God arises because it postulates that the same identical cause can bring about different effects across possible worlds. Given how we understand causation from mundane cases like the Dwight cases above, this claim cries out for an explanation. The non-ADS conception does not imply that the same identical cause brings about different effects because the non-ADS conception says that God can intrinsically change. The intrinsic change is God's willing to create. God wills different things in different worlds. The problem for the non-ADS conception is to explain this intrinsic change. The explanation here for the non-ADS conception is not a causal explanation in the strict sense because reasons do not cause God's acts. Rather, they simply make them *intelligible*. Moreover, we have independent evidence to think that reasons have a natural stopping point. As such there is no special pleading here for the non-ADS conception.

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