



# Classical Theism, Arbitrary Creation, and Reason-Based Action

Joseph C. Schmid<sup>1</sup> 

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## Abstract

Surely God, as a perfectly rational being, created the universe for some *reason*. But is God's creating the universe for a reason compatible with divine impassibility? That is the question I investigate in this article. The *prima facie* tension between impassibility and God's creating for a reason arises from impassibility's commitment to God being uninfluenced by anything *ad extra*. If God is uninfluenced in this way, asks the detractor, how could he be moved to create anything at all? This *prima facie* tension has recently been formalized and dubbed the 'Problem of Arbitrary Creation'. In this article, I defend a new extension of this problem. I begin by characterizing classical theism, divine simplicity, and divine impassibility. I then spell out the Problem of Arbitrary Creation as developed by R. T. Mullins. I next raise a worry for Mullins' version of the argument. Finally, I extend the argument and show how my extension avoids the aforementioned worry.

**Keywords** Classical theism · Arbitrary creation · Divine action · Divine simplicity · Divine impassibility

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✉ Joseph C. Schmid  
schmi215@purdue.edu

<sup>1</sup> Purdue University, 610 Purdue Mall, West Lafayette, IN 47907, USA

## Introduction

Theists of all stripes typically wish to affirm that God is perfectly rational—that God’s actions are reason-based. Both non-classical theists and classical theists are united around the affirmation that God always acts for some reason.<sup>1</sup> Thus, R. T. Mullins writes:

A reason is a consideration that counts in favor of some particular choice or action. A reason explains why an agent acts as she does. If an agent performs an action without any reason, then that action is performed arbitrarily. Theists claim that God is perfectly rational and thus always acts for a reason. Classical theists say that utterly arbitrary actions are foreign to a God who is perfectly wise and rational. ... God is perfectly rational if and only if God always acts for a reason. (2020b, p. 394)

So, both non-classical and classical theists affirm God’s perfect rationality. In contrast to other models of God, however, classical theism (as I use it) is unique in affirming four core theses: divine simplicity, impassibility, timelessness, and immutability. My article focuses on two of these core theses: simplicity and impassibility.

Let us first consider the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS) as traditionally articulated (i.e., as found in medieval philosophers like Aquinas, Anselm, Augustine, etc., as well as contemporary philosophers like Katherin Rogers, W. M. Grant, etc.). According to DDS, God is devoid of physical, metaphysical, and logical parts. He is identical to his essence, existence, attributes, action, power, and so on. On DDS, each of the following—when distinct in something—are parts: essence and existence, subject and accidents, individual and essence, individual and properties, act and potency, and agent and actions.<sup>2</sup> As Katherin Rogers puts it, DDS ‘denies that God has any properties at all. God is an act... an eternal, immutable, absolutely simple act. ... God simply is an act, and all the words we use to describe God refer to this act’ (1996, p. 166).

<sup>1</sup> Rice (2016, p. 258), Bavinck (1979, pp. 234–235), Strong (1907, p. 404), and Pruss (2017, pp. 213–214). An important note is in order concerning this commitment to God’s perfect rationality. Mullins spells out the commitment as involving the claim that God always acts for a reason (2020b, p. 394). But one might worry: could God not perform arbitrary acts? Swinburne, for instance, has plausible cases in which God may will X or not-X without having an overriding reason to will the one rather than the other. (Indeed, this is one of his theses in Swinburne (2019). Arguably, God created me but could have created a different being indistinguishable from me.) For instance, if God creates a cosmos with sub-atomic parts, must there be a reason that there are  $n$  such parts rather than  $(n + 1)$ ? Few follow Leibniz on this. This worry is valuable, and it invites a helpful clarification. Mullins’ PAC (as well as my new, to-be-articulated extension of PAC) only requires that when God performs some act A, he has *some* reason to A; it does not require that God has *overriding* reason to perform A *rather than* some alternative act. This allows God to perform ‘arbitrary’ acts in the sense of acts each of which he has reason to perform but none of which he has *overriding* reason to perform. In that sense, God has no reason to perform one *rather than* another of those actions. But each action is still such that God has *some* reason to perform it (though not *overriding* reason). And this, importantly, is all that Mullins’ PAC (and my new extension thereof) requires. Thanks to an anonymous referee for bringing this worry to my attention.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes (2018, p. 2), Bergmann and Brower (2006, pp. 359–360), Dolezal (2017, pp. 41–42), Mullins (2021).

According to DDS, then,  $x$  is a part of  $S$  provided that (i)  $x$  is a positive ontological item intrinsic to  $S$  and (ii)  $x$  is not identical to  $S$ .<sup>3</sup> More simply (and applied to God), anything intrinsic to God is identical to God (Fakhri, 2021). This understanding of parts also accords with how DDS is traditionally articulated. Augustine famously said that God *is* what he *has* (Augustine, n.d., *The City of God*, XI, 10). Vallicella (2019) articulates it likewise: ‘God is ontologically simple... there is nothing intrinsic to God that is distinct from God.’ Other scholars working in philosophy of religion and models of God similarly characterize parts this way in connection with DDS.<sup>4</sup> In motto form: everything *in* God *is* God.

What about the Doctrine of Divine Impassibility (DDI)? According to Mullins, DDI affirms that ‘it is metaphysically impossible for God (i) to suffer; (ii) to be moved by, influenced by, or acted upon by anything external to God; and (iii) to have an emotion that is inconsistent with perfect rationality, moral goodness, and happiness. The impassible God is in a state of pure, undisturbed happiness that is entirely grounded in Himself’ (2020b, p. 394).<sup>5</sup> Part of DDI is simply entailed by DDS. For if God could be moved or acted upon by something, then God would have some *potential* that could be *actualized* by something. But that would entail that God is a composite of act and potency, contra DDS (or, at least, the traditional DDS with which I am concerned in this article). Moreover, God’s *existence* certainly cannot be influenced by or acted upon (e.g., brought about) by anything. Hence, if something (call it ‘ $x$ ’) in God *could* be acted upon, it follows that  $x$  would be distinct from God’s existence. But since God is identical to God’s existence under DDS, it follows that  $x$  would be distinct from God. But then there would be something *in* God that is *not* God (viz.,  $x$  itself), contra DDS. Hence, DDS entails that it is impossible that God be moved by, influenced by, or acted upon by anything.

While much more can be said, this suffices for my characterization of DDS and DDI for present purposes. Before turning to Mullins’ Problem of Arbitrary Creation (PAC) for classical theism, I will outline the structure of the rest of my article. First, I will provide a detailed characterization of Mullins’ argument. Second, I will raise a worry for Mullins’ argument deriving from the distinction between an action’s being done on the basis of a *consideration* of  $x$  (on the one hand) and an action’s being

<sup>3</sup> Two notes. First, a positive ontological item is anything that exists (has being or reality). Second, what *intrinsicity* consists in is a matter of debate. We can make do with an intuitive understanding thereof, since nothing in my paper hangs on a precise and formalized account. I follow David Lewis’s classic articulation: ‘We distinguish intrinsic properties, which things have in virtue of the way they themselves are, from extrinsic properties, which they have in virtue of their relations or lack of relations to other things’ (Lewis, 1986, p. 61). Intrinsic features (else: predicates), then, characterize something as it is *in itself*, without reference to things wholly apart from or outside of or disjoint from the thing in question. Extrinsic features (else: predicates), by contrast, characterize something as it is in relation or connection with something wholly apart from or outside it (or as it fails to so relate). For an overview of debates concerning intrinsicity and extrinsicity, see Marshall and Weatherston (2018).

<sup>4</sup> See, among others, Grant (2012, p. 254), Spencer (2017, p. 123), Brower (2009, p. 105), Stump (2013, p. 33), Schmid and Mullins (forthcoming), Leftow (2015, p. 48), Kerr (2019, p. 54), Dolezal (2011, p. xvii), Sijuwade (forthcoming), Schmid (forthcoming), and Grant and Spencer (2015, pp. 5–7).

<sup>5</sup> See also the various references in Mullins (2020b) for this characterization of DDI, as well as Mullins (2020a).

done on the basis of *x itself* (on the other). Finally, I will defend a new extension of the PAC that challenges classical theism while avoiding the aforementioned worry.

## The Problem of Arbitrary Creation (PAC)

The central premise in Mullins' PAC is that if God is impassible, then God's act of creating the universe is performed without a reason—it is not a reason-based action. With this premise in hand, the following straightforward argument arises (Mullins, 2020b, p. 397):

1. God is impassible. (Assumption for reductio)
2. God is perfectly rational.
3. God created the universe.
4. If God is perfectly rational, then God created the universe for a reason.
5. Therefore, God created the universe for a reason. (2, 4)
6. If God is impassible, then God created the universe for no reason.
7. Therefore, God created the universe for no reason. (1, 6)
8. God created the universe for a reason, and God created the universe for no reason. (5, 7)

If successful, the argument shows that God is not impassible (and hence that classical theism is false), since it purports to derive a contradiction (conclusion (8)) from the assumption of DDI (premise (1)). Thus, to complete the argument, I add:

9. Therefore, God is not impassible. (1–8, reductio)
10. But if classical theism is true, God is impassible.
11. Therefore, classical theism is false. (9, 10)

Let us first consider Mullins' central premise: if God is impassible, then God's act of creating the universe is performed without a reason. In this section, my sole aim is to explicate Mullins' justification for the crucial premise—I am not proffering my own defense of the premise.

The foundation of the PAC is that 'God's reasons for freely acting cannot be due to anything *ad extra* to the divine nature,' since nothing outside the impassible God can move or influence him in any way (*ibid*, pp. 396–397). According to Mullins, classical theists are explicit that an impassible, absolutely simple being cannot be influenced by considerations of things extrinsic to it (*ibid*).

But in that case, it seems inexplicable how God could have a reason *for creating*. After all, creation involves the bringing about of things *ad extra* to the divine nature. But if absolutely nothing *ad extra* to the divine nature influences God's act of will (e.g., the actual or possible values of creatures, or the tokens and types of goods realized by diverse manifestations of God's glory, etc.)—and if not even a *consideration* of such things could influence God's act of will—then we seem to remove the only candidate reasons God has for *creating* as opposed to *refraining* from creating.

God's act of will would be based wholly on himself and his own goodness—something which is absolutely necessary and absolutely simple. But whether or not God creates—and, moreover, *regardless* of what God creates if he creates anything at all—God's act of will is based on that self-same intrinsic goodness that is identical to God. This seems to be a far cry from a reason *for creating*, let alone a reason for creating *this particular universe* (as opposed to some other possible universe).

The above line of reasoning captures the general argumentative pattern of Mullins' PAC. In short, Mullins argues that DDI rules out considerations of anything *ad extra* to the divine nature as candidates for God's reason for creating the universe. For in that case, something would influence or move God—God would in some sense be *responsive* to something else.

But this means that God's act could only be performed on the basis of a consideration of the divine nature itself. Mullins argues that this is precisely why one finds 'classical theists [e.g., Aquinas and Ussher] saying that all of God's acts are toward His own glory, or that God's will is not moved by anything but His own goodness' (*ibid*, p. 397). But once this is granted, then it seems we lose any connection between the reason for God's action (on the one hand) and the contents and character of creation (on the other). For God's nature is utterly simple and unvarying across worlds, with no intrinsic specification towards any particular creation (or content thereof).<sup>6</sup> We therefore seem to lose any distinctive reasons God may have specifically for creating and acting within a timeline. In that sense, there seems to be no reason *for creating* or for doing anything in particular when it concerns things *ad extra* to the divine nature. Overall, then, God's act of creating the universe seems to be performed without a reason.

Again, thus far I have simply been sketching the general argumentative pattern of Mullins' PAC. I am not defending but rather *explicating* it. Notice, moreover, that I have been careful to say '*general* argumentative pattern.' The *specifics* of Mullins' PAC lie in Mullins' assessment of six different proposals about God's reason for creating the universe. Mullins argues that each of them contradicts DDI or other core tenets of classical theism. Below, I summarize each proposal and Mullins' assessments thereof.

**First Proposal** God's reason for creating is to actualize objective (types and tokens of) value that would otherwise be absent from reality. Mullins argues that this proposal is incompatible with DDI since God's decision would thereby be influenced

<sup>6</sup> Nor could it be directed towards the relative goodness or value of the universes that could obtain. For according to Mullins, on classical theism 'God is the only intrinsically good thing. All other things merely participate in God's goodness' (2020b, p. 404). Mark C. Murphy seems explicit on this point too, writing that 'God cannot create more goodness. Even considered apart from creation, there exists all the goodness that is or ever could be' (2017, p. 83). Consider also Robert Sokolowski: 'God is to be so understood, and the world or creatures are to be so understood, that nothing greater, *maius*, is achieved if the world or creatures are added to God' (1995, p. 8). Finally, consider Joseph E. Lenow, who writes that 'had God willed to exist without creation, God would not have willed a lesser goodness than God has willed in creating the world – the same power would have been realized. Similarly, had God willed the creation of a different world, God would not have willed a lesser (or greater) goodness than God has willed in creating this one' (2021, p. 19).

by something extrinsic to the divine nature (viz., the (actual or possible) values of creatures). He also argues that it is incompatible with DDI ‘because it is a reason based on considerations external to the divine nature’ (*ibid*, p. 399).

**Second Proposal** God’s reason for creating is that creation provides variegated manifestations of the divine attributes that would not otherwise be exercised or manifested. Mullins argues that this is incompatible with DDI since it entails God’s being influenced by external considerations. ‘[I]n order for God to discern, or determine, which universe is best adapted to the exercise of His attributes,’ writes Mullins, ‘God will have to consider the content of each possible universe. It is the content of each possible universe that will influence God’s decision to create’ (*ibid*, p. 400). Nor can the reason be in terms of the fulfillment of some desire on God’s part (say, a desire to be in loving communion with creatures) since God cannot have any unfulfilled desires that are satisfied by creation (*ibid*, p. 396). In that case, some aspect of God’s being would be unactualized (or would become actualized by creation’s fulfilling said desire). And this is incompatible with God’s being fully and purely actual—a core commitment of classical theism.

**Third Proposal** God’s reason for creating is that God wills his own goodness. Mullins argues that this proposal is implausible, since ‘God wills his own goodness’ seems to have nothing to do with creation. God wills his own goodness *necessarily*, both in worlds wherein God alone exists and in ones wherein God creates an infinite multiverse (and everything in between). But God only creates *contingently*. The alleged reason simply makes no reference whatsoever to God’s creative act, let alone to the precise contents of creation over which God is supposed to have full providential control and governance. As Mullins puts it, ‘[n]othing about saying ‘God wills His own goodness’ illuminates why God creates because God wills His own goodness no matter what’ (*ibid*, p. 401).

**Fourth Proposal** God’s reason for creating is that creation benefits creatures. For Mullins, this seems to entail that God is attracted to or motivated by the (possible or actual) value of the creaturely benefits so accrued—and such extrinsic motivations or influences are debarred by DDI (*ibid*, p. 402).

**Fifth Proposal** God’s reason for creating is that his glory can be manifest to creatures. But, Mullins argues, under classical theism God necessarily has all possible glory; there is no additional glory that can be superadded to his being. God therefore cannot create the world in order to acquire some glory he otherwise would not have. And if he creates simply because of the additional value such glory would bring to *creatures* or *reality itself*, then this would be an explanation based on considerations extrinsic to God—again debarred by DDI (*ibid*, p. 403).

**Sixth Proposal** God’s reason for creating is that God is good, and goodness is by nature *diffusive*. Mullins points out that this proposal problematically entails that creation necessarily flows from the goodness of God, thereby denying God’s

freedom with respect to creation as articulated in the classical theistic tradition.<sup>7</sup> Mullins also argues that since, under classical theism, ‘the only goodness that can possibly exist is God’s,’ there cannot possibly be *more* goodness that results from the diffusivity in question—in which case, this does not seem to be a reason for God to create (*ibid.*, pp. 403–404).

Mullins thus concludes that none of the main proposals on offer concerning the classical theistic God’s reason to create succeed. And this, Mullins suggests, provides further support for the key premise that DDI precludes God’s creating the universe for a reason.

In the following section, I sketch a worry for Mullins’ general case. My worry is based on the distinction between (on the one hand) an agent’s performing an action based on a *consideration* of *x* and (on the other hand) an agent’s performing an action based on *x itself*.

## A Worry

As we saw in the previous section, Mullins frequently appeals to the purported incompatibility between DDI and God’s acting on the basis of a *consideration* of something external to God. For instance, Mullins writes: ‘Classical theists are explicit that the impassible God cannot be influenced by considerations of things external to the divine nature’ (*ibid.*, p. 397). In a footnote at the end of this quoted sentence, Mullins cites Shedd (1888, p. 405). Here is what Shedd writes:

The reasons why the Divine decree is independent of everything finite are the following: (a) It is eternal, and therefore cannot depend upon anything in time; but everything finite is in time. (b) The decree depends upon God’s good pleasure... Therefore it does not depend upon the creature’s good pleasure. (c) The Divine decree is immutable... But a decree conditioned upon the decision of the finite will must be mutable, because the finite will is mutable. (d) A conditional decree is incompatible with the Divine foreknowledge. God cannot fore know an event unless it is certain, and it cannot be certain if it ultimately depends upon finite will. (1888, p. 405)

While Shedd here affirms that God’s decisions *are* independent of anything external to the divine nature, he does *not* seem to affirm that God’s decisions are independent of a *consideration* of anything external to the divine nature. Moreover, it seems plausible that the *consideration* of something external to the divine nature can *itself* be both (i) internal to the divine nature and (ii) not based on, influenced by, or moved by anything external to the divine nature.

<sup>7</sup> One proposal Mullins does not consider at this juncture is that while goodness is not *necessarily* diffusive (which allows the classical theist to avert the necessity of creation), goodness still *tends* toward diffusivity. I shall not pursue this rejoinder to Mullins beyond this footnote since it is inessential to my extension of the PAC articulated later.

Indeed, even if we deny that a consideration of something external could satisfy both (i) and (ii) above, what matters for present purposes is that their denial is an implicit assumption of Mullins' PAC—an assumption which, as far as I can tell, is not justified in Mullins (2020b).<sup>8</sup> More precisely, the success of Mullins' PAC relies on at least one of the following two assumptions: (i) God's *consideration* of something external cannot *itself* be internal to God; or (ii) God's *consideration* of something external must *itself* be based on or influenced/moved by something external. For if both (i) and (ii) are false, then DDI *is*, after all, compatible with God's action being based on a consideration of things external to God. For if both assumptions are false, then merely from the fact that God's act is based on a *consideration* of something external, it does not thereby follow that God's act is based on *something external*. If the consideration itself is internal to God, and if the consideration itself is not dependent upon (based on, influenced by, moved by, acted upon by) something external, then DDI is preserved.

Thus far, the worry I have sketched for Mullins' PAC is a dialectical one: Mullins' PAC relies on at least one of two assumptions, neither of which is given justification in the dialectical context at hand. This does not show that the assumptions are false, of course; but it does show that if Mullins' PAC is to succeed, more work is needed.

The worry can be strengthened if the classical theist can sketch a *prima facie* plausible story—compatible with classical theism—on which (i) God's action is based on a *consideration* of things external to God, (ii) this consideration is itself internal to God, and (iii) the consideration itself is not based on, influenced by, or acted upon by anything external to God. I will now briefly sketch one such story. I do not claim this story is true. Rather, I simply claim that it satisfies (i)–(iii) above in addition to being plausible and coherent (by the classical theist's lights, that is).

God is ground of all actual and possible being. Anything which is possible is grounded in God's causal power.<sup>9</sup> God, in virtue of his perfect knowledge, knows his essence and his power perfectly. And to know a power perfectly is to know perfectly that to which the power could extend.<sup>10</sup> Hence, God knows perfectly that to which his power could extend, which includes all possible creatures (and everything about such possible creatures) as well as all possible creations. All of this knowledge is based fully on God himself since it is gleaned from a perfect grasp of the divine essence.

But in virtue of such perfect knowledge of all possible creatures and creations, God also knows all the possible tokens and types of values that could be instantiated by any possible creature and any possible state of affairs involving such values. This is true regardless of whether creatures' value would be a *participation* in God's

<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that there *is* no such justification, or that there *could not* be. Rather, it is simply to make a dialectical point about what has thus far been written on PAC.

<sup>9</sup> The story therefore adopts a powers-based account of the metaphysics of modality along the lines of, e.g., Pruss (2011). Note that God's being the ground of all possible and actual being is not unique to classical theism; most non-classical theists affirm it as well.

<sup>10</sup> This element of the story follows Aquinas (n.d.-b, n.d.-d) (cf. *Summa Theologiae* I, q14a5 and *De Veritate* q2a3).



primordial and supreme value—what matters is that their value would be *genuine* and *real*. Many such values, moreover, are unique (i.e., not exemplified by God himself).<sup>11</sup> Included among them are things like (i) the value of intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth; (ii) the existence of love-manifesting virtues in the face of evil and tragedy (e.g., forgiveness, compassion, self-sacrifice, generosity, courage); (iii) aesthetic value arising from harmony, unity, and order in subatomic, molecular, cellular, organismic, and cosmic structures; and so on.

Moreover, it is in virtue of God's *knowledge* or *awareness* of such possible values—which, recall, is gleaned from a perfect grasp of the divine essence—that God creates. In other words, it is God's *consideration* (i.e., knowledge, awareness) of these possible values—which are (or would be) external to the divine nature—which serves as the basis for God's act of creation. Notice, moreover, that it is *not* the (possible) *values* that move or influence or act on God. Rather, it is God's *consideration* or *knowledge* of such possible values which serves as the basis upon which God creates. And this consideration or knowledge is *internal* to (and, indeed, identical to) God. Finally, this consideration or knowledge is not *itself* based on, influenced by, acted upon, or moved by anything external to the divine nature; instead, it is fully based on the *divine essence itself* as the primordial ground of all possible beings (including their possible values).

I aver, then, that this story satisfies all the desiderata articulated earlier: it is both plausible and coherent by classical theists' lights; God's act is based on a *consideration* of things external to God; this consideration is itself internal to God; and the consideration itself is not based on, influenced by, or acted upon by anything external to God. *Prima facie*, then, the worry I have raised to Mullins' PAC is not merely dialectical; it also seems to be a formidable classical theistic response to the argument.

I will argue in the next section, however, that classical theism is not exactly in the clear when it comes to PAC. In particular, I will extend the PAC in a new direction, arguing that the extension provides a challenge to classical theism that avoids the worry I have just articulated. While by no means insuperable or knock-down, the challenge (i) invites classical theists to develop workable, classical-theist-friendly accounts of divine reason-based action and (ii) delimits the range of possible classical theistic accounts thereof.

## Extension

My extension of the PAC for classical theism derives from the nature of reason-based action. In particular, it seems plausible that intentional actions are guided by, explained by, and based on reasons. That is, intentional actions seem *dependent*—they are dependent on prior realities (to wit, *reasons*). Reason-based

<sup>11</sup> This is compatible with their value being a participation in God's value, just as creatures' *existence* being limited, finite, and imperfect is compatible with their existence being a participation in God's unlimited, infinite, and perfect existence. Participation need not entail non-uniqueness.

actions—though not necessitated by the reasons in question (under libertarian views of freedom)—are still appropriately dependent upon and guided by reasons that distinctively favor each action in the respective worlds in which such actions obtain. And even if one thinks there is no *causal* link between reasons and the agent's act, it seems difficult to deny the plausibility of there being *some* kind of dependence here.

Non-classical theists can accommodate this intuitive fact about the nature of intentional actions. For they can hold that there exists a multiplicity of reasons upon which God's different intentional acts across worlds are dependent, such that different reasons factor differentially into the explanation of God's choices across worlds. But (i) the existence of such a multiplicity of reasons would plausibly entail that there are positive ontological items intrinsic to but numerically distinct from God, meaning that classical theists cannot avail themselves of this maneuver, and (ii) the proposal in question plausibly entails that God's acts are *dependent* things—they are dependent on prior reasons. But this is incompatible with classical theism, since God's act(s)—being identical to God himself—is utterly independent.

Thus, plausibly, if God's act of creating the universe were performed for a reason, God's action would be *dependent* on that reason. But God (and God's existence) is *identical* to God's action on DDS. So, if God's action were performed for a reason, then *God's existence* would depend (at least in part) on the reason. But this seems absurd; God's existence surely *cannot* be dependent on anything. God is the ultimate stopping point in reality's dependence regress.

We therefore have the ingredients for an extension of the PAC, which can be formalized like so:

1. God's act of creation is an intentional action (if only analogously so).
2. Intentional actions are dependent on one or more reasons.
3. So, God's act of creation is dependent on one or more reasons. (1, 2)
4. If DDS is true, then God's existence is identical to God's act of creation.
5. If God's existence is identical to God's act of creation, then if God's act of creation is dependent, then God's existence is dependent. (Leibniz's Law<sup>12</sup>)
6. So, if DDS is true, then if God's act of creation is dependent, then God's existence is dependent. (4, 5)
7. Suppose DDS is true. (Assumption for Conditional Proof)
8. So, if God's act of creation is dependent, then God's existence is dependent. (6, 7)
9. God's existence is not dependent.
10. So, God's act of creation is not dependent. (8, 9)
11. So, God's act of creation is *not* dependent, and God's act of creation is dependent (on one or more reasons). (10, 3)
12. So, DDS is false. (7–11, Conditional Proof)
13. If DDS is false, then classical theism is false.
14. So, classical theism is false. (12, 13)

<sup>12</sup> Leibniz's Law states that for any x and any y, if x and y are identical, then whatever is true of x is true of y (and vice versa).

This, then, is the extended PAC for classical theism. I do not pretend that the argument is a knock-down, decisive argument against classical theism. Decisive arguments are well-nigh impossible in philosophy. The argument, instead, is more modest: it is meant to be a challenge to classical theists. In particular, it is a challenge to develop models of divine reason-based action that preserve God's status as an intentional agent (if only analogously so) but that also render his act independent of prior reasons. My argument, then, is best understood as a *tool* to serve and advance debates concerning God's nature and relation to the world.

I want to highlight, moreover, that this extension of the PAC is immune to the worry that afflicts Mullins' PAC. For this extension does not rest on the claim that DDI is incompatible with God's acting on the basis of a *consideration* of something external to God, which was precisely the claim that the worry for Mullins' PAC seized upon. Instead, the extension is based on (i) the identity of God's act of creation with God's existence, (ii) the fact that God's existence is independent, and (iii) the fact that God's act of creation is dependent on one or more reasons. Before concluding the article, though, I will consider two objections to the extended PAC.

**Objection 1** Perhaps God's act of creation is not *dependent* on God's reason(s) to create but is nevertheless *explained* by them. Dependence is *irreflexive*—if *x* is dependent on *y*, then *x* is not identical to *y*. In that case—since God's act is identical to everything else in God—God's act could not be dependent on God's reason(s) to create. But that does not debar God's reason(s) to create *explaining* God's act of creation. For even though the former is identical to the latter (and, indeed, identical to God himself), explanation need not be irreflexive. If all this is right, then it can be the case both that (i) God's act of creation is not dependent, and (ii) God's act of creation is performed for one or more reasons.

**Reply** I have three responses to this objection. First, it is implausible—at least by my lights—that explanation can be *reflexive* (such that something explains itself). Plausibly, nothing can explain or account for why it *itself* is in reality at all. For in order to have any explanatory power in the first place, it would 'already' (as it were) have to exist. Consider also: if I ask why *x* exists (or occurs, or obtains, or whatever), it is no use responding, 'because *x* exists (or occurs, or obtains, or whatever).' Surely, I say, this explains nothing. To be sure, I do not claim that everyone must accept that explanation is irreflexive; rather, I am simply sketching a response to Objection 1 that seems *prima facie* very plausible.<sup>13</sup>

Second, it seems deeply implausible that (say) 'God's reason to create this universe' is identical to *God himself*. Whatever else reasons are, they are plausibly *considerations* that *count in favor* of something (e.g., some action or some outcome

<sup>13</sup> Another important thing to note: the fact that some things are self-evident does not threaten my point about the irreflexivity of explanation. Self-evidence just means (roughly) that upon understanding something, one thereby understands that it exists (or occurs, or obtains, or is true, or whatever). But this is separate from what *explains* or *accounts for* its existence (occurrence, etc.). Moreover, self-evidence is an *epistemic* or *justificatory* notion, not a *metaphysical* one—and when we concern ourselves with explanations of God's action (in this context), we are concerned not with epistemic or justificatory notions but instead with extramental reality itself—some connection or relation *between or among things in reality* that accounts for why God's act of creation is as it is (or accomplishes what it accomplishes).

thereof). But is God a *consideration*? Does God *count in favor of something*? It is hard to see how. Reasons also point towards (i.e., are directed towards and referred to) that which they favor. But surely *God himself* (under DDS) does not point towards and is not of himself directed towards or referred to something *ad extra*.<sup>14</sup> But, alas, classical theists are not beholden to my metaphysical intuitions. I can only invite the reader to consult their own plausibility structures.

Third, even *granting* that classical theists can avoid these difficulties, they still seem to face a unique problem when it comes to reason-based action. When an agent A acts for a reason R to bring *x* about, surely A acts to bring *x* about *because* A takes R to be the reason for which A acts. A's taking R to be the reason for which A acts in this case is thus *prior* to A's bringing *x* about. It is thus *false* that A takes R to be the reason for which A acts *because* A brings *x* about (or *because* *x* itself comes about).

But here's the problem. *It is a contingent matter* that God takes  $R_1$  (which, say, is a reason that uniquely favors creation  $C_1$ ) to be the reason for which God acts. Hence, this must be an *extrinsic* divine predication; nothing *intrinsic* to God (under DDS) explains why this is the reason for which God acts. (Remember, under classical theism, everything intrinsic to God is numerically identical to God. Hence, everything intrinsic to God is necessary. Hence, whatever is *contingently* true of God is not intrinsic to God; it must be extrinsic. It must hold true of God, in other words, because of something *ad extra*.) But then it is going to be something *extrinsic* to God that explains this. It is thus in virtue of *creation itself*—in this case,  $C_1$  *itself*—that God takes  $R_1$  to be the reason for which he acts. But this seems to get the order of explanation wrong. It is precisely *because* God takes  $R_1$  to be the reason for which God acts that  $C_1$  results from God's act. Hence, it is *false* that it is because  $C_1$  results from God's act that God takes  $R_1$  to be the reason for which God acts.

Leftow (2015) makes a similar point. Applying Leftow's point to the present context, conjoining DDS and reason-based action as a response implies that:

the character of the universe determines God's purpose in creating. It determines the reason God made it. For the character of the universe determines which purposes it matches up with... This can't be right. Surely God's reasons for creating determine which universe He makes, rather than which universe He makes determining His reasons for creating. Surely God first has some rather than other purposes for the universe, and so creates it rather than another universe for those purposes. Surely God's purposes explain His choice of universe. ... But some rather than other divine purposes cannot explain God's choice if which purposes explain it—which purposes God seeks to serve by creating—is settled by what He creates. On [the view under consideration], the universe has a purpose only retrospectively, once it exists. One can't say that God created it with that purpose rather than others in mind beforehand. (*ibid*, p. 52)

<sup>14</sup> Aquinas (n.d.-a, n.d.-c), for instance, explicitly denies that the divine substance can be essentially referred to other things—cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles* II, ch. 12, and *De Potentia* Q7, A8. (And note that we are talking about, in the main text, an *intrinsic* directedness-toward and referral-to. And whatever is intrinsic to God is essential to God, under DDS.)

For if God created it with one purpose (or reason) rather than others in mind explanatorily prior to the existence of anything outside of God, then this would amount to a contingent predication that is not dependent on facts extrinsic to God—in other words, a contingent *intrinsic* predication. And that is debarred by DDS. Leftow continues: ‘But then it is hard to see what point there is to purpose-talk [or reason-talk] here. Its point has to be explaining why God created what He did, but how can God’s purposes [or reasons] explain what He creates if what He creates determines what His purposes in creating [or reasons for creating] were?’ (*ibid*). That, then, is my third response: even granting Objection 1, it seems to get the order of explanation wrong.

I conclude, then, that the extended PAC retains its force despite Objection 1. Onward we march, then, to Objection 2.

**Objection 2** Perhaps the classical theist can avoid Mullins’ PAC by appeal to Platonism. Consider, for instance, that Christian Platonists have long addressed the Euthyphro dilemma by affirming that God wills there to be good things (or that good states of affairs obtain) because they are good.<sup>15</sup> Why is this problematic? And perhaps a similar move will aid with the extended PAC.

**Reply** This is a valuable objection. I have two responses. First, while this response will be available to theists of several stripes, it is *not* available to the brand of theism with which I am concerned in this article (namely, a traditional, classical theistic view espoused by medieval thinkers like Aquinas and Anselm and contemporary thinkers like Alexander Pruss, Katherin Rogers, and W. Matthews Grant). For under classical theism, ‘whatever is not God is created by Him’ (Rogers, 1996, p. 167). Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey Brower likewise emphasize that—under classical theism—‘(i) God does not depend on anything distinct from himself for his existing and (ii) everything distinct from God depends on God’s creative activity for its existing’ (2006, p. 361).<sup>16</sup> There cannot, then, be any independent Platonic abstracta under classical theism.<sup>17</sup>

Second, even if there can be Platonic abstracta under the version of classical theism with which I am concerned, this would not affect my extended PAC. For if God’s act of creation is dependent on Platonic abstracta rather than some intrinsic mental item of his, God’s act of creation is still *dependent*. But since God’s act of creation is identical to God’s existence under DDS, it would follow that God’s *existence* is dependent. But that cannot be—God’s existence is *not* dependent. So the extended PAC remains.

<sup>15</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for bringing this objection to my attention. For more on Platonism within the Christian tradition, see Hampton and Kenney (2020).

<sup>16</sup> See also Grant (2019, ch. 1), Kerr (2019, p. 15), Leftow (2012, p. 20), and Schmid and Mullins (*forthcoming*).

<sup>17</sup> Nor can there be dependent but necessarily existent abstracta under classical theism. For God, under the version of classical theism with which I am concerned, is free to create or refrain from creating. Hence, anything distinct from God could fail to exist—it is *contingent*. On this commitment to God’s freedom, see Pruss (2017, pp. 213–214).

Now, perhaps one could locate the Platonic forms (or states of affairs) within the divine mind. But this, too, faces the two replies above. First, it does not seem compatible with the version of DDS with which I am concerned. For such forms or states of affairs will be positive ontological items intrinsic to but numerically distinct from God. But then it is *false*—contra the version of DDS under consideration—that whatever is intrinsic to God is numerically identical to God. Second, it does not affect my extended PAC. For God’s act will still be *dependent* (albeit dependent on something *else* in God—to wit, the forms). But then God’s act cannot be identical to God’s existence (contra DDS), since God’s existence is *not* dependent.<sup>18</sup>

## Conclusion

I began by characterizing perfect rationality, classical theism, DDS, and DDI. I then offered a detailed characterization of Mullins’ PAC. After criticizing Mullins’ argument, I defended an extension of the PAC whose principal purpose is to advance debates about God’s nature and relation to the created world.<sup>19</sup>

### Declarations

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<sup>18</sup> I leave open whether this move successfully averts Mullins’ PAC. Mullins is especially concerned with God’s act being based on things *ad extra*. But the forms as items within the divine mind would allow God’s act to be based on things *ad intra*. So the objection might neutralize Mullins’ PAC. Again, I leave this open—my thesis is not that Mullins’ PAC succeeds or circumvents this objection.

<sup>19</sup> Many thanks to two anonymous referees for helpful feedback.

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