DIVINE DELIBERATION:
POSSIBLE-WORLDS MODALITY AND
THE DIVINE WILL-TO-CREATE

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APPROVAL SHEET

DIVINE DELIBERATION:

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THE DIVINE WILL-TO-CREATE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AF-RGT	*The Apostolic Fathers: Revised Greek Texts*. Edited by J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer. New York: MacMillan, 1891. Accordance Bible Software.
ANF	A. Cleveland Coxe et al., eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3 Vols.
APQ	*American Philosophical Quarterly*
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
EGGNT	Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
IJPR	*International Journal of Philosophy of Religion*
IJST	*International Journal of Systematic Theology*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JRT	*Journal of Reformed Theology*
MAJT	*Mid-America Journal of Theology*
NPNF	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.* Vol. 2. Edited by Philip Schaff.
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
PRDL	Post-Reformation Digital Library
SBJT	*Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*
SCG	*Summa Contra Gentiles*. Translated by James N. Anderson.
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

PREFACE

For a finite person to write on the infinite mind is a delicious irony. At each stage, the dissertation has required those deliberative elements that have not to do with God: uncertainty, discovery, and painful coalescence of ideas. In key worshipful moments, I trust, the writing has imitated that divine pattern of thought in which we humans participate: fitness, order, logical hierarchy, beauty. The dissertation has been a constant companion, and its broadening implications have served to excite me—even with the challenge of ever new literature, new discoveries, and new lines of inquiry. Without Dr. Bruce Ware, I would not have considered the necessity for an inquiry concerning divine deliberation; without Dr. Jonathan Kvanvig's pioneering work, I never would have pursued it. Dr. Walter Johnson—a friend, professor, and mentor—has remained not only a needed friend but a competent (and sometimes resistant) interlocutor. Perhaps my finished work might convince him of the promise of an enriched modal metaphysics for classical Christian doctrine. I thank my first doctoral supervisor Dr. Ted Cabal for the openness and interest that let an ambitious task begin. The project came full circle when Dr. Bruce Ware become the *doktorvater* to see this project through—and I am grateful for the energy and capability that he contributed to the writing's final phases. Final and greatest thanks are due to my dear wife Amy. You own this project in part—bought and paid for with your love, prayers, and sacrifice. Soli Deo Gloria.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The phrase 'divine deliberation' may seem novel, odd, and uncouth. The phrase's history is spare. However, divine deliberation (or some similar phrase or concept) has organized and clarified questions concerning divine knowledge and the divine will. The theology proper that develops doctrine on the nature of divine knowledge and will—carrying its confessional tradition and theological grammar—has intersected with and employed the language of contemporary modal metaphysics. Most often, this intersection has trafficked in deliberation concepts. Even when the term is avoided, its central features arrive when thinkers ask *how*, conceptually, the divine will relates to a theory of possibility.

A creation, especially *creatio ex nihilo*, seems inconceivable without some theory of possibility.[1] Yet questions as to what extent God's will for the actual creation *accounts* for modality (the view I will defend, while others may say, "creates" or "makes use of") is a matter that deserves finer analysis. Theologians at this juncture cannot help but do metaphysics (employing metaphysical language, denying or incorporating metaphysical conclusions) while constructing a God-concept. This theological trend toward the use of possible-worlds analysis continues to show how a more robust theology and metaphysic pre-commits one to the shape of the whole body of dogma. The extent of the God-concept of Aquinas or Edwards is instructive in this regard, and, though one may

[1] Unfortunately, presenting and defending *in toto* a theory of possibility—what it is, what undergirds modal claims (such as *would* and *could* sentences in everyday speech)—is rare in theological and philosophical *systems*. This emphasis here falls on systems since individual writers may take up the topic, but modality remains treated as a niche question that is not the responsibility of every model of the world and, theologically, every concept of God.

not be able to pull a thread in metaphysics and watch all of theology unwind, this metaphor is far closer to the truth than to error. In particular, Christian doctrines such as providence, soteriology, and prayer have been considered explicitly where theology and metaphysics connect—a fact that pertains in any robust model of God's knowledge and will.

Thesis

This dissertation constructs a deliberative model for modality and the divine will-to-create through the application of a responsible understanding and use of modality. The theory of possibility utilized meets and employs contemporary metaphysical insights, while pointing towards improved renderings of historic Christian doctrines and adhering to the confessions and doctrinal standards of orthodox Christian faith. The dissertation will analyze and codify emerging uses of modal metaphysics in the last half century, as well as the constellation of dogmatic issues that surround theologizing about divine knowledge and will. Though various theological conversation partners maintain diverse opinions, a great deal of agreement now obtains with respect to the metaphysics and methods by which Christian thinkers work toward theological conclusions. In other words, contemporary writers reach different theological conclusions with respect to, for example, providence and prayer; however, opposing thinkers are increasingly using *the same metaphysical presuppositions*. Not only do most theologians employ possible-worlds concepts, many have ceased explicitly referencing and defending possible-worlds ideas in prolegomena: these metaphysical tools are easily assumed. This thesis will help theologians avoid culling *ad hoc* appeals from possible-worlds modality (that may or may not be coherent with that modal metaphysic as a whole).

The dissertation intends to *model* the divine will. The science of model-making reminds theologians of a model's central claim: to organize disparate data in order to present broad intellectual vistas to desperately finite minds. Model-making is the native territory of the theologian—especially due to the Christian tradition's strong

creator/creature distinction. A finite mind can comprehend nothing either truly infinite or apparently infinite without the assistance of model-making. The relevant question for any model is whether it incorporates the data and depicts them comprehensibly. The question of whether the model is simply epistemic in value (whether one ought to interpret the model in a realist or instrumental fashion) is a separate and second question. However, one certainly cannot have a "realist" model without its prior instrumental fitness, and this dissertation argues that the deliberative model better incorporates and illuminates the data and is therefore superior—at least in an instrumental or epistemic fashion.

What divine deliberation models is the divine will-to-create. The inquiry does not cover creation's ontology or other such *a posteriori* matters. Many other ontological issues remain relevant (such as the nature of substance or secondary causation), yet ontology's most robust distinction in subject matter ("being that is not-God") is left behind. This thesis is more purely theoretical and relates to theology proper; the terms are pre-creation. Thus, other issues within creation—for example, the relation of form and matter, general questions in human epistemology—are not on the table.

Methodology

Pre-creation ontology cannot ignore the importance of modality for theology. Further, whether one categorizes the decision-to-create under God's nature affects the total picture in ways that are hard to overestimate. For this reason, two chapters introduce the metaphysics of modality in theology; chapter 2 argues for a way out of "modal collapse" through Jonathan Edwards's concept of the original ultimate end, while chapter 3 examines key biblical texts that both (a) speak in modally complex ways and (b) describe God's end(s) in creation. In this way, the first part of the dissertation, establishes the need for modality and begins with scripture's witness. The second part, chapters 4-7, explores the ways in which this interdisciplinary model comports with historical theology. In particular, I intend to set forth where theologians have already been "talking this way" in the patristic, medieval, and Reformed scholastic contexts. I cover the early

patristics on divine mind and creation, the medieval power controversy, and Reformed scholastic (and contemporary) writers on the order of the decrees and the covenant of redemption. In this sense, part 2 helps break up the soil, giving divine deliberation a place to settle with stability into Christian theology since it runs parallel with language about God in more traditional theological topics.

The deliberative model of the divine will-to-create follows in the third section: chapters 8, 9, and 10. Chapter 8 highlights theological concerns with respect to divine providence and human freedom and argues for a more disciplined pattern of speaking that avoids modal incoherence. Indeed, though the model remains amenable to a few different doctrines of freedom or providence, divine deliberation shows each issue to be a species of the problem of the semantics of modality. Chapters 9 and 10 cover necessary philosophical topics: the possibility and nature of individual essences, divine inferential knowledge, as well as hypotheticals and counterfactuals. Each of these philosophical items, part of the half-century revival of metaphysics, combine for the recipe of divine deliberation and, I argue, ought to be combined minimally in the way I set forth. Culling individual ingredients from the recipe will not do, though different theological thinkers could model the fine-grained details differently. Chapter 11 summarizes the significance of the thesis, applies some of its implications, and points toward further work. The Appendix is worth consideration since it provides the argument's backbone: a series of axioms, maxims, entailments, and inferences that *just are* the model of divine deliberation from which I am working in all of chapters 8-10. Its position at the end can help the cement to harden and firm up the model—or it could help the interested reader to look ahead and anticipate some of its arguments and understand its broad purposes.

The dissertation, therefore, can be grasped in its three parts. Part 1 analyzes theological truth-claims and considers biblical texts that are amenable to or call for a clearer model of modality for their interpretation and application. Part 2 addresses key issues in historical theology. The soundings in historical theology meet two purposes: to

retain fresh memory of historic orthodoxy's parameters, as well as to show where theologians have themselves developed confessions and statements whose meaning is intentionally underdeveloped and where certain theological doctrines themselves resemble the shape of a "deliberative model" of the divine will. The historical sections in particular develop how the theologians have discussed modality primarily in theology proper with respect to divine knowledge and, especially, divine power. Part 3 develops the model in accordance with the biblical and theological ideas and with the resources of contemporary modal metaphysics.

Background and History of Research

The history of research follows two trails: the philosophical history concerning divine deliberation-to-create and the evangelical history of appropriating themes related to modality—even in contexts directly related to apologetics or religious practice.

Modal Philosophy and a Deliberative Model of Divine Creation

The only philosopher who has undertaken an "exploration of the nature of God's creative activity and the potential for understanding this idea in terms of the idea of deliberation itself" is Jonathan Kvanvig. Kvanvig aims for a "coherent theistic outlook that includes a high conception of deity together with a conception of human beings who are morally responsible because many of their choices are free; free in a sense incompatible with being closely determined."[2] Kvanvig's fruitful essays explore this

[2] Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), vii. Interestingly, the recent literature surrounding moral responsibility, especially in its practical endeavors, such as criminology, runs in the opposite direction and even debates about varieties of causal determinism and its effects on freedom continue apace. Adjacent fields accept as a starting point both personal responsibility and various kinds of causal determinism and build models from there. Nancey C. Murphy and Warren S. Brown, *Did My Neurons Make Me Do It? Philosophical and Neurobiological Perspectives on Moral Responsibility and Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Keith M. Murphy and C. Jason Throop, "Willing Contours: Locating Volition in Anthropological Theory," in *Toward an Anthropology of the Will*, ed. Keith M. Murphy and C. Jason Throop (Paolo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Sabine Maasen, Wolfgang Prinz, and Gerhard Roth, eds., *Voluntary Action: Brains, Minds, and Sociality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

human freedom primarily against the backdrop of modal considerations. Moreover, the work of such an eminent philosopher, deftly handling the tools of his discipline, while also not giving up on this "high conception of deity" yields a unique voice in creative and constructive model-making. The deliberative model aims to find that intersection between freedom and "the doctrine of full and complete providential control. According to this doctrine, God's plan in creating was *complete*, covering every detail of each moment of the existence of his creation."[3] Kvanvig is the only writer who has written extensively about these theological themes at the level of the metaphysics of modality. For his own departure from Molinism, Kvanvig argues that Molinism could not account for the truth of counterfactuals in a way that is logically prior to God's will while maintaining that the truth of that counterfactual is somehow under God's control. He argues that this fact is due to "the logical behavior of embedded conditionals."[4] Thus, his own work, in one sense, leaves off where this dissertation begins: analyzing the intersection between truth and possibility on the one hand and God's will on the other.

Jing Tong's unpublished dissertation explored how to model divine deliberation—as Kvanvig was so concerned to do.[5] The argument focused specifically on "deliberation" to create a world and argued that only causal models account properly for theological matters—yet attenuate the possibility of creaturely agency. Further, Tong works with a strictly Platonic concept of possible worlds.[6] The dissertation will also treat the standard semantics of modality developed in the last half century, considering the standard literature while also contending that such models properly *ought* to be theological. This thesis differs from the only other dissertation on deliberation due to its

[3] Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation*, x.

[4] Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation*, x.

[5] Jing Tong, "Modeling Divine Deliberation" (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2011).

[6] Tong, "Modeling Divine Deliberation," 5; I find Platonic possible worlds implausible on account of theological commitments to divine aseity and the philosophical case I present below for an ontology of counterfactuals in the mind of God.

express theological commitments to God as the only *agenetos*—the only uncreated one. Biblical statements and the history of Christian doctrine point Christian philosophy toward developing modality within theology proper, as a matter of God's knowledge and will, since to develop modality elsewhere flies in the face of fundamental Christian ontological commitments.[7] The deliberative model will show how the divine will-to-create accounts for the truthmakers[8] of counterfactuals (thus impossible to analyze in logical moments prior to God's will). The model will map human freedom on both possible worlds and the actual world. The argument will discipline theology's semantics of human freedom, which, I contend, has oscillated in its modal reference: sometimes referring to freedom at the level of possible worlds, sometimes at the level of the actual world. Divine deliberation provides a metaphysic capable of modeling both libertarian freedom and "compatibilist source" or "inclination" views of freedom[9] and, in that sense, offers a rapprochement between the two views. Of course, exponents of the separate views of freedom could (and, likely, will) continue to assert the one view of freedom over against the other, but, I argue, such writers would require a new metaphysical model other than that of possible-worlds. If my model is successful, possible-worlds semantics does not uphold the contrariety of libertarian and inclination views of freedom.[10]

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[7] William Lane Craig, *God over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), especially chaps. 2–3.

[8] The term *truthmaker* in philosophy usefully collects those theories that believe a linguistically true proposition must relate to some real object to possess its truth-value. Writers, therefore, with very different views concerning the (b) nature of the objective reality or (a) its relation to the proposition remain committed to some version of truthmaker theory. See also Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, "Truthmakers," *Philosophy Compass* 1, no. 2 (2006): 186–200.

[9] Theology's "freedom of inclination" is similar to those "source views" in the mold of John-Martin Fischer and shares many instincts with broadly Strawsonian views in the philosophical literature.

[10] Contrariety is that logical relationship of propositions where both cannot be true, though in fact both could be false. Contradiction is that relationship where at least one proposition must be true and the other false.

Modal Theology and a Deliberative Model of Divine Creation

Evangelicals have appropriated modal ideas for divine knowledge and various ethical questions related to God's creation of this particular world. Evangelicals have reached a consensus at least in practice (if not in theory) with respect to the use of modal metaphysics. The following review of literature shows the tools of modal metaphysics to appear in underdeveloped (and sometimes *ad hoc* ways) in theological and apologetic literature.

Interdisciplinary works are to be praised. What modal metaphysician would not be pleased to see coherent philosophical ideas usefully organize thoughts in other disciplines? However, without a broader understanding of possible-worlds analysis, theological appeals may use bits and pieces of the philosophy to make ill-fitting or contradictory appeals. Every exploratory effort has been praiseworthy in its own way, and modal appeals will not fade from theology and apologetics soon. Modal usage should become clearer and better as soon as possible. The following sections show how theological appeals to possible worlds are used both at academic and popular levels. Because such appeals are inconsistent in what they entail, the possible-worlds analysis must be traced back to its source in philosophy and reintroduced into the theological discourse through such a model as is proposed here (or one waiting to be hammered out by someone else).

Paul Copan. With respect to the question of the fate of the unevangelized, Paul Copan has employed in his popular-level Christian apologetics what he calls "The Accessibilist/Middle-Knowledge view." To address the felt concerns about "those who have never heard" if "Jesus is the only way to God," Copan employs in a book written for general audiences contemporary notions as complex as middle knowledge and transworld depravity, demonstrating the newfound ease and breadth of purchase that these concepts enjoy. Copan insists that we "know intuitively that . . . contrary-to-fact scenarios yield

genuine possibilities."[11] He argues that scripture takes for granted "the range of possible or alternative scenarios, state of affairs, and 'possible worlds.'"[12]

Copan relates middle knowledge concepts to the question of the unevangelized: "since God knows which persons *would* freely respond to the Gospel upon hearing it, we shouldn't be surprised if the all-knowing God would arrange the *actual* world's circumstances so that those persons who *would* respond to the gospel get the opportunity to embrace Christ freely."[13] Copan understands the Molinist construct to allow a new significant claim in the debate: "[The unevangelized] suffer from a brought-upon-themselves condition: 'Transworld depravity.'"[14] Conjoining Molinism and

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[11] Paul Copan, *True for You But Not for Me: Overcoming Objections to Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009), 206.

[12] Copan, *True for You*, 206. He cites a commonplace of middle knowledge exponents, 1 Sam 23:6–10, where God knows that if David were to stay at Keilah, then Saul would pursue him and Keilah's inhabitants would hand David over. By simple observation, one may note at this point that the argument has simply identified the importance of subjunctive conditionals, not yet tracing a model for their truth value.

[13] Copan, *True for You*, 207. Though written at a popular level, the text here can be critiqued for question-begging with respect to which metaphysical model properly sketches the truth value of subjunctive conditionals and their use with respect to providence. Copan's Scripture citations definitively affirm that God *knows* such things but *how* he knows such things is exactly the point of a philosophical model on these matters. First, Copan notes that salvation "is sufficiently *available* to every human being, whether the Spirit uses natural or special revelation—hence the term *accessibilism*" (207). He adds shortly thereafter: "Accessibilism—also called the 'middle knowledge' view, introduced by the theologian Luis de Molina (1535–1600)—holds that there are three aspects or 'logical moments' of God's knowledge: *natural*, *middle*, and *free*" (207).

Surprisingly, Copan has misstated the nature of accessibilism, which is precisely *not* the view that the Spirit may use natural or special revelation but the view that salvation is *universally available due to the conjunction of human reason and natural revelation*. Its opposite, restrictivism, maintains that salvation is accessible only through *hearing* the gospel of Jesus Christ (even if such hearing is through the special revelation of direct divine speech, visions, or dreams). Copan claims to follow the writings of William Lane Craig on this matter, though Craig's own explications set the matter out in the traditional way: accessibilists hold that lost persons may avail themselves of general revelation. Later in the chapter, Copan seems aware of this point since he states in his "Tenet #1: *God judges the unevangelized based on their response to natural revelation, which his spirit can use to bring them to salvation*" (209). In statements such as this, Copan offers the more traditional meaning of accessibilism, where the content of general revelation can avail for salvation (which is the question at issue—so it seems fair to assume that in his caveat concerning the Spirit's use of such revelation, Copan does not gratuitously include that the Spirit adds the gospel content—which would of course be special revelation).

[14] Copan, *True for You*, 212. Where Copan does follow Craig is in his application of the Molinist model to the question of "those who have never heard." After tracing a rather traditional rendering of the three logical moments of God's knowledge, Copan advances various tenets; pertinent claims include Copan's tenets 4, 5, and 7, which claim, respectively, that God creates "a world containing an optimal balance of fewest

accessibilism yields a remarkable new way to frame the problem and its answer: because God knows what all persons would do in circumstances where they might believe in Christ and knows all persons who, possessing transworld depravity, would receive salvation under no circumstances, God actualizes a feasible world in which only persons possessing transworld depravity are found in places where the message of salvation does not arrive during their lifetimes. This application of the discourse of possible-worlds thinking to the traditional appeals of Christian apologetics requires further probing.[15]

Terrence Tiessen. Due to the presence of Molinism, metaphysical and modal issues show up in a text that is missiological in focus, Terrence Tiessen's extensive work

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lost and greatest number saved" since no feasible world exists where all persons choose Christ, persons who possess transworld depravity "would have been lost in any world in which they were placed," and the phenomena of persons who seem close "to salvation in the actual world without finding it" is due perhaps to the fact that "this actual world is the very nearest the transworldly depraved ever come to salvation" (211–13).

[15] Copan argues, "Whoever would want to be saved will find salvation." Copan, *True for You*, 210. How shall this model be construed? Is it to mean that whoever does want to in this world shall be saved or whoever at some point, in some state of affairs, in any world of the full array of worlds, shall be saved? Much more must be explained for this picture to be sensible. After all, the payoff of the view is precisely that the only people lost without knowledge are those possessing transworld depravity. But what of those who possess, shall we say, multi-world depravity instead of transworld depravity? In fact, it would seem that all other persons fit in this category, since the claim that any person possesses what might be called "transworld penitence" does not seem to comport with Christian theology. Even if the category were reasonable, it seems a null set.

By definition, the persons who possess this simpler form of depravity might reject Christ in W3 and accept him in W11, while rejecting Christ even more profoundly in W10 than he did in W8. Does the view claim that a feasible world exists where some conjunction of every person who possesses this form of depravity (rather than Transworld depravity) believes in Christ? In some world, they believe in Christ, hence their lack of transworld depravity. Consequently, the world actualized will hit-or-miss, as the case may be, with these persons possessing mere depravity and their potential actually to be in that world wherein they receive Christ. For some it will be so, for some not. If the semantics relates to modality, this way of framing things seems fair.

Perhaps Copan or similar thinkers would move the focus from modal issues to the possession of a person-specific nature and God's supercomprehension of that nature. However, where that explanation gains by locating transworld depravity in the individual, it would seem to inherit a requirement for some kind of "transworld supplication," a feature of essence whereby some persons in all worlds accept Christ. If categories pertain in which persons are divided, accepting Christ in some world and not in others, then the actual situation of the world would seem to run contrary to Copan's accessibilist/middle knowledge proposal—not that the proposal would somehow be incoherent but that it would seem no longer to have its apologetic purchase.

on Christian salvation and world religions.[16] Tiessen comments on two Molinist proposals for accessibilism, which he qualifies as "Molinist (synergist)" models since he identifies a "parallel monergist strategy," with which he is sympathetic. The first Molinist-synergist strategy relates to writers such as Donald Lake and the Brethren evangelist George Goodman. Lake explicitly rests his soteriological case on a particular kind of divine knowledge: "God knows who would, under ideal circumstances, believe the gospel, and on the basis of this foreknowledge, applies that gospel even if the person never hears the gospel during his lifetime."[17] With this postulate, divine knowledge resources the doctrine of soteriology. Whoever God knows *would* believe if hearing the gospel shall be saved—regardless of whether that person does hear the gospel in the actualized world. Tiessen critiques this particular approach to an accessibilist view since it ultimately relies on no actual faith. However, Tiessen hints at an alteration of the model from Norman Anderson. Tiessen is satisfied with Norman Anderson's comments concerning *how* God knows what the response of the unevangelized would have been: "a response manifested instead, in their ignorance, by that search after God and abandonment to his mercy that only the Holy Spirit could have inspired."[18] Tiessen appreciates this "very important qualifier, for it indicates that God has given these people repentance and faith during their lifetime," a conclusion that he draws evidently from Anderson's locution "abandonment to [God's] mercy that only the Holy Spirit could have

[16] Terrance L. Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004). The book examines the wide array of issues and propounds Tiessen's own version of accessibilism (a traditional account of the unique nature of Christ's saving work, with an assertion of biblical grounds for hope that those who are self-consciously non-Christians during their lifetimes can in fact be saved).

[17] Donald M. Lake, "He Died for All: The Universal Dimensions of the Atonement," in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), 43.

[18] Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 162. Note the lack of specificity with regard to the nature of the Spirit's work in this case. Such work is not relevant vis-à-vis accessibilism if the Spirit is working miraculously and uniquely for a special revelation of the gospel content to the individual. Only if the Spirit is applying and adducing content that is precisely *not the gospel* is the hypothetical situation relevant.

inspired."[19] The modified version still rests on a particular and peculiar modal turn. Supposedly, a person with a profoundly minimal prompting-to-faith may still be saved through that "faith" (if it may so be called) because "if these people had heard the gospel later in their lives, they would have accepted it quickly . . . ."[20] Though these statements cry out for comment with respect to the exclusivity of the gospel, two points relate to how modal claims can function in theology. First, middle knowledge no longer serves merely as a useful construct to develop a full view of divine knowledge and its role in providence; in this case modal concepts serve as a *moral proxy for what takes place in the actual world*. The first form of the proposal explicitly envisions persons saved and transformed in the eschaton because God knew that *in other worlds* under more propitious circumstances, they would believe in Christ. Such speech makes itself responsible for a wholesale re-envisioning of the relationship of possible-worlds semantics or the supposed super-comprehension of individual essences (or both) across the entire panoply of relevant ethical and soteriological material.[21]

Second, Tiessen's more appreciative comments, which seem to apply the first proposal, strictly provided that this salvation is grounded upon some "faith-like" yearning-toward or depending on God in general revelation. Rather than being a modal statement that is metaphysical, the statement is built precisely from within this world-frame (not much unlike the way the Lord spoke his utterance to Abraham): "Now I know because of this latent faith that you have exercised, that if you had heard the gospel before your death you would have believed; thus, upon your death, you will greet Christ

[19] Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 162.

[20] Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 162.

[21] On such a proposal, some persons are saved according to their response to Christ under good circumstances in another world. Is the judgment that made them in need of salvation, then, based upon this world, the actual world, or some other world that remains unactualized? Any proposal of this nature is clearly related to Ockhamism's hard and soft facts, yet Ockhamism's metaphysical views (ethically) run in the opposite metaphysical direction. If one is not to be condemned and blamed on the basis of soft facts but only those facts which one actualizes in the real world, can salvation be on the basis of "soft facts?"

your Savior, recognizing him with joy." The view is burdened with all kinds of new theological responsibilities, questions deserving a reply, but this second comment remains metaphysical and modal: this view has simply re-situated the modal sentence within the frame of this world and therefore still needs and depends on some more total metaphysical model. In fact, when such a metaphysical model is proposed to make sense of a modal statement in this world, will it not look rather like what Lake proposed?

William Lane Craig. William Lane Craig deserves credit for developing a unique line of thought with respect to the fate of the unevangelized—not so much with respect to their salvation but with respect to the precise nature of their damnation. One of his most succinct applications of Molinism's modality to the question is in *The Only Wise God*: "God in his providence so arranged the world that those who never in fact hear the gospel are persons who would not respond to it if they did hear it. God brings the gospel to all those who he knows will respond to it if they hear it."[22]

Craig also employs the Molinist concept of the feasibility of worlds: "the only worlds in which everybody hears and believes the gospel are worlds with only a handful of people in them. In any world in which God created more people, at least one person refuses to receive God's salvation."[23] Thus, in another place, a Molinist thinker has offered a truly novel and interesting rendering, a plausible account of a common question. However, a true investment in considering the metaphysics of modality is necessary fully to relate these considerations to divine thought.[24]

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[22] William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 150–51.

[23] William Lane Craig, "Politically Incorrect Salvation," in *Christian Apologetics in the Post-Modern World*, ed. Timothy P. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 89. See also his article "No Other Name: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation in Christ," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (April 1989): 172–88.

[24] And then to consider whether the proposal is more similar or different to some currently on offer. I would point out the similarity between having a person's concerns assuaged by the fact that only the transworld depraved are left unevangelized and that only the totally depraved are unevangelized. Furthermore,

Bruce Little. Modal metaphysics have entered theodicy in such writings as Bruce Little's *God, Why This Evil*?[25] Some of Little's claims reveal a need for a more comprehensive modality to develop compact and consistent language for use in theology. For example, Little indicates that a "greater-good moral justificatory scheme suggests (at least in some cases) that evil might be allowed because by it God prevents a worse evil . . . . This will make at least some evils necessary to the prevention of other evils."[26] He insists that this picture "raises questions about God's omnipotence."[27] Little notes how dependent such an ethic is on the hypothetical and finds the position "meaningless": "it is impossible to know whether such a claim is true or not because it deals with a hypothetical . . . A hypothetical is impossible to prove, unless of course you are God."[28] Both claims require a far broader framework; many would quibble with the notion that humans cannot know or "prove" (an indelicate term, in this context) a hypothetical. Most important for the present purpose, however, is to pose his question with respect to the divine: what is the view wherein God "proves hypotheticals"?

In another passage, Little argues that "for choice to be authentic, there must be at least two possibilities that are equal in possibility but not necessarily in desirability or workability."[29] What is relevant is the modal portion of his construct, the *equality* of possibilities; whether and how possibilities can be sketched out upon gradations of likelihood is a metaphysical claim that, if it is to prove enduringly useful to theologians, needs a more clear modal theory.

Reformed thinkers will note that such approaches continue to ground the actual damnation of the sinner on the rejection of Christ, rather than rebellion against the Creator.

[25] Bruce A. Little, *God, Why This Evil?* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton, 2010).

[26] Little, *God, Why This Evil?*, 3–4.

[27] Language not dissimilar from the medieval power distinction (chap. 5).

[28] Little, *God, Why This Evil?*, 3.

[29] Little, *God, Why This Evil?*, 14.

In his introductory definitions, Little shows how modal semantics will shape his thesis:

> God's knowledge does . . . encompass the true *actual* as well as the true *potential*; that means he has knowledge of all past, present and future realities. The difference is that the true *actual* is the event itself actualized, while the true *potential* deals only with what might be under different circumstances whether or not it is ever actualized. God's omniscience includes middle knowledge in which God knows all true counterfactuals.[30]

For coherence, this paragraph requires that some truth operator apply in the same way to actualities and potentialities (where reality does not make a difference either in truth-status or of the meaning of the modifier *truth*), while the section likewise requires that the past, present, and future all be "realities." Last, some relationship among such propositions must legitimate the "counterfactual" nature of some such propositions. Such theological claims require a full philosophy of possibility.

Little's approach requires some theory of objects, abstract and concrete, so that their knowability may be determined: "the view of omniscience here is that God knows all things (events, happenings mental and overt) at which point they were logically knowable."[31] Indeed, his point carries little weight if most things must "become knowable" in some tensed sense *for God*. Last, Little argues that by natural or necessary knowledge, one affirms "that God knows all that is true concerning truth itself in the absolute sense."[32] A dark and shadowy statement such as this is best measured against a full-orbed understanding of modality.

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[30] Little, *God, Why This Evil?*, 16. Little argues that for God to know future free choices of creatures cannot be logically impossible since God "claims to know some future choices of his moral agents (citing Rev 11:10). Curiously, Little includes a statement that makes such knowledge contingent and confuses free knowledge with natural knowledge: "God could know that he *had* created a world before the world was created (contingent knowledge) although he could always *know* (natural knowledge) that he would create a world" (16). Knowledge that he would create a world, on all major accounts, is a matter of divine free knowledge, so this idea needs clarification.

[31] Little, *God, Why This Evil?*, 16.

[32] Little, *God, Why This Evil?*, 17. Notice the adjective *true* applied in an equal and parallel way to the nouns *actual* and *potential* as well as the adjacent "past realities and future realities." These turns of phrase depend deeply on an unstated model for modal semantics.

Bruce Ware. Bruce Ware's *God's Greater Glory* is a work both polemical and enduring. The polemics surrounding the advance of open theism not only involved the defense of centuries-old confessions and conceptions of the triune God but also genuinely creative models for answering open theism's bracing (if unbiblical) logic. Bruce Ware in particular laid down—quite permanently and uniquely—an awareness and employment of middle-knowledge concepts among Reformed evangelicals. Much in the debate and much in Ware's volume was devoted to the nature of human freedom, particularly because of open theism's central assertion that the concept of human freedom logically entails an open future.

Having dealt extensively with the issue of human freedom—critiquing the libertarian view of freedom and advancing the freedom of inclination—Ware moves to the relation of God and the world. The Reformed evangelical is particularly attuned to Ware's interaction with chapter 5, article 1 of the Westminster Confession of Faith.[33] Ware proceeds beyond the confession's affirmation of sovereignty, which merely affirms the doctrine's compatibility with the freedom of persons; Ware concerns himself "with the implementation of this [sovereign] rule in and through what [God] has made. Divine and human concurrence—the exercise of his rule through secondary agency within the created order—is here the framework within which our thinking and discussion will proceed."[34] Distinctively, Ware not only asserts the asymmetrical relationship God has with good and evil acts but also proceeds to "explore the role that a modified version of middle knowledge—which I'll call 'compatibilist middle knowledge'—may play in helping understand God's relation to and control of evil, in particular."[35] Ware not only

[33] "God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy." WCF 5.1.

[34] Bruce A. Ware, *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 99.

[35] Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 99.

affirms the fact with the Westminster confession, but also he *models* how the confession *may be so*.[36]

Any Calvinist who attempts not only a confession but also a model of foreknowledge and freedom cannot help but be involved with all the issues most central and dense in Reformed theology: "just how God's permission of evil functions in light of his eternal decree by which he ordains all that will come to be." God-world relations, as well as matters of theology proper and metaphysics are found at this intersection. Ware cites the literature that brought Luis de Molina's ideas to the fore once again (such as the long-awaited arrival of a Molina translation by Alfred Freddoso, as well as William Lane Craig's studies and Thomas Morris's exposition of the view). Further, Terrance Tiessen developed his modification of Molinism based on his (a) embrace of monergism and (b) the compatibilist view of freedom. Ware provides the standard exposition of Molinism and middle knowledge. Ware's unique feature is his proposal to "think of middle knowledge as a subset of natural knowledge. That is, natural knowledge—knowledge of what *could* be—envisions all possibilities and all necessary truths."[37] Such writers as Paul Helm and John Laing, from opposite sides, have critiqued Ware most heavily here—on definitional grounds related to natural knowledge. The dissertation takes up this topic

[36] This move is not insignificant in contemporary debates between Molinists and Calvinists, for, as Greg Welty incisively argues, a strong distinction divides Calvinists. All Calvinists (1) affirm the historic statement of compatibility and (2) argue for its non-contradictory nature; some Calvinists (3a) then appeal to mystery with respect to the statement's paradox while others (3b) advance a model of precisely how God foreordains and foreknows in a world of free creatures. Greg Welty, "Molinist Gunslingers: God and the Authorship of Sin," in *Calvinism and Middle Knowledge: A Conversation*, ed. John D. Laing, Kirk R. MacGregor, and Greg Welty (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019), 51–54. Ware's treatment of God's relation to evil prepares the way for his introduction of what he calls "middle-knowledge Calvinism." Ware sketches the historical concept of God's permission for evil and divides the Reformed God-concept from that of the Arminian in two central ways: on the Arminian view, God will not prevent specific evils that require him to abridge and interrupt human freedom (since human freedom on the Arminian view would constitute the greater good). Also, the Arminian model of permission envisages a God who permits evil *as a class* rather than *specific instances* of evil. Arminians argue that the Calvinist God-concept is the more involved with evil. Ware turns that critique on its head since the Arminian God allowed evil as a class and without greater purposes in each discrete evil.

[37] Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 110–11.

related more specifically to its origin in the philosophy of counterfactual propositions.[38] As Ware sets forth, he employs the "subset" language in a very basic sense: what a person *would* be or do is always within the massive set of what he or she *could* be or do.[39]

Freedom of inclination, Ware argues, solves the problem in Molinist middle knowledge: the "commitment to libertarian freedom" allows "no necessary connection between knowledge of each state of affairs and knowledge of what the agent would in fact choose in each different setting," so "God could not know the agent's choice by knowing the circumstances."[40] With the phrase "by knowing the circumstances," Ware has addressed a species of Molinism's grounding problem, a problem which his compatibilist version would therefore not encounter. Since (1) the objectors to Molinism and to middle knowledge complain of libertarian freedom's impact upon the construct (the grounding problem) and since (2) using the middle knowledge notion offers good potential for a successful model of *how* God created with creaturely freedom, Ware argues for its reception among the Reformed. What remains for Ware's view is a more full model of divine deliberation; how one may model the decree and divine will-to-create in a fashion that (not temporally) is *logically deliberative*, making the decree all-at-once to represent these logical moments.

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[38] See chap. 10 of this diss.

[39] If middle knowledge will answer how sovereignty and freedom are compatible, Ware wonders, "*How* God can know by middle knowledge just what choices free creatures would make in various sets of possible circumstances. The problem here is that since freedom in the libertarian sense is defined as the ability, *all things being just what they are*, to choose differently, it is impossible to know what decision will be made simply by controlling the circumstances within which it is made" (112, emphasis original). How on libertarian freedom, he asks, would decisions would be made in certain conditions, both internal and external to the agent, when those conditions are not determinative and—even when they are very influential—the ability to do otherwise regardless of their strength is the very definition of the freedom? Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 112.

[40] Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 113.

Significance

A great many theological claims, including those outlined above, require a broader theory of possibility for their coherence. In other words, many theologians have adapted concepts and employed claims without fully developing their implications and checking their cogency against a more complete model. The subject matter of this dissertation relates directly to doctrines of providence, human freedom, theodicy, the fate of the unevangelized, and the nature of God. The dissertation ends by appraising many theological ideas, yet the dissertation—even if it provokes many rejoinders on this score—will still have met its main purpose, which is to make the theological arguments better founded philosophically in order to flourish more permanently.

In mathematics, (1) time and space are irrelevant categories in *how* the left side of an equation equals the right, and (2) the order of operations are still to be observed. Divine deliberation, in a similar manner, aims to model what operations of the divine mind constitute the decree and constitute much else metaphysically. Few questions of greater significance in theology could be conceived than how God's will and decree determines what is actual and how possibility relates to the actual world.

Definitions

Any metaphysical construct on this scale must deal with an ambitious array of conceptual issues. Many of them are well-known in the literature, yet the concepts can proliferate in various literature and, in doing so, take on unique nuances. While still aiming to avoid becoming pedantic, the following section briefly addresses key terminology, refreshing the terms' standard uses or highlighting how they will be used in this dissertation.

Determinism(s), Possible Worlds, "Books,"

Determinism refers generally to a thesis regarding the causal structure behind any action, seen to be particularly relevant to free actions. Thus, common definitions of determinism relate precisely to the metaphysics of free will, rather than generically to

metaphysics itself. Further, such definitions treat determinism as the thesis that creaturely actions are "ultimately determined by causes external to the will." Definitions of determinism focus to a remarkable extent upon causation, so much so that one can use the nude noun "determinism" without referring to it more specifically as "causal determinism," an error that I think analytic philosophers should be well-disciplined to avoid. Charles Taliaferro, in an otherwise superb volume, himself defines determinism as "the view that everything that occurs, occurs necessarily, given the laws of nature and all antecedent conditions."[41] The reader may hear echoes of the most famous causal determinist Pierre de Laplace in such a definition, yet the definition does not have any modifier (i.e. "casual") in front of it. Such a definition of determinism simply will not do because the historic, philosophical tradition furnishes a great many examples of determinism that do not depend on an unbreakable causal structure from "the laws of nature and antecedent conditions."

The philosopher must be careful to avoid strictly equating determinism with metaphysical necessity. Curiously, Taliaferro's definition of determinism makes a mistake, implying that future events occur *necessarily*, rather than simply *certainly occurring*.[42] Theological determinism, to take an example, has often created models by which the world's events – all of them – including those that impinge on the free actions of creatures are known by God, certain, and "determined" in that sense. Yet, that model of determinism can coincide with several theories related to the causal structure. That view of theological determinism *can* link up with the view of causal determinism already described. However, theological determinism could also link up with any number of other theories of the universe's total causal chain. Now well beyond Elizabeth Anscombe's inaugural lecture at Cambridge, philosophers should be well-accustomed to carrying on one conversation where causation can be analyzed non-deterministically, even if the future can be analyzed

[41] Charles Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 110.

[42] Taliaferro himself argues for this very distinction a few pages later, 116–17.

deterministically.[43] Thus, *determinism*, in general and in this dissertation, cannot and should not be used on its own. Of course, when one is strictly in this context or the other, a reader may know which kind of determinism is being referred to. In general, however, causal determinism, theological determinism, and logical determinism must be distinguished.

Logical determinism is a metaphysical thesis that argues the future is fixed and unalterable, like the past. To put it in the idiom of modality, logical determinism affirms the truth value of all temporally-indexed statements, even if they are future to us. One should note that this view comports perfectly well with theological determinism, yet a metaphysician may easily be a logical determinist without being a theological determinist. David Lewis's account of possible worlds (and many other non-theistic accounts) perfectly well establish the notion that propositions in the future tense have a truth value, yet without linking up or making that truth only depend on God.

Thus, causal determinism, as a term, has the broadest extension. In other words, one can be a logical determinist without being a causal determinist. One cannot be a causal determinist without being a logical determinist. Everyone accepting the thesis of causal determinism is, doubtless, a theological determinist as well since most God-concepts (Eastern or Western) include some version of omniscience.[44] However, the reverse is obviously not true: many theological determinists would not affirm causal determinism. Further, many logical determinists would not affirm causal determinism. In point of fact, possible-worlds modality depends on some version of theological and/or logical determinism.

A possible world is a total true set of propositions that cohere to make a feasible world. Thus, with regard to the status of the future (the value of its propositions

[43] G. E. M. Anscombe, *Causality and Determination: An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

[44] Omniscience is the claim that God knows the truth or falsity of every proposition that can be known.

with respect of truth and falsehood), every possible-worlds metaphysician is a determinist of some variety. This dissertation will use the term with some reluctance, not seeking to multiply uses because this can multiply confusions. I will primarily use the term in reference to free will debates, where it tends to refer to causal determinism. However, with respect to Reformed Christian doctrine about the decrees, theological determinism is generally in view. Last, in my evaluation of certain Christian models (i.e., Molinism and Arminianism) of interpretation, I will refer to logical determinism.

Free Will and Forms of Compatibilism, and Incompatibilism

The problem with "free will," even as a term, is that no one agrees on its meaning.[45] The following brief description aims not to get too entangled in how various conceptions of metaphysics and determinism affect the free will definitions. However, to maintain a perfect wall of separation is impossible; this fact is largely because of the influence of compatibilism and incompatibilism in free will debates.

Compatibilism is the thesis that some form of determinism is compatible with human freedom. (The free will literature in philosophy tends to focus on whether "causal determinism" is compatible with human freedom). Incompatibilism is of course the denial of this thesis (and usually involves causal determinism): "determinism is incompatible with human freedom."

Thus, libertarian free will has most commonly in the tradition simply been the affirmation that a free-will choice is a choice made in the presence of alternate possibilities. This view has most delicately been put this way: "For any free choice *C,*

[45] At the risk of devolving into "grinding my own ax," I still cannot discover in conversation or in the literature what the difference between "will" and "free will" is. I struggle to find sentences where "free will" cannot be replaced with "will." These sentences suffer no loss from the replacement, and no pertinent difference seems to obtain between "will" and "free will." Philosophers do not develop concepts of "coerced willful acts" but "coerced actions," assuming that if an action is coerced it is not willful. Generally, "willful" and "free" function coextensively, and the proliferation of appeals to "genuine" or "actual" free will can feel like special pleading. When "free" seems to carry so much water in these debates, the difference it makes should be obvious. If this cannot be made clear, then the simpler language should be preferred.

Agent *A* had the power to do the act or, at least, to refrain from the act." This definition is appropriately minimal and reduces itself to the two options (acting or refraining), though more options could be present to the agent. This traditional view in more recent writing is called leeway libertarianism (to distinguish it from source libertarian views). However, after Frankfurt's critique of the principle of alternate possibilities (PAP), many incompatibilists have either accepted his critique of alternate possibilities or simply no longer emphasized the principle in their models. Instead, many incompatibilists identify the presence of free will in any act that is ultimately "up to" the individual. The problem with these so-called "source views" is that the word "ultimately" must carry a lot of weight in the definition and that *ultimately* is multivalent in its meaning. The situation leaves both compatibilists and incompatibilists to develop "source views" of human freedom. To be sure, source incompatibilists outnumber source compatibilists, yet one of the most famous compatibilists, a touchpoint in the last generation of free will debates, developed in his *magnum opus* what can only be described as a species of the source of freedom.[46] When the term *ultimately* is interpreted in a metaphysical sense, in my view, the resulting phrase cannot be distinguished from the idea that "the action could have been otherwise," which itself cannot be distinguished from the principle of alternate possibilities. My concerns about a distinction-without-a-difference notwithstanding, leeway libertarian free will requires the presence of multiple options or pathways for actions, whereas source libertarian free will requires only that the action was "ultimately" up to the agent.

Our actual world, with all of its parts and relationships, exists ontologically. However, we cannot help but use language regarding the realm of possibility, and most thinkers consider possibility to be some metaphysical feature of the real world. Thus, any complete metaphysic must address a theory of the possible (modality) in some way. The nearly ubiquitous theory of modality in contemporary metaphysics is the possible-worlds

[46] John Martin Fischer, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). See also his more recent presentation of source compatibilism in John Martin Fischer et al., eds., *Four Views on Free Will* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

modality of David Lewis.[47] A possible world is conceived, like the real world, to be a way of referring to a "book"—an innumerable set of true propositions that is "total" in the sense that it is lacking no proposition to be complete and compossible as a world.

The greatest difficulty with discussions surrounding "compatibilism and incompatibilism" is that the terms are fundamentally relative and relate to multiple different conversations. First, compatibilism and incompatibilism are most often taken as the conjunction of two beliefs, one belief related to causal determinism, the other belief related to the existence of human free actions. Taken in this way, the incompatibilist believes that causal determinism is incompatible with human freedom.

However, compatibilism can refer to the conjunction of one of the other kinds of determinism with creaturely free acts. In particular, the incompatibilist thesis of the open theists contrasts logical determinism with creaturely free acts: "The future cannot be determined in any sense, if creatures are to be free."

Forms of Foreknowledge

This branch of the debate plays out in traditional Christian theology, for the Bible contains many statements regarding divine election and foreknowledge. Theologians develop models by which to interpret those statements. Thus, the question of freedom and foreknowledge is a broadly monotheistic and specifically Christian *loci* that considers the compatibility of human free actions with a form of theological determinism, divine foreknowledge of all temporally-indexed creaturely free acts.

Open theism is the negation of this posit. Divine foreknowledge, according to the open theist, can refer only to temporally-indexed propositions that have nothing to do with creaturely freedom. Thus, what has usually been meant by "theological determinism" is impossible on the openness view. Instead, foreknowledge extends only to things not related to creaturely freedom (and therefore the determinism in view may be

[47] Lewis however struggled to retain modal realism without the actual existence of the possible worlds.

a causal determinism that is truly limited to natural happenings and initial conditions). Arminianism is a theological thesis that argues for the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom, as well as the incompatibility of human freedom with causal and theological determinism. Arminian determinism is logical determinism, and that logical determinism is vouchsafed *via* a view that, in some sense, the future exists.

The Christian doctrine of divine foreknowledge, therefore, according to the Arminian, depends upon God's knowledge of the world, which in some sense is not actually sourced in him. In other words, though the world ontologically depends on God, on Arminianism, creaturely free acts do not metaphysically depend on God. God does not know them via his decree, his natural knowledge, or any other feature in theology proper. God's foreknowledge can therefore be described in figurative language: "God looks down the halls of time and foreknows those who choose him." This basis of foreknowledge is knowledge based on the actual world and is known as "simple foreknowledge."

Molinism is another theological construct that seeks to resolve the tension between divine foreknowledge and human freedom (again, freedom that is normally conceived as libertarian freedom and—in most historic discussions—a form of leeway libertarianism). The Molinist view of foreknowledge depends on possible worlds, although some expositions do not develop the concept and instead simply focus on counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. Molinists generally assert that God knows what "any person A would do in a given set of circumstances C," due to God's divine knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (i.e. what that person would do in a similar set of circumstances in every possible world). According to the Molinist view, God knows, in his omniscience, the true propositions of the possible worlds and the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom when he decides to actualize our world. Most Molinists are careful to assert that creatures are in some sense "co-actualizers" with God since the truth value of temporally-indexed free creaturely actions obtains *via* that creaturely action.

Metaphysical, Ontological, and Practical Versions of Necessity

Metaphysical necessity refers to statements that are true or substances that exist in every possible world. For example, God exist in every possible world; likewise, mathematical propositions are true in every possible world. Metaphysically contingent substances and statements are true in only some possible worlds: Socrates is a contingent substance; likewise, "Socrates was an Athenian citizen" is a statement whose truth is contingent, not necessary. Metaphysical necessity and contingency can be contrasted with ontological necessity and contingency. Above, the existence of God was both metaphysically necessary and ontologically necessary; God's being is "from himself."

The truth value of "2+2 = 4" can be both metaphysically necessary and ontologically contingent. For example, in the course of this dissertation, I will critique Platonism's view regarding the truth of mathematics. On Platonism, the truths of mathematics are metaphysically necessary and not ontologically contingent: they do not depend upon God. They are eternally existing in the hard sense. Yet, another widely-accepted Christian option is to insist that mathematical truths are metaphysically necessary (true in every possible world) yet depend upon God for their existence in every possible world (as divine ideas or some similar construct) and, therefore, are ontologically contingent.

On my view, everything is ontologically contingent, except for God. I think the better of the philosophical argument and the tradition of Christian theology requires that God himself is the only existing thing (whether statement or substance) that truly has his ontological status "from himself." Therefore, the more interesting analysis has to do with metaphysical, rather than ontological, necessity and contingency.

Other things besides God are metaphysically necessary. However, whether Christian theologians can elegantly and coherently claim that the world's creatures, as well as true and false statements about them, can be metaphysically necessary, remains to be seen. My own opinion is that any Christian view that regards the creation as

metaphysically necessary is not unorthodox, not transgressing the bounds of the creeds and statements of the Christian church.[48] I do, however, believe that such a view is theologically peculiar; Christians do affirm *creatio ex nihilo* not *creatio ex se*. I find the view philosophically problematic; the view that everything happens by metaphysical necessity is hard to marry to a philosophical system. The metaphysical necessity of the creation amounts to the denial of the existence of any possibility. The preceeding point leads me to the definition of *fatalism*. I will avoid *fatalism* entirely in this dissertation because the term has a chequered past. Some still use the term in that sense supplied by the Greco-Roman poets: "what will come to pass, will come to pass regardless of the causal chain that proceeds it." Analytic philosophy has used the term in the more tight sense: "what comes to pass comes to pass necessarily."

Christian theology has not extended models of foreknowledge to include metaphysical necessity. A crucial clarification with respect to fatalism is an order at this point. Traditional Christian foreknowledge doctrine affirms the proposition that "necessarily, if God knows action or event A at time T-1, then it will happen." Many assume the equivalence of the preceding claim with "necessarily, if God knows action or event a at time T-1, then it will happen necessarily." Necessity in the preceding proposition has to do with the if-then relationship between the two clauses, not the actual occurrence of the events in the real world. Thus, all that follows is that the apodosis "will happen" upon the actuality of the protasis, not that it will "happen by necessity."

The point can be further illustrated as follows: the model status of necessity applies in the following if/then clause: "If I blink, I move my eyelids." One may say, therefore, "Necessarily, if I blink, I move my eyelids," however, this does not transfer the metaphysical status of necessity. After all, the affirmation "I blink" is not meant to be metaphysically necessary but contingent. The second premise is, in fact, "I blink

[48] However, if one did believe that such claims to metaphysical necessity are unorthodox, he or she would doubtless aim at the creedal statements on creation and phrases like "maker of all things, visible and invisible," which can be construed to require that created things are not metaphysically necessary.

contingently." Therefore (at the risk of being terribly otiose!), I could say that the conclusion, presuming the truth of "If I blink," is as follows: "Necessarily, I move my eyelids contingently."

Thus, whether one sees this as the proper, chastened definition of the word *fatalism*, or whether he or she prefers to refer to it in every case simply as metaphysical necessity, Christian thought has avoided claiming that the history of the world, its creatures and actions, are metaphysically necessary.

Practical necessity must be clearly distinguished from metaphysical and ontological necessity. Practical necessity describes what follows necessarily under the auspices of some tightly-circumscribed set of conditions, usually the circumstance of an individual's character. Source libertarians and their compatibilist counterparts agree on these cases of practical necessity, wherein some free actions occur without leeway possibilities but remain morally responsible because the person's very character excluded the other possibilities—rendering the choice only "practically necessary." The dissertation interacts with metaphysical necessity and will only refer to other kinds of necessity with their modifier (i.e. ontological or practical).

The notion of logical priority will help the discussion of decretal theology after the Reformation. Logical priority is the relationship between premises and their conclusions, whether in actual or hypothetical circumstances. Thus, in temporal succession, we might observe the following: a general determined the military objective, the lieutenant received the objective, and the lieutenant died together with some of his infantry in achieving the objective. The logical order does not follow the temporal order and, in some cases, even reverses it. The risking of life and limb is logically posterior to the objective itself. Thus, a proposition containing an evil (the deaths of the lieutenant and some regulars), can be analyzed logically subsequent to the strategic objective—in order to consider, for example, the morality or prudence of the general's decision. To see it from a non-moral angle, one can illuminate the nature of logical precedence and subsequence in

chemistry: logically prior to the use of mathematics to predict physical reactions is the applicability of mathematics to the universe. You cannot have one without the other, and the dependence relation runs from the metaphysical claim about math's applicability to its use in physical chemistry.

Conclusion

This chapter has situated divine deliberation and its concepts in contemporary discussion. Philosophers, such as Kvanvig and Tong have used the term in modal philosophy; its locus in Kvanvig was the divine mind and Platonic abstracta in Tong. I argued for the former approach, not only due to Christian doctrinal commitments concerning divine freedom and aseity but also due to internal features of Platonic objects themselves. Modeling a modal theory in the divine mind presented greater possibility for the needed *relationships* of propositions and the obtaining of the model status of necessity or contingency, as the case may be. Modeling a modal theory on Platonic objects left many questions unanswered due to the fact that Platonic abstract objects, by definition, do not stand in causal relations and, most importantly, have no non-obvious way of accounting for contingency, due to their own necessity and their lack of personal ontological features such as will or freedom.

The discussion of evangelical theologians demonstrated the far-reaching use of model claims, in both technical and popular works. The survey showed how Paul Copan employed such modal propositions as a motivation for divine world choice. William Lane Craig was the first to consider that modal claims about human Transworld depravity protect the righteousness of God in judging the unevangelized. For Lake and Goodman, modal propositions about persons in other worlds served as a moral proxy for what takes place in the actual world. For Bruce Little, modal claims modified greater-good theodicy (i.e. "Some evils prevent greater evils"). He further included notions that God "proves hypotheticals" and that God's knowledge includes possibility "at the time it becomes knowable." For Bruce Ware, the modal propositions involved in a compatibilist view of

middle knowledge provided a more elegant understanding of divine knowledge and providence on the whole.

Several of these questions must be considered further within their own disciplines. For example, questions regarding salvation and damnation have never been out of Christian discussion. The problem that Craig and Copan addressed, may be addressed on exegetical and systematic grounds. Their question concerns, after all, whether it is morally permissible for God to send to hell persons who did not hear the gospel in their lifetimes (which is a subset of the more basic question *"What is the basis for damnation to hell?"*). My contention, however, was both that all of these examples show the wide variety of evangelical interlocutors who use modal claims and that they cannot be fully assessed until the modal theory undergirding their claims is teased out and understood. Just as no team can compete in the arena without first putting on their uniforms, so also will these claims need greater internal coherence—a theory of modality for the discrete modal propositions that they employ. The dissertation now turns to that topic and aims to establish firmly the need for modality in both philosophy and theology. Chapter 2 must create the burden: why do both philosophy and theology need a theory of possibility?

CHAPTER 2

WHY MODALITY? AQUINAS, EDWARDS, AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF A THEOLOGY OF POSSIBILITY

Divine deliberation as a concept aims to bring together the doctrine of God and the metaphysics of modality. The task is particularly challenging since neither conversation partner thinks of the other often. Metaphysicians writing on the theory of possibility do not usually consider divine knowledge as the right and necessary locus for possible worlds' existence. Theologians even more rarely consider the need for a theory of possibility at all, much less in the doctrine of God. In order to bring these family members back to the table, this chapter addresses the basic need for a theory of modality, with a special focus on showing the need for modal philosophy in theology. The chapter defines the problem of modal collapse in the Thomist view of God and creation and argues that divine will is the way out of the collapse and into proper modal complexity. Whether one retains many features of the Thomist concept or modifies theology proper more broadly, some theory of modality in God is necessary to retain the concept of possibility in the world and a non-arcane concept of freedom in God.[1] In this way, divine deliberation can (1) overcome the problem of a perfect being who makes a desired creation, and (2) preserve divine intentional action. The aim of the chapter is first to describe what modality is and why it must arise in a theory of metaphysics, second to apply the need for a theory of modality

[1] Thomist and like-minded interpreters do posit a free God, yet with a concept of freedom that involves no contra-possibles. Setting modality aside, even the Thomist appeal to a definition like, "Any entity is free *iff* the entity acts uncoerced in accordance with nature" is misleading since the definition's purchase relies on the mind's immediate relation of such a definition to contingent creatures, who have a complex modality and (thus, in relation) a more minimal nature (i.e. less is true of them across all possible worlds). For a system that believes God's essence and existence are identical, *it is God's* nature is to possess all his life at once. This definition of freedom seems to fail because "acts uncoerced in accordance with nature" are, in the definition, understood to be *different than* the nature—a modal distinction.

to theology, third to demonstrate how some theological systems are endangered by a collapse of all metaphysics into the model status of necessity. The fourth and final aim of the chapter is to show how the concept of the original ultimate end—an important feature of divine deliberation—avoids this modal collapse. The chapter concludes with an additional argument in favor of this view of God and possibility: it preserves what is known in philosophy as "intentional action" for God as an agent.

The Philosophical Need for a Theory of Possibility

The general need for a theory of modality arises from our everyday application of different modes of existence to objects and propositions. We cannot help but accept that the propositions "2+2 = 4" and "The Allies were victorious in World War II" are both *true* but true in different *ways*. Similarly, any living person might say "God exists, and so do I," but the mode of existence would inescapably be different (necessary existence versus contingent existence). Further, we all carry to some extent that existential sense that we "might not have existed at all" and that morbid sense that someday we shall not exist in this earthly life. Unless the philosopher mounts a defense of an anti-realist position of these modal claims (that they merely express emotions, that they all, in fact, have the same modal status, that they all reflect mere confusion and error), then modal realism is to be presumed.

Modal claims inhabit our everyday moral speech. *"If I were there, I would have helped you"* is a very simple modal moral commitment that most speakers would believe conveys a value with respect to truth or falsehood. Can propositions with modal auxiliaries both possess a truth value and successfully refer to the real world? A proposition is a statement of fact that has a value with respect to truth or falsehood. Can such statements include modal auxiliaries (*"If I were there, I would've helped you."*)? To deny the existence of modal propositions requires some other interpretation. Some form of emotivism is the most common, that is, the view that such statements are mere self-

reports (non-propositional) of emotional antipathy or empathy.[2] Aside from the many arguments that may be presented against the non-reality of modal propositions, the lived experience and the ineluctable use of modal propositions beggars the imagination and leaves an antirealist position implausible. Yet, what the anti-realist position has going for it is simple: few people, having affirmed or accepted some real significance to modal propositions, have actually proceeded to *model* metaphysically the sense in which possibilities exist and the way in which propositions may refer to modal realities. Instead of overthrowing modality, too many have ignored it. Nevertheless, to substantiate any difference between necessity, possibility, contingency, and other metaphysical modes of being, a theory of modality is necessary in standard philosophy.

The Theological Need for a Theory of Possibility

Theological metaphysics provides an elegant account of necessity. On all historic Christian accounts, God is a necessary being (sometimes, the *only* necessary entity). Most theological metaphysics have retained other necessaries, some by means of traditional philosophy (such as Platonism or Aristotelianism), some by means of alterations to the theory, placing necessary truths in the divine mind.

William Lane Craig's exposition of God and abstract objects has proved persuasive among large swaths of evangelical philosophers, particularly his claims that standard Christian theology is at odds with Platonism.[3] Anti-Platonism is incumbent on the Christian thinker, Craig argues, because pre-existing and unchanging eternal forms

[2] The state of play in this debate is parallel to the "language of God" controversy in the middle of last century. For all the reasons presented in the overthrow of that mid-century *credo*, I reject also that ordinary language cannot refer to modal propositions.

[3] William Lane Craig, "God and Abstract Objects," *Philosophia Christi* 17, no. 2 (2015): 269–76. Not merely a distinction between material and immaterial, the concrete/abstract object distinction is usually based on causal powers; thus, contemporary Platonists defend the theory of eternal, uncreated forms that do not stand in causal relationship to the real word—a realm of *abstracta*. Humans are contingent, material concrete objects; God is a necessary, immaterial concrete object.

are essential to the platonic theory.[4] Any existing eternal form creates an eternal and ontological relationship between God and other metaphysical necessities. Especially insofar as those metaphysically necessary abstract objects furnish the truth of the worlds God may create, they threaten divine aseity.[5]

Several of Craig's conversation partners have admitted the danger but noticed how the concern for orthodoxy turns simply on the *origin* and *relationship* of the divine forms to God. Consequently, a view like Greg Welty's—divine theistic conceptualism—can retain much of the standard Platonic scheme, while making the forms ideas in the mind of God, ideas that God has been eternally thinking and eternally knowing with respect to all possibilities.[6] On this model, the forms, whether they be the three primary colors or the truths of arithmetic, are necessary but ontologically dependent. They are concepts in the mind of God that depend on divine thinking, and God in his necessary existence necessarily thinks those divine thoughts.[7] When God in his necessary existence necessarily thinks of such divine ideas, they share in the modal status of necessity.[8]

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[4] Brain Leftow argues that the same concern applies with respect to modal truth—if its ontology does not depend on God's: "The possible candidates for ontology in God are His nature, ideas, and powers, and God has these. . . . I aim to sketch a theory that rests modal truth on God's nature and mental life, thus defusing its challenge to divine ultimacy." Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 26–27.

[5] William Lane Craig, *God over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1–6.

[6] Greg Welty, "Divine Theistic Conceptualism," in *Beyond the Control of God? Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul M. Gould, Bloomsbury Studies in Philosophy of Religion (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 81–94. Similar concepts of divine ideas were developed in the previous generation of Christian philosophy but with epistemology as the background, rather than the metaphysics of God. See Ronald Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Lima, OH: Academic Renewal, 2003).

[7] Tom Ward argues that divine ideas are a product of God's own self-reflection, thus creating all ideas (i.e., which serve as forms, metaphysical truthmakers, and the like—all of which depend on God). As he says, "there are secular truths." Thomas M. Ward, *Divine Ideas*, Cambridge Elements in Religion and Monotheism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 20–24.

[8] Divine deliberation comports with the recent proposal that reality is comprised fundamentally of information. I had already begun to think of the matter along these lines before coming across the "divine informationalism" of Einar Duenger Bøhn, *God and Abstract Objects*, Cambridge Elements in Philosophy

The Modal Collapse

In a vision like conceptualism for abstract objects, a feature of the system is its ability to make the abstract objects *depend* on God, to safeguard divine aseity, while still collapsing their modal existence into necessity. There is no world in which the divine mind is not thinking the other necessary abstract objects and furnishing them with a conceptual basis. What is a feature in the system for necessary abstract objects is a bug in the system for non-necessary concrete objects. What is an achievement for conceiving what exists by necessity is a failure for conceiving what exists contingently, what does not exist in some possible and feasible worlds.

"Modal collapse" for certain abstract objects reduces them to necessity, which is the intent.[9] Yet, on Thomism and other historic God-concepts, God necessarily knows the world and acts all of his acts within that world—the very definition of "the complete possession, all at once, of illimitable life."[10] If God in his necessary existence necessarily thinks of the one world he will create and necessarily acts all the causes that affect the world by remotion, then the world's ontology remains dependent but its metaphysical status shares in necessity. Modal collapse is a reduction to absurdity if it is applied to concrete objects that are to exist contingently in worlds. A reduction of contingencies to necessity is a reduction to absurdity. For this reason, theological metaphysics needs a

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of Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 32–47. See also Paul Davies and Niels Henrik Gregersen, eds., *Information and the Nature of Reality: From Physics to Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[9] Nathan Shannon argues, "When contemporary versions of DC [divine conceptualism] say 'G/god' they merely rename the notion of necessary truth, and fail to refer to God." In other words, he reduces divine conceptualism to epistemology—which then makes a much more scant claim. Shannon's angle doesn't completely lack for insight; however, it also is a little pedestrian. After all, DC proponents do "rename" necessary truth since all necessary truth is grounded in God. In referring to such necessities they would be failing to refer to God-as-he-is yet would certainly refer to God-as-ground-of-being, a fact that would shake few DC proponents. Nathan Shannon, "The Epistemology of Divine Conceptualism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 78, no. 1 (August 2015): 123–30.

[10] Boethius's definition of eternity is the *locus classicus*. Paul Helm adds that God "possesses the whole of his life at once, it is not lived successively." Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 24. Also definitive for the view is Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *The Journal of Philosophy* 78, no. 8 (1981): 429–58.

model of modality. Though no theory of possibility should be creedalized, some theory or theories must become standardized so that the church may more consistently avoid the error of modal collapse. In fact, the creeds and such theological verities as the Creator-creature distinction set the dogmatic footings on which Christian philosophers might pour suitable foundations for theological models of possibility.

The lacuna of a model of possibility is most clear in the tradition developed by Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas's model of God included 'all that was not-God' in divine thought about himself. In other words, Aquinas accounts for actuality within God's eternal thought about himself, but not for possibility. Aquinas accounts for possibility-within-actuality in his concept of *potentia*, so his system could prove plausible to those who allow that physical substance can support metaphysical possibility. Yet, standard Thomism allows for no potential whatsoever in God, such that God eternally acts all things that will, in the world, have their effect "by remotion."[11]

A significant metaphysical problem obtains for the standard Thomist account: no distinction separates the actual world from non-actual worlds; no theory of possibility is actually constructed, so all contingency collapses into necessity. Indeed, some Thomists could modify the picture, such that God thinks about divine thoughts that contain both his actual and possible creations. Yet, if this thinking is "an eternal act" and in every possible world, then still nothing prevents the modal collapse. What ought to be contingent shares in the modal status of necessity. On this schema, just as in every

[11] Fred Sanders follows the Thomistic separation of divine causes from actual effects:

> But this scholastic-sounding translation into the conceptuality of internal actions is fruitful in several ways. If we do not unpack Trinitarianism using this conceptuality, it will be hard to deal with a number of pressures. . . . If we are to use the idiom of action or agency to talk about what God does, we will, of course, say that God is the source of all sorts of effects within the order of creation. But once we have begun talking in this way about an agent who carries out actions with effects, we will need to apply it consistently and ask about what God is doing when considered apart from these doings in the world. At that point we have a choice to make. We could say that within the divine life itself there is no action leading to effects, because the life of God, being simple, is above the kind of distinctions implied in agency. Agency, on this view, would be something God has with respect to that which is not God. As for the life of God itself, we might describe its being as the very act of Be-ing. (Fred Sanders, *The Triune God*, New Studies in Dogmatics [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016], 130)

possible world, propositions about prime numbers are true, so also are propositions about all contingencies true in every possible world.[12] Modal distinctions do not obtain; possibility does not exist; and all that is *just is* metaphysically necessary. The modal collapse pertains in all doctrines of God that make actuality part of God's illimitable life, eternally-possessed, "all at once."

R. T. Mullins describes the modal collapse from a different and illuminating angle. He considers the modal collapse as a way out of the doctrine of divine simplicity's (DDS) dealing with God's unactualized potential (since, on DDS, God can have no unactualized potential): "One could avoid this problem by allowing for a modal collapse. One could say that everything is absolutely necessary. Necessarily, there is one possible world—this world. Necessarily, God must exist with creation. . . . There is no such thing as contingency when one allows a modal collapse."[13] The modal collapse *option* becomes the modal collapse *problem*, however, when God's *purus actus* (which is identical with his nature) then includes—*with the modal status of necessity*—the creation.[14] Aiming to avoid making God depend upon or respond to creatures, some versions of DDS—such as that of Katherin Rogers—are "forced to conclude that creatures do have some effect on

[12] Not only due to Christian theology's rejection of creation's metaphysical necessity and embrace of *creatio ex nihilo*, the modal collapse is devastating for the entire structure of thought.

[13] R. T. Mullins, "Simply Impossible, A Case against Divine Simplicity," *JRT* (2013): 196.

[14] Michael J. Dodds's writing exemplifies how many Thomists discuss different patterns of causality, when the real problem is modality: "Aquinas teaches that God is the source of substantial form as well as the source of being. As God continued action is needed to hold things and being, so his action is also required for the continued existence of substantial forms and [the] particular species or natural types that exist in virtue of those forms." Michael J. Dodds, *Unlocking Divine Action: Contemporary Science & Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 197. Dodds remains committed to the doctrine of such forms' ontological grounding in the divine nature, yet he shows how these are produced extrinsic to the divine nature: "God produces substantial forms through the causality of creatures as secondary and instrumental causes. The use of secondary causes does not bespeak any divine limitation, but (if anything) a divine exuberance in willing to share "the abundance of his goodness" with creatures." However, none of the preening about causality matters if God creates from his essential nature, in which case the secondary causes and the substantial forms share in the modality of God's essential nature: necessity (197–98).

God's very essence."[15] Most who follow the broadly Thomist concept sketched above are confident that "Classical Christian Theism"[16] does not succumb (does not even encounter!) such problems with coherence. Katherin Rogers is a commendable exception who confronts the problem and aims for a future solution. However, celebrated evangelical literature does not address the collapse of all contingency into necessity. Some classical theists have worried that the possibility of contingency in God is too great to allow for the modal distinction in the will-to-create. Yet, three reasons uphold the effort. First, the modal collapse is inevitable without situating modality in theology proper.[17] Second, such distinctions are standard in historical theology (and thus non-threatening in constructive theology), even among contemporary writers who would be considered "Classical Theists."[18] The late John Webster, for example, defines the world as "a non-necessary, novel and voluntary work of the Trinity."[19] He further argues that "the triune God could be without the world; no perfection of God would be lost, no triune bliss

[15] Katherin Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 37. At this point the problem is nothing short of a morass for Thomists or other hard versions of Classical Theism (Rogers herself is more Anselmian than Thomist in her account). The head of the snake is eating its tail when, to preserve simplicity, the Classical Theist must claim that contingent creatures ought to be considered in the very essence of God.

[16] I use the term advisedly because (1) the phrase is not found in the literature before the last ten years and remains highly polemical, (2) at the moment "Classical Christian Theism" (CCT) still brings more heat than light, and (3) the phrase implies that Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, Aquinas, *et alii* are in some sense (a) mutually entailing, and/or (b) without their own differences, and (c) without critique by Reformed and scholastic theologians. In terms of historical actuality, the tradition *did* work out one way, but (in terms of the possibilities of its logical entailments) the tradition *could have* worked out in a number of other ways. The moniker "CCT" tends to obscure this fact and does so in a way that calls unorthodox the writing and worship of whoever falls outside of its polemical parameters.

[17] Cf. Klaas J. Kraay who argues that theists *should* embrace modal collapse for its problem-solving ability in theodicy. Klaas J. Kraay, "Theism and Modal Collapse," *APQ* 48 no. 4 (2011): 361–72. He argues that if everything shares in the modal status of necessity, then God cannot be responsible for the moral implications of history (369–72). To avoid these kinds of problems, modal complexity (1) must be developed (2) in God.

[18] Or, at least, would have been considered "Classical Theists" before the polemics in recent literature.

[19] John Webster, "Trinity and Creation," *IJST* 12, no. 1 (2010): 4.

compromised, were the world not to exist . . . ."[20] Third, the metaphysics of modality needs some foundation, and—as is always the case in Christian philosophy—its foundation ought to be in the life of the triune God. Thus, a concept of the divine will, as is found in the Reformed scholastics, provides the best pathway for separating in one logical moment all possible worlds as the objects of divine knowing and, in another logical moment, the actual versus non-actual worlds as objects of the divine knowing. In this way, the divine will establishes all secondary causes and contingent things.

A Caveat on the Creator/Creature Distinction

In forcefully making the case that the *purus actus* God-concept does require model collapse, this dissertation must be careful not to insinuate that the exponents of the "*purus actus* God" uniformly hold this position or, as a group, agree that their view entails modal collapse. Some, such as Katherin Rogers, do see modal collapse entailed and have commenced work on how to address the concern. Some aim to present reasons for why the pure act God-who-is-necessary (who acts all acts eternally, and whose acts equal his essence) still can uphold contingency and true distinction between Creator and creature. All intend to maintain the Creator/creature distinction, regardless of whether they are successful in doing so.[21]

The state of play among Thomists—or their classical theist kinfolk—seems to be that all the propositions true about God and his actions towards contingent creatures can be true and true eternally.[22] Thus, metaphysically God's eternal actions involve contingent creatures, and they impinge on his essence. For such thinkers, however, the

[20] Webster, "Trinity and Creation," 12.

[21] One should note that to be ontologically outside God is not enough in this case (although, in my estimation, this is where the conflict truly lies and is a proper area for further writing). The creator/creature distinction ought to apply to all metaphysics, yet the tradition deals with the distinction primarily (and, commonly, *only*) with respect to creaturely dependent ontology.

[22] Cf. Fergus Kerr's chapter "Stories of Being" provides the best treatment of the breadth of Thomism on this score. Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2002), 73–96.

fact that creatures are *ontologically* separate from God seems to satisfy concerns over the creator/creature distinction.

Indeed, no one should accuse Anselm, Aquinas, or anyone else in this tradition of not being concerned for and focused on the creator/creature distinction as a formal principle of their entire theological project. Tyler Whitman's recent monograph bears this out beautifully.[23] My point is that this way of describing God as "wholly other"[24] requires that God—whose essence and action are identical—eternally acts all acts that are related to contingent creatures. In this way, the "wholly other" God has been pushed so far around the horseshoe that he includes creatures into his necessary existence on the far side. I agree with Katherin Rogers on the implications, while she and I depart ways on whether the *purus actus* view can be rescued intact or whether it should be modified.

I address dispositionalism with respect to modality, broadly speaking, in chapter 12 of this dissertation. Modality is largely construed along the lines of dispositions or powers-within-animate-beings in Aristotelian metaphysics. Barbara Vetter's work is now the touchpoint for anyone who wants to maintain the Aristotle/Aquinas metaphysic in a way that comports with and employs the standard operators of modal logic.[25] I do not treat the issue at great length in this chapter because, properly speaking, in Thomas's adoption of the Philosopher, (and in the deployment of his own theology proper), *potentia* is a category that *strictly cannot apply to God*.[26] Thus,

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[23] Tyler Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Another example of strong simplicity doctrine that aims for the Creator/creature distinction as a formal principle is Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account*, T & T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology 30 (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[24] I.e., according to Aristotelian mereology, God can have no parts—even "moments of life" or "events" in the philosophical sense.

[25] Barbara Vetter, *Potentiality: From Dispositions to Modality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[26] Joseph E. Lenow has misapplied Vetter's "multi-track powers" that undergird her adoption of the Aristotelian view. She is right that, if the metaphysics work, then creaturely dispositions can map a recognizable modality. However, Vetter's view (and Aristotle's, for that matter) applies to the "multi-track

we cannot fetch the modal complexity of non-necessity from the category of *potentia*. *Potentia* applies only on one side of the Creator/creature distinction and thus is reserved only for the later discussion of other modal theories.

Divine Perfection, Creation *Ex Nihilo*, and Spinoza's Dilemma

In the early modern period, Baruch Spinoza's critique of the traditional God-concept struck a deep blow not only to Christianity *per se* but also to any formulation of God that preserves both a strong creator/creature distinction and divine perfection.[27] Baruch Spinoza problematizes divine perfection and the creator/creature distinction in a simple argument (that I have adapted for this context):

> P1. If God is eternally perfect in his nature and existence, no cause, reason, inducement, or desire can move him to change his existence, create new existent things, or fashion a design that would be desirable, useful, or better in any sense.
>
> P2. God does create "that which is not God" and does so to achieve a glorious end.
>
> P3. God, with his creation and with the ends achieved, has accomplished something desirable, useful, or better in some sense.
>
> P4. God's final state with creation being better than his original state, his original state without creation was not perfect.

To put Baruch Spinoza in conversation with Thomas Aquinas himself is useful, yet it is Thomas's inheritors who have, since the time of Spinoza, developed Thomism, at least in part, in connection to his critiques.

Aquinas's way in. Thomism's way out of Spinoza's problem pushes further into the divine nature. Thomism's way out is more properly *a way further in* to the divine *purus actus*. Though Thomism's camps and shades of thought are many, the primary response to Spinoza's dilemma is quite uniform. Thomism preserves its cogency by

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powers" of *creatures in their contingency*, and divine simplicity (in its Thomist version) entails the denial of all potentiality in God. Joseph E. Lenow, "Shoring Up Divine Simplicity against Modal Collapse: A Powers Account," *Religious Studies* 57 no. 1 (2021): 10–27.

[27] Though he does not claim Edwards's literary awareness of Spinoza's *ethics* in particular, Walter Shultz successfully draws the broader lines of connection. Walter Shultz, "Jonathan Edwards's Concept of an Original Ultimate End," *JETS* 56, no. 1 (March 2013): 107–10.

appealing to the identity of essence and existence within God. Since God's essence and existence are identical, all of God's actions have eternally existed with God. God has eternally acted all actions. Further, because every divine act is identical with the divine essence and vice versa, no contingency enters the theological picture. Therefore, Thomism holds, key premises of Spinoza's problematic fail (principally P4, above). The actions of God are all at once, all of a piece, and all identical with the divine nature. God never begins and never ceases to effect the causes sourced in himself as the prime mover.

Thomism cashes out this picture with the theory of divine action by remotion, whereas such former writers as Augustine simply allowed that God had "no real relations" with the world and did not develop a further model for divine agency. Thomism (1) maintains the "no real relations" doctrine, (2) understands relations to be *analogies* for God's actions toward the world, and (3) proceeds in the effort of making a model for divine agency, a model for how eternal actions in God may generate remote effects in a creation truly outside of God.

Thomism successfully navigates Spinoza's dilemma but at a very high cost. "Aquinas's way out" pushes further into the nature of God and answers Spinoza by claiming that what the skeptic believes is truly distinct from God is actually not distinct. The Thomist is in no danger of claiming God is not perfect from all eternity (P4, above) yet is precisely in danger of claiming that God's perfection from all eternity includes creation (endangering P2, above). If God's eternal act includes human creatures, their sin, as well as incarnation and salvation in Christ—and that act and those causes are identical with the divine essence—then creation is identical to the divine essence. The Thomistic view relates creation to God in the same way as his attributes: God is simple and *a se* because his attributes are identical with himself and with one another; that same simplicity and same aseity extend to his "pure act" with respect to creation; thus, his acts in creation are identical with himself and identical to one another.

The Thomistic way out of Spinoza's problematic forges a *way in* to God with the creation. The problem is that the success of Thomism's schematic depends on how deeply it might manage to identify creation with God. In other words, to the extent that the creator/creature distinction remains, Thomism's God-concept remains imperiled by Spinoza's dilemma. To the extent that the creator/creature distinction is sublimated by the divine existence/essence identity, Thomism successfully avoid Spinoza's dilemma. However, obscuring the creator/creature distinction (P2) is a new problem, one that impinges directly on the creeds. In fact, P2 contains two important theistic notions, (a) the creator/creature distinction and (b) intentional action ("creates to achieve an end"). The argument will return to intentional action after examining Jonathan Edwards's answer to Spinoza.

Edwards's way out. Jonathan Edwards developed his way out of Spinoza's dilemma in his dissertation "The End for Which God Created the World." For Edwards, the answer is through analysis of agent-causation itself. The concepts of ends, proximate and ultimate, he modified with "original," making the end depend on the agent's will in such a way that it does not reflect (in terms of value theory) on previous states of affairs for the agents or the world.[28] In this way, Edwards escapes Spinoza's dilemma by rejecting a different premise than the Thomist, premise P1.

The thought of Jonathan Edwards crystallized and made more pristine what was evident throughout Reformed thinking. Reformed scholastics debated divine ends in the lapsarian debates and in doctrines like the *pactum salutis*. Even in traditional loci, like the atonement, Reformed writers reasoned from revealed purpose of God to the means of their accomplishment more broadly. The central motif of John Owen's thought in *The*

[28] Jonathan Edwards, "The End for Which God Created the World," *The Complete Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011), 1:94–99. One should note that I focus on the Edwardsean *concept* of the original ultimate end in his theory of agents and actions, not on his entire metaphysical system. Concerns about whether he, broadly, succeeds in avoiding panentheism are not relevant to this claim (especially since Edwards's panentheism, if it is the proper label, is ontological in nature). If all is "in God" for Edwards, then he means it primarily with respect to being, due to his idealism.

Death of Death was precisely the agent working towards his end (God, working towards his glory to be known in Christ's redemption).[29] The developing God-concept of the Reformed tradition, together with philosophical inheritances from such thinkers as Leibniz and Spinoza, challenged Edwards to integrate and stabilize key issues in philosophical theology in order to set forth the divine purpose and decree more clearly. Edwards's enduring achievement is his philosophical treatment of the nature of an end.

How can a perfect being conjure anything additional to his own essence? This question captures Spinoza's critique of Christian philosophical theology. Walter Shultz presents Spinoza's philosophical problematic, which is indeed a "multifaceted paradox": "if God created the world to achieve an end, then the state achieved must be more valuable than the initial state without creation."[30] Thus, Edwards analyzed the concepts of agency and ends more fully and developed the concept of an 'original ultimate end', in order to quell the unsettling conundrum of Spinoza. "No one before Edwards had used the term, "original," or its composite concept in presenting an account of God's end in creating the world."[31] Edwards differentiates original ends from consequent ends primarily from the grounds on which the end would be good-in-itself and valued by the agent. Therefore, the original ultimate end (1) secures such theological necessities as divine aseity, (2) fends off the disturbance created by the postulate that an agent who desires a future end is in some sense compelled towards that which is more perfect, and (3) provides a clear starting point for the movement of the divine will in the project of decretal theology.

Edwards writes a significant passage where he teases out contingency and possibility in the divine decree, rather than of metaphysics:

> It is most certain, that if there are any things so contingent, that there is an equal possibility of their being or not being, so that they may be, or they may not be; God

[29] John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1852; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2007), 48–53.

[30] Shultz, "Jonathan Edwards's Concept," 109.

[31] Shultz, "Jonathan Edwards's Concept," 111.

> foreknows from all eternity that they may be, and also that they may not be. All will grant that we need no revelation to teach us this. And furthermore, if God knows all things that are to come to pass, he also foreknows whether those contingent things are come to pass or no, at the same time that they are contingent, and that they may or may not come to pass. But what a contradiction is it to say, that God knows a thing will come to pass, and yet at the same time knows that it is contingent whether it will come to pass or no; that is, he certainly knows it will come to pass, and yet certainly knows it may not come to pass![32]

Further, Edwards delineates what he deems *absolute* in such metaphysical discussion. Absoluteness does not preclude divine intellectual fecundity, the divine mental production of all things as possible:

> The meaning of the word *absolute*, when used about the decrees, wants to be stated. It is commonly said, God decrees nothing upon a foresight of any thing in the creature; as this, they say, argues imperfection in God; and so it does, taken in the sense that they commonly intend it. But nobody, I believe, will deny but that God decrees many things that he would not have decreed, if he had not foreknown and foredetermined such and such other things. What we mean, we completely express thus That God decrees all things harmoniously, and in excellent order, one thing harmonizes with another, and there is such a relation between all the decrees, as makes the most excellent order.[33]

On this view, the logical presence of the original ultimate end, together with its appropriate 'consequent ends' along the way, warrants further decrees. One should note, this structural entailment in the mind of God does not render metaphysically necessary his actions, preferences, or volitional stance, nor does it lay bare his every decision to human rational inquiry. (1) What the original, ultimate end is, (2) how many consequent ends are related to it, and (3) what means God employs to accomplish them could be known only by revelation. The logical schema, however, remains structurally valid (as it is present in God's mind), whether or not the theologian has all the sound premises to include. It is therefore certainly not impious or presumptuous to conclude that God has a full picture of all ends and their entailments: each consequent end logically posterior to the original ultimate end. The key question for divine deliberation is what God's chief ultimate end is

[32] Jonathan Edwards, "Remarks on Important Theological Controversies," in *The Complete Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:527.

[33] Edwards, "Remarks," 2:527.

and what consequent ends are logically entailed (or what other proximate or relative ends are revealed by God's actions and word).

This deliberative model of the divine will-to-create could in fact be amenable to Thomism's version of classical theism if the Thomist used the model simply to describe the coherence of a more full and complete existence/essence schema in God. Yet, Thomism's God-concept handles the dilemma in a less satisfactory way, while producing perhaps a deeper dilemma with respect to the creator/creature distinction. Thus, Edwards way out is preferred. Significantly, divine deliberation is ideally fit to model the original ultimate end that Edwards describes.[34] One final point reveals the theological payoff of a philosophical model of divine deliberation.

Divine Deliberation Preserves Intentional Action

Deliberation as a process of intellectual consideration (with the supposed weighing of good and bad options to arrive at a viable conclusion) seems *prima facie*, an activity inappropriate for the Christian divine being—due to considerations of temporality, contingency, and the like. Indeed, as an *activity* to be undertaken *as a process*, deliberation does not comport with divine attributes. Yet, deliberation includes logical hierarchy and will, so this theological dismissal of a deliberative concept cannot be so easily allowed; Bruce Reichenbach's *reductio ad absurdum*, for example, threw the notion that God cannot deliberate onto the horns of a dilemma:

> (a) To say that a person is omniscient is to say that he knows all that will happen, including all the decisions he will make and all the actions he will perform.
>
> (b) To say that a person is deliberating is to say that he tries to decide or make up his mind about his own future, possible actions, given certain beliefs, wants and intentions.
>
> (c) But a person at the same time cannot both know that he will do a certain action and deliberate about whether to do the same action.
>
> (d) Therefore, if God is omniscient, he cannot deliberate.

[34] The original ultimate end concept can be applied in various theological visions and does not commit someone to every tenant of Edwardsianism, such as his idealism or model of the Trinity.

(e) To say that a person is acting intentionally is to say he is acting in a rational, purposive, goal-directed manner to bring about what he desires.

(f) All intentional action necessitates deliberation.

(g) Therefore, if God is omniscient, he cannot act intentionally.[35]

Divine deliberation preserves divine intentionality by unpacking divine omniscience with volitional concepts. God's omniscience considers necessary objects and propositions necessarily, while contingent objects and propositions depend on the divine will. Two options for interpretation follow. One may posit that such contingencies, lacking actuality, are not candidates to be known at all; logically unknowable things cannot threaten omniscience. Second, one may posit, as the Reformed tradition does, that such contingencies, though lacking actuality, God can know as the object of his will. The existence and nature of divine deliberation must be reconsidered against the backdrop of Christian orthodoxy and through a more full treatment of the divine mind. Divine deliberation preserves intentional action.

This consideration of divine intentional action casts further doubt on the Thomist God. Though something like this model of divine deliberation and modality could be mapped onto the existence/essence identity in God, since God has no real relations and nothing in God is related to anything else in God ("all that is in God is God"), then intentional action seems impossible because intentional action *just is* the relations between propositions and state of affairs that justify or induce the agents' actions. Since no attributes, ends, or relations can properly be distinguished in divine eternal action, such action(s) cannot be intentional *in se*.[36]

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[35] Bruce Reichenbach, "Omniscience and Deliberation," *IJPR* 16, no. 3 (1984): 229–30. Reichenbach suggests in the article that omniscience is incompatible with deliberation, a point that is independent of the schema above and does not apply to my model, which is free of contingency and uncertainty (225–26). I have made changes that have not altered the argument of the schema to suit this presentation.

[36] If the Thomist were to answer the objection and employ something like this model, it may be that intentional action, like so many other things, is a phenomenon that appears in our world, though the phenomena describe God only by analogy and cannot actually be predicated of him. In other words, divine deliberation or some other such model may preserve a theory of divine intentional action *in the world* that describes God not actually, but analogically (on the Thomist view of analogical language).

The failure actually to predicate of God intentional action is an additional reason to prefer an original ultimate end concept for the divine will-to-create and to model that concept with a theory of possibility based in divine deliberation. Instead, premise (b) can be rejected since deliberation can be modeled in such a way that removes finitude, uncertainty, and indecision (i.e. "tries to decide," "make up his mind"). With this philosophical basis in mind, we are pursuing a concept of God more firmly rooted in and answering to the descriptions of scripture itself, rather than—as far too often is the case with Thomism—having to emphasize what scripture *does not actually say* about God.

Conclusion

This chapter briefly described the philosophical need for theory of modality, what it is, and why it comes up naturally in broader philosophical theories. In particular, ordinary approaches to everyday language require some theory for the meaning of modal statements. I argued that, as a discipline, theology generally has not identified a theory of possibility as a necessity for a coherent systematic theology. I traced why and how a modal theory should be expected to pertain within theology proper and critiqued concepts of God as "pure act" on the basis of these concerns. Though the problem of modal collapse can be sketched out in general terms, I did so through the problematic of Baruch Spinoza since it focuses on the divine will. Modal collapse in general, I argued, is a penetrating critique for the *purus actus* God-concept, and the problem of a perfect being creating "that which is not God" is a deep and specific instance of it. I sketched Jonathan Edwards's way out of the dilemma, and offered his concept of the original ultimate end, his "key," as a crucial component for this model as well. A similar problematic, from Bruce Reichenbach, concerned the possibility of divine intentional action, and the Thomist God-concept seemed to be boxed out here as well. However, I contended that the deliberative model, built on the original ultimate end, can preserve acting for an intention. With the need properly in place, the dissertation turns to its central resource for

answering these questions, the scripture. What are God's intentions? What is his original ultimate end? The next chapter turns to what the Bible says and how these exegetical considerations touch upon divine deliberation.

CHAPTER 3

THE COUNSEL OF HIS WILL: EXEGETICAL INSIGHT

The dissertation has established recurring modal appeals in various theological arguments and genres, as well as particular difficulties associated with Thomism's God—overcome in Jonathan Edwards' concept of the original ultimate end. This chapter explores in a devoted way the scriptural passages that present themselves as candidates for the divine will-to-create. The chapter provides an exegetical grounding in those places where scripture shows God's will or choice with respect to the whole creation and is thus attentive to pre-creation modes of divine thought or choice.

The aim of the chapter is to set the thesis on its deepest footings, biblical revelation. The chapter brings in key texts for analysis: Ephesians 1:3–14, 1 Peter 1:20, Hebrews 6:17, John 14–16, the High Priestly Prayer of John 17, Matthew 11:25–27 and Psalm 2. Other various texts receive brief reference along the way, and the word for *counsel* in Ephesians 1 (βουλή) is broken out for special treatment under its own heading. This word study also involves early patristic reception of the term. Though the exegetical study could be extended to greater length, these texts provide the full and necessary backbone to understand what scripture says about God's end in creation.

The scripture is the only source from which to discover what God has revealed his most ultimate end(s) to be. Though the exegete has no guarantee that God *will* include all or any ultimate ends in written revelation, he or she *is* certain that this data is not found in human musings or natural revelation. Even what we may know "by eminence" concerning God depends on divine revelation, for the Bible establishes what moral characteristics ought to be negated and applied to God. Only with these biblical data in place, will a more full model of the deliberative will be sketched in.

The Grounding of God's Purpose in Ephesians 1:3–14

Ephesians 1 stands out for its clear and repeated treatment of election. One thesis surrounding the election words (ἐξελέξατο, προορίσας, ἐκληρώθημεν) should cut through some of the debates that have sought to interpret them: when Paul appeals to election, his purpose is precisely to analyze God's action *beyond the level of human contingency*, past any consideration of various merits, rewards, and punishments.

Justification is legal; election is doxological: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Eph 1:3-4 ESV).[1] Paul's parameter ("before the foundation of the world") is biblical in its scope (Ps 90:2; Rev 13:8). The figurative phrase can be construed literally as "before the act to create." One could go a step further: "before the decision to create." A Thomist account would explicate the metaphor as an analogy for the remote nature of God's causes and their affects in the world. Thus, no matter how the language is taken, it refers metaphysically—creation removed from the context—to inner divine life.

A similar statement could be made with respect to Wisdom in Proverbs 8. Here, 'before the foundation of the world' concepts do not remove but, in fact, *establish* what Wisdom says of the relationship with the Creator,[2] what is literally true of the Logos in relation with the Father.

> The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of

[1] English-language Scripture quotations will be marked with the abbreviation (ESV) or unmarked (author's translation).

[2] Bruce Waltke highlights wisdom's "organic connection with God's very nature and being, unlike the rest of creation that came into existence outside of him and independent from his being" and that "this wisdom existed before creation and its origins are distinct from it." Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 409.

> the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always. (Prov 8:22-30 ESV)

Any exegesis of this passage requires some thickly-developed concept of divine mental life that logically precedes creation. The Christian Trinity is commended by this fact, for without creation, God acts in Triune love. The Triune persons account for this developed model of divine mental life. Alternatively, one could interpret these biblical descriptions as analogies for the eternal state of the divine mind. However, this interpretation faces an extraordinary difficulty, for whatever is understood to be immanent in the life of God was described by God himself—even if by analogy—as Wisdom personified. The point of *personification* is to highlight *personal relations*. Even if the personification is deemed figural, something in or about divine mental life was fittingly set forth by interpersonal communication. Whether literal or figurative, the interpretations must allow that point.[3]

What must be affirmed is that God's knowledge organizes propositions and possibilities in an array relating them as logically prior and posterior to one another. Returning to Ephesians 1, for example, the election of people is "in him." Further, this election "into Christ" is described by a purpose clause: εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ. Election of persons unto salvation logically depends in this passage both on the plan for Christ and the purpose of a holy and blameless presentation in God's presence.[4] The divine will then sets forth—not in a discreet way but in a logically hierarchical form—a full purpose whose highest end, in this passage, is "Christ," a glorification of the Messiah; by electing Christians into "the Beloved," the result of our

[3] The passage also should be taken to support the notion that all of who Christ is the was "possessed" by God at the very beginning. Christopher Seitz argues along these lines, and his arguments from (1) the "in the beginning" (רֵאשִׁית) parallels with Gen 1, (2) the significance of *aquire* (קָנָנִי) in Prov 8:22, and (3) the Christian reception the passage Col 1, are all compelling in my judgment. Christopher Seitz, "The Trinity in the Old Testament," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 34–36.

[4] Frank Thielman explains, "Although grammatical priority does not always translate into conceptual priority, it does so here." Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 48.

being "holy and blameless before him" obtains.[5] Verse 9 is especially dense with references to a full plan: γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν αὐτοῦ ἣν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ. God makes known (γνωρίσας), not an *ad interim* report, not particular propositions or general ideas. In fact, προέθετο refers to a "setting forth" that "makes public" what was a hidden, *comprehensive* design, an interpretation confirmed not only by the famous phrase "the mystery of his will" (τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ), but also by the unique use of εὐδοκίαν. The term εὐδοκίαν bears its general reference to the "state of being kindly disposed," yet the relative clause (ἣν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ) modifies the emotional or dispositional quality of the term by its tight linguistic connection to a "plan set forth." *Goodwill* still successfully refers to a dispositional state yet a dispositional state that itself is set forth in Christ and all things related to him. The plan exegetes the kindly disposition; the kindly disposition exegetes the goodwill; and to explain Christ is to explain the whole purpose.

Verse 10 confirms the point above. Paul uses rhetorical repetition: the setting forth of a plan which results in an administration in the fullness of the appointed time (εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν). An eternal plan has a temporal administration; thus, all the logical relationships set forth in the temporal administration were represented in the eternal plan. Of course, the "fullness of time" language here means more than a juxtaposition of ultimate and temporal reality, but it cannot mean less. All things are ordered in their relation to Christ (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι) in the eschatological direction of the world.[6] In the same way, all things can be logically related to Christ as an original

[5] Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 178–79.

[6] John Calvin makes the distinction between proximate and ultimate ends with regard to the phrase "that we should be holy":

> This is the immediate, but not the chief design; for there is no absurdity in supposing that the same thing may gain two objects. The design of building is, that there should be a house. This is the immediate design, but the convenience of dwelling in it is the ultimate design. It was necessary to mention this in passing; for we shall immediately find that Paul mentions another design, the glory of God. But there is no contradiction here; for the glory of God is the highest end, to which our

ultimate end in the divine plan. All parts of the purpose are summed up in Christ. Other individual decrees, summed up in Christ, as seen in their unity. Other similar ends in the passage include "to the praise of his glorious grace" (κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ), the ground of the redemption that forgives trespasses in verse 7. Again and again in the passage, grace is what is literally *gratuitous*, ungrounded, the fact of God's posture and pleasure that explains his act as an agent but is itself unexplainable.[7] The display of grace itself is exactly the kind of purpose that comports well with an original ultimate end. This claim is particularly self-attesting when that grace is so closely united to "the purpose set forth in Christ."

The original ultimate end of grace, because unmerited divine favor involves action, must—by logical implication—involve propositions logically subsequent to it. Thus, Christ will be the very matrix of grace; more than that, Christ will be the center of all things in existence ("to unite all things to him," ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι). Those who are united to the Beloved are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.[8] In Ephesians 1, election hangs upon the decree of Christ as the Beloved, which hangs upon the decree that Christ would unite all created things, which hangs upon the decree for divine glorification by display of grace.

Though the history of exegesis has not laid out the metaphysical implications of this passage, even from antiquity the preachers and doctors of the church have read from Ephesians 1 how God's act is free and gratuitous and grounded ultimately on his "good pleasure." Such theological claims have metaphysical implications. All things are related to Christ, yet those who are related to him by "hearing the word of truth" and by

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sanctification is subordinate. (John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. John King [Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847]), Eph 1:4, para. 88489, Accordance Bible Software.

[7] See also John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 69–75.

[8] The language of logical/causal subsequence is not uncommon in the commentary history: "Election is the cause or source of all subsequent benefits." Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1856), 29.

"sealing with the Holy Spirit" have obtained an inheritance. Paul once again wraps these items together through a concept of predestination that is not arbitrary, yet whose purpose is not discrete but according to an entire "counsel of his will."[9] In other words, the predestining purpose is not irrational, yet its rationality is not severable from its whole "setting forth," nor is its rationality logically entailed by any necessity—but by will.[10]

Counsel as a Kind of Knowledge in Ephesians 1

Though the phrase "counsel of his will" has many and various interpretations, they all orbit around one central concept. Though the phrase "counsel of his will" can mean much more, it can mean no less than that God's will is based on *knowledge*—and a *kind* of knowledge best described by the noun "counsel" (βουλή). The term conjures up notions of "possibilities for action," a key philosophical notion for grounding agent-intention.[11] In LXX Ps. 1:1, βουλή refers to the counsels of the wicked, and in 1 Cor. 4:5 it explicates the purposes of human hearts that God will disclose. *Human* counsels and heart-purposes cannot help but be temporal, though that fact is due to creaturely finitude. But counsels and heart-purposes *per se* cannot help but be logical and hierarchical. The very use of the term highlights a very different notion than "discrete knowledge." The interrelations of propositions, forming a whole, mutually justify God's choice and action.

Precisely because God's counsel refers to a whole that has an "unchangeable character," he uses creaturely means (like oaths and step-by-step convincing) to inform the "heirs of promise" (Hebrews 6:7; more on this passage below). In a fascinating passage from the Apostolic Fathers, 1 Clement 2:3 echoes Paul's teaching; God is "also

[9] In the economy, this work is the Father's. "Paul describes God the Father here with a participle, "the one working," continuing Paul's focus on God's activities in establishing and implementing his plan of uniting all things in Christ." Lynn Cohick, *Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 109.

[10] I take *will* in the New Testament text to be used precisely to exclude the category of necessity from the discourse.

[11] The seminal account remains Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

full of holy plans in good will" (μεστοί τε ὁσίας βουλῆς ἐν ἀγαθῇ προθυμίᾳ).[12] Didache 2:6b echoes Psalm 1's reference to human evil counsels: "οὐ λήψῃ βουλὴν πονηρὰν κατὰ τοῦ πλησίον σου" ("you shall not consider evil plans against your neighbor.").

However, other Apostolic Greek Fathers employ the term with reference to God. The *Epistle to Diognetus* 8:9-11 refers to God's "inexpressible intent" and "wise counsel":

> Diog. 8:9 ἐννοήσας δὲ μεγάλην καὶ ἄφραστον ἔννοιαν ἀνεκοινώσατο μόνῳ τῷ παιδί.
>
> Diog. 8:10 ἐν ὅσῳ μὲν οὖν κατεῖχεν ἐν μυστηρίῳ καὶ διετήρει τὴν σοφὴν αὐτοῦ βουλήν, ἀμελεῖν ἡμῶν καὶ ἀφροντιστεῖν ἐδόκει·
>
> Diog. 8:11 ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀπεκάλυψε διὰ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ παιδὸς καὶ ἐφανέρωσε τὰ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἡτοιμασμένα, πάνθ' ἅμα παρέσχεν ἡμῖν, καὶ μετασχεῖν τῶν εὐεργεσιῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἰδεῖν καὶ νοῆσαι ἃ τίς ἂν πώποτε προσεδόκησεν ἡμῶν . . . (AF-RGT)

The use of ἐννοήσας explicitly refers to the divine mental action that produces such a "great and inexpressible intention," while the reference to the "consulting with the Son alone" (ἀνεκοινώσατο μόνῳ τῷ παιδί) confirms the Son as the highest purpose of the intention and chiefest actor in it. The concepts follow Paul's thought in Ephesians 1 closely, though the vocabulary differs. *The Shepherd of Hermas* "Visions" 3:4a represents a similar use of terms:

> Ἰδοὺ ὁ Θεὸς τῶν δυνάμεων, ὁ ἀοράτῳ δυνάμει καὶ κραταιᾷ καὶ τῇ μεγάλῃ συνέσει αὐτοῦ κτίσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ τῇ ἐνδόξῳ βουλῇ περιθεὶς τὴν εὐπρέπειαν τῇ κτίσει αὐτοῦ, καὶ τῷ ἰσχυρῷ ῥήματι πήξας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ θεμελιώσας τὴν γῆν ἐπὶ ὑδάτων, καὶ τῇ ἰδίᾳ σοφίᾳ καὶ προνοίᾳ κτίσας τὴν ἁγίαν ἐκκλησίαν αὐτοῦ, ἣν καὶ ηὐλόγησεν, (*AF-RGT*)

In the contemplation of God, all is comprehended, from the "foundation of the earth upon the waters" (θεμελιώσας τὴν γῆν ἐπὶ ὑδάτων) to "his own wisdom and providence that formed the holy church" (τῇ ἰδίᾳ σοφίᾳ καὶ προνοίᾳ κτίσας τὴν ἁγίαν ἐκκλησίαν αὐτοῦ) Thus, as with Paul in Ephesians 1, the text intends to overawe with its doxological heights (ηὐλόγησεν). As the section begins, the great wisdom of God (καὶ τῇ μεγάλῃ

[12] Clement highlights the mission of the Spirit in this context: Οὕτως εἰρήνη βαθεῖα καὶ λιπαρὰ ἐδέδοτο πᾶσιν καὶ ἀκόρεστος πόθος εἰς ἀγαθοποιΐαν, καὶ πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου ἔκχυσις ἐπὶ πάντας ἐγίνετο.1 Clem 2:2, (AF-RGT).

συνέσει αὐτοῦ) is clarified by "glorious counsels that put on the beauty of his creation" (τῇ ἐνδόξῳ βουλῇ περιθεὶς τὴν εὐπρέπειαν τῇ κτίσει αὐτοῦ). Divine counsel is represented by creation's actuality. *Hermas* identifies the act of creating as a fitting and proper display, not narrowly but broadly, because creation includes in one act a whole fitting counsel.

Counsel (βουλή) cannot mean less than an appeal to divine knowledge that has synthetic relationships between propositions. In other words, the divine will is based on a knowledge that has subjunctive conditionals. If/then propositions, statements of antecedence and consequence, and the like form some kind of structure that is at least (whether univocal or by analogy) referred to by *counsel*.[13]

If one wanted to employ *counsel* univocally, he might appeal to the free agreement of the Trinitarian persons in a concept similar to the *pactum salutis*. If one wanted to interpret *counsel* analogically, appeal might be made to God's knowledge of the world or worlds he might create and the possibilities and counter-possibilities as he looks into his whole divine life, possessed at once.[14] No matter the model, to see less than hierarchical reasoning or a synthetic relationship between propositions in divine knowledge simply does fail to interpret "the counsel of his will." Some such concept must be employed for the exegesis of Ephesians 1, because of the passages's internal evidence, the meaning of the term βουλῇ, and the patristic reception and development of similar concepts.

This picture of an entire structure of inferential and hierarchical knowledge in the divine mind seems for Paul in Ephesians 1 much more fitting for the "good pleasure" of God than anything else. In other words, as God is praised for having his good pleasure to display his glorious grace by the creation in Ephesians 1, Paul seems to envision God

[13] Hoehner writes, "In conclusion, the term gives a sense of deliberation: therefore, decisions and plans are not based on a whim but on careful thought and interaction." Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 230.

[14] Note that the analogical possibility here includes possibility in "God's knowledge of himself" and the will-to-create could not be one of them, lest the possibility collapse back into necessity.

as having the whole counsel before his mind, the whole possibility of all creation. Though some interpretations of Ephesians 1 view propositions as discrete and simple (e.g. the "predestining of person X" or the "passing over of person Y"), these pictures do not seem to fit well as a ground for the "good pleasure" that Paul employs in his argument and in his praise. Paul's reasoning runs more in this way: the particular person's election is related to (and logically subsequent to) an entire counsel by which God intends the display of his grace in Christ, who would be taken as The Beloved and would be united to elect persons by gospel and Spirit and would deliver a spiritual inheritance. This whole scheme for this whole world is "founded" (to use the root word of verse 4) by God "according to his good pleasure." Therefore, a model of the divine will to create should look like a "counsel of will," an exhaustive understanding of the world to be created, combined with knowledge of the relationship of every true proposition in that world that has logical hierarchy of purpose.

Petrine and Pauline Agreement in 1 Peter 1:20

First Peter 1:20 ought to be considered alongside Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Peter employs similar language of foreknowledge. Further, this Petrine passage is similar to Ephesians 1 with respect to how it comforts the believer by laying him or her back on the eternal plan of God, a plan that foreknew both Christ himself and the Christian.

Interestingly, the parallel reaches all the way back to the initial doxological context of the two apostles. Like Paul, Peter's initial outburst of praise affirms the goodness of God's inner life and what he has executed in the world *("Blessed"!*), while also highlighting the role of the Father, the one who is the source not only of the Son's subsistence by nature but, more importantly in Peter's context, the source of the Son's being Savior and Messiah.

What Peter adds that is not present in the Pauline context of Ephesians 1 (but Paul addresses the notion later, especially in Ephesians 3), is the polarity between foreknowing and revealing (προεγνωσμένου μὲν πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου φανερωθέντος δὲ

ἐπ᾽ ἐσχάτου τῶν χρόνων δι᾽ ὑμᾶς).[15] Foreknowing, as with the semantics of Paul, is taken by most scholars to have a constitutive force. In other words, when God *knows* something, just as when God *speaks* something, the sense of the verb is active and creative in its impact. For God to *foreknow* the Eternal Son as the Savior Jesus *constitutes* the plan.[16] This foreknowledge is rightly summarized as a decree. This foreknowledge or decree for Peter in some sense is in force and applicable, therefore, across all of history.

Peter's immediate context points towards the conditions of holiness given to Israel. Peter shows how in some sense it was to Christ to whom Israel was called, even before Christ had come. Thus, the apostolic logic flows, is it not better to see and imitate the one who has been foreknown as both the picture of holiness ("be holy for I am holy") and as the humble sacrifice for sin? Significantly, Peter uses tighter language of *foreknowing* (προεγνωσμένου) and *revealing* (φανερωθέντος), language that highlights the constitutive force of God's foreknowledge. Using the decree concept to understand Peter is not only appropriate due to the lexical issues but due to the fact that the decree is the sense in which future actions exist. Though actions future to the children of Israel did not exist yet in the sense of space and time, Peter can include them in his evaluation and application of the Old Testament believers through the foreknowledge/decree concept because future actions existed in the decree of God.

"Confirming Unchangeable Plans" in Hebrews 6:17

Hebrews 6:17 could receive only brief reference in the treatment of the term *counsel*, βουλή. A more complete look will produce significant implications for this thesis. The Hebrews passage presents how in the course of Abraham's biography "God made a promise" and "swore by himself." The text's initial horizon of interpretation is

[15] Karen Jobes writes, "Thus God knew the complete program of redemption before the foundation of the world." Karen Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 119.

[16] Referring to προεγνωσμένου, Greg Forbes argues that προεγνωσμένου "refers not only to prophetic foresight but to [God's] sovereign volition or predetermined plan." Greg Forbes, *1 Peter*, EGGNT (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 44.

how Abraham's faith in the promises played out over his life when based in the oath of the One who is highest, God himself. The author of Hebrews explains the general fact of swearing oaths: oaths load the weight of testimony on oneself and makes the swearer accountable to one higher (v. 16). Therefore, God as an actor on the stage of history in the life of Abraham, loads the weight of testimony on himself and swears by himself—there not being one higher.

The oath confirms, in the contingencies of the world and in the midst of personal biographies, what is known by the testimony of God from before the foundation of the world. Verse 17 confirms this idea and applies it to the author's Christian audience: within God's overall *counsels*, he can *counsel* to make clear the unchangeable nature of his *counsels*. When God wills to do so in his counsels, he uses (on the human plane of history) human means of testimonial affirmation: an oath.

Human confidence emerges from joining "two kinds of unchangeable things" (δύο πραγμάτων, v. 18). The first unchangeable thing is the counsel God has chosen (τὸ ἀμετάθετον τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ, v. 17); the second unchangeable thing is God's non-lying character (ἐν οἷς ἀδύνατον ψεύσασθαι [τὸν] θεόν, v. 18). In the conjunction of these two unchangeable things, the faithful have "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (v. 19). The counsel is volitional, the divine truthful character, necessary (ἀδύνατον ψεύσασθαι). The conjunction of the necessary character with the will of the oath confirms the promise within the counsel of God. Significantly, this passage sets forth God with an unchangeable counsel that, in place of the impossibility of full explanation to creatures, can be guaranteed with an oath—a form of affirmation appropriate for finite beings.[17]

[17] Chrysostom even identifies the oath with the Son, basing the claim on the phrase "he mediated by an oath" (ἐμεσίτευσεν ὅρκῳ):

> Well, who then is He that sware unto Abraham? Is it not the Son? . . . So when He [the Son] sweareth the same oath, "Verily, verily, I say unto you," is it not plain that it was because He could not swear by any greater? For as the Father sware, so also the Son sweareth by Himself, saying, "Verily, verily, I say unto you." . . . In these words he comprehends also the believers, and therefore mentions this "promise" which was made to us in common [with them]. "He mediated" (he says) "by an oath." Here again he says that the Son was mediator between men and God. (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on*

Within the full unchangeable counsel, God has willed that he would be a participant and engage in creaturely forms of action, such as oath-making, for the sake of those creatures—a clear presentation of divine condescension in Hebrews 6:17.

The passage fits well with a bi-modal presentation of God, wherein "above the creation," God wills a plan that is unchangeable precisely because every proposition and detail fit and are summed up in the original ultimate end. To alter or change any proposition or detail would do away with the very idea that God created a "counsel," a total true set of propositions whose hierarchy and relationships relate to an ultimate end and justify its value. At the same time, "inside" the counsel, God is an actor who will confirm human hearts by displaying his necessary character (he cannot lie) and his volitional commitments (the oath). Once again, though the passage focuses on the confidence and confirmation of faithful hearts, its warrant is in the very life of God both outside of relations with creation and inside of them. A deliberative model of the divine will-to-create provides a fitting concept of God-in-himself and God-in-the-world that allows for elegant exegesis of scriptural texts like Hebrews 6:17.[18]

Metaphysically Complex Speech in John 14–16

The Lord's discourse in John 14–16 and High Priestly prayer in John 17 demand much attention when considering the divine will, as well as the immanent and economic Trinity. John 14 in particular proves difficult to exegete with respect to whether its provocative statements refer to the immanent Trinity and God's being in himself or to the economic Trinity and God's works in the world. For example, the sending of the Spirit of truth is the sending "of another Helper," denoting a mode of being in the world, a mission both for the Son-as-a-helper and for the Spirit-as-a-helper. However, the

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the Gospel of Saint John and the Epistle to the Hebrews, Chrysostom's Commentary on New Testament Books XIV, ed. Philip Schaff [New York: Christian Literature, 1886], Heb 6:17, para. 22960, Accordance Bible Software.

[18] Chap. 8 addresses God's actualizing a world in which he is an agent and the modal difference this makes when referring to God.

Spirit's sending from Father and Son has usually been construed also as a way of denoting the third person's life in the immanent Trinity. Further, the Father will send the Spirit "in my name," Jesus says, which seems a reference not to "name" of the Son's being eternally but in Christ the Son's works in the world. The specific name of Jesus the Messiah temporally indexes the reference within time and asserts his power and authority. Under this Messianic ministry, the Spirit, the Perfector of divine works, accomplishes his mission of convicting.[19]

In John 14:28, Jesus says "the Father is greater than I," a statement that directly contradicts "the Father and I are one" (John 10:30), if the two statements are taken in the same sense. The obviously different senses available for interpreting the two phrases are that in his mission, Christ the Son is "lesser than" God the Father in his mission, while in the life of God *in se* the Father, Son, and Spirit are one. Thus, a modal distinction is the clear avenue available for interpreting John 10:30 and 14:28 in non-contradictory ways: one refers to God the Son's immanent mode of being, the other to the economic mode of being. Significantly, the immanent mode of being must contain the modality for the economic; in the oneness of Father and Son (John 10:30) is the possibility for a mode in creation that distinguishes the persons, even as greater or lesser.

The picture is not fully clear yet. No account of orthodox Trinitarianism considers the missions arbitrary, as if it would be fitting for the Spirit to send the Father, or some such other arrangement. Twentieth-century theology, especially through the formulation and application of Rahner's Rule, as well as social trinitarianism, have seen within the dynamics of the economic Trinity a direct telescope through which to view the immanent Trinity.[20] Classical trinitarians rightly demur from this exegesis, yet texts like

[19] One also thinks in this context of Jesus' statement in Matt 12, that he is binding the strongman and that the Spirit is "plundering his goods," activities that prove that the "kingdom of heaven has come upon you."

[20] The foremost summary and review of twentieth-century literature related to Rahner's Rule and its interpreters is Fred Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Rahner's Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, Issues in Systematic Theology 12 (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

John 15:26 reveal the way in which classical trinitarians still connect immanent and economic frameworks through the notion of *fitness*: "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me."

Classical trinitarianism develops a pattern of exegesis for these verses that avoids betraying the confession of the gospel and the interpretation of other passages. To achieve this purpose, a concept of the trinitarian *taxis* has been used to represent the ordering of the triune persons based on their subsistence in the divine nature. Classical trinitarianism does not, therefore, represent a tradition that removes John 14–16 entirely from the conversation of the immanent Trinity. To the contrary, John 15 has been essential for developing the concepts of filiation and spiration, for verse 26 insists that Christ Jesus sends the Spirit from the Father.

The Spirit is affirmed as proceeding from the Father, and the relations of origin in the divine nature make fitting the relations of sending in the mission. Both East and West follow this pattern of logic with respect to the Son; the West simply has extended that exegesis (1) with reference to the Spirit (2) in a passage such as John 15:26–27. The relations of origin in the divine nature create a *taxis*, an order of standing, which itself makes certain missions fitting for the divine persons. Therefore, the notion that the divine will has some measure to prefer and take pleasure in a plan for the world—even if that measure is merely "fittingness with divine taxis"—enjoys broad support.

For good reason, exegetes have rarely been able to avoid discussing the eternal generation of the Son in John 16:25–28.[21]

> I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have

[21] Calvin says of v. 28: "This mode of expression draws our attention to the Divine power which is in Christ." Calvin, *Commentaries*, John 16:28, para. 73794. See also Kevin Giles's writing, which interacts with Athanasius and Augustine: *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 84–85, 154.

> believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father. (John 16:25–28 ESV)

This passage contains precisely the same immanent/economic dynamic whereby economic missions for the Son (relating who the Father is) push into and touch upon the immanent nature of the Son's subsistence (i.e. proceeding from the Father). This reading is based upon the progressive, ever-increasing nature of the mission and the culmination that it reaches. Jesus says that he has been relating the Father through figures of speech. It is no surprise that such figures would be needed for communicating to humans who, "see through a glass darkly." Yet, eschatologically (a concept latent in the terms "the hour" and "in that day"), the Son will set forth and manifest the truth of the Father without such figures.

When the mission of the Son in this way is *ultimate* (not limited or partial) and *intrinsic* (related to divine life), it cannot fail to provide insight into the immanent trinitarian life. Some of the Son's missions are not ultimate; the Son, for example, saves, but does not save all persons. Some missions are ultimate but not intrinsic, such as the complete authority obtained in the Davidic kingship, which plainly does not simply "exegete" or "propound" something intrinsic to the divine life. A mission that is *both ultimate and intrinsic*, however, must be *fitting* with immanent trinitarian life. Therefore, the good pleasure of God's will delights in worlds that glorify the Son and express trinitarian missions fitting to the glory of the three persons in their subsistence.

The High Priestly Prayer of John 17

The Lord's high Priestly prayer presents soaring spiritual concepts that connect the disciples in the garden and those "who would believe through their word" to the love of the Father for the Son before the foundation of the world (vv. 9, 20, 24.) Not only do explicit statements point towards God's end in creation, but the characteristic constellation of purposes shows that the pattern is describing what is ultimate. Jesus' first request is that he, the Son, now be glorified, "that the Son may glorify [the Father]." This appeal is based on Jesus' "authority over all flesh" (v. 2a), a phrase that is conceptually

parallel to Paul's "summing up of all things into Christ." The appeal is made on an ultimate intention for creation, yet within the authority of Christ over all flesh a preeminent aim is described: "to give eternal life to all whom you have given him" (v. 2b).[22] The preeminent purpose of Christ's authority is so ultimate because it, in itself, serves to glorify the Father: "This is eternal life, that they know you" (v. 3a). Last, knowing God itself glorifies the Son (v. 3b). The tight constellation of appeals (that have a circular warrant) shows that Jesus is describing not proximate or subordinate goals that are easily justified by appeal to a different kind of purpose. Instead, Jesus is appealing to an original ultimate end.

Verse 5 introduces language that most interpreters have taken to describe inner Trinitarian life and how it comports with or yields the Trinitarian mission. The messianic Son on earth is praying in verse 5 in line with the eternal Son's existence "in [the Father's] own presence . . . before the world existed." Several points are peculiar in the verse: καὶ νῦν δόξασόν με σύ, πάτερ, παρὰ σεαυτῷ τῇ δόξῃ ᾗ εἶχον πρὸ τοῦ τὸν κόσμον εἶναι παρὰ σοί. First, the divinity of the Son is included in the fittingness that he would ask for glory ("νῦν δόξασόν με"); God would only fittingly glorify God. The Person of the Son in divine *taxis* is included in this fittingness. Likewise; the begotten Son would fittingly *ask for* this glory of the unbegotten Father. Second, prayer figures in the purpose of providence. Even in the Son's mission—as numerous other texts reinforce—the meticulous plan of God includes prayer in carrying out its purposes. The triune God includes the prayer of the God-man in providence. Third, the Son's glorification "in the presence" of the Father appears twice: παρὰ σεαυτῷ . . . παρὰ σοί. These phrases describe the mission in language that comports with the Son's eternal existence, not dissimilar to a passage like Hebrews 1:3 (ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως

[22] D. A. Carson arrives at the same insight: "Rather v. 2b refers to the Father's gift, *in eternity past*, of authority over all humanity, on the basis of the Son's *prospective* obedient humiliation, death, resurrection and exaltation. It is nothing less than the redemptive plan of God, for the second part of the verse makes the purpose of this grant clear: it is that the Son might give eternal life to those the Father has given him." D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 555.

αὐτοῦ, "who, being the radiance of his glory and exact imprint of his nature").[23] Fourth, Jesus' unique use of "before the foundation language" (πρὸ τοῦ τὸν κόσμον εἶναι; "before the world was set to be") highlights the concept of original intention.

The backbone of John 17, verses 6–19, continually employs language of taking/receiving/passing—whether words, elect people, or glory.[24] Jesus uses three phrases that deserve special mention: (1) the Father's being "in me, and I in you" (v. 21), (2) "my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" (v. 24), and (3) "I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them." All of these phrases reveal a communication of the Father's identity based on the Word's own identity. The exegesis of John 17 has led theologians to broad agreement that the nature of the Word's existence (his subsistence in the divine nature) is related to the Father (*filiation*) in a way that fits the relation to the Father in the mission (manifestation, communication of attributes, fellowshipping of love).

The passage grounds the original ultimate end exactly where it may be logically sustained. To claim God's original ultimate end is something extraneous—related to human contingencies—is implausible. But an original ultimate end that glorifies the Son through the Father's gift of disciples who are sanctified in the Spirit fits and extends the glory of trinitarian life *ad intra*. Such an ultimate end remains original in its uniquely contingent character from the will of an agent, God himself, while also being related to the product of the very nature of God himself, glory.

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[23] The use of a separate sentence in common English translations for Heb 1:3 regrettably draws attention away from the fact that its participial phrase describes the attendant circumstances of v. 2, where "God spoke to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he created the world."

[24] John 17:6–9 (ESV) exemplify the point: "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me."

"Fitting Acknowledgement" in Matthew 11

Jesus' comments in Matthew 11:25-27 are firmly grounded in economic relations but reach beyond the economy to the *taxis* of the Trinity in the persons' relations of origin within the divine nature.

> Ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· ἐξομολογοῦμαί σοι, πάτερ, κύριε τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅτι ἔκρυψας ταῦτα ἀπὸ σοφῶν καὶ συνετῶν καὶ ἀπεκάλυψας αὐτὰ νηπίοις·Matt. 11:26 ναὶ ὁ πατήρ, ὅτι οὕτως εὐδοκία ἐγένετο ἔμπροσθέν σου. Πάντα μοι παρεδόθη ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός μου, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐπιγινώσκει τὸν υἱὸν εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ, οὐδὲ τὸν πατέρα τις ἐπιγινώσκει εἰ μὴ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ ᾧ ἐὰν βούληται ὁ υἱὸς ἀποκαλύψαι.

In this passage, sandwiched between Christ's denunciation of Jewish cities and his invitation to come to him for rest, Jesus "acknowledges" or "professes" the Father: ἐξομολογοῦμαί. This passage sets forth activity undertaken by the Father; here the Father hides and reveals "these things" (i.e. judgment and salvation) in a pattern that reverses the worldly approaches to power and is therefore "fitting."[25]

Verses 26 and 27 expand what is included in verse 25. For example, the reason Jesus acknowledges the Father in verse 25 is grounded in the will or good pleasure (εὐδοκία) of the Father (v. 26), and this goodwill has a pattern or manner "before him" or in his presence (οὕτως εὐδοκία ἐγένετο ἔμπροσθέν σου). The Father's blessed will grounds his Fatherly work of hiding and revealing. Similarly, verse 27 answers back to verse 25; the way the Father hides the "great things" from the worldly-wise and reveals them to the children is by handing them to the Son. A pattern of revelation that hands "the great things" to the Son so that this revelation would make it to the world's humble, is a pattern of revelation and salvation in the Trinity *ad extra* that fits the pattern of self-giving and subsistence in the Trinity *ad intra*.

Further, this text reveals the Son's will of choosing (βούληται ὁ υἱὸς) a word elsewhere reserved in the New Testament for the Father's will/choice or that of the

[25] The Father's place in Trinitarian *taxis* also makes fitting his being the economic agent of the divine will. David Turner says of v. 26 that "the basis of the Father's concealing and revealing activity is the Father's own desire. Nothing outside the Father has determined this course of action." David Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 303.

undivided Trinity. Some interpreters would argue that verse 27 must be strictly bound to the economic mission because it refers to the Son's choosing. The text does refer to the choosing, and the text does refer to the mission, but it refers to both in a way that overlaps with and comports with the immanent Trinity.[26] Thus, the will of the undivided Trinity can still include the will of the Father and the choosing of the Son in the choice of a plan in the world to create. A deliberative model of the divine will-to-create sets forth this language well since the undivided will of the Trinity can create just that world wherein all actions and missions of the triune persons fit with the pattern of inner divine life. It is significant that the scripture, in the most primal features of the plan of providence, refers to words of *willing* and *choosing* that terminate upon the persons, yet whenever the scripture does so, those personal actions of willing and choosing comport with their subsistence in the divine nature.

Fitting Begetting in Psalm 2

Psalm 2 so obviously addresses the divine plan that a wide variety of interpreters from a wide variety of angles must interact with its text. However, Psalm 2 is equally notorious for its difficulty, especially with regard to the interpretation of the (constantly changing) speakers in verses 5 through 8. Neither Psalm 1 or 2 is attributed directly to David in the superscript. Almost all of Book One of the Psalter is filled with Davidic Psalms, and its opening context causes the reader to think of the anointed king, David. Additionally, parallels with the thought and language of Psalm 110, explicitly ascribed to David, further enhances the ease with which the reader considers David to speak in his prophetic role when he refers to the nations' rage and the Lord's laughter and derision. Thus, verse 5 comprises a Davidite speech, introducing the speaker of verse 6.

[26] I would argue that the aorist παρεδόθη, published poorly in English as a perfect verb, further identifies Jesus's appeal to inner divine life, that the plan of giving to the Son in time matches with the eternal self-giving from the Father to the Son. Thus, the giving is not perfective in force—things "having been given to Jesus the Messiah" on the plane of history (they have not been given yet in that sense, not until Matt 28). The reference is better taken as "all things once were given" (or some similar translation that captures the appeal to indeterminate past time).

Significantly verse 2 already identified that the Lord Yahweh has an Anointed One (עַל־יְהוָה וְעַל־מְשִׁיחוֹ) against whom *all the nations* rage. In the persons of Saul, David, Solomon, and all the rest of the royal house, the Lord did indeed have anointed kings. Yet, the context exceeds a normal reference to royal progeny. To claim that *all the nations* rage against David seems to be hyperbole. Thus, interpreters easily notice the set up for a typological presentation of the Anointed Lord by means of anointed David as early as verse 2 of the passage.[27]

In particular, verse 3 shows how this Anointed One would be the one decreed through whom the nations would be bound (מוֹסְרוֹתֵימוֹ), the nations raging for the removal of such "cords," עֲבֹתֵימוֹ.[28] It is precisely not through David that such a binding would take place (a fact of which David or any other inspired writer would be keenly aware).[29] Only through the final inheritor of David's throne could such a plan be accomplished, yet through the decree of the Lord, such a plan can be spoken of by means of prophecy. In fact, the decree itself becomes a kind of "binding" upon the prospects of any who would resist his will.

This background sets on a firm footing the interpretation of verse 6 as the speech of the Lord Yahweh, here considered as the *Father* since he addresses the *Son*. This "Son" however cannot be David or anyone like him who in the typical ancient Near

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[27] Derek Kidner sets the background well:

> While [Psalm 2] is usually considered a coronation psalm, it seems on closer inspection to recall that occasion (7–9) at a subsequent time of trouble (such as that of 2 Sam. 10). At David's own accession there were no subject-peoples to grow mutinous (3). For Solomon there were plenty, but there were few for any of his successors. A greater, however, than David or Solomon was needed to justify the full fury of these threats and the glory of these promises. (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, TOTC, vol. 15 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973], 66)

[28] The plural pronominal suffixes on both nouns point to both persons, the Lord and the Anointed, as the source of the bonds.

[29] See also Tremper Longman III, *Psalms*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 60. Longman recognizes the tension between "hypocritical" kings who would appreciate such vaunted language and genuine appreciation of the Psalm's eschataological sense after the fall of Zedekiah.

Eastern sense was considered the "human representative of the divine God on earth."[30] Instead, this Anointed One, this king, is presented in the heavenly, non-temporal design to be the permanent king. In time future to the world of Psalm 2, this king will be unchallenged because the plan is from God and not from men. The crucial fact comes from the perfective force of the Hebrew verb (נָסַכְתִּי).[31] Something that in the Psalm's frame of reference clearly has not yet happened (the establishment of the unchallenged anointed king on Zion) is presented through the perfect stem. In this sense, Psalm 2 began speaking about the decree before it so famously mentions the decree explicitly. The speaker of verse 7 introduces himself in the Hebrew with the piel cohortative verb: "May I announce the statute of Yahweh." The speaker then refers to his own personal identity through the pronominal: "the Lord said to me" (אֵלַי). The exegesis does not require but strongly suggests that this decree is sourced in the one the Son calls *LORD*, especially since the Son describes himself as a herald or messenger of that decree.

In the text's central, astounding clause ("You are my Son; today I have begotten you"), the Psalmist describes the declaration of the Father concerning the second person's sonship. Many have taken this text as one of the proofs for eternal generation, and the text certainly is not against that theological descriptor. The reasoning is quite simple: verse 7 describes a declaration of sonship that is not temporal. Therefore, this sonship is eternal and describes the eternal begetting of the Son from the Father.

However, the text is clearly driven by Messianic concerns. Also, one should properly distance concepts like 'eternal generation' or 'filiation' from doctrines of "decrees." A "decree to beget" is an impossible trinitarian formulation. Instead, the

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[30] Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, Rolf Jacobson, and Beth Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 68–69.

[31] The LXX translates with the aorist, likely due to contextual issues. Verse 6 includes two Hebrew imperfects with v. 7 switching both to Yahweh's direct speech and to the perfect verb. Within the speech God cities his own settled action, and the Greek perfect would emphasize the effect of the action unto the present. The LXX translators likely preferred the aorist due to its rendering of the past event as punctiliar and more "untouched" by present concerns. Most contemporary English versions translate the MT with the perfect tense.

passage speaks directly to the Father's decree that the Son be the anointed king. The direction or flow of action in the Father's decreeing and the Son's announcing matches the pattern of the Father's eternal generation of the Son. Taken as a "fit and typical pattern," the problems associated with directly relating Psalm 2 to eternal generation are avoided. What good may be said about eternal generation from Psalm 2 is retained by seeing its relationship to the economic Trinity in the context. The formulation in John 5:26 is most helpful, where Jesus teaches that the Father has life-in-himself and has also given the Son to have life-in-himself. Thus, such passages show the way in which (1) the eternal subsistence in the triune nature of the three persons and (2) eternal trinitarian delight match the contingent declarations that the Father would be the Sender of the Son and that the Son would be the Expositor of the Father. Psalm 2 supports an act of will (i.e. a decree) that matches, in a relationship of fittingness, the *taxis* of the Blessed Trinity.

The citation and use of this text in the New Testament confirms this summary. Three passages explicitly quote Psalm 2:7. Acts 13:33 invokes the text with reference to the raising of Jesus. Importantly, the resurrection is not merely in the Acts 13 context but is specifically the instrument by which Acts 13 claims Psalm 2 is fulfilled. Hebrews 1:5 does not mention Christ's resurrection and exaltation explicitly, but makes epexegetic comments on the initial claims regarding Jesus' exaltation. In other words, verses 3 and 4 speak not only of the Son as the exact imprint of the Father's nature, but also of his mission in the economy where he is proven "much superior to angels" by such things as "making purification for sins," and "sitting at the right hand of majesty" (a clear reference to the session of Christ). Verse 5 expands on verses 3 and 4, giving their precedent in the Old Testament. The forward-looking, messianic promise and heavenward-looking Sonship relation show why it is fitting that the Son would display not only the exact divine nature of the Father but also the glories of salvation and atonement.

The last text, Hebrews 5:5, like Acts 13:33, refers to the fulfillment of Psalm 2:7 in the context of the exaltation of Christ. The New Testament interprets Psalm 2:7 as fulfilled not so much at the baptism of Christ, but at his exaltation upon the completion of his messianic mission, though his baptism is important in the biblical trajectory. Each of the baptismal narratives includes the voice of the Father conveying pleasure in the "Beloved Son." The baptism is included on this trajectory, but these New Testament passages envision the completion of Psalm 2:7 in the resurrection and ascension. Romans 1:4 may serve as a final proof, where Christ is "designated the Son of God in power" (τοῦ ὁρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει) by the resurrection. Though Paul does not copy the language, he does copy the theological flow of thought. It is the resurrection, that designates Jesus, by the Spirit, as the son of God in this sense.

Therefore, Psalm 2:7 and its New Testament interpretations support the decree concerning the Son. This dissertation will argue for a hierarchical logic between the various decrees. Thus, in the first decree of God, a host of decrees impinge on the person and work of the Son. The total set of decrees, set out in their own relationships of logical priority and dependence, that relate to the person and work of Christ comprise what may be called "the Christological decree" or "the decree of Christ."

These various passages support the dissertation by showing how holy scripture sets forth decree concepts with a differentiation between God's life in himself—depending on divine nature—and his life toward the world—depending on divine will. Further, the exegesis of scripture shows, with a basis in divine revelation, God's own speech concerning how certain decrees in the total divine plan provide warrant for others. Last, scripture gives key insight into God's chief end in creation, to glorify the Son.

Conclusion

The treatment of Ephesians 1 revealed scripture's interest in a concept like an ultimate end that is original to God as an agent. What the text affirms, it clearly presented beyond the level of human contingency in any sense, requiring concepts of highly

developed divine intellection. The term βουλή and its adjacent concepts, I argued, require relationships of hierarchy and logical dependence in the divine decrees for a comprehensive design. The passage further confirmed that the decree concerning Christ is the true focal point on which all others depend. I argued in the exposition of the passage that the divine plan is not irrational yet possesses a rationality that can be perceived only in light of the whole—principally in light of its ultimate end, Christ. In other words, the interrelations of God's purposes and the propositions in the world he actualizes are mutually justifying. First Peter 1 supported this perspective while offering the decree as the sense in which "hidden" future actions do exist.

I argued that John 14 should be interpreted in such a way that the relations of origin in the divine nature render the Trinitarian missions to be "fitting" in the actual world. John 16:25–28 required this interpretive structure all the more since the passage seems to rely upon the Son's generation from the Father as the basis for his being the revealer of the Father. Jesus's request for glory from the Father in John 17 demonstrated not only Jesus's divinity but also a fitting relation between the Father as the source of glory and the Son as the one glorified. Further, the trinitarian will to actualize the world included and depended upon incarnate actions, such as the Son's prayer. The passage contained appeals in Jesus's prayer that appear to be an original ultimate end, since these appeals relied on a kind of tight circularity—the pleasure of God and no other proximate ends as some kind of external warrant. The Son's "acknowledgement" in Matthew 11 revealed a special role for the Father. Jesus's praise acknowledges the Father's goodwill, a kind of goodwill that can be "set before him" in a kind of "array" or understanding.

Hebrews 6:7 reminded us that God is a character in his own counsels. In other words, in God's plan, he can choose contingently to communicate his own determinations and his necessary truthful character to comfort his people, actualizing the world in which he is an agent. Psalm 2 included both the concepts and terminology of the decree. The passage matched, again, the insight that Trinitarian *taxis* and its fittingness seem to make

it right that God would actualize a world such as this one. On this basis, we can proceed to construct a model whereby the perfect God intends to create a good world that manifests the beauty of his subsistent relations and glorifies the Son through the Spirit's work to unite a redeemed people to his atoning work achieved in the incarnation.

CHAPTER 4

POSSIBILIA AND ABSTRACT OBJECTS AS THE PATRISTIC PRECEDENT FOR MODALITY| IN THEOLOGY

Though divine deliberation is not an historical theological topic or phrase, the adjacent topics that form its central ingredients certainly are. The following chapters address representative, not comprehensive, examples of debates in historical theology (1) that touch upon concepts necessary for this thesis on divine deliberation, (2) that argue over proper metaphysical semantics,[1] or (3) that do both. The background to the historical section of the dissertation (chapters 4–7) is the simple fact that theology has no "doctrine of possibility" *per se*; this dissertation has no clear, ongoing conversation in historical theology that it joins. However, lack of explicit engagement does not mean that modal concepts and metaphysical talk in historical theology have not related to what is possible.

Consequently, the dissertation must simply argue for and clarify its connections to adjacent conversations in historical theology. The four points of connection in these four chapters spread out across the patristic, medieval, and Reformation periods, and this first chapter explores how the patristics responded to early Neoplatonists. Well-established, culturally-instinctive philosophical doctrines (such as the existence of eternal forms) were rejected or sharply curtailed by early Christian writers. The aim of the chapter, therefore, is to present, analyze, and synthesize the church fathers and apologists of the first two centuries in their own context. Their issues and debates differ; however, they consistently argue in ways that prevent the

[1] Patterns of speech that systematically comport with common (or stated) first principles.

philosophical doctrine of forms or the pre-existence of matter (a ubiquitous Greek philosophical doctrine) from establishing the foundations of possibility outside of God, or as a limit upon God. The writing reports only those passages and writers most significant for the research, and, for simplicity, the analysis is broken up into three headings: one devoted to Justin Martyr, another to Irenaeus, and another to less voluminous writers or those whose writing simply touched less on these metaphysical issues. Chapter 5, on medieval thought, more directly relates to divine metaphysics, while the chapters on Reformed thought show how this dissertation's metaphysical semantics fit within that tradition. This thesis stands more directly in the modern Reformed tradition, so chapters 6 and 7 will interact with and deploy concepts explored there. This first historical chapter, by contrast, goes to the beginning of the Christian tradition, both to general metaphysical debates and specifically to the challenge of Platonism and abstract objects.

God and Abstract Objects

This dissertation's model of divine knowledge rejects notions that require God metaphysically to receive or employ objects that do not depend on him ontologically. The dissertation develops a more maximal view of divine knowing, but without predicating divine thoughts on God's interaction with pre-existent forms, *abstracta*, or anything else. Further, the nature of the Trinity and the relations of triune persons, based on the exegetical chapter, should supply the initial shape or furnishing for a model of divine deliberation, an insight traceable to the Apostolic Fathers. The question of Platonism and abstract objects has received extensive recent investigation. This chapter investigates Christian anti-Platonism through the main second century writers while culling various other insights and building blocks from the earliest apologists and theologians. The conclusion sets up the prospects for divine deliberation.

In few other circumstances does the philosopher play the gadfly so much as with reference to abstract objects or the process of thinking. So functional in the average person's life, abstract objects and snap decisions are central to the philosopher's

concerns. *"What is love? Is it a property that this person, your fiancé, truly possesses in a great quantity? How did you make that decision? Can you set forth your deduction?"* The actual function of abstract objects is often asserted as an answer to its ontological status: *"Of course mathematics exists – have you seen it work? Where would we be without it?"*

Debates in philosophical theology snarl these questions all the more: *"How does God relate (or not) to abstract objects, and how does God think?"* With an orthodoxy in view—whether Jewish, Christian, or Muslim—the question must answer to the respective doctrine of creation, for Abrahamic monotheism claims that God is the only Uncreated One, the Creator of all things. The pattern of Christian orthodoxy addressed these philosophical questions from its very inception in the early church, and the issues have been reinserted into contemporary Christian philosophy—inserted precisely where a dearth of work and publication existed.

The purpose of this chapter therefore is to address a Christian philosophy of the divine mind through historical treatment of the ante-Nicene fathers and apologists. The chapter first will broach contemporary debates to show the intersection of philosophy and Christian Theism vis-à-vis divine deliberation and the question of abstract objects. With these lines traced, the chapter presents research on the ante-Nicene fathers—excluding Tertullian's voluminous writing to reduce overall scope. The chapter concludes with a summary and application for Christian philosophical theology.

The question of God and abstract objects is not treated in a wide swath of contemporary philosophy but is growing in recent discussion.[2] One of the only recently-published and accessible volumes is from editor and contributor Paul Gould.[3] William

[2] For example, the symposium between William Lane Craig, J. Thomas Bridges, and Peter Van Inwagen in *Philosophia Christi* 7, no. 2 (2015): 267–307. See also William Lane Craig, *God over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[3] Paul M. Gould, ed., *Beyond the Control of God: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

Lane Craig, a primary *provocateur* in the contemporary discussion, writes a key essay in the volume. Craig claims that to conceive of abstract objects as Platonism does—with independent, eternal status—runs afoul of the Nicene Creed itself; thus, the Christian philosopher should be pleased to abandon Platonism with respect to abstract objects.[4]

The response to Craig's claim (hereafter, CC) is not uniform. For example, Scott Shalkowski, another anti-realist with regard to abstract objects, does not think that the possible eternal, self-existent status of such abstract objects would threaten classical Christian theism.[5] Paul Gould, a Platonist himself, concurs. Greg Welty, another author in the volume, does not explicitly agree with CC, yet his "Theistic Conceptual Realism" proves to be a model architecturally fit as a response to CC—a modification of Platonism in response to the dilemma.

Paul Gould admits the fact that "there is a tension between traditional theism . . . and Platonism, a tension that has been noticed since at least the time of Augustine."[6] The word *tension*, however, is too generous for Gould's position and does not match the Western doctors that he cites, for—with reference to the Platonic doctrine—Augustine uses the term *blasphemous* and Aquinas the term *contrary*.[7]

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[4] William Lane Craig, "Anti-Platonism," in Gould, *Beyond the Control of God*, 114–15.

[5] Scott Shalkowski, "God with or without Abstract Objects," in Gould, *Beyond the Control of God*, 143.

[6] Paul M. Gould, "Introduction to the Problem of God and Abstract Objects," in Gould, *Beyond the Control of God*, 2.

[7] Gould's own endnote he cites Augustine and Aquinas in turn:

> When considering the nature of creation, Augustine notes "God was not fixing his gaze upon anything located outside Himself to serve as a model when he made the things he created, for such a view is blasphemous" (On Eighty-Three Diverse Questions, question 46, "*De Ideis*," quoted in Wolterstorff 1970, 280). Aquinas nicely states this tension between Platonism and the Christian faith as well: "it seems contrary to the faith to hold, as the Platonists did, that the Forms of things exist in themselves" (*Summa Theologiae* 1.84.5). (Gould, 17n4)

No explanation for Gould's appraisal of a "tension" rather than contradiction in the doctors' writings is forthcoming. The reference to Nicholas Wolterstorff is to his *On Universals* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970). Wolterstorff is less sanguine about the possibility of harmony between the Christianity and Platonism.

The question of God and abstract objects is an opportunity for philosophical and historical theology both to set forth the issues more clearly and to frame up an answer. Both debates, therefore, vindicate a project to read carefully the early fathers and apologists on questions (1) of the divine mind, (2) whether eternal abstracta threaten the divine status, (3) and whether the divine mind, pre-creation, thinks in such a way as to deliberate according to will.[8]

Justin Martyr

First and Second Apology

Justin Martyr in his *First Apology* identifies Jesus, the Word, also as the Logos, applying this point in condemnation of the Greeks: "For not only among the Greeks did reason (Logos) prevail to condemn these things through Socrates, but also among the Barbarians were they condemned by Reason (or the Word, the Logos) Himself, who took shape, and became man, and was called Jesus Christ."[9] Justin identifies a trinitarian person with embodied reason, whose existence condemns the wicked by his agency and essence.

Justin, characteristic of the early fathers, does supply the Word himself as the basis of creation's form, contrasting that point in this passage with the mythological background of the Greek poets' "form": "In imitation, therefore, of what is here said of the Spirit of God moving on the waters, they said that Proserpine [or Cora] was the daughter of Jupiter. And in like manner also they craftily feigned that Minerva was the

[8] Christopher Stead notes the proclivity of the early Christian writers to refer to God as Perfect Mind; further, the notions of mind in evidence are clearly dependent on Platonism (however, his data may be self-selecting here: the Platonists themselves would be the ones most likely to use the term *nous* in any case). He argues that the Platonic conception of mind became the common stock of Christian orthodoxy. Though he does not want "to exaggerate the tendency," he critiques the church fathers and their commitment to Platonic categories, arguing that "the Godhead cannot be pictured in this fashion." Christopher Stead, "The Concept of Mind and the Concept of God in the Christian Fathers," in *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology: Essays Presented to D. M. MacKinnon*, ed. Donald M. MacKinnon, Brian Hebblethwaite, and Stewart R. Sutherland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 52–53.

[9] Justin Martyr, "First Apology," *ANF* (1885, repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:164.

daughter of Jupiter, not by sexual union, but, knowing that God conceived and made the world by the Word." Thus, Justin's overall Trinitarian concept is bound up with creation, as when he mentions both Spirit and Son in relation to the Creation of the world.[10]

On this basis, Justin claims for Christians a participatory knowledge—"the knowledge and contemplation of the whole Word, which is Christ."[11] This idea Justin contrasts with Plato who says in the *Timaeus* that "it is neither easy to find the Father and Maker of all, nor, having found Him, is it safe to declare Him to all." Justin argues that "since [the Word] is a power of the ineffable Father, not the mere instrument of human reason," his apology provides better ground for metaphysical reason than the philosophers.[12]

Dialogue with Trypho

Logos and communication. Central to apologetic concerns with Jewish interlocutors is the question of the nature of Messiah's coming. Justin asserts two advents in the plan of salvation and does so in a manner original to God—not a reactive choice based on human contingency.[13]

Justin seeks to establish the divinity of Christ with Trypho and argues that Jesus is "called God" yet "distinct from Him who made all things,—numerically, I mean, not [distinct] in will.[14] For I affirm that He has never at any time done anything which He

[10] Justin Martyr, "First Apology," *ANF* 1:184–85.

[11] Justin Martyr, "Second Apology," *ANF* 1:191.

[12] Justin Martyr, "Second Apology," *ANF* 1:191

[13] Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," *ANF* 1:210.

[14] Justin Martyr addresses elsewhere the matter of numeric division:

> And that this power which the prophetic word calls God, as has been also amply demonstrated, and Angel, is not numbered [as different] in name only like the light of the sun, but is indeed something numerically distinct, I have discussed briefly in what has gone before; when I asserted that this power was begotten from the Father, by His power and will, but not by abscission, as if the essence of the Father were divided; as all other things partitioned and divided are not the same after as before they were divided. ("Dialogue with Trypho," *ANF* 1:264)

who made the world—above whom there is no other God—has not wished Him both to do and to engage Himself with."[15] Justin's purpose is to establish the "otherness" of a divine person, and he makes his distinction between a numerical and a volitional pole.

Justin argues exegetically that the Son must be begotten of the Father:

> "I shall give you another testimony, my friends," said I, "from the Scriptures, that God begat before all creatures a Beginning, [who was] a certain rational power [proceeding] from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord and Logos; and on another occasion He calls Himself Captain, when He appeared in human form to Joshua the son of [Nun]. For He can be called by all those names, since He ministers to the Father's will . . . since He was begotten of the Father by an act of will"[16]

Justin continues the argument: "But this Offspring, which was truly brought forth from the Father, was with the Father before all the creatures, and the Father communed with Him."[17] Bracketing the question of pre-incarnate appearances (i.e. the Captain), one can conclude that Justin ascribes to the Son rational power and communion with the Father. According to Justin, Christ "trusts in" and "refers all things to the Father."[18] These statements should not be abused, but to argue that Justin's statement requires at least mental assent and communication is not to over-interpret.

Critique on the nature and number of first principles. Having proceeded from an analysis of the many pre-Socratic philosophers, Justin treats Plato and Aristotle and points out the contradictory nature of the two "most renowned and finished philosophers."[19] In particular, he cites their disagreement on the number of first

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[15] Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," *ANF* 1:223–24.

[16] Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," *ANF* 1:227.

[17] Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," *ANF* 1:228.

[18] Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," *ANF* 1:249.

[19] Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," *ANF* 1:275.

principles.[20] He analyzes Plato further, pointing out the incongruity in the philosopher's teaching. *"Are there some things made that are indestructible and immortal?"* is the animating question, and Justin arraigns Plato for answering with both an affirmation and denial:

> Plato, at any rate, at one time says that there are three first principles of the universe— God, and matter, and form; but at another time four, for he adds the universal soul. And again, when he has already said that matter is eternal, he afterwards says that it is produced; and when he has first given to form its peculiar rank as a first principle, and has asserted for its self-subsistence, he afterwards says that this same thing is among the things perceived by the understanding. Moreover, having first declared that everything that is made is mortal he afterwards states that some of the things that are made are indestructible and immortal. What, then, is the cause why those who have been esteemed wise among you disagree not only with one another but also with themselves?[21]

Justin thereby establishes an early Christian *reductio* against the objective existence of Platonic universals.

Essence and mental act. A God concept dominated by the divine-as-essence does not (or likely will not) broach the question of how God may or must act mentally to plan. Analysis must be held in abeyance for the following point, for Justin provides an alternative consideration relevant to the early Christian God concept: the creator must develop creatively and discursively, neither constrained nor guided by the capability of himself or the pre-given matter: " . . .Plato never names him the creator, but the fashioner of the gods, although, in the opinion of Plato, there is considerable difference between these two. For the creator creates the creature by his own capability and power, being in need of nothing else; but the fashioner frames his production when he has received from

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[20] Justin Martyr says,

> While Plato says that there are three first principles of all things, God, and matter, and form,—God, the maker of all; and matter, which is the subject of the first production of all that is produced, and affords to God opportunity for His workmanship; and form, which is the type of each of the things produced,—Aristotle makes no mention at all of form as a first principle, but says that there are two, God and matter. (Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," *ANF* 1:275–76)

[21] Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," *ANF* 1:276.

matter the capability for his work."[22] A deliberative model of the divine will-to-create and Edwards's Original Ultimate End guard divine aseity by preventing any essence or abstract object to "frame the fashioner by what he receives." The Creator's mind receives only from his own mind.

Justin critiques Plato's cosmology, more than his metaphysics; however, the upshot is again to highlight God's utterly unique preexistence because any other pre-existent thing would prove a constraint upon God. An important caveat adds finesse to the consideration. Justin cites Plato approvingly in a later passage: "This we lay down as the first principle of fire and the other bodies, proceeding according to probability and necessity. But the first principles of these again God above knows, and whosoever among men is beloved of Him."[23] Therefore, Justin allows "first principles" that "God above knows" due to his status as Creator. God knows both the probabilities and necessity by which fire burns.

Irenaeus

Against Heresies: Book 1

Critique of mythological cosmology. Irenaeus wrote at great length against the Gnostics, whose metaphysic was less than an organized philosophy; however, certain of Irenaeus's commitments are latent in his counterpoints. The Valentinians claimed that Jesus just *happened* to be the Word, one of the *Æons* of the heavenly *pleroma*. The Savior could have been another *Æon*: "it would have been probable that the apostle spoke of another."[24] Irenaeus asserts the orthodox claim as Old Testament monotheism:

> One God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and

[22] Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," *ANF* 1:282.

[23] Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," *ANF* 1:283.

[24] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 1," *ANF* 1:229.

> the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord.[25]

Irenaeus's scriptural appeal preserves the trinitarian nature, condemns gnostic cosmology, and makes viable the economic works of the Trinity; however, the bulk of Irenaeus's overall critique against these heresies does not speak to the question of the divine mind. His reassertion of monotheism against the pagan cosmology does reassert what was latent in Justin and others as well: no pre-existent form or matter can account for the world's presentation, and therefore the world's comprehensible shape must be a matter of divine creative thought. Thus the bishop argues that "the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God" is "not found in this, that any one should, beyond the Creator and Framer [of the world], conceive" of any such constructions of the *Æons* and the *Pleroma* separate from the faith of the Catholic Church."[26] Irenaeus argues against the alternative ontology on the basis of Trinitarianism.

Critique of mathematical cosmology. However, within Irenaeus resides a complicating point, that divine thought itself cannot account for any creation. He traces the declension of divine thought whereby "all the Æons were brought into existence at once by *Propator* and his *Ennœa* . . . When the *Propator* conceived the thought of producing something, he received the name of Father."[27] Irenaeus discards the Gnostic commitment that mere thought is productive of beings, in this case *Anthropos, Aletheia, Ecclesia, Logos,* and *Zoe* by the divine coupling of "*Propator* and his *Ennœa.*"

Separate from the mythological critique, Irenaeus confutes the mathematical cosmology of the Marcosian sect: "[T]hey refer everything to numbers, maintaining that the universe has been formed out of a Monad and a Dyad. And then, reckoning from unity on to four, they thus generate the Decad. For when one, two, three, and four are

[25] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 1," *ANF* 1:330.

[26] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 1," *ANF* 1:332.

[27] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 1," *ANF* 1:333.

added together, they give rise to the number of the ten Æons."[28] The point is significant, for it represents a refutation of cosmology in the platonic style, at least insofar as that cosmology possesses some mathematical realism according to which created things are made according to its invisible dictates.[29] In the main, Irenaeus's refutation is otherwise devoted to Christological and soteriological matters (i.e. differing applications of redemption through the Savior), according to which "knowledge is the redemption of the inner man."[30]

Against Heresies: Book 2

Divine Mental Conception. Commending orthodox teaching, Irenaeus highlights once more the inconsistency of the notion that one Supreme Divinity would form the mental comprehension of the universe and a Lesser Divinity would shape its form. This backdrop launches the church father's presentation:

> Let them cease, therefore, to affirm that the world was made by any other; for as soon as God formed a conception in His mind, that was also done which He had thus mentally conceived. For it was not possible that one Being should mentally form the conception, and another actually produce the things which had been conceived by Him in His mind. But God, according to these heretics, mentally conceived either an eternal world or a temporal one, both of which suppositions cannot be true. Yet if He had mentally conceived of it as eternal, spiritual, and visible, it would also have been formed such. But if it was formed such as it really

[28] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 2," *ANF* 1:341.

[29] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 2," *ANF* 1:342. Both the ontological commitments of thought and the mathematical cosmology are addressed forcefully when Irenaeus confutes Basilides:

> Basilides again, that he may appear to have discovered something more sublime and plausible, gives an immense development to his doctrines. He sets forth that Nous was first born of the unborn father, that from him, again, was born Logos, from Logos Phronesis, from Phronesis Sophia and Dynamis, and from Dynamis and Sophia the powers, and principalities, and angels, whom he also calls the first; and that by them the first heaven was made. Then other powers, being formed by emanation from these, created another heaven similar to the first; and in like manner, when others, again, had been formed by emanation from them, corresponding exactly to those above them, these, too, framed another third heaven; and then from this third, in downward order, there was a fourth succession of descendants; and so on, after the same fashion, they declare that more and more principalities and angels were formed, and three hundred and sixty-five heavens. Wherefore the year contains the same number of days in conformity with the number of the heavens. (Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 2," *ANF* 1:349)

[30] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 2," *ANF* 1:346.

> is, then He made it such who had mentally conceived of it as such; or He willed it to exist in the ideality of the Father, according to the conception of His mind, such as it now is, compound, mutable, and transient. Since, then, it is just such as the Father had [ideally] formed in counsel with Himself, it must be worthy of the Father.[31]

The implications of this claim could hardly be overstated. First, Irenaeus locates ontological realism only after divine processes of "mental conception" and "actual production." Second, Irenaeus records a first instance that more plainly points toward pre-creational *activity* in the divine mind, by which God "counsels with Himself" to arrive at that which is "mentally conceived." If "all things are to be spoken of as having been so prepared by God beforehand,"[32] what is the nature of this preparation? This plan is not a "creation" (in the sense of being extended in time and space), but according to Irenaeus' treatment, it must in some way involve mental extension.

The effectiveness of divine thought. A later passage, though primarily a *reductio* against his opponents, still offers insight into the bishop's working concept of the divine mind.[33] Irenaeus argues that God's true idea must be that which comes to fruition. However, if God is ever ignorant of or permissive toward a modification of his mental proposition then that ontological existent is "more powerful, stronger, and more kingly." No reason seems available to assume that this ontological existent could *only* be a lesser divine person and *preclude* that it could be eternal abstract objects.

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[31] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 2," *ANF* 1:362.

[32] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 2," *ANF* 1:362.

[33] The relevant section is as follows:

> The [immediate] Creator, then, is not the [real] Author of this work, thinking, as He did, that He formed it very good, but He who allows and approves of the productions of defect, and the works of error having a place among his own possessions, and that temporal things should be mixed up with eternal, corruptible with incorruptible, and those which partake of error with those which belong to truth. If, however, these things were formed without the permission or approbation of the Father of all, then that Being must be more powerful, stronger, and more kingly, who made these things within a territory which properly belongs to Him (the Father), and did so without His permission. If again, as some say, their Father permitted these things without approving of them, then He gave the permission on account of some necessity, being either able to prevent [such procedure], or not able. (Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 2," *ANF* 1:365)

With regard to divine deliberation, dynamics of the trinitarian mind would be obviated by this conception if such deliberation were to involve conflict between the divine persons' mental propositions. However, a God concept that forms assured divine ideas through interpersonal communication—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—would not *prima facie* transgress the bounds of Irenaeus's theological reasoning, so long as it is free from notions of disagreement, confutation, or frustration. The possibility of divine deliberation is not here discarded but, at least, is tightly framed. Moreover, some notion of volitional deliberation seems necessary, in fact, to Irenaeus's thought, though his development is not in this direction. He immediately argues that since God is "free and independent"[34] that he may not be "a slave to necessity, or that anything takes place with His permission, yet against His desire; otherwise they will make necessity greater and more kingly than God, since that which has the most power is superior to all [others]."[35]

Intellection without extension. Irenaeus argues that the Logos is the "intelligence sent forth of God" yet since it is of the "mind of God, who is all understanding, [the Logos can] never by any means be separated from Himself; nor can anything [in His case] be produced as if by a different Being".[36] Later, he adds, "He is all Nous, and all Logos, as I have said before, and has in Himself nothing more ancient or late than another, and nothing at variance with another, but continues altogether equal, and similar, and homogeneous, there is no longer ground for conceiving of such

[34] Another counterpoint against the heretics confirms the necessity of a divine freedom that is found in voluntary determination of all things: "And that they may be deemed capable of informing us whence is the substance of matter, while they believe not that God, according to His pleasure, in the exercise of His own will and power, formed all things (so that those things which now are should have an existence) out of what did not previously exist, they have collected [a multitude of] vain discourses." Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 2," *ANF* 1:370.

[35] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 2," *ANF* 1:365. The passage confirms that Irenaeus does not include only God's potential competition with lesser deities but with "necessity" itself.

[36] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 2," *ANF* 1:374.

production in the order which has been mentioned."[37] In this manner, Irenaeus argues for an eternal generation of the Logos that is extension of the divine mind without division and is not an ontologically productive action. The notion of "setting forth the Logos" agrees with the exegetical conclusion of this study. If God's original ultimate end is the glorification of the son through incarnation and atonement, then all manner of logically subsequent ideas follow to form the plan for the world.

Against Heresies: Book 3

At the conclusion of Book 3 Irenaeus states—in refutation of Marcion—that if the goodness and justice of God are to be separate as operations of different persons, then divinity is compromised:

> By dividing God into two, maintaining one to be good and the other judicial, does in fact, on both sides, put an end to deity. For he that is the judicial one, if he be not good, is not God, because he from whom goodness is absent is no God at all; and again, he who is good, if he has no judicial power, suffers the same [loss] as the former, by being deprived of his character of deity.[38]

This statement realizes a problem if justice is treated as an abstract existent to which God conforms. This problem does not obtain, however, for deliberative mental activity of the divine persons. Moreover, with regard to the economy of salvation, the Trinitarian canon of *inseparable operations* answers Irenaeus's concern (if one takes this mental activity as an *ad extra* work). Consequently, in addressing his opponents, Irenaeus makes available a framework for God's original creative activity, but does not develop it in Trinitarian or non-Trinitarian terms.

Against Heresies: Book 4

In Book 4, Irenaeus argues that the Word and Wisdom (for him, "the Son and Spirit") were always with the Father, "anterior to all creation."[39] Irenaeus does not

[37] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 2," *ANF* 1:375.

[38] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 3," *ANF* 1:459.

[39] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 4," *ANF* 1:486.

finesse the point theologically but says no less than that God created "by Wisdom," which therefore is with the second Trinitarian person. Moreover, this relation cannot be merely economic but intellective due to the passages Irenaeus cites:

> "God by Wisdom founded the earth, and by understanding hath He established the heaven. By His knowledge the depths burst forth, and the clouds dropped down the dew."
>
> And again: "The Lord created me the beginning of His ways in His work: He set me up from everlasting, in the beginning, before He made the earth, before He established the depths, and before the fountains of waters gushed forth; before the mountains were made strong, and before all the hills, He brought me forth."
>
> And again: "When He prepared the heaven, I was with Him, and when He established the fountains of the deep; when He made the foundations of the earth strong, I was with Him preparing [them]. I was He in whom He rejoiced, and throughout all time I was daily glad before His face, when He rejoiced at the completion of the world, and was delighted in the sons of men."[40]

These comments reveal a concept whereby the "Son and Spirit" are, in some sense for Irenaeus the answer for how the Father arrives at the will to create.

Shorter Writings

Diognetus

The Epistle to Diognetus in chapter 2 condemns pagan idols as vain and in chapters 3 and 4 includes the Jews as (like the pagans) superstitious in the present iteration of their religious observances. Chapters 5 and 6 briefly introduce the belief and, more significantly, the pattern of life for the Christians. In chapter 7, the argument takes a more richly theological turn:

> Truly God Himself, who is almighty, the Creator of all things, and invisible, has sent from heaven, and placed among men, [Him who is] the truth, and the holy and incomprehensible Word, and has firmly established Him in their hearts. He did not, as one might have imagined, sent to men any servant, or angel, or ruler, or any one of those who bear sway over earthly things, or one of those to whom the government of things in the heavens has been entrusted, but the very Creator and Fashioner of all things.[41]

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[40] Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: Book 4," *ANF* 1:486.

[41] Mathetes, "The Epistle to Diognetus," *ANF* 1:82. Note that "Mathetes" is the Greek word *teacher* ascribed to the unnamed author (by some scholars) for ease of reference.

This apologetic letter presents central early claims: (1) God is the almighty Creator, and (2) the Word, sent from God into the world, is also the "Creator and Fashioner of all things." The epistle proceeds from this claim to coordinate God's character and his thoughts:

> Yea, He was always of such a character, and still is, and will ever be, kind and good, and free from wrath, and true, and the only one who is [absolutely] good; and He formed in His mind a great and unspeakable conception, which He communicated to His Son alone. As long, then, as He held and preserved His own wise counsel in concealment, He appeared to neglect us, and to have no care over us. But after He revealed and laid open, through His beloved Son, the things which had been prepared from the beginning, He conferred every blessing all at once upon us, so that we should both share in His benefits, and see and be active [in His service]. Who of us would ever have expected these things? He was aware, then, of all things in His own mind, along with His Son, according to the relation subsisting between them.[42]

The author's philosophical finesse vis-à-vis his Trinitarian doctrine merits careful attention, especially due to its early date. The author highlights the divine mind as an answer to pagan conceptions of cosmological origins and destination, and he avers that the Father originates and communicates to the Son. The content of "His own wise" counsel and his being aware of "all things in His own mind, along with His Son" imply a voluntary original plan. That one person of the Trinity (the Father) communicates to another (the Son).

The Shepherd of Hermas

The Shepherd of Hermas contains little conceptual theology, emphasizing practicality. One passage, however, shows how closely-joined characteristic patristic affirmations are to early Christian life. The Shepherd instructs his reader:

> First of all, believe that there is one God who created and finished all things, and made all things out of nothing. He alone is able to contain the whole, but Himself cannot be contained. Have faith therefore in Him, and fear Him; and fearing Him, exercise self- control. Keep these commands, and you will cast away from you all wickedness, and put on the strength of righteousness, and live to God, if you keep this commandment.[43]

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[42] Mathetes, "The Epistle to Diognetus," *ANF* 1:83.

[43] "The Pastor of Hermas," *ANF* (1885; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 2:20.

Though not in a philosophical treatise, the principal creedal affirmation that God (1) created all things (2) out of nothing, and is (3) able to "contain the whole" has metaphysical ramifications. In particular, the conjunction of the verbs "created and finished" boxes out any possibility that a lesser divinity began or took over the project, while "all things" would include abstract objects among those things "created."

Tatian, "Address to the Greeks"

Tatian follows the logic of Justin closely in setting forth the interaction of divine persons in creation; significantly, he adds some additional philosophical vocabulary (retained in Greek):

> God was in the beginning; but the beginning, we have been taught, is the power of the Logos. For the Lord of the universe, who is Himself the necessary ground (ὑπόστασις) of all being, inasmuch as no creature was yet in existence, was alone; but inasmuch as He was all power, Himself the necessary ground of things visible and invisible, with Him were all things; with Him, by Logos-power (διὰ λογικῆς δυνάμεως), the Logos Himself also, who was in Him, subsists. And by His simple will the Logos springs forth; and the Logos, not coming forth in vain, becomes the first-begotten work of the Father. Him (the Logos) we know to be the beginning of the world. But He came into being by participation,[44] not by abscission; for what is cut off is separated from the original substance, but that which comes by participation, making its choice of function, does not render him deficient from whom it is taken.[45]

Tatian adds such concepts as the ground of all being and reinforces that the "first principles" spring forth from the divine essence itself in the Logos. Tatian is one of the few to connect such divine ideas to the activity of the Son, rather than the Father.

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[44] Underlying "by participation" is the Greek κατὰ μερισμόν; however, "by division" is not the better translation due to the semantic context. He argues that some "cutting" (abscission) or any other act of separation appropriate to describe matter is inappropriate to describe the begetting of the Logos. Further, for Tatian the essential to the Logos and the Divine life is his sharing the rational power of the Father (Tatian also will employ Justin's figure of the torch that partakes in the flame of the torch that lit it).

[45] Tatian, "Address to the Greeks," *ANF*, 2:67.

Theophilus, "Theophilus to Autolycus"

Theophilus offers a profoundly developed coordination of Trinitarian theology and creation doctrine:[46]

> God, then, having His own Word internal within His own bowels, begat Him, emitting Him along with His own wisdom before all things. He had this Word as a helper in the things that were created by Him, and by Him He made all things. He is called "governing principle" [ἀρκή], because He rules, and is Lord of all things fashioned by Him. He, then, being Spirit of God, and governing principle, and wisdom, and power of the highest, came down upon the prophets, and through them spoke of the creation of the world and of all other things. . . . Wherefore He speaks thus by the prophet Solomon: "When He prepared the heavens I was there, and when He appointed the foundations of the earth I was by Him as one brought up with Him." And Moses, who lived many years before Solomon, or, rather, the Word of God by him as by an instrument, says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."[47]

Nascent trinitarian theology therefore delivers to Theophilus metaphysical commitments when he reads Genesis 1. Though he sets forth generation and procession together with creation, and includes all the trinitarian persons in the work, he does not delimit personal roles or mental design. Theophilus supplies Trinitarian architecture in the place of Form in terms of governing cosmological principles.

Athenagoras, "A Plea for the Christians"

Athenogoras argues that the Christians should not be considered *atheoi* since they acknowledge "one God, the Maker of this universe, who is Himself uncreated . . . but has made all things by the Logos which is from Him . . . ."[48] Thus, he concludes that Christians are treated unreasonably. He also has set forth the very problem for the empire: Christians worship a supreme God whose "Logos which is from Him" orders creation. Worship therefore is the consequence of all action, and plural divine claims cannot be sustained.

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[46] When Theophilus speaks of God's Word "internal" (ἐνδιάθτον), he employs language from LXX Ps. 45:1, a text used against Arius at Nicaea.

[47] Theophilus, "Theophilus to Autolycus," *ANF* 2:98.

[48] Athenogoras, "A Plea for the Christians," *ANF* 2:131.

Athenogoras proceeds into far more detail than many writers and develops a Trinitarian conception of mind. This trinitarian God concept does not necessarily rely on volitional, deliberative powers, however, for the *Logos* is construed as the actual design itself.

> And, the Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son, in oneness and power of spirit, the understanding and reason (νοῦς καὶ λόγος) of the Father is the Son of God . . . He is the first product of the Father, not as having been brought into existence (for from the beginning, God, who is the eternal mind [νοῦς], had the Logos in Himself, being from eternity instinct with Logos [λογικός]) . . . The prophetic Spirit also agrees with our statements. "The Lord," it says, "made me, the beginning of His ways to His works."[49]

Similarly, he addresses the beliefs of Thales and Plato, incorporating the thinkers by showing how they already divide their understandings of the supreme beings into higher and lower categories, the higher being characterized by supreme intelligence. Athenogoras argues that the philosophers speak better than they know affirming one sole intelligence on which others depend:

> God, [Thales] recognises as the *Intelligence* (νοῦς) of the world; by *demons* he understands beings possessed of soul (ψυχικαί); and by *heroes* the separated souls of men, the good being the good souls, and the bad the worthless. Plato again, while withholding his assent on other points, also divides [superior beings] into the uncreated God and those produced by the uncreated One for the adornment of heaven, the planets, and the fixed stars, and into demons; concerning which demons, while he does not think fit to speak himself, he thinks that those ought to be listened to who have spoken about them.[50]

This passage confirms that Athenegoras finds purchase in the Logos as intelligence and in his God-concept supremely marked by *mind*. Divine works of planning and providence are asserted but not integrated in terms of how the divine mind develops its content. This mental content cannot, in any case, be the eternal Forms—in accordance with his polemic against Plato.

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[49] Athenogoras, "A Plea for the Christians," *ANF* 2:133.

[50] Athenogoras, "A Plea for the Christians," *ANF* 2:141.

Clement of Alexandria, "The Stromata, or Miscellanies"

Clement of Alexandria follows the former writers when he treats of the opinions of the Greek philosophers concerning the nature of God. However, he penetrates the issues more deeply when he argues for *development* in the Greek god-concepts, development *from* treating the elements *to* supreme mind as metaphysical first principles. He presents the pagans as working towards a doctrine that, like the Christian teaching, embraces the creation of first principles by God. Without God, they divinize the first principles. "The elements were designated as the first principles of all things by some of them: by Thales of Miletus, who celebrated water, and Anaximenes, also of Miletus, who celebrated air as the first principle of all things, and was followed afterwards by Diogenes of Apollonia. Parmenides of Elia introduced fire and earth as gods."[51] He argues that, inevitably, these Greek philosophers regarded "as divine certain first principles, being ignorant of the great First Cause, the Maker of all things, and Creator of those very first principles, the unbeginning God, but reverencing "these weak and beggarly elements," as the apostle says."[52]

Significantly, Clement argues that God is the "Creator" of all "first principles." Because he coordinates the claim *contra* the earliest Greek metaphysicians, his assertion applies to contemporary debates, not to be dismissed as a reference to the physical. The statements deserve only a measured impact, however, since the metaphysical conceptions he cites are of course not Platonic. Clement proffers *created* "first principles."

Clement traces this development to those who "have eagerly sought after something higher and Nobler . . . "Anaximander of Miletus, Anaxagoras of Clazomenæ, and the Athenian Archelaus, both of whom set Mind (νοῦς) above Infinity . . . Democritus of Abdera . . . added to them images (ειδωλα)."[53] Though he does not cite Plato in this

[51] Clement of Alexandria, "The Stromata, or Miscellanies," *ANF* 2:190.

[52] Clement of Alexandria, "The Stromata, or Miscellanies," *ANF* 2:190.

[53] Clement of Alexandria, "The Stromata, or Miscellanies," *ANF* 2:190.

passage, Clement seems to move further to a position contradictory of abstract existents. Further, Clement establishes an axiom for theological models of possibility, abstract objects, and creation: it is "higher and nobler" to "set Mind above Infinity."

Conclusion

The data from the early church fathers, therefore, supports anti-Platonism, as these early thinkers argue that platonic form—as a first principle—is an ontological existent together with God which diminishes the overall concept of his being Creator of all. In short, these patristic writers make the Platonic doctrine of forms part of their polemic, not with regard to the forms as constituent of reality, or the pattern prescribed for substance, but as an uncreated object.

Justin Martyr emphasized contemplation of reason ("the Word") and claimed that the Word metaphysically grounds reason better than the pagans' account. Contemplation of the Word is especially amenable to divine deliberation since God's contemplation of Christ and all he would be must be central to the concept. Further, Justin contains metaphysical postulates that require Platonic form—or anything like it—to be a subset of God's knowledge, rather than something independent and eternal.

Irenaeus reinforced that the world's comprehensible shape is due to the divine mind. In contrast with mathematical Neoplatonic cosmology, Irenaeus rejected that the supreme being contemplated a particular "Aeon" or "Word" out of many others. However, the Father's decision to create is, in a biblical sense, a contemplation of the Word, all that Christ would be through the glorification that ensues from his mission in the actual world. Irenaeus does separate the concepts of "mental conception" and "actual production," an ancient facsimile of contemporary jargon related to possible and actual worlds. Further, he uses terminology related to divine mental acts such as "counseling with himself." His terminology of God's "preparing beforehand" or mentally conceiving, can be interpreted as the logical relations of the divine mind and the intention of the divine will. Every Christian theologian must agree with Irenaeus that God cannot be "a

slave to necessity." Irenaeus's insights matched the general goal of this project, as well as the conclusions of the exegetical chapter: the Son and the Spirit are in some sense the answer to the question concerning how the Father wills what he wills.

The Epistle to Diognetus refuted pagan cosmological origins of the universe and grounded the universe's shape and reality in the mind of God. Interestingly, the author appealed to a kind of meta-knowledge of one's intention: he uses language where God the Father is aware of "all things in his own mind, along with his son." This manner of speaking touches upon deliberative concepts because it is aware both of possibilities and of one's disposition towards them. The practical work, the Shepherd of Hermas, affirmed God as the one who "is able to contain the whole, but himself cannot be contained." Tatian's significant contribution is his explicit appeal to God as the necessary ground of all things and his appeal to the nature of the Logos as the source of "first principles."

For Theophilus of Antioch, the nature of the Trinity accounted for the form of matter also. He equated God's "word internal" with the "governing principle" of the world, a general pattern of thought continued in Athenagoras. In fact, the consideration of Athenagoras and Clement emphasized how the early Greek fathers primarily associated God with intelligence, a mind that, as Clement says, is "set above infinity." The earliest church fathers, therefore, use terminology strikingly similar to much of that found in contemporary theological writing. God's knowledge of all possible worlds, his infinite awareness of potential hypotheticals, is easy to coordinate with their patterns of speech. In fact, considering the decree regarding Christ as the original ultimate end, the Logos *does* account for the form of actual matter, not just in terms of a metaphysical theory that relates form and matter, but in terms of a modal theory that accounts for the world God chooses to create. The apostolic fathers supported the project to develop a full account of God's knowledge of all possible worlds and his will-to-create the actual world.

In sum, I would argue that the early church fathers set a course amenable to a theory of divine deliberation. Apologists such as Justin and Athenagoras refuted the pre-existence of universals alongside God, as if his plans, creation, or mental concepts combined elements ontologically latent in both himself and other abstract objects. Though some of their trinitarian language (especially that of Athenagoras) seems too costly for divine essential unity, second-century apologists (especially Justin) represent trinitarian semantics that allow concepts of mental assent and communication within God's unity. Two further insights are especially relevant for divine deliberation: the Creator's mind receives only from his own mind; God knows both the probabilities and necessity "by which fire burns." Of course, contemporary Christian thinkers may depart from the early apologetic direction, but none can plausibly reject that such patterns of speaking about God are in the tradition. God's mind receives from his mind, and his knowledge includes a proposition or object's modal status—whether possible or impossible, contingent or necessary.

Theologians such as Irenaeus divided "mental conception" and "actual production," providing a useful framework on which to build out the distinction between metaphysics and ontology in possible-worlds modality. Irenaeus would agree with Theophilus that the divine Trinitarian nature "takes the place," in some sense of Platonic and Aristotelian Form, while he also affirms a kind of pre-creation *activity* in the divine mind. The plan for creation is a "mental conception," not ontologically independent. The combination of a trinitarian shape (patterning ultimate ends after Triune *taxis*) comports with the exegetical chapter, so that the divine will-to-create is *a priori* shaped by only one pre-existing thing: the divine *taxis* itself. This trajectory should be treated further in the patristic writings and provides the presumptive authority of tradition to anti-realism with respect to abstract objects and the possibility of a divine mind with a deliberative type of knowledge.

CHAPTER 5

THE POWER DISTINCTION AS THE MEDIEVAL PRECEDENT FOR MODALITY IN THEOLOGY

The "power controversy" in medieval theology is arcane, but its particulars map onto standard questions of metaphysics and theology proper. In fact, the questions generated in the power controversy are precisely where metaphysics and theology meet. Is God so powerful that he can change the very past that he created and once upheld? Is changing the objective reality of the past metaphysically possible, even for God? Does this impossibility make "changing the past" as useless of a heuristic as the proverbial "creation of a rock that the omnipotent God cannot lift?"[1] The medieval controversy focuses on the most fundamental question of the nature of God and the nature of metaphysics.

The controversy, in fact, can be interpreted to anticipate possible worlds metaphysics. Those who would win the controversy, by force of logic and persuasion, did so by appealing to the fact that God cannot in contradictory ways *will* someone to exist. Those who failed to win the controversy swam against the fundamentally irrationality of their own position: the claim that contradictory, temporally-indexed propositions could obtain in the same world in the same sense. This chapter briefly records the medieval

[1] George I. Mavrodes, "Some Puzzles concerning Omnipotence," in *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, ed. Michael L. Peterson, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 141. Omnipotence should refer only to those objects, actions, and states whose descriptions are not self-contradictory. Mavrodes addresses his essay to the paradox of the stone, arguing that the very expression "too heavy for God to lift" is self-contradictory. The argument likewise applies to God's creative, intellective activity. God cannot create a logical problem beyond his power, cannot create possible worlds beyond his control, cannot brook any entity that proves an independent constraint upon his will. I also would ask: can this approach be taken with the following expressions: 'Can God create a creature with the freedom of indifference?' Can God create an open future? Can any possible world include the Classical God who creates creatures with radical libertarian freedom?

distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia relevata*, its main actors and writers, as well as its outcomes. The chapter argues that the power distinction was decided on modal commitments implied in historic theological orthodoxy. The power controversy anticipates and legitimates a deliberative model of the divine will-to-create due to the kinds of appeals made by "rationalists" with respect to the medieval debate: the rationalist view upholds a vision wherein an infeasible world is impossible for God in the same way that all absurd things are impossible for God—impossible by their conceptual incoherence, not by any limitation in the omnipotent God. Failure to create impossible worlds is a feature of God's omnipotence, not a bug.

The Power for any Act and Reversing the Past

One of the more salient debates in the medieval power distinction refers to the possibility of undoing the past vis-à-vis the restoration of virginity in the faithful. The central categories referred to whether God had the ability to restore virginity *juxta meritum* or *juxta carnem*: the former with regard to merit and "the integrity of the body" and the latter referring to actual bodily constitution and personal life history, which would require the erasure of the past. St. Peter Damien was a chief exponent of God's *potentia absoluta*.[2] Irven Resnick says of St. Peter Damien that he "asks explicitly, if God cannot affect a virgin birth, nor restore physical integrity to a virgin, then how will the perpetrators of these crimes no longer be with that work?"[3] Judicial guilt, Damien seemed to fear, cannot be truly removed without changing the constitution of the past. The category draws a direct line from the past, through the law of identity, to the present.

[2] Filip Ivanovic argues that St. Isidor in the East should be considered before Damien in the West. However, the East is not the progenitor of the prolonged discussion that lasted through the early modern period. Filip Ivanovic, "*De Potentia Dei*: Some Western and Byzantine Perspectives," *The European Legacy* 13, no. 1 (2008): 1–11. "Absolute power" is a useful translation only if one remembers the actual sense of *absoluta*—"freed" or "released" from all constraints, even of the world God created.

[3] Irven M. Resnick, *Divine Power and Possibility in St. Peter Damian's De Divina Omnipotentia*, Studien Und Texte Zur Geistesgeschichte Des Mittelalters 31 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 79.

> Damien does not consider this problem, then . . . from a purely speculative standpoint. He is led to it because if God cannot restore virginity *juxta carnem*—for whatever reason—then the possibility of change *juxta meritum* is threatened too, for if God cannot do the easier the neither can he perform what is more difficult. Conversion is rendered null and penance is made void.[4]

Thus, for Damien, if God does not change the flesh, then the change with respect to judicial merit also is threatened. If God will change the flesh with respect to virginity, which marks a one-time entrance into sexual experience in the bodily history, then God must be able to change the past. Resnick further points out that, according to Damien's younger contemporary Anselm, "the penitent does not seek to remove the past or sin itself, but only the consequence of sin, namely the offense against God and the guilt of punishment. Damien does not fully develop this distinction, however."[5]

Damien arrived at his colossal assertion through a unique metaphysic of creation related to modality through *what counts as the conditions of actuality*. On the one hand, Damien affirms the unchangeability of the past by setting forth (1) God as Creator *ex nihilo* and (2) all of God's creation as good. What God does not do he is not *willing* to do.

> Yet there is a sense in which the past can be said not to be, Damien suggests. When we—and not God—perform some evil deed, we fall from being into non-being, and return to the nothingness from which were created.… On the one hand, God does not cause the past not to have been . . . . On the other hand, [Damien] suggests, there is a sense in which the past can be said not to be . . . . Evil is distinct from being, its negation, and consequently even when these acts were said to be they lack the true conditions for existence.[6]

Resnick sees a path for interpreting Damien's distinction: that the "evil past," like all evil, does not exist in the proper sense. This move makes the power distinction a species of the question of the ontology of evil.[7]

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[4] Resnick, *Divine Power and Possibility*, 80.

[5] Resnick, *Divine Power and Possibility*, 81.

[6] Resnick, *Divine Power and Possibility*, 83.

[7] The majority of medieval writers worked with neo-Platonic theories of privation, often supplied through the mediation of Augustine. St. Peter Damien extends its entailments further. The erasure of world-indexed events of evil to remove individual guilt had always focused precisely on the removal of guilt—a

William Courtenay's essay on John of Mirecourt and Gregory of Rimini situates their treatments of the medieval power distinction very well.[8] These thinkers are sympathetic to Peter Damien's argument that God can make the past 'not to be'. Referring to Mirecourt's *First Apology*, Courtenay argues that the Cisternian monk

> rejects as a logical contradiction the idea that God could undo . . . the past . . . what is past is necessarily true and no longer contingent, a situation that cannot be altered even by God, even *de potentia absoluta*. However his argument also "addresses itself to an entirely different issue: the question of the necessity or non-necessity of creation. The only sense, Mirecourt states, in which it could be said that God could make what has happened not to have happened would be to consider the situation *before* it took place, before creation, when what we call past was in the future and, therefore, contingent.[9]

In other words, Mirecourt arrived at his destination (avoiding the logical contradiction) by employing avenues of modal logic. Mirecourt modifies Damien by making God's power turn on the modal status of creation. All things are possible when God "considers the situation . . . before creation," yet once God creates this world its features are necessary.[10] This practical necessity obtains *even* for God because it is *according* to

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change in judicial relation. Damien shows the idea's implications for a change in actuality—both for the individual and world's actuality. For neo-Platonic theories of evil and Christian thought, see Christian Schäfer, "Augustine on Mode, Form, and Natural Order," *Augustinian Studies* 3, no. 1 (2000): 59–77; and Fran O'Rourke, "Evil as Privation: The Neoplatonic background to Aquinas's *De Malo*, 1," in *Aquinas's Disputed Questions on Evil: A Critical Guide*, ed. M. V. Dougherty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 192–221.

[8] William J. Courtenay, *Covenant and Causality in Medieval Thought: Studies in Philosophy, Theology, and Economic Practice* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984).

[9] Courtenay, *Covenant and Causality*, 236.

[10] Heiko Oberman speaks of the "restriction of metaphysics" in nominalistic thought and how such a move "highlights the importance of God's revelation, the chosen order." Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1963), 41; Oberman adds, "God's gratuitous, self-giving love, expressed in the very fact that he chose to commit himself at all, is not operative *actualiter* but *historice*; not existing *within* the order chosen, but *in the fact that* he chose this particular order in eternity" (43). Some kind of ethical voluntarism can easily follow when other principles are not given absolute power: "To say that the inherent value of certain acts and the relation of these acts to the reward can be considered apart from God's acceptation is to treat these issues *de potentia absoluta*" (43). Notice that this "restriction of metaphysics" is simply a modal distinction: principles of metaphysics cannot reveal why God's chose *just this world order*; instead, God's choosing just this world order is a kind of revelation.

God.[11] This kind of "undoing the past" is, of course, no longer literally undoing the past. Instead it could refer only to the mental existence of such "future states" in the mind of God. On Mirecourt's conception, God can morally determine or will a state of guilt "not to have been" based upon later penance. This concept exemplifies modal thinking, justifying actual states of affairs (at least in part) with reference to possible, not-yet-actual, or contrary-to-fact states of affairs.

The Distinction Codified

Catholic theology in the High Middle Ages was already wrestling over categories that would prove essential to later Reformed thinkers;[12] for example, the question of whether there are two wills in God is preceded by the question of whether there are "two powers in God." Similar language of God's "ordinance" as a limitation to his power would later be used with reference to the decrees. Medievals began answering metaphysical questions with modal distinctions, such as the necessity of the actual world's propostions logically subsequent to God's will-to-create. Heiko Oberman shows how some of these issues coalesced in nominalism:

[11] The only anticipation of a debate like this seems to be in Tertullian whose line of thought queries whether "God can will to create a world he will later destroy." Roy Kearsley's *Tertullian's Theology of Divine Power* demonstrates that the prolific patristic author anticipated the importance of divine power in his theological polemics yet never covered the scope or philosophical depth that would later shape the medieval power distinction. Perhaps the closest Tertullian comes to a kind of absolute power above the order that the divine will has produced is in the "remaking of an essentially good but [exploited] cosmos. . . . Here Tertullian strikes away from the tradition and Irenaeus and feels obliged to have God deploy the full force of creative power for the destruction of the world. So would come about the final removal of invasive evil." Roy Kearsley, *Tertullian's Theology of Divine Power*, Rutherford Studies in Historical Theology (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 143–44. Kearsley himself critiques this move on Tertullians's part as "overkill in the fullest literal sense" and notes what he considers "logical flaws in Tertullian and "mainly due to the fact that his writings were "urgent polemic" (44).

[12] Note the difference between the mediaeval power distinction and that of the early modern period, which continued the mediaeval power debate. The distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinate* would influence Martin Luther, in particular. Richard Paul Desharnais, "The History of the Distinction between God's Absolute and Ordained Power and its Influence on Martin Luther" (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 1966). For the shifts in the concept in the early modern period, see Francis Oakley, "The Absolute and Ordained Power of God in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Theology," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59, no. 3 (1998): 437–61.

> The term itself reveals that originally [nominalism] was meant to circumscribe a philosophical movement which accepted a divergence of the logical and the ontological order of things, in some respects parallel to that of early scholasticism represented by Abelard and Roscellin. The Nominalistic theory of knowledge, especially, has led historians of philosophy to believe that here we are dealing with the heart of this late medieval movement. One of the most learned experts in this field, Paul Vignaux, has concluded that the distinction between the *notitia intuitiva* and the *notitia abstractiva* "semble le point de départ de la théorie de la connaissance, peut- être de toute la philosophie de Guillaume d'Ockham."[13]

The distinction between the "logical and ontological orders" *just is* a modal distinction between what is traceable to the divine nature (the logical order) and what is dependent on created contingency (the ontological order). Further the distinction between the *notitia intuitiva* and the *notitia abstractiva* represents the different modality with a distinction in divine knowledge—a historical precedent for the maneuvers of the present thesis.

William J. Courtenay and Joseph P. Wawrykow summarize: "In the second half of the 13th century the distinction of absolute and ordained power was employed by most theologians . . . . *Potentia ordinata* was equated with the total preordained, providential will of God, while *potentia absoluta* was divine power without considering [divine] will or the created order."[14] As these historical themes arrive at Thomas, he follows the distinction when writing directly on the question of power. "As with others of his generation, Thomas identified a potential order with the total divine plan, but he did not identify divine wisdom with the present order of things."[15] Some "potential order" exists outside the actual one (the "total divine plan"), and we cannot say that "divine wisdom" is identical with "this order" (i.e. this one actual order is not what God created without alternate possibilities). The present order, therefore, is a product of the divine

[13] Heiko Oberman, "Some Notes on the Theology of Nominalism: With Attention to Its Relation to the Renaissance," *HTR* 53, no. 1 (1960): 48. Vignaux's French says that the distinction "seems to be the starting point for the whole theory of knowledge, perhaps the whole philosophy of William of Ockham."

[14] William J. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition: A History of the Distinction of Absolute and Ordained Power*, Quodlibet 8 (Bergamo, Italy: Lubrina, 1990), 87. See also Joseph P. Wawrykow, review of *Capacity and Volition: A History of the Distinction of Absolute and Ordained Power*, by William J. Courtenay, *Church History* 65, no. 4 (1996): 685–87.

[15] Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition*, 89.

will; it is not the only and necessary product of the divine nature and wisdom."[16] Divine choice turns not on wisdom but on will.

What Is at Stake in the Distinction

Lawrence Moonan traces the power distinction's connections with the past and other issues in theology proper. Moonan's scope is comprehensive; his treatment of the primary source literature thorough. However, his synthetic moves when bringing together the power distinction's significance can be stated rather simply. Moonan aims to understand the "genre" of the distinction and the "salient features of the circumstances in which it was used."[17] He highlights especially the dialectical context in which the distinction developed —in the Summas and Sentence commentaries of the medievals— and argues that many such discussions fall into the fallacy of *secundum quid* (the use of a principle or proposition without due given to limiting factors of its application). The Power distinction was primarily a discussion for theologians and developed within that realm of terminology. Moonan highlights that the distinction "was not expressed in the Platonic dress . . . of the Timaeus" nor "in the language of Aristotle, whose views on matters other than logic were provoking such concern . . . ."[18] The distinction was, however, one that had been "used by Augustine, to a somewhat similar purpose: the distinction between what God could do *de potentia* as against *de iustitia*."[19]

In due course, the distinction, taking on a life of its own, developed "in connection with problems which are not theological."[20] Such questions asked whether God could "dissolve angels and souls out of existence," or "bring about that two things

[16] Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition*, 89.

[17] Lawrence Moonan, *Divine Power: The Medieval Power Distinction Up to Its Adoption by Albert, Bonaventure, and Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 327.

[18] Moonan, *Divine Power*, 301.

[19] Moonan, *Divine Power*, 331–32.

[20] Moonan, *Divine Power*, 333.

supposed contradictory could be true together."[21] The conclusions became properly philosophico-theological and ontological in nature. Thus, a question about God became just as much about the nature of possibility itself. With regard to whether God "could" do what he is not doing, the answer relates clearly to modality:

> Yes, because there is nothing in God to necessitate him to do what he is doing, and nothing in the intrinsic nature of something done by God, in virtue of which it has to be as it happens to be. Rather, what there is in the actual order of things is willed by God; and there is nothing in the nature of being willed by God . . . in virtue of which that which is willed by God is *eo ipso* necessary.[22]

Nothing that is willed by God is necessary "from the thing itself," so God can do other than he does (modality), though he will not so do (actuality). So, the medieval power distinction turned into a modal distinction to analyze God in two ways: with the creation and without, with the comprehensive divine plan and without. Modal questions of what God *could* or *might* do had to be considered in one of two ways: absolute in God's nature or relative to his will and plan.[23]

Thomas on "The Power of God"

Thomas defines omnipotence as "God's ability to do all things that are possible absolutely," excepting from this absolute possibility such things as "creating a square circle" or "denying himself." Moreover, he distinguishes between active power and passive power to assert that for God it is no impotence or imperfection not to change: "The absolute possible is not so called in reference either to higher causes, or to inferior causes, but in

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[21] Moonan, *Divine Power*, 333.

[22] Moonan, *Divine Power*, 336.

[23] Moonan writes,

> That rather what they intended to achieve was in general being achieved, appears from the way in which school and in the period concerned it can be seen to respond to uses of the Distinction on the part of their fellows. Objections to such uses—in this mutation, for example—are rare in the period, and those which are to be found or against incorrect or inappropriate applications of it, not against the distinction itself. (Moonan, *Divine Power*, 368)

reference to itself."[24] Thomas Aquinas takes up the questions of divine power asked and answered by other medievals. In particular, Aquinas represents a settlement on the question of whether God can change the accidental characteristics of the past—making the past "not to have been." His answer represents a Western standard on the matter that previously was more hotly in debate. Interestingly, Aquinas's rendering of the power distinction put in doubt its consistency with the doctrine of transubstantiation.[25] Moreover, his reference to the question of "virginity" (seen as an ontological status—which would require a change of the past) is significant since he turns away from St. Peter Damien on the matter.

> I answer that, As was said above (I:7:2), there does not fall under the scope of God's omnipotence anything that implies a contradiction. Now that the past should not have been implies a contradiction. . . .
>
> Reply to Objection 1. Although it is impossible accidentally for the past not to have been, if one considers the past thing itself, as, for instance, the running of Socrates; nevertheless, if the past thing is considered as past, that it should not have been is impossible, not only in itself, but absolutely since it implies a contradiction. Thus, it is more impossible than the raising of the dead; in which there is nothing contradictory, because this is reckoned impossible in reference to some power, that is to say, some natural power; for such impossible things do come beneath the scope of divine power.
>
> Reply to Objection 2. As God, in accordance with the perfection of the divine power, can do all things, and yet some things are not subject to His power, *because they fall short of being possible*; so, also, if we regard the immutability of the divine power, whatever God could do, He can do now. Some things, however, at one time were in the nature of possibility, whilst they were yet to be done, which now fall short of the nature of possibility, when they have been done. So is God said not to be able to do them, because they themselves cannot be done.
>
> Reply to Objection 3. God can remove all corruption of the mind and body from a woman who has fallen; but the fact that she had been corrupt cannot be removed from her; as also is it impossible that the fact of having sinned or having lost charity thereby can be removed from the sinner."[26]

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[24] Thomas Aquinas, "God Is Omnipotent," in Peterson, *Philosophy of Religion*, 140. Here Thomas seems to open himself to the charge that the conditions of absolute possibility may reside outside of God.

[25] Since Aquinas argues that God cannot change accidental characteristics of the past.

[26] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), I.25.4, emphasis added. See also Thomas Aquinas, *The Power of* God, trans. Richard J. Regan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9–12.

Two features deserve note in Thomas's discussion. He maintains the past-index as he observes the event: "if the past thing is considered as past, that it should not have been is impossible, not only in itself, but absolutely since it implies a contradiction." Now, the two halves of the angelic doctor's statement are at cross-purposes. This first half preserves the past-index ("considered as past"), while the second half refers to *absolute* impossibility (considered without time indices). Yet, what Thomas is clearly after is a way to consider propositions from (God's) absolute perspective, which is to put them into "books of compossible propositions" set before the mind of God beyond the auspices of the actual world of creation. In other words, what is needed is to consider propositions in possible worlds. From such a modal perspective, Thomas's point can be clearly maintained. Perfect divine power has nothing to do with doing impossible things.[27]

Thus, historical theology comports with this theological version of modality from another angle in the medieval period.[28] Whereas the patristic era emphasized divine rationality as the starting point for metaphysics, as well as the absence of any divinities or platonic forms *with* God, the medieval era emphasized divine rationality as an organizing principle for metaphysics in a way not dissimilar to modern notions of complete books of non-contradictory and feasible sets of propositions, known as worlds.

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[27] Though he uses some non-standard language, John Feinberg is inheriting categories of the power distinction when he discusses his own way through the problems of voluntarism and essentialism. "More radical forms of theonomy [hard voluntarism] allow God "the power to violate the law of non-contradiction" while Feinberg's "modified rationalism" defines omnipotence "so that God works within the rules of reason." John S. Feinberg *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 73–74. Rationalism believes that a "best possible world" exists, and God must create it. Modified rationalism argues that God may or may not create, and if he chooses to create it must be "one of the good possible worlds" (74). In this way, a contemporary theologian affirms that God has power (1) not beyond his nature, (2) not contrary to the divine will, and (3) then within the order of the world.

[28] The foregoing treatment should not be overthrown by the needle that some medieval interpreters threaded. Some medieval interpreters still held the rationalist view that it would be impossible to actually re-create a virgin by changing the past. However, they did uphold that God could do to sexually-experienced persons with respect to their virginity, what he does to bread and wine with respect to its transubstantiation: not to change the past or the accidental properties, but—according to divine mystery—to change the essential properties. This interpretation does not require the metaphysical implications of changing the past that map onto modal considerations. Instead, they are mereological metaphysical implications and thus do not affect the way the power distinction is applied in this argument.

The irrationalist interpretation of the medieval power distinction, required an apophatic affirmation of a contradictory set of propositions in the mind of God with respect to the world he created, a metaphysical implication that was considered theologically out-of-bounds.[29] Clarifying theology proper and clarifying modal metaphysics walk hand-in-hand; possibility is rooted in God's being, so modality must be included in definitions like omnipotence.[30] Further, both in John of Mirecourt and in Thomas Aquinas, the power distinction is resolved through a model whereby God interacts with possible yet non-actual states of affairs, known to his omniscience, and "limited" only by his rationality (which, for example, disallows contradictory states of affairs). These medieval tools match the "books of total true propositions" in contemporary possible worlds metaphysics.

Conclusion

This chapter has observed how the medieval distinction between logical and ontological orders is a modal distinction and how the medievals, in order to address this problem consistently, began to consider a potential order outside the actual world. Medieval writers even emphasized that God could have expressed his essential characteristics through some other preordained system, which favors the thesis that the actual world is grounded in some sense in divine will. I argued that, to read Thomas

[29] Peter Vranas covers a version of the question of whether "God can change the past" by asking whether a person can "kill his younger self." The law of identity differentiates his point from the medieval one since his question asks if a self-same person can be the cause of a temporally earlier death. Yet, the problem of "changing one's own past" brings up the same notion of impossibility present in the medievals. Peter B. M. Vranas, "Can I Kill My Younger Self? Time Travel and the Retrosuicide Paradox," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 90, no. 4 (2009): 520–34.

[30] Edward Wierenga's book updates many perennial questions with regard to the divine nature that relate to modal metaphysics (paradoxes of omnipotence, the necessity of the past). Significantly, he points out that the many characteristics of God described in the Bible (such as his interest in creation, desire for a right relationship with his creatures) do not so much relate to the divine nature itself "perhaps because God could've been different in these respect; you need not have created the world and its inhabitants, or he might not have taken an interest in such creatures, or he might have left them in their misery after they have rebelled against him." Edward R. Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 2.

rightly, one must employ a modal distinction—and it seems a modal distinction is exactly what he was after in key sections of "On the Power of God." In fact, after Thomas, the debate seemed to have settled into a situation that fits with this dissertation's project: all possibility depends on God, while contradiction remains antithetical to his nature. Thus, though God could have made another system, he cannot simultaneously make the actual world and those contrary to it. Thus, the question of absolute and ordained power settled into the familiar territory of divine omnipotence: "the ability to do all things possible to do." The insight from the medieval power distinction, therefore, provided (1) an historic parallel conversation for divine deliberation, (2) undergirded much of the language I employ in the thesis, and (3) pointed to the need for theological development in this area.

Thus, I argue that both in the medieval and patristic periods, a theological model of modality can be based upon divine thought, both in its extension and in its organization, that is, both in the divine mind's ideas and in the ideas' relations with one another. Thus, though the kinds of mental acts are different, divine thought constitutes the ideas on the one hand and, on the other, constitutes their logical relations by contemplation. God's immediate contemplation of his ideas is inferential and grounds the logical relations among all propositions and all worlds.

CHAPTER 6

THE ORDER OF THE DECREES AS PRECEDENT FOR DELIBERATION SEMANTICS IN THEOLOGY

"How many angels can stand on the head of a pin?" was once a rather serious question. What once demonstrated a student's finesse with categories of substance, space, and time, now is considered the reduction to absurdity of scholastic philosophy, eliciting a chuckle. To write about the distinctions between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism now enjoys quite the same unfortunate notoriety. Though many dismiss lapsarian doctrine as an old scholastic barnacle, whether one conceives of the divine decree as logically prior or subsequent to the fall significantly affects the larger theological system. This chapter will present an historical, theological, and exegetical treatment of the lapsarian views (a) to reveal from another angle problems solved by the deliberative model and (b) to set forth the theological grammar of the lapsarian debates as an orthodox pattern of speaking about divine deliberation.

The aim of this chapter is the show (1) how the theology of the decrees developed, (2) that it represents in historical theology a manner of speaking about logical relations among God's purposes in creation, and (3) why decretal theology supports divine deliberation. To accomplish the third aim, the chapter addresses (3a) some objections to decretal theology, (3b) what possible origins exist for the first purpose of the divine will, (3c) brief exegetical investigations for that first decree, and (3d) a final proposal from philosophy related to decretal theology. The third aim, therefore, moves beyond historical analysis to part of the dissertation's constructive proposal. Divine deliberation as a model of God's knowledge accounts for the existence and order of divine decrees. Of course, some readers may hold the view that the world's future is

open,[1] and as the chapter's final proposal opens, I argue for why meticulous divine knowledge and a total true set of propositions are necessary not only for this model but for a coherent theory of God's will to create at all. Lapsarian doctrine is an example of standard Reformed thinking about pre-creation volition and reason: (a) divine reason to make a hierarchy of logical dependence among the decrees and (b) divine volition for the decree-to-create. The semantics of lapsarian doctrine—themselves part of the orthodox tradition—are a manner of speaking about God's will and knowledge onto which divine deliberation can be mapped.

Election amid the Loci of Early Christian Thought

Erik de Boer argues that the "origin of Augustine's doctrine of predestination lies in his early years, the first year as an *episkopos*."[2] In terms of historical theology, the seminal thought of Augustine would set forth a metaphysical notion concerning God and creation, to be developed further in the medieval period by Aquinas: that God, through the decree actually establishes contingency. "Therefore he governs all things in such a manner as to allow them to perform and exercise their own proper movements. For although they can be nothing without him, they are not what he is."[3] A tradition of Reformed thinking has continued to this effect—to rebut those who claim that the decree is incompatible with human will and contingency by claiming that such will and contingency could not exist except if by the decree itself. However, Augustine's developments were largely unemployed in the Thomistic synthesis, and the African bishop's later soteriological ideas were forged primarily on the anvil of anthropology. Since Augustine highlighted mankind's corrupted will, his predestinarian material

[1] And in this sense not a "world," not a total true set of propositions.

[2] Erik A. de Boer, "Augustine on Election: The Birth of an Article of Faith," *Acta Theologica* 32, no. 2 (2012): 72–73.

[3] Augustine, *City of God*, 7.30, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, vol. 2, *Augustin: City of God, Christian Doctrine*, 1–511, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dods (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 140.

focused on the fact that God must save sovereignly, rather than how God's decree works metaphysically. The early church addressed the doctrine of predestination, even the scriptural word *predestination* rather little—precisely because its preachers needed to address pagan contemporaries with a message of responsibility and damnability before a righteous God, who had created all people and made open the way of salvation through faith in Christ. Stoicism, Pythagoreanism, Gnosticism, Manichaeanism, all envisioned the human actor as largely cast upon a deterministic system. Early exegesis, even of a *locus classicus* like Romans 9 shows the tendency to emphasize personal responsibility without further intellectual apparatus to maintain divine sovereignty.[4]

Augustine, therefore, is the first to set forth at greater length the doctrine of predestination—and this largely in conversation with his anthropology. In terms of historical theology, the distinction is key, since Augustine does not have anything like the eternal decree/temporal providence matrix used in classical Reformed dogmatics. Augustine developed his earliest lapsarian theology in need of a firmer concept of grace against the Pelagians with the subsequent anthropology emphasizing the glory and necessity of divine election to salvation. Augustine's lapsarian theology is developed enough to encompass both the divine planning of creation and the philosophical difficulties of determinism and contingency.

These philosophical matters animated lapsarian distinctions in the thought of Thomas Aquinas and the later medieval synthesis—no longer sustained by considerations of grace due to the stabilization of Catholic views after the Second Council of Orange (AD 529).[5] Among the kaleidoscopic views in the medieval period, one controversy deserves reference. A medieval monk, Gottschalk of Orbais, advocated a doctrine of

[4] See for example, Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Books 6–10, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 2002), 118–22.

[5] Guido Stucco, *God's Eternal Gift: A History of the Catholic Doctrine of Predestination from Augustine to the Renaissance* (Bergamo, Italy: xlibris, 2009), 180–235.

double predestination and was drawn into controversy with John Scotus Erigena.[6] Medieval predestinarian theology remained largely metaphysical, dealing with the doctrine of God vis-à-vis perfect being theology. Consequently, only after the Reformation did the tradition develop accounts of logical ordering for the decrees.

Decretal Theology of Election in Reformation Stability and Controversy

The deposit of voluntarism at the fountainhead of the Reformation contributed to the formation of decretal theology. Carefully to be differentiated from ethical voluntarism (or any reduction of the divine essence to a matter of will), metaphysical voluntarism asserts that the divine plan and purpose cannot be reduced to the divine essence. The divine plan and purpose are therefore non-teleological in the Thomistic sense; the divine purpose is not a "natural" outworking of the divine essence nor can it be inferred from natural premises. For the human mind, therefore, knowledge of the divine plan is strictly revelational.

John Calvin

John Calvin's name is synonymous with the first pristine and complete presentation of Reformed theology—both due to his complete exegetical basis in the commentaries and the theological synthesis of the *Institutes*. Calvin's doctrine removes the infralapsarian logic whereby the one "passed over" was in sin according to the lapse and needed no direct predestining decree (as is the case with the elect). Calvin's reformulation makes the lapse subsequent: "For first there is certainly a mutual relation between the elect and the reprobate, so that the election spoken of here cannot stand, unless we confess that God separated out from others certain men as seem good to him."[7]

[6] Gottschalk of Orbais, "Gottschalk and a Medieval Predestination Controversy: Texts Translated from the Latin," ed. and trans. Victor Genke and Francis X. Gumerlock, Mediaeval Philosophical Texts in Translation 47 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010).

[7] John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: Camelot Press, 1961), 68.

Calvin developed a very strong doctrine of election in his decretal theology, though he does not address the lapsarian views directly. His commitments to double predestination and to the single plan of God as enveloping all things—including taking up into itself all sin—have generally earned for him the label of supralapsarian.

More significant is the inheritance of Calvin. Until very recently, historical theology, championed by Alexander Schweitzer, treated Calvin as the progenitor of a rigid, axiological predestinarianism and a "metaphysic of the divine will." Cornelius Venema states that "Calvinist doctrine of predestination included some of these elements, e.g., a double decree of election and reprobation, an express formulation of God's pre-temporal decree/s, and the inclusion of the fall into sin within the scope of God's will."[8] Still others sought to "defend" Calvin by creating a 'Calvin against the Calvinists' motif whereby Calvin was conceived as the Christological thinker—with Christ as axiom—and theologians like Bullinger and Beza as those who treated the predestining decree as the axiom.[9] Most important for this chapter's purposes is the plain recognition *of an axiom*; in other words, the Reformed generally admitted that God's decree-to-create could be analyzed axiomatically with concepts of logical precedence and subsequence. While the disputes continued regarding what the logical order of the many decrees within the one decree may be, analyzing the divine will's decrees with logical hierarchies was the common practice. Though generations-old, the scholarship that sees rigid predestinarianism as the focal point for Calvin has begun to fade. Calvin is by no means solely responsible for the emerging theological tradition of the Reformed churches.[10] Instead, Christ and election are two focal points in Calvin's Christology, an early and

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[8] Cornelius Venema, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Doctrine of Predestination: Author of "The Other Reformed Tradition?"* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 24.

[9]See Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (1986; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), iv.

[10] Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, iv. Muller is correct to read Calvin as developing two main axioms: Christ on the one hand, election on the other. This tendency did create an imbalance for the second Reformation generation to settle.

original feature that necessarily counterbalanced his decretal theology. In fact, Calvin's double predestination would not persist in many other early Reformed dogmaticians.

The Synod of Dordt

By the time the Reformation churches came to the Synod of Dordt, decretal theology had more well-determined bounds, and the decree of election was tightly situated between two Gibraltars: the decree of the fall on the one hand and the unconditional nature of God's gracious election of the other. Thus, the formularies from Dordt codified the emerging *status quo*, an infralapsarian decretal order that went without much argument.

Those supralapsarians who did demur primarily objected to whether the infralapsarian schema could truly uphold the unconditional nature of election. The Polish Reformed theologian Johannes Maccovius argued that predestination's only cause in its rational conception was God.[11] Maccovius, additionally, made much of the fact that, in its carrying out, predestination has many causes other than God.[12] Election's object is different when considered in its rational purpose in God and when considered in its actual undertaking in the creation. Election's object is man "creatable," and its goal must be "from somewhere," namely, God's "rational end as it is in intention."[13] If all humanity is

[11] Johannes Maccovius, *Loci Communes Theologici*, ed. Nicolai Arnoldi (Amsterdam: Ludovici and Daniel Elzeviros, 1658), 71, PRDL. Maccovius's *Loci Communes Theologici* have no published translation, so the translations are my own.

[12] Maccovius writes, "Praedestinatio est absoluta a causa impulsiva quae extra Deum est"; "Predestination has been carried out from a cause carried out outside of God." Maccovius, *Loci Communes Theologici*, 71.

[13] Maccovius, *Loci Communes Theologici*, 71. Maccovius's full text: *Objectum praedestinationis est aluid ratione finis prout est in intentione, aliud prout est in executione. Ratione finis prout est in intentione est homo creabilis; Ratione finis qui est in executione, est homo condendus, conditus, permittendus in lapsum, lapsus; & ratio prioris est, quia finis non est de nihilo, sed de aliquo*. My translation: The object of predestination is, on the one hand, [God's] rational end as it is in intention, on the other hand as it is in execution. The rational end, as it is in intention, is man creatable. The rational end that pertains in execution, is man both going to be formed and having been formed, both going to be permitted to fall, and having fallen. And [God's] reason is of the earlier [proposition], because the end is not out of nothing, but from somewhere

considered as fallen and then some are unconditionally elected, how can the nature of God's decree truly be without condition, once such persons have already been conceived of as sinners? If they are (1) individuated as (2) sinful, then God's consideration of them is unavoidably discriminatory based on the divinely-decreed nature of their sin—unless God were proverbially to "blind himself" (but this would seem to be special pleading). The supralapsarian election is more robustly gratuitious. *Homo creabilis* is more clearly a bulwark against any distinction in *homo conditus et lapsus*[14] that could induce, even partially, God's election. Nonetheless, infralapsarianism admitted itself more easily to the Reformed consensus and maintained a clear, orthodox dogma.

The Westminster Standards

The Westminster Confession applies the orthodoxy of Dordt into a positive, mature system of Reformed theology. Consequently, much of the lapsarian debate has proceeded on the basis of how Westminster set forth the issues in that unbroken tradition of the Standards. Though not seeking to explicate the concept, the Westminster Confession of Faith addresses middle knowledge by claiming that God "knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions" (3.2). Westminster affirms that God knows what comes to pass upon "all supposed conditions," which includes conditionals and, it would seem, counterfactuals. However, early Reformed theologians maintained the scholastic stance *per se* on *scientia media*, that such a construct as middle knowledge "cannot stand with the absolute perfection of God. For it supposes that events will happen independently of the will of God and also make some knowledge of God depend on the object."[15] Thus, some early Reformed hoped to find libertarian freedom in middle knowledge while others feared finding a threat to aseity.

[14] "Man creatable" versus "man formed and fallen."

[15] William Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, 1.7.28, quoted in J. V. Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 115.

Whatever should be said of contemporary models of middle knowledge remains to be seen, whether models from the Reformed (Bruce Ware, who incorporates Edwards's moral inability and freedom of inclination into the construct) or from Molinists (Thomas Flint, who incorporates modal logic and possible-worlds thinking). Clearly, however, the 17th century Reformed saw middle knowledge, "which the Jesuits glory of as a new light" as "but the very old error of natural man, which looks upon things contingent, as not created and determined by the will of God."[16] As a significant counterpoint, the fact that the Westminster divines and most after them left open the notion that God *knows* modal facts is significant for contemporary model-makers along these lines. In other words, Westminster properly said that, whatever *scientia media* may be, it cannot proffer contingent things that are not created or determined by God. God's knowledge 'of what may be' remained an open question, however. In this sense, modal ideas often were in the lapsarian discussions and polemics, though claims about such knowledge (rightly) did not appear in confessions and statements of faith.

Adam and Christ in Decretal Theology

Chad Van Dixhoorn shows the way in which federal and decretal theology created an infralapsarian inference for the Westminster divines:

> In the story of redemption, there are two people that feature most prominently. The first is Adam, in whom all are horribly fallen, both the elect and non-elect. The second is Christ, by whom God's elect are wonderfully redeemed. When we think about the means that God has appointed for a redemption, the most important thing to remember is the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. God destined us to "obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9, 10).[17]

Persons are conceived of as "in Adam"—then redeemed in Christ. Thus, when someone is elected in Christ, God's choice in this case is presumed beneath the lapse of sin. In this case, federalism—a theological construct in the actual plan of redemption—parallels the

[16] Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards*, 115.

[17] Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith: A Reader's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 53.

lapsarian view and serves as a placeholder for infralapsarianism. Fesko argues along these lines that the Synod of Dordt is explicitly infralapsarian, though not contrasted with supralapsarianism (or making any mention of the other system at all).[18] Dordt in the background, Fesko argues that,

> the [Westminster] Confession takes a similar path: 'As God hath appointed the Elect unto glory; so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his Will, fore-ordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected, *being fallen in Adam,* are redeemed by Christ'" (3.6, emphasis added). The divines could have simply written: "they who are elected are redeemed by Christ."[19]

Fesko then confirms his point from the annotations of the Westminster theologians who appeal to Romans 9:21 and interpret the lump of clay as "all mankind of one blood," a "corrupt mass of humanity."[20] Thus, the Westminster annotations explicitly commit to fallen humanity as the object of God's electing decree, but do not interact with the supralapsarian position. Though this interpretation is not necessary, when contemporary historical theologians, such as Fesko, infer infralapsarian from the 'being in Adam' phrase of the confession, the entailment is strong. However, federalism is no splint to shore up the entailment issues in the lapsarian views because (1) the exegetical data provides no "election in Adam" and (2) election is individual in the Bible, setting federal theology aside from the point, and since the decree concerns the fall, *per se*. The proper question relates to which decree is properly prior and which is properly subsequent: is the decree to elect some persons into Christ logically prior or subsequent to the decree of the lapse? Is the decree of the lapse logically prior to the decree to elect into Christ?

This thesis previously argued that God's original ultimate end is to glorify the Son. The decree of the fall should not be without some sustaining reason or purpose;

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[18] J. V. Fesko, "Lapsarian Diversity at the Synod of Dort," in *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2011), 99–123. The relevant formulation from Dordt is from article 7: "He chose in Christ to salvation a definite number of particular people out of the entire human race, which had fallen by its own fault from its original innocence into sin."

[19] Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards*, 117.

[20] Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards*, 117.

thus—though the decreed lapse could have another, unknown purpose and though speculation could furnish interesting hypotheses, it is far better to make the lapse depend logically on the subsequent decree to elect some into Christ. Divine deliberation allows modal operators into divine knowledge to be analyzed in divine knowledge. To be specific, if the lapse is logically subsequent to the decree of election into Christ, then no feasible world could obtain where no persons are saved. In other words, upon the conjunction of a decree of election into Christ and a logically subsequent decree of a fall, a decree to save the elect follows necessarily. If the dependence relationship between the propositions is reversed, the decree of salvation only follows possibly, and possible worlds exist where the decree of salvation does not, in fact, follow. The lapsarian debates have already modeled theological debate that makes use of modal language, like what divine deliberation must employ. Developing a concept of deliberative divine knowledge, in return, sets forth supralapsarianism more plausibly.

Modes of Divine Agency in Search of a Model

W. G. T. Shedd in his own polemical work defending and advancing the Westminster Confession as "pure and unmixed Calvinism" sets forth notions of how God acts in different modes, confirming both necessity and "necessary contingency":

> [The Confession] brings sin within and under the control of the Divine decree. Sin is one of the "whatsoevers" that have "come to pass," all of which are "ordained." Some would have liked the doctrine that sin is decreed stricken from the Confession, because in their view it makes God the author of sin. The Confession denies this in its assertion that by the Divine decree "violence is not offered to the will of the creature, nor is the liberty of second causes taken away, but rather established." In so saying, the authors had in mind the common distinction recognized in Calvinistic creeds and systems, between the efficient and the permissive decree, though they do not use the terms here.[21]

Shedd then offers Judas and Paul as examples of characters uniquely overshadowed by the divine purpose: "The two divine methods in the two cases are

[21] William G. T. Shedd, *Calvinism: Pure and Mixed, A Defense of the Westminster Standards* (New York: Scribners, 1893), 32.

plainly different, but the perdition of Judas was as much foreordained and free from chance, as the conversion of Saul. Man's inability to explain how God can make sins certain, but not compulsory, by a permissive decree, is no reason for denying that he can do it or that he has done it."[22] Two significant points are in order. First, Shedd's appeal to differing "methods" of foreordination is an appeal to a yet-unknown (at his time) philosophical model of divine knowledge that could remove any *prima facie* tension between perdition and election. Second, any distinction underlying Shedd's appeal between "sins certain and not compulsory" *just is* a premise from modal metaphysics. Preceding Reformed theologians can be praised for recognizing where the work had to be done, even if they could not yet lift a spade to work in that field. After Dordt and Westminster, both sides of the lapsarian debate have argued along the lines of necessity and contingency, and, I argue, develop a well-accepted manner of speaking about divine election and purpose that justifies the semantics of the deliberative model of divine knowledge. Reformation theologians have, however, aimed for different divine ultimate ends as they consider the order of the decrees.

Objections in Modern Theology

"Rationalism": Arminians (and Calvinists) Demur

Jack Cottrell sets out decretal theology on more tightly Arminian lines. He argues that the whole lapsarian controversy is "misplaced," wrongly focused on whether or not the decree to elect is before or after the "decree regarding the Fall."[23] Cottrell argues: "But the focal point of election is not man's decision to sin, but rather his decision with regard to God's offer of grace." Instead, the "crucial question is whether God's decree to elect is prior to man's decision to accept Christ or whether it follows it.

[22] Shedd, *Calvinism*, 32–33.

[23] Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible Says about God the Ruler: The Doctrine of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1984), 2:345n23.

The latter is the biblical view."[24] Cottrell's treatment fails to cohere; he ascribes to decretal theology as 'the sovereign divine plan before the foundation of the world' yet grounds in some sense the divine decree upon "man's decision" (ontological and in time); whether this "focal point" is man's decision regarding the fall or regarding election, the system creates insurmountable problems with regard to (1) God and time, as well as with regard to (2) how God might ground a decree on an in-time creaturely decision.

Some classically-Reformed theologians also have interpreted the lapsarian controversy as misplaced, but have appealed to a dearth of revelational data and the impossibility of good and necessary inference to tease out the logical ordering. Herman Bavinck for example perceives far too organic a relation between the decrees to offer an ordering of them.[25] Yet, these concerns from the subtle Dutchman only show how troublesome it might be for a human to set forth *all* the logical relations among the decrees. Bavinck's concerns do not affect whether God's mind considers the decrees with such logical relations.[26] In fact, he seems open to a similar concept.[27] Thus neither the primacy of man's actions (Arminian) nor the "organic" relationship among the decrees (apophaticism) should hold back investigating the order of the decrees. After all, even organic material has logical relations.

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[24] Cottrell, *What the Bible Says*, 2:345.

[25] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 2:372–73.

[26] Cornelius Venema, "Covenant and Election in the Thought of Herman Bavinck," *MAJT* 19 (2008): 69–115.

[27] At many points Bavinck speaks in a non-modal way: "the counsel of God is to be understood as his eternal plan for all that exists or will happen in time. Scripture everywhere assumes that all that is and comes to pass is the realization [of God's will and plan.]." Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:372. Elsewhere, Bavinck opens the door when he claims that it is a "privilege" for humans "to act on the basis of deliberation and planning. In the case of rational creatures, idea and purpose precede action. In a far more sublime sense this is true for the Lord our God, apart from his knowledge and will nothing comes in to being" (2:372). Then, Bavinck falls back on apophaticism: "All that exists is ultimately grounded in God's good pleasure. . . . Beyond that we cannot go" (2:373).

That Which Only Apophaticism Could Deny

One could situate the Reformed response to critiques of "rationalism" or speculation rhetorically: Reformed proponents argue their rational insights not extensively but as a minimal baseline for any theology that would not be apophatic. *"If we cannot deduce this fairly of any agent, including God, then we can say nothing positive of him"* goes the persuasive appeal. A. H. Strong begins his discussion of election with a triad of postulates to query God's plan, intention, or end:

> Number 1: As the sovereign, God has the right to bestow Grace (unmerited favor) on whom he will.
>
> Number 2: Scripture demonstrates that God has indeed "exercised this right."
>
> Number 3: God has an overarching goal or reason other than "to save as many as possible" for granting his special grace.[28]

Strong proceeds to argue that

> God's decree is eternal, and in a certain sense is contemporaneous with man's belief in Christ; secondly, that God's decree to create involves the decree of all that in the exercise of man's freedom will follow; thirdly, that God's decree is the decree of him who is all in all, so that our willing and doing is at the same time the working of him who decrees our willing and doing.[29]

Happily for the philosopher, theologians are pre-committed to philosophical language. Strong's first point relies on a theory of time (and *how* this contemporaneity creates *what* affect). His second point insists that comprehensive future tense statements ("all that will follow") can be true, even when they involve freedom ("in the exercise of man's freedom"). His third point involves primary and secondary causation. The language of divine deliberation seeks to develop philosophically the footings that have already been laid in the Reformed tradition.

Decretal theology (developed largely as an alternative to essentialism) suffers from a lack of a model for how planning, willing, and decreeing can be performed in

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[28] A. H. Strong, *Outlines of Systematic Theology: Designed for the Use of Theological Students* (Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland, 1908), 208.

[29] Strong, *Outlines of Systematic Theology*, 209.

succession—even logical succession—while being eternal. What true distinction is found in the difference between an "eternal act" and "essence"? The problem is avoided if *eternal* is explicated merely as "non-temporal," if one employs an A-theory of divine timelessness. A central philosophical problem impinging on the lapsarian views of the decrees turns on whether decrees themselves may be eternal and what that very predication might mean. Appeals to the "eternal decree" often end the discussion.

Strong sets forth the eternal decrees: "It belongs to the perfection of God that he have a plan, and the best possible plan."[30] Charles Hodge also offers comment: "That the decrees of God are eternal, necessarily follows from the perfection of the divine Being."[31] Each of these theologians hereby makes the point that God's plan is unchangeable (rightly so), yet, as the statements are offered, it is difficult to see how eternity and essence are unmixed.[32] Hodge appeals to the use of phenomenological language to define *eternal* further:

> So the Bible speaks of the decrees of God as they appear to us in successive revelation and in their mutual relations, and not as they exist from eternity in the divine mind. Neither is there any force in the objection that the agent must be before his acts. The sun is not before his brightness, nor the mind before thought, nor before consciousness, nor God before his purposes. These objections are founded on the assumption that God is subject to the limitations of time. To Him there is neither past nor future, neither before nor after.

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[30] A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology: The Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland, 1907), 1:353.

[31] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 1:538.

[32] The question of God and time, as well as that of metaphysical voluntarism (divine freedom of action) will ultimately determine whether one agrees that the issue of the lapsarian debate is truly set on a good footing or whether the whole undertaking is obscured by the lack of any succession, whether temporal or logical, and by the lack of any origin of the volition or deliberation over it, in the Triune God. One must reckon with the key questions of the lapsarian decrees: was the plan some kind of effulgence or mere expression of the necessary nature or was it combined with rational and deliberative elements? Was it set forth as one total plan with an ultimate end with explicable reasons (at least known to God) of why he would decree this plan and not that? Why does Hodge appeal to actualist ontology to ground the eternality of the decree when he does not ascribe to actualist (over essentialist) ontology elsewhere? Though the Princeton theologian's motives are unknown, the appeal seems necessary to maintain the "eternal" predication in the face of a voluntarism, the heart of decretal theology itself. To correlate the "eternal act" of the decree with the divine ontology is *ad hoc* in Hodge. Interestingly, it is thoroughgoing in Karl Barth. For this reason, Edwards's concept provides a necessary distinction between the actual and possible in God.

Thus, the plan of God appears eternal to us, but is inscrutable and cannot be set forth univocally. Hodge's argument is confirmed only if one assumes it can be carried by *the very fact* of God's eternality (and if one assumes a particular theory of time). In point of fact, the nature of God and time is disputed within the history of the Christian church and especially among contemporary Christian philosophers.[33]

Hodge's appeal *that* the decree is eternal is unassailable. No matter one's view of time, no matter one's definition of *eternal*, the term will be the right modifier for the decree. A problem arises, however, because appealing to the eternal nature of the decree is meant to end the discussion, not begin it. Arguing that the decree is eternal does nothing to demonstrate how it is eternal—both in the *means* God uses and in the *manner* that this eternity affects other issues in theology. Hodge's eminence and significance in the history of Reformed thought need no defense. However, in this section, he seems plainly caught between Reformed and Edwardsian views of divine will and the decree, on the one hand, and classical Thomist views of divine essence (identical with divine eternal act) as the decree's basis, on the other hand. The following quotation is long but useful to show the relevant, contradictory, patterns of speech in Hodge's account of the decree:

> From the indefinite number of systems, or series of possible events, present to the divine mind, God determined on the futurition or actual occurrence of the existing order of things, with all its changes, minute as well as great, from the beginning of time to all eternity. The reason, therefore, why any event occurs, or, that it passes from the category of the possible into that of the actual, is that God has so decreed. The decrees of God, therefore, are not many, but one purpose. They are not successively formed as the emergency arises, but are all parts of one all-comprehending plan. This view of the subject is rendered necessary by the nature of an infinitely perfect being. It is inconsistent with the idea of absolute perfection, that the purposes of God are successive, or that he ever purposes what he did not originally intend; or that one part of his plan is independent of other parts. it is one scheme, and therefore one purpose. As, however, this one purpose includes an

[33] Interestingly, Hodge himself and other Reformed dogmaticians do not employ categories of eternal action elsewhere in the loci of theology. In other words, those who set forth the decree as eternal along these lines must claim that this particular action of God—a saving action no less—is somehow among the *ad intra* works of his attributes. The traditional Reformed theologians could appeal to the fact that all of God's acts can be conceived outside of time in the traditional A-theory relation of God and time; however, on this appeal the point of the decrees' eternal nature is moot since every act of God is of the same eternal (i.e., non-temporal) nature.

> indefinite number of events, and as those events are mutually related, we therefore speak of the decrees of God as many and as having a certain order. The Scriptures consequently speak of the judgments, counsels, or purposes of God, in the plural number, and also of His determining one event because of another. When we look at an extensive building, or a complicated machine, we perceive at once the multiplicity of their parts, and their mutual relations. . . . We can, therefore in a measure, understand how the vast scheme of creation, providence, and redemption, lies in the divine mind as one simple purpose, although including an infinite multiplicity of causes and effects.[34]

First, Hodge appeals to an essentially Thomist account of the divine essence. In other words, God's unity requires that he possess all his life at once, while other attributes (Hodge appeals to perfection) entail other things of divine nature (Hodge asserts the possession of a perfect plan). Interestingly, Hodge passes over this assertion (that perfection entails possession of a plan) without defense, when the possession of a plan is not self-interpreting as a necessary perfection for the greatest conceivable being. Even if the entailment isn't clear, the maneuver is obvious. First, Hodge moves "from perfection to a plan" in order to ensure utter non-contingency in the decree. Second, if the decree is required by 'the attribute of perfection in a unitary God who possesses all of his life at once and therefore has no contingent life,' then the decrees are safely defended as unitary and non-contingent. Third, Hodge uses these points to aver that the decrees are not successive in any sense. Though the temporal sense must be excluded from consideration (easy to do), the sense of logical succession does not need to be and is not necessarily (or even likely) excluded by this line of thought.

Hodge may rightly reply that if logical succession is construed as having some premise or conclusion of God drawn from a mixture of necessary and contingent premises, then such logical succession might threaten the coherence of his God-concept (fair enough). However, logical succession can refer simply to any kind of dependence relationship among logical premises, even necessary ones. Hodge, for example, uses such propositions of logical dependence in his own description of God. Also, mathematical equations show non-temporal logical succession. So, Hodge's second point, the appeal to

[34] Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:537.

the eternal possession of the perfect divine plan, its actions and propositions, does not entail that logical relations fail to pertain in the mind of God. In fact, Hodge's further arguments in the context assert such "mutual relations" among different decrees in the divine plan.

In Hodge's writing, the uncontrolled interplay between the Reformed and Thomist conceptions of God[35] creates implicit contradiction[36] in his statements related to actuality and possibility. Hodge's reference to the "futurition" of acts and God's moving such acts from "the category of the possible" to the actual does not comport with a metaphysic of God that allows no possible worlds. On a *purus actus* God-concept, one world is eternal in the life of God. One world is eternal in the perfection of God. That world is possible in the sense that its ontology yet has no existence extra-mentally (as a creation). Future states of affairs in that world are "possible" and not "actual" in the sense that they have not yet ontologically come to pass. However, this distinction between possibility and actuality, this sense of God's actualizing future state of affairs, is not modal metaphysics; it is simple ontology. Such a simple claim insists that some future state of affairs in the actual world are *becoming*. Though eternally existing in the life of God, such occurrences have not yet come to pass. That claim is ontological, not metaphysical, and does not actually support what is meant by philosophical and theological talk about "the possible." Charles Hodge was a man of his time, a champion even; the purpose of the section is not to criticize him unduly. However, for the purposes of this argument, Charles Hodge is an ideal representative of someone who stands in the streams of two traditions that, in his era, are not yet sorted out: the classical Thomist

[35] The passage cited at length shows Hodge to oscillate between Reformed and Thomist conceptions of God. Indeed, the view that God possesses his plan as a consequence of his perfection, and "lives" or "possesses" the full life of that plan forever in eternity (since divine act and essence are identical) *just is* the classical account of Thomism, and the classical account of Thomism has no need of the decree for a full and complete God-concept. The Reformed God-concept requires a theology of the decrees precisely due to its emphasis on the will of God.

[36] Explicit contradiction is when two set of propositions, as stated, entail a contradiction; implicit contradiction is when two sets of propositions, combined with an implicit premise, entail a contradiction.

tradition and the Reformed and Edwardsian tradition. Further, Hodge is a representative of how essentially modal patterns of speech are, as it were, pre-verified in the Reformed tradition.

The latter half of Hodge's excerpt reveal his commitment to logical relations in divine knowledge. Yet, his commitment to the "pure act" God-concept (partially seen in the first half of the excerpt) can be inimical to developing a theology of the decrees. Such a God-concept only can be—not *must* be—inimical to decree by divine will because one could make the same move that Hodge made, namely, to describe scripture, once again, as analogically giving us in human form words that do not actually apply to God but (by applying in the right way to humans) still convey truth by analogy.

Thomism's commitment to analogical language is well-known. Analogical language is universally employed with respect to Scripture's anthropomorphisms. God does not have a "right arm" for example (e.g. Psalm 89:13). The right arm, however, is a metaphor for divine power. Thomism's commitment to anthropopathism is also well-known; however, the figural content of anthropopathisms are far more difficult to tease out. An analogical rendering of "God is moved with compassion" can sound stilted: *"God's being moved with compassion is a description of the relation of the eternal act of divine life towards the human person at a particular time (not a human or divine description of something within God or any emotion presented by God)."* Thus, anthropomorphisms actually do what they claim; they describe by a metaphor something about God. Anthropopathisms, on the contrary, do not. They offer a metaphor for *relations* or for human *perception*, not for God himself. Emotions describe not something in God but the actual relational state of affairs or simply the feeling or awareness in the creature. The referent for an anthropomorphism is easy to state; the referent for an anthropopathism is not.

Hodge's category requires a neologism, some new concept: *anthropologism*. Such a word would describe human perception of logical relations among the decrees of

the *purus actus* God but not—according to Hodge's assertion—any logical relation among those decrees *in God himself*. The referent for such a metaphor, like with anthropopathism, is hard or impossible to state. Worse, it requires its proponent to believe that logical relations among God's intentions and plans is truly predicated, not of divine intentions and plans, but only of the human apprehension of God.

To claim that any theologian could know the full structure of God's intention and decree would be breathtaking hubris—but no theological camp has advanced such a claim. Hodge's position seems to stake out the opposite extreme, a claim that there is no structure provided by logical relations of dependence and subsequence in the knowledge of God. God's knowledge, for Hodge, seems simply to be of one mode: intuitive knowledge of his complete life lived eternally.[37] In between these two positions obviously lies a group of theologians who would believe the Bible ought to be read and theology ought to be framed in a model such as this dissertation seeks to construct. (1) Logical relations do pertain in God's knowledge of all worlds. (2) God's chief ultimate end accounts for his will to create one world—making that world actual and all other worlds counterfactual. (3) Humans do know certain ultimate ends of God and certain relations between such divine intentions based on divine revelation. (4) God's gift of such unique and intimate knowledge regarding his intention by no means vouchsafes to human minds the ability to connect every proposition to a supposed logical conclusion in God's mind. In other words, too many variables remain in scripture to allow theologians to perform an algebraic equation and "solve for *x*." Though some intentions of God are known by the revelation of divine speech and some may be known by true and necessary consequence, all will never be known because what we do not know far outweighs what we do, and, where premises are missing, reason cannot operate.

Theology can still construct a hypothetical model that combines and organizes various revealed intentions, and a model may be believed properly, though tentatively, on

[37] Again, after which, the theology of the decree or will of God is moot.

the basis of its coherence and its elegant display of what is known by revelation. Belief in the overall model can be right and justified but not with the same certainty as that which is revealed by clear statement. Therefore, traditional Reformed treatments of lapsarian doctrine admit patterns of speech necessary for a model of divine deliberation, and no objection prevents a model that includes logical relations in divine knowledge. Historical theology also points toward how one may think of logical dependence and subsequence. To set forth this important point, the chapter returns to Edwards' chief ultimate end, this time applying it to how the Reformed have thought about lapsarian doctrine. Last, the chapter considers how the lapse can be part of God's end in creation.

Decretal Origins

Decretal theology precedes Jonathan Edwards' *The End for Which God Created the World*, yet his concept of the original ultimate end is a natural fit and unavoidable control on how one conceives of the origin of the divine decree. Even Edwards's greatest critics, if Protestant, likely still think of the true origin of the decree as God's ultimate or final aim in the plan of creation. Supralapsarians ought freely to reconsider orientation of their decree-order on the basis of what light scripture sheds on God's ultimate end. The electing decree is not logically prior to that of the lapse merely to give the fall a purpose, nor to preserve election's "absoluteness," but because the decree is *subsequent to the decree to glorify the Son* by uniting a people to his atoning work. Divine deliberation allows a biconditional logical connection to exist between election and the lapse: "if and only if a people is elected into Christ, humanity will fall." Those elect-and-fallen will *fail* to become elect-and-saved *in no feasible world* due to the very structure of the universe of possibilities created by divine knowledge.

Robert Reymond's Supralapsarianism

Robert Reymond's re-orientation of traditional supralapsarianism clarifies the true issues animating the system of thought. What is precisely not the animating concept

is that elected men ought to be considered *as men* rather than elected sinners considered *as sinners*. This is the "infralapsarian insight" which Reymond finds consistent with the supralapsarian tradition. What Reymond finds still to be a distinction that makes a difference between the two systems and what causes him to urge upon his hearers the supralapsarian doctrine is that the discriminating decree of election must be logically prior to the fall in order that God's permissive decree for the fall in fact have some grounding.[38] Most supralapsarians contend that if the fall is logically prior to election then the decree of the fall in the divine purpose remains gratuitous, ungrounded in a higher end or purpose. For this reason, supralapsarians find themselves to be the true inheritors of end-based decretal theology, since the logical entailment of the structure leaves no decree in its invention and ordering without a grounding in the "original ultimate end."

The problem of moral grounding affects reprobation as well. How can an infralapsarian ground the permissive decree of the fall without a logically-prior decree to elect (or to glorify the Son through incarnation and atonement)? The infralapsarian reply often questions how the supralapsarian conceives a decree for election before the negative necessities of the scheme of redemption were in place? Decretal theology and eternality brought Karl Barth to precisely the same issues, and his famous maxim applies: *"Christ is the answer."* One might ask concerning the entire lapsarian system the question: "Where does the decree to glorify the Son fit logically in the order?" Biblical passages, especially Pauline and Johannine, clearly demonstrate the glory of God as an original ultimate end, with the glorification of the Son being a consequent end in trinitarian love and life. The decree to glorify the Son, therefore, is logically prior to the lapse (supralapsarian).

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[38] Robert Reymond, "A Consistent Supralapsarian Perspective on Election," in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Brand (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 156–62.

Karl Barth and the Christological Decree

Karl Barth reinvigorated with his dialectical method the Christological orientation of the doctrine of election.[39] Karl Barth would begin, however, by reorienting election as a matter of theology proper, whereby God elects himself, causing himself to be the one of gratuitous grace, the one who would define himself no longer other than in relationship with the creature:

> The election of grace is the whole of the gospel, the gospel *in nuce* . . . that God elects in his grace, that he moves towards humanity in his dealings with in this covenant with one man Jesus and the people represented by him. All the joy and benefit of this whole work as creator, reconciler and redeemer . . . are grounded and determined in the fact that that God is the God of the eternal election of his grace.[40]

The fact that Barth locates election primarily within God's being makes the doctrine—in one sense—a foil for the divine attribute of love: Barth argues that the doctrine of predestination "is not a mixed message of joy and terror, salvation and damnation . . . not dialectical but non-dialectical."[41] Election is the very "rift within God's being," the one place where ontology is not whole but proceeds in constant action. Election is the center of Barth's actualist theological ontology, a feature consistent among many changes from his early *Göttingen Dogmatics*, where he describes the "doctrine of predestination" as a "continuation of the doctrine of God . . . ."[42] McCormack emphasizes Barth's treatment of election as "the primal decision of God."[43] This designation excludes "every hint of temporality" and has a "logical force," disallowing the theologian from describing further or inquiring "behind" God's decision. In Barth, election orbits

[39] Though he did participate in the "Calvin versus the Calvinists" theory of post-Reformation dogmatics, he correctly read the architectural deposit of the tradition as a whole.

[40] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey Bromley and Thomas Torrance, trans. G. T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936), II.2:13–14.

[41] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II.2:12–13.

[42] Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, ed. Hannelotte Reiffen, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 445.

[43] Bruce McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 59.

around the loci of theology proper. God elects himself to be the electing God in this sense, a divine *extra* according to the terminology of Reformed scholasticism.

His metaphysics altered by the doctrine of election, Barth proceeds to reinvigorate Christology and decretal theology. His well-known supralapsarian doctrine is thoroughly Chrisotlogical. Christ is the Elect and Electing Man in Barth, and the divine decree of Christ's election sustains the subsequent decree of those elect in him. Barth points out the sure confidence we have on the basis of the reconciliation in the divine essence:

> When we are confronted with this event as the saving event which took place for us, which redeems us, which calls us to faith and penitence, we do not have to do with one of the throws in a game of chance which takes place in the divine being, but with the foundation-rock of a divine decision which is as we find it divinely fulfilled in this saving event and not otherwise. It is therefore worthy of unlimited confidence and only in unlimited confidence can it be appreciated. It can demand obedience because it is not itself an arbitrary decision but a decision of obedience. That is why it is so important to see that this is the character of the self-humiliation of God in Jesus Christ as the presupposition of our reconciliation.[44]

Barth is correct in judging the divine decree certain in Christ and, within Christ, certain for the elect. "The being of man in Christ" makes possible the election of humanity in the Elect One; thus, incarnation is a corollary category for Barth and fixes his doctrine of election in the decree of incarnation:

> We must not deceive ourselves. The incarnation, the taking of the *forma servi*, means not only God's becoming a creature, becoming a man—and how this is possible to God without an alteration of His being is not self-evident—but it means His giving Himself up to the contradiction of man against Him, His placing Himself under the judgment under which man has fallen in this contradiction, under the curse of death which rests upon Him.[45]

Here is a proposal for a Christological reorientation of lapsarian doctrine: the elect are elected into Christ and, subsequently upon the decree of the lapse, their redemption is decreed precisely because they have been elected into Christ. Such a schema certainly

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[44] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II.2:185.

[45] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1:103.

remains supralapsarian but in a very different Christological key.[46] For Barth *election* itself is functioning in the place of *decree*, and the concept stands at the very origin of the world's being. In other words, the glorification of the "elected" Son through the atonement accomplished for the elect is an ultimate end of God and an essential feature of this world that makes God to actualize it and not others. Barth is certainly correct not only to highlight that God's will-to-create amounts to what might (infelicitously) be called "God's election of himself," and this election of what is true of God in the actualized world ought to be ultimate (a point to which I will return in chapter 10).

Exegetical Investigations

Only two steps remain in this long chapter. The first is to explore whether and how the scripture speaks about any warrant for election. Of course, the chapter's initial purpose is to show how divine deliberation employs semantics no different from the Reformed tradition; additionally, a secondary purpose is to glean from that very tradition how God's purpose in Christ has been conceived as the ultimate end. I have sought to sketch in some important connections on that score, and the following exegetical section will help that cement to harden. Last, a brief section addresses how philosophers have seen this kind of structure to impact divine glory and praise. In particular, I explore how Jonathan Kvanvig and Alvin Plantinga consider moral praise or blame to redound to God only on the basis *of the entire world actualized*. Kvanvig, in particular, underscores deliberative divine knowledge. Plantinga, in particular, teases out how evil must be allowed in the world for God to achieve his purpose—yet such evil swallowed up by the moral worth of incarnation and atonement.

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[46] I develop Barth's proposal slightly here in my own clarification. Part of the problem for Barth's interpreters, aside from his dialectical writing, was that he did not conceive of election at this point as individual. In fact, "individual election" does come after the fall for Karl Barth—despite the larger Christological supralapsarianism. See also Shao Kai Tseng, *Karl Barth's Infralapsarian theology: Origins and Development, 1920–1953* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016).

Jude, Romans, and Decretal Warrant

A grounding problem for the decree of reprobation is one of the thorniest problems for infralapsarians. Each side of the equation has its decree, asymmetrical though they may be. Thus, when a fall is decreed, is the fall gratuitous or grounded in a logically prior decree? What grounding has the decree of reprobation? Is there a separation between God's decree of the fall for the rebel and then later for his or her reprobation? Jude 4 speaks of those who "long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only master and Lord, Jesus Christ." A few exegetical points must be considered. Jude is specific: the reprobated persons are "designated" for a very definite "condemnation." Their perversion of God's grace and their denial of the Lord Jesus prove essential, rather than incidental to the reprobated state of condemnation. Christologically, therefore, this passage is parallel to Ephesians 1—both passages speak of opposite elections (unto salvation and unto reprobation) *with reference to Christ*. Both passages privilege a decree concerning Christ upon which the decree concerning the person hangs. The decree to glorify Christ precedes the decree of the fall, whose "condemnation" is logically subsequent to Christ's person and work.

Romans 9:20-23 can be adduced for a similar point.[47] The text urges the primacy of the Christological category. Is the "lump of clay" one undifferentiated mass (supralapsarianism) or a lump of lapsed humanity after the fall (infralapsarianism)? Instead, the pattern of scripture follows the decree and purpose concerning the exaltation of the Son. What controls this text is the relation of the two vessels to Christ. A

[47] Rom 9:20–23 (ESV) says,

> But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.

differentiating decree relating humanity to the Son, whether by salvation or reprobation, deserves pride of place in the decrees.

Paul's rhetorical question is meant as true-to-fact: "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction?" (Romans 9:22, ESV). The rhetorical flow of the text clearly engages what the mere rational mind would interpret as a contrary-to-fact; The merely rational interlocutor does not imagine "vessels of wrath made for destruction." Therefore, Paul sketches a scenario in which God highlights an attribute unexpressed in eternal trinitarian love, namely divine wrath, and makes "vessels of wrath" with the intention for destruction. The purpose or decree of this destruction, therefore, is by definition logically prior to the decree to create the vessels of wrath. In this sense, God is the first object of the decree ("desiring to make known his power"), specifically through the person of Christ, and warrants the decree of their lapse. Christ is the center of God's end in creation.

The Priority of the Decrees of Christ

The Bible does not present God ever as gratuitously wrathful, instead, as wrathful (a) due to sin and (b) through the "one like a son of man." Interpreting Romans 9, therefore, the "destruction" which is the end of these vessels of wrath is precisely the destruction wrought by the judgment of the Davidic Messiah, who was once the object of the reprobate's rebellion. That the Son would be vindicated as son of David in power (Rom. 1:4) and glorified by his judgment is decreed prior to the decree of the lapse, and this Christological decree is the warrant for the display of wrath. My line of thought climaxes in 1 Peter 1:20-21. Peter sets forth Christ as (1) foreknown, (2) before creation, (3) the basis for the believers' status "in God," and (4) "elect" in his death and resurrection. This Christological determination cannot be of God's essence but a matter of decree—and a decree logically prior to the salvation of human beings. To turn the matter around logically, is to turn God's purpose on its head. Lewis Sperry Chafer states

the issue simply, if unwittingly: "it may be further observed that had Adam obeyed God, as God commanded him to do, there would have been no need of a redeemer; God the Redeemer as well as the need for him was evidently in the decree of God from all eternity (Revelation 13:8)."[48] Chafer, an infralapsarian (or, as he prefers, a sublapsarian), seems to speak better than he knows. If "God the Redeemer as well as the need for him" was in the decree of God, and if the premise of Adam's obedience is logically impossible, then God's intention in the Redeemer *is* the decree on which others depend, the goal towards which other decrees tend. God's original ultimate end is his glory, the full expression of his attributes and the exaltation of the Son. The decrees concerning salvation therefore are all logically subsequent to the determination to exalt the Son. This claim fits with the general thesis of "Supralapsarian Christology."[49] However, scripture witness reveals not only that Christ would be glorified by union with a people but by *redeeming* union. God's decree concerning his exaltation is logically prior to the lapse and to redemption.

Confirming this emphasis is the High Priestly prayer of John 17, in which Christ derives comfort, focus, and fortitude from praying the plan of the Father. Christ possesses the glory as the one with authority "over all flesh" and particularly in his granting eternal life to "those whom [the Father] has given to [him]."[50] Christ accomplished the decree to glorify the Father on earth and its logical subsequent is the reception of further glory himself.[51] The relationship between Christ and his people is

[48] Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 230–31.

[49] The divine decree concerning Christ could not be made logically contingent on the human fall into sin. For a thorough and needed treatment of this supralapsarian tradition, see Edwin Chr. van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology*, AAR Academy Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[50] John 17:1–2 ESV says, "When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.'"

[51] John 17:4–5 ESV says, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."

intimate[52] and fulfills a gratuitous goal of joy and love, an original ultimate end.[53] Christ's recitation portrays logical relationships within the one divine purpose: divine glory, exaltation of the Son, incorporation of humanity.

The Election of Angels as an Instance of Supralapsarian Christological Election

The lapsarian views rarely treat scripture's reference to "elect angels." Significantly, any election of angels is *by definition* supralapsarian. No angels were elected *unto salvation* nor was there any plan of redemption for those who did lapse (Heb. 1:4-2:10). Those angels elected according to 1 Timothy 5:21 receive a supralapsarian election.[54] Grudem says of this passage "[Paul] is so sure that it is God's act of election that has affected every one of those good angels that he can call them "elect angels."[55] But what election have they received? The simplest postulate to explain an election *sans* a lapse is an election into the Christological decree—that these would be personal, spiritual participants for Christ rather than against him—logically subsequent to the decree for the divine self-glorification principally of and through the Son. The chapter now concludes showing how the end of divine glory requires a world whose moral worth can be known before creating, and whose worth of incarnation and atonement cannot obtain without the fall.

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[52] John 17:7, 9–10 ESV says, "Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. . . . I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them."

[53] John 17:13, 23–24 ESV says, "I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world."

[54] First Tim 5:21 ESV says, "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality."

[55] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 672.

A Proposal for the Structure of the Decrees

Charles Talliaferro rightly identifies what is at stake in debates about divine knowledge is the structure of the cosmos itself.[56] Whatever claim is made concerning the meticulous extent or lack thereof in the divine intelligence *must* be repeated—not unlike a sympathetic nervous system—in claims about the structure of the Creator's cosmos. The determinist's view of God's meticulous intellection has the structure of the cosmos all of a piece, set before the divine mind.[57] The indeterminist posits a very different and necessarily more minimal structure to the cosmos. *Determinist* and *indeterminist* in this context refer to whether the truth-value of all the world's propositions are determined at the moment of creation. The indeterminist in this sense believes that the world's total true set of propositions are not determined (not known by God) when God "begins to create." Molinism is deterministic, accepting the thesis of a determined set of true propositions that God chooses. Open theism is fully indeterministic. "Metaphysical lightness"[58] and "soft facts"[59] have described the product of divine intellection, and—even if the language is rejected—what the terminology fences is necessary to form a coherent concept of a will-to-create. The strict indeterminist, therefore, curtails divine intellection. God cannot know meticulously what world is being actualized due to the presence of creaturely free

[56] Charles Talliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 108–118.

[57] The modal notion of God's "weakly actualizing" and "strongly actualizing" possible worlds is now common parlance. Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 174–88.

[58] Bob Hale is not so keen to discuss the philosophical theology but has set forth a thorough case for "metaphysically lightweight" objects that are modally *real*, even as semantic values. Bob Hale, *Necessary Beings: An Essay on Ontology, Modality, and the Relations between Them* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 39ff. William Lane Craig has been more keen to discuss kinds of "lightweight Platonism" as alternatives to Platonism *per se*, Platonism which he argues proffers abstract objects *agenetos*, along with God. For example, see the symposium between William Lane Craig, J. Thomas Bridges, and Peter Van Inwagen in *Philosophia Christi* 17, no. 2 (2015): 267–307.

[59] The "soft facts" distinction was developed by William of Ockham who grounded creaturely responsibility in the fact that the creature's ontology provided the truth-making conditions for the soft-facts, making those propositions into hard facts. Alvin Plantinga explores and applies the distinction in "On Ockham's Way Out," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 235–69.

acts.[60] Each party envisions divine logic rather like a computer subject to the "halting problem": given any program and input, will the computation or consideration "run" or go into an infinite loop?[61] A libertarian free will act (metaphysically "solid" or actualized), most theologians seem to assume, would throw the logic into a loop.[62] Thus, adhering to meticulous divine foreknowledge has often been corequisite with a view that God can work toward an end that includes Christ's atoning work.

Yet many Reformed thinkers affirm that the doctrine is right and accurate without attempting to show how it is so. Doctrine concerning the divine will-to-create remains largely undeveloped vis-à-vis the logical structure and intellectual possibilities of the divine mind, particularly the metaphysical status of its objects and the moral status of those things entailed by its ends. A deliberative model would begin to address this empty space—particularly a deliberative model with meticulous divine foreknowledge.

An under-determined cosmos as the object of God's intellection seems a non-starter for the divine will; in other words, the nature and the activity of the divine will proves strangely incoherent when moved by such minimal inducements that bear no clear relation to the eternal divine essence itself. More extended and elegant intellection is

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[60] Thomas Oord goes so far as to construct an "Essential Kenosis Model of Providence," in which any decision to create is an emptying of some of God's prerogatives and power since he logically cannot ultimately know or control its outcome in any sense where the world touches upon creaturely free acts. Thomas Jay Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 160–86.

[61] Noson S. Yanofsky, *The Outer Limits of Reason: What Science, Mathematics, and Logic Cannot Tell Us* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 139. Many insights that reason affords apply directly and broadly to what might be termed the "transcendentals of intellection." Mental activity is predicated upon certain conditions. Especially with regard to modal realities, some insight might be gained from computer technology. Any mental activity would be subject to something akin to "the halting problem" in computer informatics if some suitably-rich sense of the individual cannot be conceived of mentally.

[62] For John Sanders, the impossibility of a "risk-free" creation carries the notion that creaturely free acts are logically unknowable and open routes extend into the future where God may attain his goals. John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 61–64, 244–46. The open future still leaves no possibility of actually comprehending the moral value of the world God actualizes until the future is, in fact, actualized. Openness theologies, thus, must defend a God who creates without the ability to assess fully the world that will be actualized.

proper for the primal "move" of the divine will.[63] More "fully extended" models of the divine will envision the divine mind setting forth an ultimate end and its entailments, rather than a discrete desire. The divine essence may necessitate that he prefer a world he knows meticulously. The point can be proven by the basic contours of determinist and indeterminist proposals. Even conceived minimally, determinists consistently structure the cosmos and the "prime move" of the divine will around (1a) the Father's purpose to glorify the Son, while indeterminists do the same with regard to (1b) God's purpose to know and love human creatures as agents and ends-in-themselves. This question seems necessary then for all proposals concerning the divine plan: is the desire essential enough and the intellection extensive enough to move the divine will in terms of an original ultimate end?[64] God's knowledge can ground commitments of his will, especially if one considers God to interact with metaphysically light existents, objects of his own thought.

Moral Value in the Modal Propositions

How can moral motivation pertain to modal possibilities? We tend to think that moral values do not apply in possible worlds, but this instinct is *merely* an instinct. Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols present experimental philosophy on the assigning of moral value.[65] When a self was described in an abstract world—fully deterministic—most respondents saw an individual as not morally culpable for events taking place according to his agency within that world. When they were presented with a concrete instantiation of the same in the same determined world—wherein a man "named Bill" in order to be with his secretary found it necessary to kill his wife and children through arson—the respondents flipped and maintained his moral responsibility, even in a fully-

[63] Some small inducement is possible, though implausible (at least for a maximal God who is the grounding for modality).

[64] Talliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, 108ff.

[65] Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols, "Free Will and the Bounds of the Self," in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 530–54.

determined universe. When considering matters of the divine mind and will, especially insofar as it may involve meticulous intellection, does the philosophical theologian somehow downplay moral responsibility in the abstract conditions of the thought pattern, rather than other concrete conditions? This experimental philosophy reveals that, unsurprisingly, our own human, contingent moral equipment functions better in the context of human moral contingency. Moral facts themselves have no such limitation, nor does God.

Moral culpability is not primarily a matter of concreteness; moral values pertain *in abstracta.* And this principle allows moral value to be assigned to metaphysically light objects and to entire possible worlds; moral valuation transcends modal possibilities. This very fact depends on theology: the divine nature is the condition upon which possible worlds may be considered—even by the divine mind. The divine will thus may be most greatly moved to an original ultimate end that most greatly meets the "one moral universe" of the divine nature, God's character and attributes. Most importantly, a deliberative approach to the divine will-to-create would vouchsafe a model in which everything logically successive to the original ultimate end would be morally valued contingent upon the end or ends it serves (both secondary and ultimate).

The Great Things of the Gospel and God's Will to Create a Particular World

Two prominent analytic philosophers have in recent work set forth and defended conceptions of the divine will-to-create whose architecture depends heavily on fully-extended divine intellection. In accordance with the argument above, the divine will-to-create is more fit to respond to the total structure of the divine thought (ends-and-entailments). Johnathan Kvanvig develops a deliberative model of the will-to-create, and he commits both to libertarian freedom and full providential control:

> If even the hairs on our head are numbered, if even before on our tongue our words are altogether known, if the activities of free individuals can be correctly predicted far into the future, if even the darkness is as light to the Creator, what naturally comes to mind in contemplating such figures of speech is the idea of a lack of

> limits. . . . There are no limits to what God knows and *takes into account in undertaking the great miracle of creation*. There is, thus, a presumption in favor of unlimited conceptions here because of their power to explain the variety and scope of the available data.[66]

Kvanvig defended Molinist accounts for a long time, a project that he aims partially to undo, partially to modify. Instead, Kvanvig pursues "An Epistemic Theory of Creation," that (1) *models* (but does not necessarily realistically describes) the conditions under which God determined to create and (2) that relies not on counterfactuals but on epistemic conditionals. His model relies heavily on maximal notions of divine thinking:

> We should not imagine that there are possibilities that escape God's attention, since one of the things he will be certain of is which groups of conditional certainties display probabilistic coherence and which don't. Hence, one of his certainties at the initial stage in the model will be claims to the effect that there is no good reason in terms of probabilistic coherence itself to favor one group of conditional certainties over other groups of conditional certainties.[67]

He adds that God will "also be unconditionally certain that there is no reason to favor . . . any of the probabilistically coherent competitor groups."[68] On Kvanvig's scheme, God's knowledge encompasses modal facts, and God appraises all world systems that have probabilistic coherence (the world is feasible and the epistemic conditionals will pertain in that world-system). In the epistemic world-system God has given "powers and abilities to things themselves" in order to avoid occasionalism.[69] What remains for Kvanvig's model is his own concern for *how God would choose* a world-system from those that display probabilistic coherence.[70]

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[66] Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xi, emphasis added. He refers to Matt 10:30; Pss 139:4; 139:12.

[67] Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation*, 123.

[68] Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation*, 123.

[69] Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation*, 127.

[70] Though he sketches some possible solutions, the remainder of his treatment focuses on the fact *that* infallible divine knowledge could obtain in that world.

Some possible worlds are "more valuable than others."[71] Alvin Plantinga is well-known for providing a defense in problem-of-evil discussions,[72] but he has gone further to offer an actual theodicy that he believes also functions to validate the Supralapsarian view of the divine decrees. "Given the truth of Christian belief, however, there is also a contingent good-making characteristic of our world—one that isn't present in all worlds—that towers enormously above all the rest of the contingent states of affairs included in our world: the unthinkably great good of divine incarnation and atonement."[73] Plantinga treats the base level of possible worlds that contain incarnation and atonement as "L" and sets forth a principle: that God desires to create a world with a value exceeding L and that all such worlds by definition contain evil. "God's fundamental and first intention is to actualize an extremely good possible world. . . . The priority in question isn't temporal and isn't exactly logical either; it is a matter, rather, of ultimate aim as opposed to proximate aim."[74] The attentive Reformed theologian may want slightly to modify the ultimate aim (i.e., "to glorify the Son"), the immediate entailment of which would be to create Plantinga's ultimate aim of creating "a world of a certain level of value." In any case, the result is a model that is suitably rich to account for the world, the freedom of its creatures, and the divine will-to-create just that world out of all possible worlds.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the development of lapsarian doctrine in Christian thinking, providing for the early Christian centuries reasons for lapsarianism's late development. Decretal theology *per se* is primarily a Reformed construct due to the

[71] Alvin Plantinga, "Supralapsarianism, or '*O Felix Culpa*,'" in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, ed. Peter van Inwagen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 9.

[72] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

[73] Plantinga, "Supralapsarianism," 7.

[74] Plantinga, "Supralapsarianism," 12.

Reformation emphasis on divine will. The Reformation debate quickly settled into a standard infralapsarian position that went without much argument yet also had room available to include supralapsarian thinkers. The chapter set forth how Westminster interacted directly with the newly-fashionable middle knowledge construct and how those divines entertained the idea that God knows what we now call "modal facts." What the confession foreclosed was any possibility that such facts might be utterly independent of God in their source or actualization.

The chapter proceeded to discuss the place of Christ in decretal theology. The early Reformed treated Christ axiomatically in these debates; that is, they considered God's decree that Christ be incarnate and glorified as axiomatic for the remaining decrees. Of course, all agreed that the resulting "whole plan" is so naturally, elegantly, and perfectly fit together that it may be described as one "decree."

Thus, the Reformed spoke of God's action in different modes without yet having a model of modality. The chapter then considered the ways in which the Reformed have (whether explicitly or implicitly) resisted the prospects of making a model for how this modal knowledge might be attributed to God. Arminianism, quite naturally, argued that the project gets off on the wrong foot since God's electing decree must be logically subsequent to the human being's decision to accept Christ. From an entirely different angle, thinkers like Herman Bavinck preferred apophaticism, claiming that no logical relations can be discerned by the finite mind. The chapter showed, however, that someone like Bavinck—or Strong and Hodge in anglophone theology—still cannot help but use language that calls for the model they are rejecting. If one does not want to develop at least a basic and tentative model for the ordering of the decrees or the way that modality might be unpacked, he should at least cease to use the vocabulary (and possibly be done with the Reformed emphasis on divine will altogether).

The chapter then set out what proposal is available for the true origin of the decree, the original ultimate end of Jonathan Edwards. From very different perspectives

within the same general tradition, Robert Reymond and Karl Barth have argued for the preeminence of the decree of Christ, whereby persons are elected into Christ logically prior to the fall. The chapter proffered that this kind of supralapsarianism is a wise and biblical way to sketch the situation. God's ultimate end is the glory of Christ; the assured confidence of the salvation of those in union with him, produces a right grounding for the degree of the lapse. This general insight was confirmed with exegetical investigations of the scripture, and the thesis of divine deliberation is advanced by having some basis to differentiate between more logically ultimate and more logically subsequent decrees within God's unitary plan.

The final part of the chapter argued that comprehensive divine knowledge is required to ground the structure of the decree and will-to-create at all—and, as Kvanvig showed, epistemic conditionals can be used for divine knowledge. Further, it observed that moral values obtain in entire modal systems. Thus, God's moral evaluation, prior to creation, must be and can apply only to an entire world considered as a world. The chapter placed in this light the ingenious proposal of Alvin Plantinga that God desired a world with certain great-making moral values, such as incarnation and atonement. Every world with incarnation and atonement contains human sin, and, thus, logically subsequent to God's will to glorify Christ in this matter, a world containing the fall was necessary.

Lapsarian doctrine enshrines divine freedom, God's freedom to act for his purpose and sovereignly decree the means by which he achieves his ultimate ends. For this reason, commitment in the lapsarian debates orients one's idea of the priorities and relationships among God's decreed purposes. In philosophical and decretal theology, Edwards's concept of the original ultimate end is necessary, and this concept, together with Karl Barth's Christological emphasis in election, places the Christological decrees logically prior to the soteriological decrees, a conclusion that the biblical data sustain. Historic supralapsarianism holds forth this trajectory and is most amenable to the idea that God's ultimate end is his glory in Christ, to which the decree of election is logically

subsequent. Orthodox theology's manner of analyzing logical subsequence in the divine decrees can and ought to be applied throughout a full theory of divine knowledge and the divine will-to-create the actual world. Divine Deliberation in this way helps set forth how all the decrees amount to one decree to create—with every feature of the world dependent logically, one way or another, on the original decree of God's good pleasure to glorify the Son through incarnation and atonement. The glory of God in the Father's revealing to those weak in the world the atonement accomplished by the Son and applied by the Perfecting Spirit is of an unquantifiable value. Logically subsequent to the decree to glorify the Son in this way is the lapse. The Christian philosopher must both follow Ephesians 1 in blessing him "who works all things according to the counsel of his will" and proceed with solid philosophical toil to present a model of the divine will-to-create, and the dissertation now turns to the more strictly philosophical section.

CHAPTER 7

THE *PACTUM SALUTIS* AS PRECEDENT FOR DELIBERATION SEMANTICS IN THEOLOGY

Theology about the divine will has undergone very little ordinary language analysis. Theologians—and ordinary Christians—often turn the phrase *'What is God's will?'*. However, if someone were to ask *'How is 'x' rather than 'y' God's will?,'* the answer would likely concern how to reframe the question rather than the divine will itself. The crossroads of God-world relations is largely voluntaristic in Reformed teaching; that is, the Reformed treat first of a basic Creator-creature distinction, with everything concerning the world, the *missio dei*, and the like therefore a matter of creation—thus *contingent* rather than *necessary*. The Reformed, therefore, speak of the divine *will* to create rather than the "need," "effulgence," "natural expression," or any other strangely infelicitous phrase to describe a necessarily-created order. John Feinberg's statement shows the relationship between the Reformed treatment of divine essence and cognition: "God decided to act beyond the immanent bounds of fellowship within the Godhead."[1] Reformed philosophical theology, however, has largely failed to catch up with these theological gains. Indeed, for the confession of the faith and communion of the churches, a discrete and coherent God-concept on this basis is not the first priority—though it is also not negligible. Two doctrinal *loci* in particular (1) firm up the Reformed commitment to this kind of philosophical thinking and (2) also reveal the potential lack of coherence in its language. With reference to one of these doctrinal *loci* (decretal theology and the lapsarian views), the previous chapter argued how the divine

[1] John S. Feinberg *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 501.

will may desire to create, even when residing in eternal perfect pleasure: acting for an original ultimate end to glorify the Son, a form of Christological supralapsarianism. This chapter focuses on the second doctrine that locates Reformed commitments and Reformed language: the "covenant of salvation," or, *pactum salutis*.[2]

The aim of the chapter is to present the *pactum salutis* as a widely-accepted doctrine of pre-creation activity in the history of Reformed thought. Though every doctrine has its detractors, the "covenant of redemption" has enjoyed remarkable and continual support since its development in the post-Reformation scholastics. The chapter further aims to analyze contemporary treatments of the doctrine, and to show both how the doctrine encounters problems in Trinitarian theology and how these problems are solved by taking a non-realist interpretation of the covenant of redemption. In other words, one does not need the *pactum* as a univocal description of an actual act of God but as an analogical description of divine deliberation.

A section will sketch in what is at stake in the debate, the conclusion of which will refer to the place and use of the *pactum* in Reformed theology. The bulk of the thesis analyzes historic and contemporary treatments of the doctrine, Geerhardus Vos on the one hand and J. V. Fesko on the other. These thinkers have represented doctrinal formulation at greatest length and with greatest worth for this analysis. Whether one subscribes to the theological superstructure of their covenantalism in general and with the *pactum* in particular, the reader should accept the judgment that their treatments of the *pactum* employ a theologically orthodox manner of speaking about God-world relations. Though I object to some of what the *pactum* implies and its exegetical basis, I think most of its exponents' energy, writings, and claims for the doctrine can be rescued by interpreting it in a non-realist fashion. The *pactum* is at least a useful fiction for human

[2] The notion has also been called the "covenant of peace" or "covenant of redemption" and, historically, referred to a pre-creation agreement or covenant between the Father and the Son for the working of salvation (and, particularly, the Son's role within the economy). Contemporary treatments of the doctrine include the Holy Spirit as party to the covenant as well.

minds to conceive an epistemic model of divine deliberation. Consequently, the chapter concludes with thoughts towards a deliberative model.

The Reformation's Effect on the Concept of God

Scholastic thought, pristinely in Thomas, conceived a God who created essentially and whose identity—as *purus actus*—guaranteed that his eternal acts generated their effects, though mediated, in space and time.[3] The Ockhamist tradition, through Gabriel Biel and Martin Luther, dispatched with this essentialist rendering and confessed a God who created as an act of will and for whom revelational data was required for theological verities.[4] Reformed dogmatics paid its dues therefore *via* a promissory note for future philosophical theology. The structure of Reformed thought coheres only with a refined, expanded, and clarified doctrine of the divine essence and the divine persons.

Theologians treated the will very little in categories related to *persons* and *acts* but instead with *essence* as the clear backdrop.[5] The problem in the overall scheme is not

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[3] Aquinas, in *SCG* 2.35, questions whether

> if the action of the first agent is eternal, does it follow that His effect is eternal. . . . God's act of understanding and willing is, necessarily, His act of making. Now, an effect follows from the intellect and the will according to the determination of the intellect and the command of the will. Moreover, just as the intellect determines every other condition of the thing made, so does it prescribe the time of its making; for art determines not only that this thing is to be such and such, but that it is to be at this particular time . . . . Nothing, therefore, prevents our saying that God's action existed from all eternity, whereas its effect was not present from eternity, but existed at that time when, from all eternity, He ordained it (Thomas Aquinas, *SCG*, trans. James N. Anderson (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame, 1976), 24.

[4] John L. Farthing, *Thomas Aquinas and Gabriel Biel: Interpretations of St. Thomas Aquinas in German Nominalism on the Eve of the Reformation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988). Gabriel Biel was a student of William of Ockham and a significant exponent of German nominalism. Nominalism is often dubbed the "way of modernity," and Biel seems to have been a chief influence on Martin Luther. Perhaps even through Ockham, Luther saw a vision for resourcement from the church fathers and for a theological vision that included the overarching, voluntaristic action of God. For the breadth of Ockham's impact, see William J. Courtenay, *Ockham and Ockhamism: Studies in the Dissemination and Impact of His Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). For Ockham's continuities and discontinuities with Scholasticism, see Richard Cross, *The Medieval Christian Philosophers: An Introduction* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014).

[5] Due to the conciliar favor for dyothelitism with respect to the person of Christ. Two natures entails two wills with respect to those natures. However, this numerical distinction of the will-of-nature

with the definition or philosophical coherence of *will* per se; trinitarian theology with an enduring and consistent voice argues that will is grounded in nature and expressed in a person.[6] Thus, the divine will is grounded in the one divine essence, expressed in the three divine persons, and makes possible the picture in theology proper of the three divine persons in an eternal act, a concert of love. The divine will, grounded in the one divine nature, makes possible other Trinitarian tools, such as inseparable operations. The problem arises when asking *how* that will expresses purposes, plans, and contents beyond the nature—or due to eternal acts of the persons subsisting in that nature. The pertinent question asks not how God thinks "eternally" but how he thinks discursively. Natures do not think; persons do.[7] Of course, the question should immediately be qualified: a person's thinking or willing is never entirely separate from that person's nature. However, ordinary language analysis would recognize that most sentences that take an interest in the will are precisely concerned with "essential will as expressed in an individual substance of a rational nature"—a person. Ordinary language does refer to the will-of-a-nature, does so more commonly to that will, expressed by a person. Therefore, to refer to "will of" any trinitarian person should be understood as orthodox trinitarian shorthand. The *pactum salutis* allowed many of the Reformed to begin talking this way.

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with respect to the person of Christ does nothing to advance *what a will is*, how this faculty operates in a nature, *and also in a person* (a hypostasis of that nature), and whether the will-of-nature and will-of-person are different in any sense (and, subsequently, whether they are contradictory or complementary).

[6] See also Stephen J. Wellum on the person-nature distinction in *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 255–65.

[7] In Q & A at the 2018 Eastern Regional meeting of ETS, I was asked by James Dolezal whether we could say that "God, in a given act, acts Father-wise, Son-wise, or Spirit-wise." My response was that such a rendering of the Trinity could meet the ecumenical creeds but hardly sets forth biblical passages in shining clarity; a better rendering of the "only apparent diversity view" is that of Brian Leftow, "A Latin Trinity," *Faith and Philosophy* 21, no. 3 (2004): 304–33.

Origin of a Concept: The *Pactum Salutis* in Scholasticism and Contemporary Calvinism

The Reformed scholastics sought to codify what was previously an *ad hoc* break from Roman Catholic dogma, purging the system of contradiction, discrepancy, or oversight. Reformed scholastics developed the *pactum salutis* in response to rationalist thinkers in the seventeenth century, and the notion took hold quickly among Reformed writers: the key even to metaphysics and God-world relations had a revelational basis.[8]

In a piece of brilliant research, Muller traces the intellectual history of a concept that was confessedly approved "out of nowhere" in Reformed dogmatics; Muller's hunch that the Reformation generation's exegesis or formularies must have made the notion acceptable to the scholastics is apropos. However, the radical reworking of the God-concept itself in the early Reformed can help account for such a radical and total shift. In this way, the *pactum* has the effect of securing a transition of the divine will and power from its "absolute" reality to a covenantal intention.

> What is perhaps most remarkable about this chronological presentation of the early dogmatic history of the *pactum salutis* is the lack of opposition to what, at least on [Herman] Witsius' testimony, was a relatively new idea with a rather shaky pedigree—an idea, moreover, that did not easily find clear dogmatic precedent, in Witsius' view, prior to Arminius. This lack of opposition in an era of orthodoxy and fairly strict confessionalism raises the question of whether the concept might have had other precedents: the seemingly sudden appearance of the doctrine as a virtual truism within the space of four years itself raises questions. Worlds may arise *ex nihilo*, doctrinal formulae probably do not. More precisely, these observations raise the question of whether there were elements of Reformed exegesis and doctrinal discussion that laid a groundwork or provided a backdrop to the formulation of the *pactum salutis*, prior to the first use of the term—and even prior to the dogmatic construction that led to the term, a groundwork or backdrop conducive to the nearly immediate and very easy acceptance of the doctrine.[9]

Fundamentally in agreement with Muller's take on the development of the doctrine, Carl Trueman describes the exponents of the "covenant of redemption" as fundamentally in

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[8] Richard A. Muller, "Toward the *Pactum Salutis*: Locating the Origins of a Concept," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007): 11–65; Carl Trueman, "From Calvin to Gillespie on Covenant: Mythological Excess or an Exercise in Doctrinal Development?," *IJST* 11 (2009): 378–97.

[9] Muller, "Toward the *Pactum Salutis*," 14–15.

agreement with the tradition of Calvin, though they did introduce new terminology. Though I find more innovation in the *pactum* concept, Trueman presents a compelling case that the early Reformed emphasis on "Christ as Mediator" makes the later-developing covenant of redemption stand "in positive relation to the earlier work of Calvin and company."[10] Scott Swain's statement shows the proximity—and overlap—of the doctrine with the categories of Creator and creation:

> The doctrine of the decree does not concern the beginning of God, because God has no beginning. The doctrine of the decree concerns the beginning of all things that exist outside of God. In more technical idiom: the divine decree is the eternal work of the triune God (*opera Dei interna*) that moves and directs the external works of the triune God (*operationes Dei externa*).[11]

Swain's language becomes less clear as the doctrine is related to the divine nature: "The decree is both a free expression of God's triune perfection, which is its principal and source, and the eternal foundation of the economy of nature, grace, and glory, which is its effect."[12] The very word *decree* is present in the sentence to secure divine will in the concept, yet *decree* is reduced to "an expression," and expression is somehow modified by *free*. (What is a "free expression" if not a "decision" or "act of will"?) Definitions such as this reveal the theological work still undone. The tradition, in both scholastic and contemporary forms, continues to furnish precise distinctions from the Thomistic commitment to essence,[13] while a doctrinal formulation such as the *pactum* was

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[10] Trueman, "From Calvin to Gillespie on Covenant," 378.

[11] Scott Swain, "The Covenant of Redemption," in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott Swain (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 107.

[12] Swain, "The Covenant of Redemption," 107–8.

[13] Fred Sanders follows the Thomistic separation of divine causes from actual effects when he writes,

> But this scholastic-sounding translation into the conceptuality of internal actions is fruitful in several ways. If we do not unpack Trinitarianism using this conceptuality, it will be hard to deal with a number of pressures. . . . If we are to use the idiom of action or agency to talk about what God does, we will, of course, say that God is the source of all sorts of effects within the order of creation. But once we have begun talking in this way about an agent who carries out actions with effects, we will need to apply it consistently and ask about what God is doing when considered apart from these doings in the world. At that point we have a choice to make. We could say that within the divine life itself there is no action

hammered out precisely to enshrine divine will as the origin of the economy. The *pactum* intentionally avoids categories of necessary or essential action.

Reformed Language Concerning the *Pactum*: Reading J. V. Fesko

Few historical theologians have so penetrated the Reformed consolidation of theology proper with regard to the covenantal intention for the creation as J. V. Fesko.[14] In a recent volume, Fesko seeks to construct, on the basis of the historic Reformed, a contemporary treatment of the *pactum salutis*.[15] The pattern of Fesko's argumentation mirrors that of the contemporary biblical theologies. The argument deals with exegetical flow-of-thought and narrative categories, yet it consistently speaks in ways that seem to make metaphysical commitments. The very passages that for most scholars leads to an historic, progressive revelation of Messianic identity leads Fesko to argue that the texts entail the *pactum salutis*. Simply because the texts are Christological, are they thus covenantal, and thus decretal, and thus having to do with the *pactum salutis*? At worst, the argumentation devolves into a free association of ideas. At best, it proves that the *pactum salutis* is a simple concept that conveys in the idiom of a different discipline (systematic theology) what the Bible says about how God thinks.[16]

> leading to effects, because the life of God, being simple, is above the kind of distinctions implied in agency. Agency, on this view, would be something God has with respect to that which is not God. As for the life of God itself, we might describe its being as the very act of Be-ing. (Fred Sanders, *The Triune God*, New Studies in Dogmatics [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016], 130)

[14] J. V. Fesko, *Diversity within the Reformed Tradition: Supra- and Infralapsarianism in Calvin, Dort, and Westminster* (Greenville, SC: Reformed, 2001); Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

[15] J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016).

[16] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 82–87, where covenant-making activities *in time* warrant the supposition of the same *in God*.

The Covenant: A Model for the Logical Relations of Divine Purposes?

J. V. Fesko does not claim that the exegesis of Psalm 2 includes the *pactum salutis*, but he sees the necessary obedience of the messianic representative as required in the passage. As warrant, he presents a tight argument that the royal song takes the form of as a covenant renewal ceremony—this time to which the people's representative is party, rather than the people itself.[17] He finds the Davidic covenant to be a kind of space-time mirror or the presentation in creation of that which was covenanted among the Trinity in the eternal *pactum*.[18] Are such biblical texts not exhausted by "the original historical horizon" and "more likely" also describe how "the Son's eternal relationship with His Father grounds the redemptive historical outworking of his earthly ministry"?[19] To prove this entailment would likely prove far too toilsome; to say that scripture reveals this idea truly to be the case seems too much.

However, adherents of this view could take an instrumental view of the *pactum* in texts like these: can the structural conditions of a covenant (in actual space and time with actual persons) prove a suppositional model for the logical relations of the divine mind? Does this proposal for a covenant of redemption (which involves personal will and action) mirror a deliberative model of divine intellection? Indeed, earlier Reformed inheritors, such as Geerhardus Vos, have followed a similar notional pattern in their dogmatics: Vos argues that the *pactum salutis* "does not precede election but follows it in order. . . . The counsel of peace comprises the eternal suretyship of Christ, on which all of God's gracious treatment of sinners in time depends."[20] Vos argues that "the counsel of

[17] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 80–86.

[18] Yet he does not make the assertion in the body of the chapter, just the conclusion: "The timeframe of God the Father's covenant with the Son originates in eternity, not in redemptive history. God make a covenant with David . . . because of his covenant with the Son in eternity." Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 94.

[19] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 94.

[20] Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012), 1:132.

peace is the eternal pattern for the temporal covenant of grace."[21] He elsewhere refers to the connection, asserting that Prophet-Priest-King ideas proceed "forward as types to the body that would come, at the same time they appear back as organs to the eternal image of this body as it was present in God's counsel of peace."[22] More will be said by way of summary and implication, yet the data already demonstrates that these Reformed thinkers use the biblical covenants—with all their deliberative and volitional elements—as warrant for, patterns of, and even a typological-representation of a divine eternal covenant. Covenant-making in creation models divine thinking before creation. Thus, precedent clearly exists in the major Reformed tradition for a deliberative model of the divine will-to-create, though this kind of theological talk has not been explicated as such.

The Covenant Model: Instrumental or Realist?

One could take the claims of Fesko and Vos instrumentally—arguing that the analogy provides philosophically a *model* of divine action but does not make a *realist* reference. However, Fesko maintains a realist reference when fitting elements of his exegesis into such a conceptual construct as the eternal *pactum salutis*. For example, Fesko identifies how the "context of Psalm 2 is important for a number of reasons, but chiefly because it draws attention to the necessity of the obedience of the Messiah."[23] Fesko is speaking *directly* about the actual space-time necessity of Christ's obedience, yet his whole argument sets up inferences from the biblical text to the *pactum*. Is "the obedience of the Messiah" a contingency of the *pactum salutis*? What level of detail and contingency is included in the *pactum*, and if detail is scant, why is the *pactum* noteworthy? The purchase of the *pactum* concept seems to come from its cementing *that*

[21] Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics,* ed. and trans. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), 2:92.

[22] Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:11.

[23] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 89.

Father and Son were united in knowledge and will concerning all the world's conditions before creation, not *what* each condition of the "covenant of redemption" was.

In his pattern of argument and conclusions, Fesko is not the exception but instead represents the failure of many theologians to be clear in these postulates. Having dealt with the elements of coronation in the passages of Zechariah and Psalm 2, Fesko concludes: "God's decree is not a bald declaration but rather is enrobed in the covenant."[24] What a "bald declaration" would be is not quite clear; neither is the meaning of how a declaration is "enrobed in the covenant." It could be that "covenant" here is a stand-in for a concept like the decree to glorify Christ, to which decree others are subsequent. Fesko then asserts one of the central theses of the book: "God's covenantal decree that one of David's heirs would rule over the nations played out on the stage of redemption history, but yet it was rooted in eternity."[25] The special pleading is plain since the exegetical data is in support of the "stage of redemptive history" (not the rootage of eternity), yet Fesko applies the exegetical force to his construct, the *pactum*. Regrettably, Fesko merely asserts his thesis and offers no warrant or support for it. The entirety of the chapter concerns how God's covenantal decree "that one of David's heirs would rule over the nations played out on the stage redemptive history," but his thesis, the purpose of the book, and the central claim regarding the covenant of redemption is *exactly what happened*—and what theologians may claim to have happened—in eternity among the persons of the Trinity.[26] The thesis, however, may mostly or wholly be saved by converting it into a philosophico-theological model of divine discursive thought, rather than exegesis of God's revealing a pre-creation covenant that was actually enacted.

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[24] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 93.

[25] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 93–94.

[26] Further, to claim—using figurative language—that something was "rooted in eternity" is unhelpful, due precisely to the fact that from the Reformed theological perspective everything is rooted in eternity: people, politics, animals, every datum of the divine plan.

The Covenant Model: The Processions as a Basis?

Fesko continues with a trinitarian claim, namely that the Son's "eternal relationship with his Father grounds the redemptive historical outworking of his earthly ministry."[27] This point is derived neither from Zechariah nor from Psalm 2, though few theologians would dispute the claim notionally. He continues, "The Son's eternal procession from the Father undergirds his mission as the Messiah."[28] An article of theology such as this precisely must analyze terms such as "eternal relationship" and "undergirds" and use these terms consistently—or avoid these terms precisely in favor of their non-figurative equivalents. Attempting an interpretation, one might assume that since the covenants vouchsafe mutuality, deliberation, and responsibility on the stage of history, then whatever grounds those features (the nature of Trinity-in-eternity?) must have the same shape. Indeed, proponents of the *pactum salutis* have praised its ability to guard mutual agreement and a total united will and action in the *missio Dei*. In this sense, the *pactum* firmly holds dogma in place without explicating it: the triune persons agree (yet have one will) and make a covenant (which is normally considered an *ad intra* work) that includes within its structure the whole divine work (the economic Trinity). Divine deliberation similarly guards mutuality and unity in the divine will-to-create.

Ultimately, Fesko argues that God "makes a covenant with David, and the other patriarchs for that matter, because of his covenant with the Son in eternity."[29] The postulate of the covenant of redemption is supported hypothetico-deductively precisely because some cause is needed—or supposed to be needed—for God to make a covenant with David and the patriarchs. The problem for the schematic is that the Bible outlines plenty of causes, reasons, and other purposes appropriate to an agent for God's desire and

[27] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 94.

[28] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 94. Fesko follows what Sanders describes as the traditional argumentation of tracing "the temporal missions back to eternal processions" and then describing the same as "internal actions." Sanders, *The Triune God,* 130.

[29] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 94.

decision to make a covenant with David and the patriarchs—none of which appeal to an eternal covenant. However, functionally the appeal to an eternal intra-trinitarian covenant affirms that whatever other causes, reasons, or purposes God has for the Davidic covenant, it must ultimately depend on God's determination to glorify the Son. At this point, the conceptual overlap between decretal theology and the *pactum* is clear, and both serve most to create conceptual space in the average theologian and worshipper that *Father, Son, and Spirit create the world and act in accordance with it based on agreement concerning all of its conditions*. If God makes a covenant (or, if one prefers, "decrees a plan") and if that plan's end is to glorify the Son, then many subsequent ends must obtain to fulfill that glorification. Thus, covenants like those with David and the patriarchs are fitting subsequent ends that fulfill the divine purpose—though they are not necessarily deduced from the ultimate end. What is necessary is that subsequent ends must fulfill the ultimate end. What is contingent is that these covenants would be the subsequent ends. Yet, in the divine mind, all the ends are set forth as one pact, one decree, and willed for its whole purpose and outcome.

"Covenant" Contains "Will"

Last *covenant* itself must come in for analysis. Is the term limited to its exegetical meaning or does it quite literally take on metaphysical overtones as a kind of placeholder for the world created or, at least, for the "agreement" that made this world's presentation of incarnation and atonement enormously good? After all, the claim that God does all things in accordance with his purpose is a pedestrian claim in constructive theology—and easily supported by exegetical theology. If the notion of a "covenant of redemption" amounts to this idea, then that "covenant" is easily sustained but has less practical effect. If it amounts to more than this idea, then the claim is clearly beyond the necessary exegetical basis and therefore must commend itself on the basis of its solving broad-scale philosophical problems.

The emphasis of Fesko's reading ought to fall on the agency of God, *per se.* Significantly, agency requires personhood, rather than merely essence; thus trinitarian theology, if this model be developed, could not appeal to the essential will for the claim of unanimity.[30] The point of the *pactum* from the beginning was its picture of *two agents agreeing*. In the theology of the pactum, *covenant* language preserves volition and logical hierarchy within the matrix of the divine plan, which maps neatly onto the model of divine deliberation.

The Relevant *Voluntas Dei*:
Essential or Personal?

More pertinent for the doctrine of God is the question this line of thought raises: is the willing of the divine persons "productive" or just of the essence? What Fesko and the rest of the tradition seem to require with regard to the divine will-to-create is an answer affirming the first. A good example of the equivocation on *will* is in Fesko's treatment of the High Priestly Prayer. "The fact that Christ prays to his Father means that, once again, even though the Trinity shares one will it finds expression in a pluriform manner."[31] To understand what "finds expression" in the sentence means is difficult; the possible—and most likely—reading is to treat *will* as a noun referring to the "outcome of will" instead of the actual will itself. This reading does entail an equivocation but offers the best sense to the sentence. As such, the sentence would say that the 'intention or

[30] Further examples establish the pattern of (1) using temporal covenants as a model of divine intellect and will and (2) then situating those claims on the processions. In the middle of prolonged discussion on the immanent and economic Trinity, Fesko contrasts, "The eternal processions and their covenantal missions," gratuitously inserting "covenantal" into his argument without any justification or even broaching the topic. "Nevertheless, by starting with the missions of Christ and the Spirit, we can look back to the reveal the eternal origins in their intra-trinitarian processions." Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 169. What clearly needs further analysis is the meaning of "origins." The word refers to the "missions," and the term leaves the impression that the mission itself was either necessary or—once divinely-willed, its mode was contingently necessary. In other words the intra-trinitarian processions by nature "caused or originated" such a mission or, the Trinity being as it is due to such processions, when the will of God was to create and act in the economy, the missions had to transpire in this way. Either interpretation is possible; neither is clear. The point is significant, for if the missions follow as a necessity of processions, then his argument concerning the *pactum*, a covenant is unnecessary. The very idea of a covenant requires volitional contingency.

[31] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 179.

purpose of God' each trinitarian person undertakes in the appropriate manner. The problem in the reading is that "shares one will" refers to the commonplace in theology proper that the divine will is unitary due to the fact that the will is a faculty of the essence and functions therefrom. Thus, *will* seems predicated upon the essential will, yet the sentence relies on personal will, while the likely meaning refers to 'the outcome of will'.

The way through the morass may be found by philosophical analysis of 'will'. The will, no doubt, can be isolated or reduced to a matter of nature. This point obtains whether with a weak ontology (the will of emergent natures: e.g. "the will of the people") or a strong ontology (the will of substance-natures: the impersonal "will" of flora and fauna or the personal will of dogs and humans). Will, insofar as it exists in an essence, is therefore both a severely underdetermined term and a underdeveloped concept. One can certainly defend a certain kind of "will" for sunflowers, but this will would be utterly different, far more minimal, than "will" appropriate to the essence of humans—precisely because humans are individuated as persons—and rational persons at that. "Will in essential-personal matrix" is precisely the will worth talking about, the will pertinent to the function of persons; this "will" is untreated in Reformed theology and its implications are unexplored in models of such doctrines as the *pactum salutis*. Yet, *will* is always in the background when one says "The Father, Son, and Spirit enter into a covenant of redemption before creation."

This treatment offers a solution: the essential will is united in the one essence; the personal will is united *by* the three persons. For the sentence to read "united by the three persons" is not special pleading, for, indeed, the personal will would, on the one hand, be "divided" ("individuated" is likely better; "expressed" is likely best), but, according to the eternal existence and act of the three divine persons, the will-as-expressed-in-persons is truly unitary. Therefore, traditional trinitarian doctrine is preserved with a unitive divine will at both essential and personal levels, the second level being so precisely because of personal action. This model has the advantage of presenting a God-concept

that is undisturbed by the 'initial action', the will to create and the individual missions of the three persons of the Godhead.

Is Deliberation "Entirely Unworthy of God?"

In key places, Fesko's treatment commits to language of deliberation and dialogue—for example when he argues on the basis of the High Priestly Prayer in John 17. "Some might try to eliminate the dialogue between the Father and Son by arguing that this is truly an economic event and this is not necessarily reflective of an ontological reality. Or in the desire to preserve the unity of the divine will they eliminate the idea of Father-Son agreement."[32] Fesko replies: "First, we must remember that Christ dialogues with the Father as the God-man."[33] Unfortunately, Fesko says nothing further about the claim that "Christ" (a messianic title) dialogues as "the God-man." Theologically, the statement is inexplicable, or, more precisely, the statement is explainable in far too many ways for the meaning to be anything close to definite. His meaning seems to set forth the second person of the Trinity—the Word proceeding from the Father eternally—acting as the Davidic heir, the messianic Savior and as the Son "begotten in time," a hypostasis of divine and human natures. Can the God-man's prayer in time demonstrate God the Son's covenantal-making before time?

The theological implications of the claim are significant. Geerhardus Vos also carefully disallowed positing the enfleshed Christ as a party to the covenant. More significant, however, is the Christ he did posit for the *pactum*. In a significant passage, Vos disagrees with a significant theological statement of Isaac Watts. He summarizes Watts's proposal: "The covenant between God the Father and the Son is from all eternity. This requires that both parties are present. However, in the Trinity there is only one mind

[32] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 179.

[33] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 179.

and one will, which therefore cannot make a covenant. The covenant can only be made between God and the human soul of Christ."[34]

Assessing the view, Vos allows "an element of truth in it," yet he rejects only the idea that "the actual soul of Christ existed." He agrees with Watts that "due to the eternal counsel of peace, the humanity of the Mediator was eternally and ideally present . … his human nature was thereby taken into account as if it were really present."[35] The attempted distinction between the existence of the "actual soul" and the external and ideal presence of "the humanity of the Mediator" belies special pleading in this passage. Yet, the "eternal and ideal" presence of the humanity of the Mediator *can* be accounted for through divine deliberation that transposes these insights into the category of divine knowledge. Thus, as in the exegetical section of chapter 3, the God-man's prayer in time is a better demonstration of deliberative knowledge, knowledge that incorporates actual dispositions, and conditional propositions. Seen in this way, the prayer of Christ corresponds to propositions of divine knowledge such as "The Father wills to glorify the Son," and "if the incarnate Son fulfills the law, his death bears atoning value." Vos's concept of the hypothetical flesh of Christ *can* be present in logical propositions.

With regard to Fesko's reading of John 17, one could argue that Fesko describes the High Priestly Prayer *per se*; however, his entire purpose is to argue *against* the notion "that this is purely an economic event" and *for* the notion that the prayer necessarily reflects an ontological reality. What it would mean for something to be "purely" an economic event is uncertain (but the event is certainly economic). Moreover, the Son clearly addresses the Father "as the God-man," as Fesko admits, but the remainder of his section continues to build suppositions of pre-temporal divine "dialogue" (his term) on the text.

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[34] Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:84.

[35] Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:84.

The overwhelming consensus interprets the "genuine dialogue" of the Father and the Son (vis-à-vis the Son's situating his will) as related precisely to his unique status in the economy, that is, a hypostasis of divine and human natures.[36] Thus, Fesko remains within the context of the problem when he discusses how the Father and Son might "dialogue" in terms of the agreement of the *pactum*—to send and be sent. The "dialogue" of Father and Son in the *pactum* is better understood as a deliberative model of the triune God's knowledge. "The ideal and eternal presence of the Mediator" is a far more daunting theological edifice than to develop a model of the divine will that depends on the three persons and employs deliberation as its structure for discursive thought. Though Fesko does not take up and philosophize on the terminology, he tacitly defends such language. Vos himself only asserts that to ask a question about the Son's possible withdrawal or unwillingness with reference to the *pactum* is simply "unworthy of God."[37] Conceptual development vis-à-vis the will of the persons is clearly lacking to sustain these doctrinal formulations.

Are the Divine Persons Volitionally Different in Any Sense?

Fesko cites Anselm and Aquinas to set forth "relational opposition" as a commonplace in the historical treatment of the three divine persons. With this history in

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[36] Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:180. Does his raising the spectre of an "elaborate monologue" point in the realist direction?

[37] The point can be made from Vos's questions 9 and 10 in his "Covenant of Grace" lectures, in which the question-and-answer format is original in his text:

9: "After the Father had presented Him with the task of surety, could the Son withdraw from it or, after having accepted it, lay it down again?"

"To posit this would be entirely unworthy of God. In the Trinity, complete freedom and perfect agreement go together. And the Surety was a divine and therefore immutable person. Thus Scripture also alludes to the immutability of God's counsel (Heb 6:18). The Remonstrants teach the opposite."

10: "How do you describe this counsel of peace in a few words?"

"We can say that it is the agreement between the will of the Father in giving the Son as head and redeemer of the elect and the will of the Son in presenting Himself for them as surety." Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 2:90.

view, Fesko argues that dialogue-resulting-in-agreement in no way threatens the "unity of the Trinity." Unfortunately the "unity" he speaks of is not clear from the context—particularly with reference to whether this unity is ontological or volitional. He does say that the "triune unity does not eliminate dialogue and interaction, indeed communion, among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,"[38] so any essential, static union is thereby removed. To say that the three persons, subsisting in the essence with the essence expressed in the persons, interact and share communion is indeed a theological commonplace. The very question at issue is to what extent any *dialogue* can be created, insofar as dialogue itself, when advancing to reach any sense of agreement precisely requires *difference*.

Fesko himself raises the spectre of a kind of feigned "monologue." Is the expression of the essence in the persons sufficient for this "dialogue"? In particular, is the unity of the essential will and the distinction in the personal will what he would agree brings the divine persons to such "agreement"?[39] Fesko explicitly warns in another place against thinking of the incarnation this way. He warns against thinking "that, since Christ is incarnate in his economic mission, the incarnation is part of his ontological procession?"[40]

Most significant is Fesko's third caution: "if Christ's obedience is part of his procession or nature, then can we say that Christ willingly and voluntarily came to do the work the Father gave him (John 17:4)? Christ's work would no longer be contingent and voluntary but necessary and involuntary—simply the necessary outworking of his procession."[41] Fesko identifies the nub of the issue and explicates the central problem in dealing with the divine will. The triune God must *will* to create, and, logically prior, the

[38] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 180.

[39] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 180.

[40] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 190. His application strains credulity: "The formulation leans heavily, it seems, towards pantheism" (190). Most likely he points to the fact that something contingent (incarnate being) has been subdued into divinity.

[41] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 190.

triune persons must *will* the economic relations appropriate to the 'chief ultimate end' that elicits the divine will-to-create.[42]

This passage also demonstrates the unfortunate and unmistakable lack of clarity with regard to *will*: "… The Son proceeds eternally from the Father, which means he eternally shares in the Trinitarian will to redeem fallen humanity, but more specifically voluntarily pledges his obedience to the Father's covenantal command to be sent into the far country."[43] The first reference to the "Trinitarian will" seems to derive from the essence, while the second reference to the will is the Son's will to obey, which derives from the person.[44] Consequently, Reformed philosophers, developing a deliberative model of divine intellection, should be unafraid to employ the difference-of-identity between the will of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit in constructing such a model.

Toward a Deliberative Model of the Divine Will-to-Create

Fesko's constructive thought is praiseworthy, and he himself embodies that element of Reformed thought willing to explore some deliberative model or treatment of the divine will. When treating Ephesians 1, famous for grounding God's act in the "good pleasure of his will," Fesko writes, "The key question before us is, when does the triune God deliberate regarding the identity of these redeemed Jews and Gentiles, those who constitute the eschatological dwelling place of God, the final temple? Paul clearly places

[42] Those who are aware of contemporary debates concerning EFS or ERAS will note what is at stake in this claim. Interestingly, the ERAS exponents have less to explain with regard to the divine will in this regard. Both the traditional and the ERAS teachers are beholden to the more basic problem, however.

[43] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 191.

[44] Thomas Joseph White takes Barth's treatment of the crucifixion as an intra-trinitarian event as his starting point: much of modern theology has followed Barth on this point (yet Barth deemed the covenant of redemption "mythological"). The second Barthian point White analyzed was most interesting: "The second idea is that obedience, found in the man Jesus, in fact has its condition of possibility in a transcendent "pretemporal" obedience in the immanent life of the Trinity." Thomas Joseph White, "Intra-Trinitarian Obedience and Nicene-Chalcedonian Christology," *Nova et Vera* 6, no. 2 (2000): 378. White's analysis argues that this second point cannot be reconciled with Nicene-Chalcedonian Christology since it presumes obedience in the procession. However, Barth aims for some modal rendering—in my judgment—rather than an ontological one and therefore can be reconciled with Chalcedonian Christology.

the Trinitarian deliberations over these matters before the creation of the world . . . ."[45] He coordinates the term with covenantal: "These three texts have an eternal origin within intra-trinitarian covenantal deliberations."[46] His notion of deliberation becomes clearer: "But God's selection is not a bald abstract choice, considered apart from other factors."[47] The "factor" to which Fesko proceeds in the argument is that the elect were chosen "in the Beloved," and this line of thought clearly demonstrates the growing complexity of the will and plan of God—interacting with other "factors."[48] God's will for the second trinitarian person to be The Beloved is the necessary proposition to make possible the contingent proposition of the elect's salvation "in him." Thus, whatever specifically Fesko intends with the word *deliberation*, he must at least allow (a) discursive thought and (b) hierarchical logic; also, we could now add two kinds of knowledge: (c) knowledge of the divine will expressed in the three persons, and (d) the conjunction of the Father, Son, or Spirit's volition and a true proposition involving that person in the economy (e.g. "The Father is pleased to reveal the great things of the gospel to those weak in the world." "The Son is pleased to acknowledge the Father's gracious will.").

Another section reveals the implications of Fesko's language: "Paul clearly places both the election of Jews and Gentiles in Christ before the foundation of the world. In other words, the deliberations regarding the work and circumstances surrounding the redemption of the elect are pre-temporal."[49] Plainly, Fesko here has expanded his theological reasoning from soteriology alone to include God-world relations. Intending no cheekiness, the analytic philosopher should be excused when suggesting that, whether Fesko intends it or not, this statement is beyond traditional covenant language and is

[45] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 110.

[46] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 52.

[47] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 52.

[48] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 110.

[49] Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*, 110–11.

carrying metaphysical freight—allowing the possibility of "deliberation" among the persons of the Trinity.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the *pactum salutis* to be a commonplace in Reformed treatments of God, enjoying wide acceptance. Significantly, the doctrine's wide acceptance came both quickly and unexpectedly, as the scholarship of Richard Muller demonstrates. The concept was immediately received across an entire generation of post-Reformation scholastics. Richard Muller rightly argued that this immediate acceptance of the formulation is because its fundamentals were already present—a thesis amenable to those documented in the work of Heiko Oberman. The Reformation affected both the doctrine of God and metaphysics in fundamental and irrevocable ways.

The chapter then interacted with the scholar J.V. Fesko at length due to the fact that he teases out in great detail the doctrine on an exegetical basis. I argued that many of Fesko's readings of the scripture texts are accurate yet better interpreted as a non-realist model for logical precedence and subsequence in the divine mind, as well as the operation of divine will in choosing the actual world. I further sought to cut off the retreat made by some purported proponents of the *pactum*, those who want to retreat back into *purus actus* theology. The whole point of the pactum to begin with, I insisted, was to emphasize divine will, rather than essence, the fundamental trajectory established in the Reformation. Of course, one may break with that trajectory, but his conversation partners should be allowed to question why he does not also break with the *pactum*. Geerhardus Vos's more classic treatment demonstrated language that even presented the incarnate Christ as in some sense notionally present in the eternal counsel. Such a view is impossible if rendered in a literal fashion. But, I argued, in the sense of "a proposition latent in a possible world that God wills to create," Christ—the incarnate Redeemer—*is* notionally present. Thus, I argued that the doctrine firmly establishes not only the orthodox nature but the palatable taste of language like "divine deliberation."

Should the Reformed adopt a realist position with regard to deliberation? Quite obviously, *deliberation* would no longer include such semantic items as *uncertainty*, *slowness*, or *caution*, when modified by *divine.* The term could instead isolate the following: "the extension of logical relations among suppositional possibilities unto the formation of a unified plan." This "extension of logical relations among suppositional possibilities" would require both intellection and will of the *personal* rather than merely *essential* kind.[50] A realist treatment of divine deliberation is possible, though not required by the biblical and theological data. Those features of the model would be determined by larger, philosophical considerations: contingency in the divine plan,[51] abstract objects and metaphysical lightness,[52] whether counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are possible or throw divine postulation into a "halting problem,"[53] whether the instrumental or "epistemological" model successfully avoids the grounding problem traditionally associated with the *scientia media.*[54] To the investigation of philosophical issues the dissertation now turns. The Reformed doctrines of the decree and the *pactum salutis* not only allow for but support a deliberative model of divine will that grounds God's "Let there be."

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[50] Fesko has written also on lapsarian doctrine, a doctrine that points in the direction of some kind of deliberative realism as well. J. V. Fesko, "Lapsarian Diversity at the Synod of Dort," in *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones (Gottingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2011), 99–123.

[51] Dirk-Martin Grube, "Contingency and Religion: A Philosophical *Tour d'Horizon*," in *Religions Challenged by Contingency: Theological and Philosophical Approaches to the Problem of Contingency*, ed. Dirk-Martin Grube and Peter Jonkers (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1–44.

[52] Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[53] Noson S. Yanofsky, *The Outer Limits of Reason: What Science, Mathematics, and Logic Cannot Tell Us* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 139–59, 309–19.

[54] Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 140–43.

CHAPTER 8

THEOLOGY'S USE OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE AND PROVIDENCE (AND ITS MODAL SEMANTICS)

The following four chapters set forth divine deliberation. Chapter 8 shows how appeals to God's decision "in eternity" (or the nature of God and time), as well as appeals to the nature of freedom have prevented the development of theory of different kinds of divine knowledge. The chapter aims to overcome those impediments. Chapter 9 deals with the nature of necessity and contingency, their relation to God and whether the necessary God can have any contingent life. The chapter argues that possible-worlds metaphysics clarifies talk about God. To refer to God's necessity is to refer to divine identity *across* possible worlds and to refer to God's contingency is to refer to God's identity *within* any specific possible world. The chapter then addresses three problems that this conception of God's necessity across possible worlds and contingency within a world solves: (1) Barth's Trinitarian ontology and Rahner's Rule, (2) analogical and univocal language, and (3) divine simplicity.

Chapter 10 turns towards problems in modal philosophy. The metaphysical grounding of both individual essences and counterfactuals has been a consistent problem in possible-worlds modality since David Lewis. The chapter argues that divine deliberation can ground counterfactuals with an actualist ontology. The chapter shows how this view of modal truth (a) comports with historic theological exemplarism (the theory of divine ideas) and (b) provides truth-makers for linguistic propositions about nonexistence. Most importantly, the chapter asserts that the act of divine thought, God's *actual relating of worlds*, constitutes all modal truth. Chapter 11 defends how God's knowledge can be of multiple kinds and modes, without any threat to his perfection. God

can have both immediate and inferential knowledge; God's knowledge can have perfect indexical reference.

The cumulative case built by this analysis is as follows. God knows all necessary truths immediately; he knows contingent truths with an inferential structure; he knows synthetic truth (truths that depend on the relationship between possible worlds and/or individual essences) modally. Divine knowledge, therefore, simply *is* what metaphysically undergirds the truth value of modal statements. Since God's creative act of will follows from meticulous knowledge that (1) immediately knows all necessities, that (2) inferentially knows all contingencies, and that (3) actively knows all modal truth, *divine deliberation* is the right way to describe this will-to-create.

Theological Need for a Model of Modal Language

Theology aims to give an account both of God and of the world. Reformed theology has largely construed the world as a consequence of God's will and decree, while describing the divine will and decree as *eternal*, forestalling any discussion of *how* to understand the divine will-to-create. Thus, the Reformed have hardly developed a theory of possibility (a theory of modality). Molinist proposals with respect to divine providence have highlighted the significance of truth-makers for counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (or the lack of such truth-makers). Moreover, evangelical theories should maintain the traditional philosophical interest in the truth status of our everyday modal statements (e.g. "If I were alive back then, I would have done the right thing").

Evangelical theologians must construct some model by which modal statements are (1) true, (2) false, or (3) meaningless and show how this model applies to God's will, decree, and providence. The purpose of this chapter is threefold: briefly to explore and set forth historical evangelical systematics that impinge on a theory of possibility, to examine what recent Molinist proposals have revealed about evangelical instincts with respect to modality, and to remove an impediment (how to speak of freedom) toward developing a more cogent evangelical modal model. The third leg of the

stool is significant; the chapter asserts that on standard possible-worlds modality, libertarian and source views of freedom are compatible. Writers ought to use appeals to such freedom(s) with the proper modal reference.

The Westminster Confession of Faith 3.2 wrote a promissory note for future evangelical philosophy: "Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet has he not decreed to create anything because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass up on such conditions." The statement not only ascribed to the divine mind knowledge of all supposed conditions,[1] but also, by using the modals *may* and *can*, included *possibilia* as an object of God's knowledge. Westminster's authors took a dogmatic position with respect to the theories of Arminius and Molina without developing a model of the notion of possibility contained in the statement. One could add how later Reformed theologizing includes divine volitional (possible) action, in Trinitarian life:

> The pact of salvation makes known to us to relationships and life of the three persons in the divine being as a covenantal life, a life of consummate self-consciousness and freedom. Here, within the divine being, the covenant flourishes to the full. . . . The greatest freedom and the most perfect agreement coincide… It is the triune God alone, Father, Son, and Spirit, who together conceive, determine, carry out, and complete the entire work of salvation.[2]

Evangelical theology ought therefore to approach confidently a theory of possibility.

Much of the "Grammar," Not Yet a Full Modal Model

Two reasons contribute to the lack of a model of possibility in evangelical thought: (1) the matter is not a pressing need in the theological system—due to the ease of the "eternal" appeal and (2) the allowed symmetry between the evangelical view and Classical Thomism (God's eternal possession of all divine "life," action and effects, which includes the one decree, fully formed, an eternal act with all divine causes being

[1] What but God's mind, after all, is doing the "supposing?"

[2] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 3:214–15.

expressed by remotion in the actual world). The Thomistic model thus, on its face, does not depend on a theory of divine thought.

Lapsarian Doctrine and Covenant of Redemption

For this reason, the Reformed (post-Thomist) tradition has situated the decree on a new base—divine knowledge rather than divine action. However, the theories of divine knowledge have not been extended. The Arminian tradition has not required a fulsome modal theory of divine knowledge, presenting divine foreknowledge as a literal "seeing" of the actual world (which requires an eternalist ontology with respect to the existence of the future); the Calvinist tradition has not attempted a fulsome modal theory of divine knowledge, presenting divine foreknowledge as the result of the decree ("God knows because he decreed it so"). However, the decree, though it has come in for analysis, has not been fully modeled. Reformed thinkers do query matters related to the decree in the lapsarian debates, as well as in covenant of redemption. No matter whether one endorses how these debates have resulted in dogmatic categories, the debates themselves at least stand on firm exegetical footing; in other words, they set out to handle, successfully or unsuccessfully, the exegetical questions of Ephesians 1, Isaiah 53, John 17, and the like. Thus, "orthodox theological semantics," an orthodox manner of speaking about divine will and action, is no bar to a deliberative model of the divine will-to-create. In developing more fully a model of the decree, one simply extends an orthodox way of speaking already in print with respect to lapsarianism and an intra-trinitarian covenant.

Kinds of Divine Knowledge

One contemporary example of the maturing and merging of the doctrinal concerns with a theory of possibility is the writing of K. Scott Oliphint:

> In [the category of free knowledge] we begin to see more explicitly the relationship between God's knowledge and God's will. In fact, often times the free knowledge of God and the free will of God have been thought to be coterminous: "the knowledge that God must have is a necessary knowledge but it is also natural, and

> as much as God has it by nature rather than by imposition from without—the knowledge that God freely has is a knowledge to coincide with his will for the being or existence of all things *ad extra.*[3]

Oliphint continues to show why knowledge and will should be considered together:

> If God really knows something, that which he really knows (to put it negatively) cannot coincide with himself, since he himself is necessary (and the character of knowledge is linked to the character of the object[s] known). . . . Since everything except God is *not* necessary, whatever he knows that is *not* God is by definition contingently willed and known; it does not have to exist at all. Its existence, whether in the mind of God or in an objective context (created by him), is dependent on God's free determination.[4]

Oliphint makes clear his agnosticism on one key question: "We cannot comprehend how one who is necessary . . . can have anything but necessary knowledge."[5] Yet, Oliphint's caveat is in some ways too modest, for even an historical theologian—attempting not to be constructive but analytical—can highlight how the Reformed tradition has appealed to the Decree, volition, and even the Covenant of Redemption (which is doctrinally construed as a work *ad intra*) in order to secure God's freedom. Thus, to locate some model and avoid utter agnosticism, in one of these loci (or in something similar), would we find contingency.

Divine Deliberation and Time

Appeal to Eternity: Where the Discussion Ends

Creation is the volitive act of a necessary being and thus isolates a unique experiment in thought. How can we construe will without need, appetite, and every other accouterment of contingency? Many classically Reformed would—too easily—consider divine eternality, the classical approach in God-time relations, to remove the God-

[3] K. Scott Oliphint, *God with Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 96.

[4] Oliphint, *God with Us*, 96.

[5] Oliphint, *God with Us*, 97.

concept from the context of the problem. The divine-will-to-create is the act *par excellence* for a consideration of will.

The very phrase "eternal decree" often functions to end any query into the nature and logical inter-workings of God's plan. The appeal to the "eternal divine decree" or "eternal act" seems to solve the problem with a wave of the hand. The phrase might denote a literally "eternal" act: this is the sense employed when orthodox Trinitarians describe the eternal action of love and communication between Triune persons. Sense 1 straightforwardly places the persons on the repose of the divine nature; the Triune persons love according to nature. But applied to the plan, this means that God knows and creates his plan according to nature (which is contrary to this inquiry). Another sense could argue for a particular divine-act-of-will that was itself discrete yet non-temporal. However, if sense 2 refers merely to non-temporality, then its appeal has minimal power: *of course* the divine decree *itself* is not temporally-indexed. The phrase fails to express its meaning explicitly and consistently and thereby severely hampers not only the discussion in the literature but also the lucidity of the theologians' ideas themselves.[6]

Hodge argues for the necessity of the decree: "That the decrees of God are eternal, necessarily follows from the perfection of the divine Being. He cannot be supposed to have at one time plans or purposes which He had not at another."[7] Further, he speaks in a register that treats the contents of the divine plan as some kind of metaphysical fact. To be clear, he says nothing of the kind explicitly, but he clearly omits reference to the productive activity of the divine mind, and—where his language falls short of reinforcing that the plan is part of the divine essence—his language treats that

[6] Interestingly, physicists discuss the Augustinian phrase—perhaps the earliest appeal to the modal notion that time was a creation of God, so he could do nothing *before* he created. William B. Drees, "Our Universe—A Contingent Cosmos?," in *Religions Challenged by Contingency: Theological and Philosophical Approaches to the Problem of Contingency*, ed. Dirk-Martin Grube and Peter Jonkers (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 228–29. For a popular treatment, see Paul Davies, *The Goldilocks Enigma Why Is the Universe Just Right for Life?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 66–70.

[7] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 1:538.

plan as eternally existent: "He sees the end from the beginning; the distinctions of time have no reference to Him who inhabits eternity."[8] "Inhabiting eternity" does not vouchsafe knowledge of things that do not exist in any sense—and the sense in which the contents of the decrees exist is the pertinent question. The classical theory of divine timelessness is coherent; Hodge's comments in this place address metaphysical concerns, however, and therefore are not in the God-time context.

"*Just as If*" Justifications: Where the Discussion Restarts

Throughout the history of doctrine, God's relationship with time (or lack thereof) has served as a steady and constant appeal to solve or even remove central problems related to the divine will, to God-world relations, and to such things as petitionary prayer. Some writers carefully situate their claims vis-à-vis God and time; most, however, do not, and the result is a supervening claim of God and time that somehow covers or atones for a slipshod treatment of divine foreknowledge and freedom or, even, of the divine will or decrees themselves. A particularly helpful example of this phenomenon, due to his candor, comes from Edward Dorr Griffin, who writes of "God's government the same as though there was no decree."[9] Griffin argues that "an eternal succession of ideas" is irrational and absurd.[10] Further, he considers "succession" impossible for God, though he reduces the notion strictly to temporality:

> Besides, succession of ideas implies imperfection, and stands opposed to all our notions of infinity, omniscience, and unchangeableness. If new ideas are received, there is a change of thought, which will induce a change of counsel. If God is eternally receiving new ideas, he is not in possession of all ideas once, and therefore is not omniscient. If new ideas are constantly coming into his mind, either the old

[8] Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* 1:538.

[9] E. D. Griffin, *Sermons, Not Before Published, On Various Practical Subjects* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1844), 161.

[10] Griffin, *Sermons*, 161.

> ones are crowded out and forgotten, or he must grow in knowledge. Either supposition he is not infinite [sic].[11]

Griffin's meaning thus far seems to refer to God's relation with abstract objects, if indeed, "eternal ideas" exist *agenetos.* This reading seems confirmed as he continues:

> The same may be said of a succession of exercises in the divine mind. This equally implies change and forgetfulness; for if new exercises arise which were not in the mind before, why should not the old ones, which go out, be forgotten? If then God has no succession of ideas or exercises,—no succession of thoughts, feelings, or purposes,—he has no succession at all, and therefore has no relation to time; for time depends on succession and is measured by it. God's existence that is not in succession, and therefore not in time, but in one eternal now.[12]

Griffin argues for divine timelessness from a particular view of the divine essence—from his posit of total non-succession in all divine works, particularly intellection. The position is defensible, no doubt, but undercuts the very notion of the divine will to create in the theology of the decrees. Further, that intellectual succession (which is little more than logical relation) "implies imperfection" is simply a *non sequitur*.[13] Of course, Griffin could reply that his comments have to do with temporal succession. I reply simply that (1) he should have said so, (2) and such a defense still fails because *it is the lack of all succession in God* that makes his point. This pattern of refuting temporal succession, while failing to explore logically successive ideas is common in Reformed discussion—which often fail to get off the ground after they appeal to what was planned "in eternity."

For Griffin, this point of divine timelessness and the pattern of God's interaction make his "feelings and government in the course of events . . . the same as though he began to exist in time, and neither knew nor determined anything before the moment of its occurrence . . .".[14] Also he lays down the following proposition: "*The*

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[11] Griffin, *Sermons*, 161–62.

[12] Griffin, *Sermons*, 162.

[13]Griffin's language of God's "*receiving* new ideas" is also special pleading. Whether God may literally *ideate* of even possess ideas that have logical succession is the question at hand.

[14] Griffin, *Sermons*, 161.

affairs of the world are conducted just as though God had nothing which we call foreknowledge and foredetermination. They are conducted just as though he began to exist in time. Everything is regulated by his present choice; for his present choice is the choice of one eternal now."[15] Griffin thus posits an "eternal"[16] plan and actions that are (tensed) choices. In speaking of God's decree functioning "just as if" he began to exist in time," however, Griffin points to a system wherein God's plan is formed precisely by his knowledge of all epistemic conditionals—which gestures toward a kind of early evangelical modal theory. If the God "outside of time" and with foreknowledge, governs "just as if" he were in time and had none, then some model must set forth *how* God could be in the "just as if" mode of relationships and actions with the creation.

This exposition certainly urges further treatment of divine modality, lest there be lingering confusion over what it means for everything to be "just as if" God (or his decrees) began to exist in time. Some authors in the area, such as William Lane Craig, would take a more realist approach to this very "just as if" notion, where God exists tenselessly *sans* creation but exists in a tensed fashion with the creation.[17] The argument of Bruce Ware and John Frame would be similar, while maintaining a modal distinction: just as God creates space and fills it with his omnipresence, so also does God create time and fill it with a kind of "omni-temporality."[18] The traditional divine timelessness view itself must account—through some modal mechanism—for how things exist "as if" God existed in time, as if his "eternal" (non-temporal) choice were a temporal choice. But the question relates not only to the traditional God and time discussion. Any theory of God,

[15] Griffin, *Sermons*, 162.

[16] Which in his discussion functions as an attribute of the decree, a predication.

[17] William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship with Time* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

[18] Bruce Ware, "A Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God," in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God, Four Views*, ed. Bruce Ware (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 87–89; John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 557–59.

time, and the decree includes God's acting "as if" he were in time, which deserves an explanatory theory.[19] These modal claims pertain and the Christian philosopher may rightly proceed by making a deliberative model of the divine will-to-create.

No matter which interpretation be taken, any model should lay aside language that presents God's existing with an eternal plan that is part of his constitution, for the divine will-to-create is at least—on the Reformed concept—an act of will in the sense that it is contingent rather than necessary. We may safely set aside "eternal" language with reference to God's plan or decrees, not because God's plan was determined within the contingency of space-time (It was not!), nor because some stepwise logical progress mentally exhausts him (It does not!) but because it solves no problem and distracts from the question at hand.

In the Reformed tradition, the question of the divine will generates a *how* question. *How* God sets forth his plan; *how* that plan is a product of the divine mind; *how* God moves from a state of non-creating to a state of creating. These legitimate *how* questions—which would in normal circumstances validate the work necessary to hammer out a theological model—have been answered by a *that* question: "Do you not know *that* the decree is eternal?" Theologians should recognize the need to model how God plans and creates—even if they do not have the ability or opportunity to make it their own project. Some such thing as divine deliberation—an act of the three persons that is "gratuitous" in the Edwardsian sense of an 'original ultimate end' is the most likely to create a successful model of how God wills-to-create.

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[19] The most common off-ramp in this discussion is the appeal to analogical language. That appeal must be further substantiated: to what in the referent does the analogy point? If we cannot say because the theory of analogy does not differentiate things in God, is that not apophaticism? Can scriptural speech that is plainly "as if" God is in the world be reduced to analogies whose non-figurative reference cannot be explained?

Contemporary Evangelicals and Their Metaphysical Ideas

Philosophy

Average Evangelical philosophers and theologians (as opposed to those rather odd thinkers with a peculiar interest in the metaphysics of modality) are embracing the reigning modal theory from philosophy and its associated semantics, developed principally by David Lewis in his book *Counterfactuals*. Philosophers are prone to speak of a "standard semantics" for "modal semantics" or, perhaps, to charge another writer with the need to "develop a semantics in accordance with his metaphysic" or to "develop the semantics of a nuance in her metaphysical view." Though unwieldy, the philosophical jargon can prove helpful: *semantics* simply refers to a well-developed and detailed manner of speaking derived from metaphysical first principles and extending down to, grounding, and organizing the literal semantics of everyday speech.[20] So the standard modal semantics, developed outside of evangelical concerns, was quickly adopted into the renaissance in Christian philosophy through various writers, chiefly, Alvin Plantinga.

Plantinga developed a sophisticated and rich understanding of divine intellection in "God and Other Minds."[21] A Lewis-influenced modal theory functioned prominently in his *God, Freedom, and Evil* (which is a possible theory even for those who don't advocate for the free-will defense). Plantinga's Notre Dame colleague Thomas Flint would be the thinker literally to write the book on Molinism, and standard possible-

[20] The easiest analog for the theologian is, say, the development of a "grammar" of the Trinity; the relevant difference between a "grammar" and a "semantics" is that "theological grammar" details a safe pattern of speaking that does not transgress creedal or some other dogma, while a philosophical semantics must undergird ordinary philosophy of language and how language-reference works.

[21] Alvin Plantinga's defense of the analogical position for belief in other minds (including the divine mind) is seminal in this generation. His defense answers apophaticism regarding divine intellection. We have good reason, we are justified, in drawing this analogical conclusion; thus, to consider divine thinking and willing is not inappropriate along the same lines as we employ whenever affirming the existence of other minds. Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God.* Contemporary Philosophy (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967). Colin Gunton finds the weakest section of Plantinga's work to be his analogy between "speaking of God and speaking of other minds." Gunton may very well over-interpret the analogy. Plantinga makes a transcendental move: we cannot, as a very constituent of our rational processes, dismiss *a priori* language about God. Colin Gunton. review of *God and Other Minds*, by Alvin Plantinga, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 30, no. 6 (1977): 581.

worlds semantics was the backbone of Flint's theological exposition.[22]

Perhaps the most prominent among evangelical philosophers, due especially to the breadth and variety of his influence, is William Lane Craig. Craig has in various contexts employed Molinist possible-worlds thinking to maintain human responsibility based on libertarian free will and employed the free-will defense. The standard theory of modality figures in his rejection—against secular cosmologists—of the possibility of an actual infinite (which grounds his Kalam argument).

Philosopher Greg Welty—not a Molinist—has worked with the standard modal semantics as a conceptual framework as he interacts with Molinism. Both philosophers are active theologians and churchmen who take an interest in Molinist soteriology, while at the same time advancing the theory's connections with metaphysical concerns. For example, each has written extensively in the recent (and very profitable) flare-up among evangelicals related to God and abstract objects. Welty argues for divine conceptual realism with respect to abstract objects, whereby abstract objects are ontologically *real* objects of the divine mind, whereas Craig (while urging all evangelicals towards some anti-Platonist model) prefers himself a form of nominalism with respect abstract objects. Divine conceptual realism would lend itself to a very metaphysically rich version of Molinism whereby the view of God and abstract objects is meant to solve not only the ancient problem of the one and the many and develop a position with respect to universals and particulars, but also to set forth the individual entities that Molina speaks of as objects of God's supercomprehension. A nominalist view would lend itself to an epistemic version of Molinism (which some might view as a lesser version of Molinism, if Molinism at all). An epistemic form would not rely necessarily on any "production" of individual entities and the counterfactuals of their freedom but would rely simply on the total set of true propositions in the form of

[22] Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

conditionals. This evidence is enough to confirm the conceptual links between the contemporary standard modal theory, Lewis's semantics, and various facets of evangelical philosophy.

Theology

Of course, not only have evangelicalism's philosophers been so influenced but also its theologians (though with less self-conscious awareness and intention). Ken Keathley's book *Salvation and Sovereignty* signaled Molinism's diffusion and acceptance among evangelicals as a way of handling divine sovereignty and human responsibility.[23] This earlier period in the literature (the 80s and 90s) envisioned a rapprochement between Arminians and Calvinists.[24] One may observe that, at least, the model's twin pillars confessedly had a foot in either camp: meticulous sovereignty on the one hand, libertarian freedom on the other. Though Keathley's book has not remained prominent in terms of ongoing citation in scholarly articles or dissertations, Kirk McGregor's work has, from a similar position in the evangelical mainstream, resourced theological ideas *via* philosophical modal metaphysics. Though it was Alfred Freddoso who finally translated into English Part 4 of Molina's *Concordia*,[25] Kirk MacGregor has, acquainted with the Spanish historical records and the Latin writings of Molina, produced an accurate and accessible biography of the Jesuit and his ideas.[26] Writers like MacGregor and John Laing, (whose writing gives special reference to exegetical and theological concerns) have helped to mainstream modal analysis in the theological commonplaces of divine

[23] Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B & H, 2001).

[24] William Lane Craig, "Middle-Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapproachment?," in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 141–64.

[25] Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of The Concordia*, trans. Alfred Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[26] Kirk R. MacGregor, *Luis de Molina: The Life and Theology of the Founder of Middle Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015). A great deal of original work remains to be done here, including expanding awareness of the role of Molina's contemporary Francisco Suarez.

sovereignty and human responsibility.[27] In the space of a generation, categories such as possible-worlds, counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, transworld identity, and the like have been first introduced and now assumed in these theological *loci*.

Two writers deserve special mention as the survey concludes: Terrance Tiessen and Bruce Ware. Tiessen and Ware have defended, after a fashion, "middle knowledge," but have understood the relevant freedom to be freedom of inclination. In fact, both writers have argued that such perfect, mellifluous knowledge of God literally *cannot* unfold if sufficient conditions of creaturely choices cannot obtain in the logical moments of divine thought. Libertarian freedom, they argue, would stop the unfolding of the logical hierarchy, similar to the way that computational logic can encounter a "halting problem" without the necessary inputs.

Many Molinists (or Calvinists of a more traditional persuasion) have critiqued the Tiessen/Ware view, claiming that such knowledge is not "middle knowledge" at all but a subset of natural knowledge—and Tiessen and Ware have, after a fashion, agreed.[28] Since middle knowledge cannot be grounded in a creaturely antecedent to God, the category is *in this sense a subset of natural knowledge*. However, "middle-knowledge Calvinists" maintain that middle knowledge is still a distinction with a difference due to its non-necessary nature. Scott Oliphint's comments are in line with this observation. Concerning the logical moments of divine knowing, especially the two polarities (natural and free knowledge), he says the following:

> It is the free knowledge of God that becomes more difficult for us to reconcile with God's character, especially as we think of God as independent of anything outside himself. Thus, when we think of God's free knowledge, we are *not* thinking of all things possible to God—only he knows those things—but we are thinking of things that are *possible* and *determined to be actual.*[29]

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[27] John Laing, *Middle Knowledge: Human Freedom in Divine Sovereignty* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018).

[28] Terrence Thiessen, "Why Calvinists Should Believe in Divine Middle Knowledge, although They Reject Molinism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 69, no. 2 (2007): 345–66.

[29] Oliphint, *God with Us*, 98.

In other words, God's natural knowledge otherwise encompasses those things which are necessary, which are the case in every possible world (such as "three is a prime number"). Some distinction must be made therefore to treat those things that are natural knowledge yet contingent—by no means present in every possible world, though certainly present in many feasible worlds. Thus, middle-knowledge Calvinists see the discussions of possibility as part of divine knowledge and an answer for how God is sovereign, for the structure of the decree, and for the activities of providence.[30]

Freedom: A Final Hurdle

Why have evangelicals not previously developed modal models? Lack of specificity or clarity regarding the decree is a contributing factor. If the one "eternal" decree is the divine nature eternally acting, the conversation is forestalled by Thomism. If the decree is grounded in divine volition with no model for *how* the volition operates, the conversation is forestalled by apophaticism.[31] In a similar fashion, the lacuna of work related to God and abstract objects muted a modal theory, and the explosion of work in this area has expanded it.

Notions of freedom, however, ever since Dordt, have proven the most significant limiting factor. Both Arminian libertarianism and Calvinist compatibilism had their own reasons for thinking of *the possible* only within "just this" world. This chapter's final section, therefore, offers a proposal that I intend to be both brief and bracing: on the standard modal semantics that enjoys an ever-growing modal metaphysics, both libertarians and compatibilists at times misspeak. Clarifying the metaphysics specifies the use of ordinary language and shows the sense in which the

[30] Bruce Ware, "Middle Knowledge Calvinism," *Calvinism and Middle Knowledge: A Conversation*, ed. John D. Laing, Kirk R. MacGregor, and Greg Welty (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019), 118–31.

[31] This view would describe those who would confess the creeds of the Reformation and *in principle* refrain from modeling how their affirmation are true, a view or intellectual mood ably set forth by Greg Welty, "Molinist Gunslingers: God and the Authorship of Sin," in Laing, MacGregor, and Welty, *Calvinism and Middle Knowledge*, 51–54.

freedom of an individual is libertarian and the sense in which it is compatibilist, the freedom of inclination.

Modality and the Semantics of Freedom

What bedevils the promissory note for an evangelical modal model is the matter of human freedom. As 'God and the World' debates have migrated further into possible worlds discourses, the confusions surrounding language of freedom have worsened. A human person is an individual substance of a rational nature; thus, human hypostases may exist mentally, in particular in the divine mentality. No logical bar prevents the supposition of God's active knowledge of individual essences. However, the nature of freedom affects what total view of metaphysics and creation can be constructed. Of course, the converse is true: the nature of metaphysics and creation affects the available views of freedom. What follows teases out the possible-worlds view of creation and shows what freedom may be in that metaphysical picture.

The nature of each individual essence is, by definition, known by God. And the nature/character matrix of each individual person is sufficient to make knowledge of what he or she would do in every situation. These "doings," these actions, then, are libertarianly free in the modal sense; these doings are not necessary; these actions could have been otherwise (and are otherwise) in other possible worlds. If the level of analysis, however, is the world actualized (or, *being* actualized), the actions *will* not be otherwise and the pertinent sense of freedom is the freedom of inclination.[32]

This description is not slipshod; therefore, it did not ask of a free act in the actualized world *whether* it could be otherwise, for such a statement would literally be contradictory and absurd. The contradiction can be set forth simply: the freedom and the

[32] This step in the argument is simply the standard observation that forms of theological determinism do not imply fatalism: William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 67–74.

act in question were carefully circumscribed *to this world* (and thus to a non-modal semantics), while the word *could* expands the sense *to all possible and feasible worlds*.

Here, again, is the offending proposition with respect, say, to feasible world 220: "Could the Free Act of Agent A at time T1 in World220 be otherwise?": each half of this statement examines the proposition according to a different sense and hence offends the law of non-contradiction. Let's say W220 is the actualized world: to ask if a discrete free act in the actualized world could be different *just is* to ask *if it may be in* a different world than the actualized world. If we think in the modal sense, the question is tantamount to asking whether other worlds exist, and the answer is an obvious *yes*. If we ask while maintaining the limits of the consideration (the actual world, W220), the question is tantamount to asking whether an actualized world can contain a proposition upholding the free act *A* and the free act not-*A* at the same time and in the same sense, and the answer is an obvious *no* (due to contradiction). Any other conclusion is to misapply the possible-worlds analysis.

Thus, modal semantics (MS) allows us to refer to libertarian freedom, for, upon analysis, agents and acts are not determined across all possible worlds.[33] World semantics (WS) by definition no longer includes a non-contradictory semantics of 'contrary choice', "refraining," and the like. What the world contains simply *is* the semantics of that world: the total set of true propositions that cohere to form a feasible world. So, on a WS, we call *free* those actions grounded in the inclination of the agent. These acts show the but-for counterfactual: "But-for the will of the actor this state of affairs would not have obtained." Viewed from this perspective, the MS locution "he could have done otherwise," when translated into WS, *just is* the claim "his will inclined him to the act in this world" or, differently, "that act in this world was grounded in the inclination of the agent in question." Metaphysical libertarianism reduces to the freedom

[33] Though the messy language of "powers" ("of contrary choice" or "to refrain") ought to be left behind.

of inclination when a possible world is analyzed and actualized internally. Likewise, in a possible-worlds analysis, uncoerced freedom is set forth together with what the agent feasibly could do or refrain from doing in other worlds. In the semantics of a world, we use the but-for counterfactual, rather than the 'could have been otherwise' description, which is proper to modality. To use logical modal operators, the semantics of a world use the existential quantifier rather than the possibility quantifier.

To finish the argument, I return to these human hypostases God has "known." God mentally comprehends each person as an individual essence and as an agent in every possible world. A set of true propositions describes the individual essence in every possible world where he or she appears. The individual essence is not necessary, for (some) possible worlds do not contain that individual essence; yet the individual essence just *is* the person in the sense that it grounds any potential transworld identity. More particular true propositions in each possible world describe the array of circumstances and influences surrounding the person, which at this level of analysis may be described as a matrix of nature and character. The counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are what the person would do in another set of circumstances, in another world. What the creature would do in a world under consideration is known to God by definition. If that world is the world God actualizes, the facts of creaturely freedom are what the creature will, in fact, do. God knows meticulously what actions are grounded on the person in such a way that it could have been otherwise because, with a soft ontology, such *is* otherwise in such other worlds.

When we assign praise or blame because it "could have been otherwise," we describe the act with a modal semantics, isolating aspects of the agent and act metaphysically. If we do the same with a world-specific semantics, we assign praise or blame with the but-for counterfactual: "but-for you, this state of affairs would not have obtained" or "as the source of the action, you are the responsible agent." In the indicative,

the statement conforms to the same standard of causal inference: "because of you, this state of affairs obtained."

For simplicity, these two sentences, the subjunctive and the indicative, did not define *you*, the second-person singular. In standard WS, the personal pronoun contains but cannot be limited to the individual essence. Its reference covers "essence + character + motives" (ECM), all the standard constituents of the will. Only slightly, then, does Edwards need to be modified: rather than the "mind choosing," the will is the "person choosing," all aspects of the properly-functioning person in an environment that produces agency.

"Choosing" thus denotes actions undertaken by a potential agent where ECM was actually necessary. Though ECM may not be sufficient for the act, agent ECM was necessary, thus the action represents an instance of choice. Where the potential agent acts without ECM with respect to the act, he or she has failed to become an actual agent; in other words, he or she was coerced or acted by true natural instinct. In summary, on the possible-worlds modality, so broadly accepted in contemporary theological writing, no contradiction obtains between libertarian and source views of freedom. To say that a free act "could have been otherwise" is a metaphysically modal claim whose truth depends on analysis of all possible worlds (or at least *some* others). To say that a free act was sourced in the agent and represented his or her highest inclination is a simple modal claim, whose truth depends on analysis of just the actual world's total true set of propositions. Assuming possible-worlds metaphysics, to ask if the agent "could have done otherwise in this world than he did in this world" is contradictory and absurd. If one maintains this metaphysic and proper modal reference, however, libertarian and source views describe freedom differently and are not mutually exclusive.

Evangelicals Rejecting This Metaphysics of Modality

What the spate of recent Molinist proposals reveals about evangelical instincts with respect to modality is simple: an earnest biblical and exegetical preference for

systems of possibility based on maximal divine knowing. Some evangelicals will continue to prefer the more basic Arminian approach: since the world contains free will acts, God can know the truths of nature and his intentions, but he cannot know the world in the modal sense (i.e. he cannot know a total true set of propositions *as a possible world set over against others*). This Arminian arrangement literally cannot be conducive to an ultimate end (an end where varied agent contingency and actions logically relate to a consequent purpose). Very practically, the Arminian model could not say, "The Father intends to glorify the Son by his atonement of fallen persons applied to them by the Holy Spirit" precisely because the actions of free creatures are a logical supposition of instrumentality expressed in the prepositional phrase: "by his atonement of fallen persons applied to them by the Holy Spirit." In other words, specifying such an ultimate end (pre-creation) requires knowledge of that which is lower in the logical hierarchy, which includes creaturely free acts. For this reason, Arminian notions of the divine will-to-create have focused on a proximate end related to divine love or relationship: God desires relationship with creatures.

A second observation of evangelical Arminians will highlight a significant fact related to modal thinking and creaturely freedom: logically entailed by the Arminian supposition of libertarian human freedom in the world (not across possible worlds—but in the created world) is the complete ontological feasibility of only one possible world. This reading of 'could have been otherwise' not as a matter of modal metaphysics but as a matter of a human power or *potentia* leads to some kind of eternalist ontology with respect to the one world or to a metaphysics of openness. Either way, because the free creatures possess libertarian freedom "in the world," a possible-worlds modality is excluded (or collapsed into ontology and the theory of actuality, as is the case with Open

Theism's neo-Molinism).[34] Further, both Arminian and Openness theologians would themselves bear responsibility to develop a modal model.

Conclusion

This chapter established the need for a theory of modality, as well as some of the building blocks that already exist in theological grammar. I reviewed claims related to the covenant of redemption and emphasized the need to differentiate between kinds of divine knowledge. Since everything other than God is not necessary, God's knowledge of non-divine entities' truth value (not the propositions of themselves—but their truth value) ought not to be necessary. Contingency—even that based upon God's will—must be involved in the true status of contingent propositions.

The chapter then surveyed maneuvers that often end or forestall the discussion: appeals to eternity and appeals that God acts "just as if he is in time." The chapter glossed the state of modal metaphysics in contemporary philosophy and theology before coming to the final hurdle that forestalls the discussion I seek to create about divine deliberation: human freedom.

It was necessary to treat Evangelical philosophers' and theologians' modal ideas because I made a fundamentally modal argument with respect to the nature of freedom. I argued that libertarian and source views of freedom are not mutually exclusive on standard modal systems of thought. The contrariety that most thinkers seem to assume is apparent between freedom of inclination and libertarian freedom is just that—only apparent. Not only do I believe this model solves a painful, perennial problem in the history of philosophy and theology (for those who hold to modal metaphysics), I also believe that it establishes the value of this deliberative model and removes its final hurdle.

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[34] Elijah Hess, "Arguing from Molinism to Neo-Molinism," *Philosophia Christi* 17, no. 2 (2015): 331–51. For a rejoinder (very early) to the development of neo-Molinism, see Paul Kjoss Helseth, "Neo-Molinism: A Traditional- Openness Rapprochement?," *SBJT* 7, no. 3 (2003): 56–73.

Beginning with the Westminster Confession of Faith, evangelical doctrine has a standard pattern of speech that grounds theological statements in possibility. Recent Molinist proposals have aligned many evangelical thinkers with contemporary philosophical use of modal logic. Developing an evangelical model of modality based on maximal divine knowing will complete a task long undone in evangelical philosophy and more clearly unite doctrines such as lapsarianism and the covenant of redemption with providence and freedom. The "eternal" quality of the decree is no bar to developing such a model nor is human freedom, when such freedom is more carefully specified in accordance with the reigning model of possibility.

CHAPTER 9

THE DELIBERATIVE MODEL OF THE DIVINE WILL-TO-CREATE

A deliberative model of the divine will-to-create can correct the most glaring lacuna in Christian God concept, namely, its relation to a theory of modality. Further, this thesis attenuates the growing rift between those who have been called "Classical Christian Theists" and "Modified Theists." This chapter begins setting forth the concepts necessary for divine deliberation: divine transworld identity, the contingency of the economic Trinity, the "decree" in Reformed theology as a "book" in possible-worlds thinking, language about God, and divine simplicity. The chapter will show how God can establish contingency and be within it, as well as how this philosophical claim fits with trinitarian theology.

The Necessary God in a Contingent World

Christian theologians have always needed some account of *change* or *potentia* in relation to God—even if this accounting intends to deny the presence of change or *potentia* as a reality. Such accounts focus on obvious material, like scriptural sayings regarding God's emotions and decisions. Accounts of the attributes of God necessarily interact with relational attributes: God is eternally "holy" but, *sans* creation, is not described as eternally "wrathful." Another common starting point in Reformed theology proper, the names of God, requires the same maneuver: some account must be given to think of God as Savior economically, not immanently in the divine life. (1) God is author and creator of the world *ex nihilo*; he transcends the modal system. (2) God is an agent and character in the world he creates; he acts within the modal system. What should be an obvious and uncontroversial statement will yield productive theological implications:

when God considers all feasible worlds, when God creates the real world, *he exists in every possible world*. By strict implication, when God creates, he decrees that he act as he does with respect to that world, the real world subsequent to his decision to create.

God is the true exemplar of transworld Identity. God exists above, before, and beyond all worlds. The array of possible worlds *just is* the fruit of the divine mind. By nature, necessary beings are those which exist in every possible world, and God is the necessary being who exists *a se*. Relatively standard accounts of the Christian God and his creation *ex nihilo* have developed alongside this more standardized modal metaphysics. However, key implications have not been teased out and allowed to run through important theological loci, especially Reformed accounts of providence and the decrees. It should go without saying (though it must be reiterated for theological discourse) "God as he is in himself" and "God as he is in creation" are *modal* distinctions. The traditional theological categories of the imminent and economic Trinity, though developed to describe far more, do not describe anything less than modal distinctions as well. God knows intuitively his own intellect and the possibilities of what he might create that is not-God; he knows all worlds as the product of his intellection and knows himself present in each world: 'God in W1', 'God in W2', 'God in W3', and so forth.

Biblical revelation is not a metaphysical manual to describe exactly how God chooses to create and whether the real world must of necessity be the best possible world. However, Scripture cannot be avoided entirely in these matters and, though God transparently does not disclose himself exhaustively, he reveals clearly that the ground for his making the world is his mind and heart.[1] God knows himself in all possible worlds and, in modal terms, decrees who he is in the real world (say, "W3") just as he does with every other creature and proposition in the set that comprises the full "book" of W3.

[1] As the exegesis of chap. 3 showed.

In the history of theological discourse, to say such things about Jesus is well-documented, and theologians' instincts, for this reason, should accept modal discourse uncontroversially. The second person of the Trinity is eternally Word and only subsequent to the decree (i.e. logically dependent upon the decree) can be described as Savior, Messiah of Israel, and "Jesus." This logic extends, broadly speaking, into the missions of the Trinity, with the Holy Spirit as Perfector of divine works, the Applicator of the work of redemption, the Comforter sent until Jesus returns.

The work of the Father is less settled and more provocative for the following obvious reasons: to discern whether the role of the Father should be seen "above all worlds" or within W3 is difficult. The activity of the Father in the economic trinity involves some acts that are clearly modally dependent on his world selection (e.g. "sending the Son"). But the other primary scriptural mission of the Father (the decree) can seem to represent the Father before and above all worlds, the Father as he is in the immanent Trinity, God as he is in himself.

"Necessaries Related to Contingents: Is It Even Rational?"

Heated debate has encircled this territory. The question of such decrees involves the kind of "modal bottleneck" that Karl Barth so famously described. Barth saw Christ and Christ alone as the true mode of God's existence in the world. Barth's treatment is open to critique in many ways, but is ready for affirmation in this sense: within the structure of God's "will-to-create W3," his redemption in Christ *just is* what makes the world *good*; thus, as we trace back the work of the economic Trinity along the lines of the decrees—as a rational creature traces God's ultimate purpose "to the very top" of W3, to the "modal bottleneck"—there is Christ. That the Son would be glorified in the world is the original ultimate end of creation, so the ultimate modal distinction is that, in the second person, God-would-be-Christ in the world he created. Yet, by the very nature of the case, by the very logic on which such a modality and ontology depends,

'God in W3' is not in modal terms the same as 'God *a se*'. God *a se* knows the possibility of all worlds and wills W3, which entails his willing his own mode of being in accordance with W3.

This framework provides a tidy solution to some painful debates in theology proper. Rahner's Rule on this modality (and, I would argue, on any cohesive modality) is impossible and illogical. Rahner's Rule is correct metaphysically speaking. By proper metaphysical rules of identity, transworld beings (not only *including* God himself but preeminently God himself) retain the true facts of their identity across worlds.

Metaphysically, the immanent trinity of God *a se* is the economic trinity of 'God in W3'. However, modally speaking, the immanent trinity is not the economic trinity; no maneuver by which the roles of the trinitarian missions provide the basis for differentiation in God *in se* will do. On possible-worlds metaphysics, each possible world has a different 'total true set of propositions' concerning what the triune persons do and when. Thus, any "trinity in action in a world" (an "economic-trinity-in-W") is metaphysically-related to the immanent trinity, but since the causation is one-way, reasoning from the economic trinity in any possible world (including the actual world) back to the immanent trinity is fraught with pitfalls.

What should become clear, therefore, is that the tradition of Classical Christian Theism has developed, in broad strokes, the discourse the church needs to confess God *a se*. A necessary being, God knows himself across all possible worlds, and God is Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in all possible worlds. Since the world was created *ex nihilo*, not as a product of necessity but as a product of God's good pleasure, one cannot predicate of God *a se* everything that is true of 'God in W3'. Thus, some proper distinctions must be set forth to describe the Trinitarian God as he is in himself. "Scripture and right reason" support the two-millennia tradition of the church's way of speaking of the triune God: one nature and three *personae*, distinguished by modes of subsistence.

Nevertheless, God-in-W3 is not modally the same as God *in se*. When God creates the real world, he decrees that W3 exist including his own existence in that world (his own complete set of true propositions pertaining to his agency in W3, his actions and relations to every aspect of his world). To be clear, God's mere existence in W3 is *necessary*, for he is in every possible world; but his mode of existence, the total true set of propositions for God in W3, is contingent—appearing only in that world in precisely that form.

Modified theists develop the discourse and pattern of speech needed to understand and worship God-as-he-has-made-himself-known. By the fact of his metaphysical identity, when humans come to know by revelation and divine action God in W3, they *just have* come to know God. This philosophical theology sets up what, so far, might be described as a theological demilitarized zone or no man's land. What classical and modified theists still would dispute is whose territory controls, say, decrees, anthropomorphisms, or anthropopathisms (or the whole dispute over analogical and univocal language). At this stage of the argument, one may pause and recognize the validity of this modal argument without abandoning his or her position in classical or modified theism's polemics. Yet, the argument proceeds now to still a better way.

The Decree as a "Total True Set of Propositions"

The decree itself has often been caught up in modal debate (though, the theological writing has not characterized it in these metaphysical terms). However, theologians have long disputed about the number of the decrees, while developing a discourse that is willing to detail many different decrees and then subsequently insist that the decrees—due to their integral and uncomplicated nature in the mind of God—are, in some sense, one. In other words, the decrees (plural) are rather like a "total true set of propositions" and the decree (singular) like a world. The standard account of modal metaphysics interprets the state of affairs in historical theology harmoniously. The one decree just is W3. The one will-to-create is that means by which the trinitarian God,

inscrutable to our human knowledge, determines by his good pleasure to create the world that is. That decree to create W3 by a logical implication, is the integral and unified decree of every true proposition in W3, including all true propositions about 'God in W3'. Thus, any decree, viewed individually and terminating on a particular person of the Trinity, is rightly viewed as a revelation of the logical substructure of the decrees or, if one prefers, a revelation of part of the structure of the "book" of true propositions in W3.

Seen in this light, modified theists are right to see the remarkable monarchianism of the Trinitarian missions in W3. The order of sending in the missions includes the initiative of the Father, and scripture's description of salvation includes the Father's sending. Classical theism is right to insist that the Father's sending the Son is *sub specie aeternitatis*; in other words, it is a decree—a trinitarian decree. The immanent Trinity, in willing the one decree-to-create, willed all trinitarian persons in their missions in W3, including the decrees of the Father's sending in W3.

In this modal sense, the total set of true propositions of W3 is a one-way mirror, out from which the world's rational creatures cannot look to know on their own inspection the immanent nature of God *above* W3.[2] What we might know, therefore, about the immanent trinity is not from the "book of the world" but from the "book of the word," specifically from those places where divine discourse in Scripture describes not 'God as he is in W3' but God as he is in himself.[3]

Most Reformed theologians safeguard this vision of the one divine act to will and create the world above the modally dependent act of the Father's initiation and sending by means of the *pactum salutis*. In other words, in developing traditional robust doctrines about the Trinity's work in redemption, the monarchy of the Father *in the missions of salvation* is strictly implied. However, the Son's saving work cannot obtain if

[2] This is the sense in which I take Barth.

[3] Quite obviously, exegeting as creatures the difference between discourse about God-in-the-world and God *in se* is both unavoidable and rather like "seeing through a glass dimly."

he in his person does not possess truly and equally the divine nature.[4] If, therefore, in the monarchial mission, the Father acts out of prerogatives of the divine nature, then the true divinity of the Son and the efficacy of his mission is threatened. Though the construct does not fully work out the philosophy, the theological notion of the covenant of redemption safeguarded (above all works, above all worlds) a unified triune act to undertake redemption. The ground that the theological construct of the *pactum salutis* has marked out is better described as "the one act of the triune God to will and create W3," an act that includes within it the total set of true propositions in the world God has created, including and especially the decrees of redemption.[5] This concept of God sets forth a clear account of the eternal coequal Trinity and will-to-create, while providing a better framework for describing scripture's many clear statements that reveal who God is in himself and in relation to his creatures.

Language about God, Analogical and Univocal

This model also incorporates aspects both of analogical and univocal language. The difference of language reference is simply incorporated by the standard account of modality. When language within W3 refers properly to that which is within W3, when the categorical language of the 'total true set of propositions' in the real world refers to other entities within the real world, that language by strict implication is univocal. Any language, however, that refers to entities outside W3 (and above W3) must be analogical. Certainly, someone could argue that language within W3 simply cannot refer outside W3, but, no doubt, all should agree that *if language can refer outside W3* then it must do so by

[4] The church applied the same logic, of course, to the Holy Spirit; however, this theological logic first developed in pro–Nicene Christology, rather than later pneumatology.

[5] In this sense, this proposal does not have to transform, truly, the *pactum salutis*. One could still posit a *pactum salutis sub species aeternitatis* in the trinitarian act to create W3. The argument above is shaped as it is to highlight as plainly as possible that the theological construct of the *pactum salutis* seems to function more to create in the mind of the theologian and worshiper (even if beneath conscious comprehension) this distinction between God metaphysically and modally, between the trinitarian act of God *in se* to create the world and the fatherly act of God in W3 to send the Son.

analogy.[6] John Feinberg employs philosopher William Alston's proposals concerning predication in "Functionalism and Theological Language":

> The function played by both the divine and human psyche is the same, even though how God goes about knowing may be a mystery to us. So also for God's intending or promising to bring something about. While we don't know exactly what it is to purpose as God does, we know the results and we know what it means for us to purpose and bring something about. Both God and our psyche can function in similar ways. . . . Alston's proposal also allows us to avoid saying that everything we say [of] God is metaphorical.[7]

Philosophically, Feinberg's words amount to a model-making view of divine predication, indeed, a model-making view of a great deal of predication (Alston's "functionalism"). This approach constitutes a third way, not a middle way. One might argue that a "middle way" in some sense validates its two opposite as representing the debate rightly in some sense. Classical treatments of analogical and univocal predication simply understand language improperly. Concepts are linguistic models, and the problem can be solved if one agrees to use the term *univocal* in this way.

Stated more simply, semantic meaning is fundamentally determined by context, and semantic meaning can be discerned in meta-contexts. In the context of human description, to "do something" is inextricably related to the body. In the context of divine description, to "do something" refers to action of a pure spirit. The linguistic capacity has no difficulty discerning the core and the periphery of the word in its contexts. Thus, functionalism allows for accurate reference through structural linguistics.

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[6] I take it that human language that depends on the contingencies of other worlds can be true or false but beyond human investigation (because we have no experience of non-actual worlds). What we can say more certainly in modal metaphysics pertains to our world in a transcendental fashion, forming the *conditions of possibility* for our world and thus for all actual worlds. Thus, God knows the truth status of references to contingencies in other possible worlds, but for us the truth status is a kind of analogy due to another world's proximity in likeness to our own. Thus, what is both in our world and in others (e.g., necessary truths) can be referred to univocally.

[7] John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 79–80.

Divine Simplicity

Such theological verities as divine simplicity seem to be better situated by this philosophical model. Divine Deliberation helps account better for all the data and could pacify much of the disputes surrounding simplicity doctrine. The immanent Trinity is simple. God is uncomposed; he is "from himself." However, what primarily bedevils the classical doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS) is the fact that if "all that is in God is God," then the world in itself must in some sense be in God by nature or necessity. *The actual world would have to be in God in every possible world,* which is self-referentially absurd and does away with modal metaphysics. The greatest difficulty for thoroughgoing DDS in church pews are biblical texts that flow relentlessly with God's emotions and intentions. Further, this dissertation has documented the greatest difficulty for thoroughgoing DDS—modal collapse. Any difference between necessity, actuality, and contingency is erased as all that *could* be, *would* be or *might* be collapses into what *is*. The world then either becomes God by nature or his creation by necessity.

Yet the tradition's achievement in DDS can be properly applied beyond the world to the only being in all worlds, God *in se* (rather than to God-within-the-actual–world). This God-world distinction improves the quality both of theological and philosophical ideas. Theologians have no need to describe God immanently and eternally *with his creation* because Edwards's concept of the agent (acting for his ends) and the concept of the original ultimate end supplies the distinction necessary to show God as (1) perfect and blessed in his eternal divine life and (2) King over a creation he made not by dint of his nature, nor by any logical necessity, but of his good pleasure and for his glory.

Conclusion

This chapter began the defense of divine deliberation, starting by establishing God as the true exemplar of transworld identity. To begin proper modal discourse about God requires recognizing the bivalent ways in which we refer to God: both as he is in himself, above and beyond our consideration of worlds, and as he is in every possible

world. As the only necessary being, God himself is the only inhabitant of every possible world. I proffered that this issue is precisely the "modal bottleneck" that Barth described, that, because God has chosen to actualize this world, he has in some sense elected himself to be as he is in this world. Distinguishing between non-necessary truths about God in the actual world and necessary truths about God in every possible world is certainly possible (though plagued with difficulties or improbabilities from the human vantage point alone). Humans need "scripture and plain reason" indeed in order to make these claims.

I described the nature of worlds and sketched why I think theological discourse about the decrees can not only be directly mapped onto philosophical discourse about worlds, but also strictly equated with it. I then showed how this fundamental equipment in theological modality reframes mistaken ideas about both analogical and univocal language for God, as well as divine simplicity.

Both analogy and simplicity, of course, need to be maintained, but I argued that they cannot be maintained in the current form without jettisoning modality and constructing a new theory. Instead, the chapter showed how analogical language and a hard version of divine simplicity apply to God *in se* and how univocal language and soft simplicity (that version of the doctrine that focuses on incorruptibility and lack of composition) applies to God in the actual world.

This chapter has set forth how the necessary God inhabits non-necessary worlds and how he partakes, via the rules of identity, in the total true set of propositions in the actual world. This philosophical proposal is parallel to theological notions of the decree and the covenant of redemption. This distinction between necessity and contingency in God's life is parallel to the immanent and economic trinity or (a clearer way to say it in this context) "God-in-himself" or "God-in-the-actual-world." This distinction clarified what debates over analogical and univocal language, as well as divine simplicity have truly been after. Strong claims about analogical language and

divine simplicity (though not the strongest) can be made about God-in-*se* but not about God-in-the-actual-world.

CHAPTER 10

INDIVIDUAL ESSENCES AND DIVINE IDEAS

Any version of possible worlds metaphysics requires the concepts of individual essences and counterfactuals in order to run. This chapter conceptualizes individual essences in such a way that fits with traditional theology and the use of possible worlds to analyze doctrinal ideas. The chapter proceeds to describe the actualist ontology of non-existence and counterfactuals. In other words, some act or state of affairs must undergird the truth of statements about (1) any object's non-existence in a world or (2) the counterfactual aspect of any true statement. The act of knowing and juxtaposing possible worlds constitutes this existence. In the same vein, the chapter concludes by asserting that modal relations *just exist* within the operations of the divine mind; thus, modality is constituted by divine knowing.

Any entity that appears in many possible worlds and possesses a transworld identity is considered an individual essence.[1] The nature of the individual essence must be sketched in. Does the individual essence have some ontological status? Are individual essences like Platonic forms, existing eternally and unchanged? Are they useful fictions simply to summarize or describe features of what is true about the individual in all the possible worlds in which he or she appears? The most important question relates to their metaphysical status in relation to possible worlds. Does the dependence relation run from the true sets of propositions about entities in the possible worlds up to the individual

[1] Plantinga's modal exposition has centered the discussion on modality for a generation. He does not present an ontological framework to undergird the possible worlds; any that will match its epistemic purchase would seem to do (so, this thesis provides an ontology in divine thought). Further, his work on transworld identity is key to a theistic modal semantics, wherein God knows selfsame *things* across the possible worlds of his own thought. Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974).

essence or from the individual essence down to populate the possible worlds?[2] The question of the individual essence is often the nub of fierce Molinist/Calvinist debates. Some Molinist descriptions set forth individual essences ontologically independent from God (much the way that, on Platonism, the forms do not ontologically depend on God). Combining this picture with *creatio ex nihilo*, Calvinists have critiqued their Molinist colleagues because in forming the decree and will to create, God would in some sense be limited by what else has an ontologically independent existence, namely, the individual essences. Instead, the individual essences are contingent and ontologically dependent, not dissimilar from how other necessaries, such as the prime numbers, remain ontologically dependent.[3]

The Anatomy of Necessity in Ontologically Dependent Things

Chapter 2 described ontologically dependent necessity. Such necessary things exist in every possible world but do not themselves account for the possible worlds, which are upheld by God himself. In this way, a Christian model can easily affirm the unique divinity of God as the only being that is both necessary and ontologically independent, while still developing a view of necessity for such things as mathematical truths and other necessary objects and propositions.

The only remaining question, then, is what "order" or relation of dependence obtains. Does God comprehend possible worlds in his knowledge and then on the basis of those possible worlds the mathematical truths are construed as necessary? Or does God know what concepts of his mind are necessary and then, logically, all possible worlds are populated with those necessary things? To put it very simply: which way does the dependence relation run? From the modal status of necessity to the possible worlds or

[2] This argument simply lays aside any concept of the individual essence that is independent of God because their independence does not comport with divine aseity and early Christian teaching on divine ideas (set forth in a later chapter).

[3] As described in chap. 2.

from the possible worlds to the modal status of necessity? Though a strong view of some form of divine conceptualism could construct an argument that runs in the opposite direction, I prefer the latter option because, on this model of metaphysics, that is simply how all modal status works. Modal status runs *from* the possible worlds *to* the entities, whether necessary or contingent.

This picture is easier to paint initially on the canvas of necessary entities, but it now must be applied more importantly to this question of individual essences. Is the array of possible worlds logically subsequent to the individual essences or are the individual essences logically subsequent to the array of possible worlds? Once again, an argument could be made that God considers individual essences logically prior, yet the more elegant interpretation seems to be the opposite, to allow the normal direction of modal status to apply. The possible worlds are logically prior to the individual essences.

Divine knowledge of individual essences is a logical consequence of his knowledge of every possible world, the entities within them, and their contingent status (because they are not in every possible world). In fact, an entity within possible worlds, and with transworld identity is in some sense *constituted as an individual essence* by God's comprehension of the entity in every world where it exists. An individual essence just is the unity to which transworld identity points. Thus, since an individual essence is constituted in part by relations, its ontology depends on divine mental activity.[4] Since an individual essence is constituted by knowledge that crosses possible worlds, the only

[4] Against the grounding objections, Kirk MacGregor has defended the doctrine of supercomprehension, making the case that counterfactuals can be "grounded in God, specifically in the divine ideas of creaturely wills as they preexist in the divine essence, without making counterfactuals necessary." Kirk MacGregor, "In Defense of Molina's Doctrine of Supercomprehension" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Philosophical Society, Denver, November 13, 2018). I should note that MacGregor confessedly aims to convince most Molinists (as well as, of course, "anti-Molinists") of the doctrine of supercomprehension in his writing. The doctrine of supercomprehension as advanced by Laing and MacGregor does, in fact, make individual essences part of divine knowledge and contingent upon God himself in that way. This strong dependence relation, no doubt, is what makes so many Molinists demur: it seems to forfeit the path to libertarian freedom and invite criticism from Arminians and, especially, Open Theists.

proper place for that constitution is in the relations of God's knowledge.[5] Consequently, the concept of individual essences is serviceable for the divine will-to-create, and once again divine deliberation—with logical, not temporal, priority and subsequence—is necessary to make sense of the metaphysical concept.

Individual Essences in Exemplarism

Linda Zagzebski presents a satisfying argument for the existence of individual essences and for their application to exemplarism in the history of theology and metaphysics (or, indeed, to any models similar to exemplarism, any model which makes great or maximal use of divine ideas).[6] She argues (1) in favor of the concept of individual qualitative essences (IQEs), and (2) that qualities, rather than brute individuation differentiates the entities.[7] Zagzebski describes exemplarism as "a brilliant attempt to explain both how the creation comes to be and how God knows created things."[8] She ascribes the view to an eminent and historical list of persons: the theory goes "as far back as the Christian neo-Platonists" and includes Augustine, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Ockham, and Leibniz. Zagzebski formalizes a definition: "Exemplarism is the

[5] I would argue this is also the better place for the Molinist notion of supercomprehension, an idea that is used more often to describe God's discrete decisions within the world: "Because God supercomprehends an 'individual essence A' within the actual world, he chooses option X." Supercomprehension fits better as a concept along these lines: "God's knowledge that constitutes individual essences via contemplation of contingent entities that have Transworld identity across all worlds where they exist." John D. Laing, "Molinism and Supercomprehension: Grounding Counterfactual Truth" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000); "The Compatibility of Calvinism and Middle Knowledge," *JETS* 47, no. 3 (September 2004) 455–67; some Molinists deny the utility of Supercomprehension in their accounts: Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 56n26.

[6] Linda Zagzebski, "Individual Essence and the Creation," in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[7] She interacts briefly with the question of "thisness" (haeccities), approving of the notion but showing how it relates more to the question of differentiation rather than individuation.

[8] Zagzebski, "Individual Essence and the Creation," 135.

theory that the ideas of all possible created beings exist eternally in God's mind and act as models or exemplars for those among them that God chooses to create."[9]

She sketches an answer to the question often bracketed in such theologizing: *how* these ideas are in God's mind. What she sketches includes vignettes of the great tradition, particularly inflected with Thomas's voice: the Father knows himself, which act is the perfect image of himself—the Word. This image, the Word, contains all *possibilia*, "not only of all possible individuals, but also of universals."[10] The modal collapse is not imminent if a view asserts that God "looks into himself," which contains possibility; the modal collapse is imminent if the view claims that any one of those possibilities is *actual* in the necessary God, for then all things share in the modal status of the divine nature.[11]

The power and force of models along these lines is clear: "if [creation] is significantly free, [it] requires choice, and choice requires not only will but intellect."[12] A creating God must act on his intellect. "Exemplarism also gives a plausible understanding of God's present knowledge of his possibilities and hence is supported by the traditional strong views of God's providence."[13] In this way, Zagzebski applies her thesis: for the model of exemplarism or any similar model to pertain to this metaphysical question in theology proper, actualism in ontology cannot be the case. Thus, she commends an ontology that grounds individual essences through ideas in the divine mind. In other

[9] Zagzebski, "Individual Essence and the Creation," 135.

[10] Zagzebski, "Individual Essence and the Creation," 135–36.

[11] Zagzebski points out, "On some versions of the theory, since God is simple, there can be no real distinctions in God save the distinction among the three Persons. So the exemplars are not really distinct from each other, nor are they distinct from the divine essence." Zagzebski, "Individual Essence and the Creation," 136. This comment is curious because she does not interact further with, much less dismiss, the proposition; a proposition that removes the possibility of *differentiating* what her model is currently *individuating*. Any model of individuation that leaves individuals undifferentiated is turned around backwards and cannot be right. Perhaps by her use of the phrase "on some versions of the theory." Zagzebski respects the tradition while possibly distancing herself from it.

[12] Zagzebski, "Individual Essence and the Creation," 136.

[13] Zagzebski, "Individual Essence and the Creation," 136.

words, "fully individuating ideas of possible beings" must be able to exist in some sense prior to their being actual. This thesis is precisely that which a philosopher such as James Ross has attacked (believing full individuation takes place when essences are actual) and a theologian such as Karl Barth has attacked (for reasons of his actualist divine ontology).[14] Exemplarism (or some such similar theory) can powerfully set much else in theology on a good footing only if it is free from any metaphysical problems of its own. Zagzebski thinks she can avoid this problem by showing a qualitative difference in all individual essences.

The coin with which this metaphysic of modality might purchase explanatory power is precisely its concept of transworld identity. The "objection" or "problem" of transworld identity must first be articulated carefully; the question of transworld identity is in one sense no more than a species of the standard question of identity. The metaphysical mechanisms by which the philosopher traces identity across worlds will prove exceedingly similar to that employed in tracing identity across time in this world (or any other possible-not-actual world, for that matter). *Prima facie*, identity in one world has the advantage of continuity in space and time (though such continuity is not often used for the linchpin of identity) or causality generally (to which also there are many objectors). Thus, across the array of thinkers, Zagzebski commends the simplicity of applying her individual qualitative essences: "any objects X and Y are identical just in case they have the same individual essence. It does not matter whether X and Y are specified in their occurrences in distinct possible worlds, or whether they are specified in their occurrences at distinct moments of time in the same world, nor does it matter whether X and Y exist in the actual world."[15] She continues: "if there are no non-trivial

[14] With respect to Ross, I follow Zagzebski's model upholding individual essences in the mind of God but continue to share Ross's compelling concerns with respect to their residence in the divine nature. See James Ross, "God, Creator of Kinds and Possibilities," in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, ed. Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 315–34.

[15] Zagzebski, "Individual Essence and the Creation," 138.

individual essences, the problem of transworld identity becomes exceedingly difficult because spatio-temporal continuity or other causal relations cannot be appealed to, and since haeccities are unhelpful,[16] there does not seem to be anything left but qualitative similarity."[17] Interestingly, Zagzebski's propososal can be rescued by a species of actualist ontology—the act of divine knowing.

Actualist Metaphysics, Everyday Semantics, and Divine Deliberation

The main objection for possible world semantics and its necessary operating principle of transworld identity is a paradox of qualitative similarity. The complaint runs in quite simple terms: if something in world 1 (say, the puffer fish) "counts as" the same entity in world 2 due to qualitative similarity, what is to block the same from being true of an object in world 3 qualitatively similar to that in world 2? If the previous hypothetical question contains nothing problematic then, it would seem, that the identity could be transferred across worlds 1 through 3 and such items would be labeled "identical." However this problem "is not a problem limited to possible-worlds semantics. It arises anytime a statement is made concerning *de re* possibility for actual or non-actual individuals."[18] Alvin Plantinga does not address the issue in the same way but confirms the same point in his prolonged analysis of *de re* and *de dicto* necessity.[19] In fact, the problem pertains in virtually all theories of necessity. Possible-worlds semantics is guilty only by setting the matter forth so clearly.

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[16] I would note that haeccities (or the "property of 'thisness'") are contested in the literature (and not necessary for divine deliberation). Haeccity is much more helpful than Zagzebski lets on if the individual essences are supported ontologically by divine knowledge. Objects of divine knowing have their ontological status from that relation, and haeccity more easily fits as an option for separating essences.

[17] Zagzebski, "Individual Essence and the Creation," 139. She means that haeccities are unhelpful *by themselves* of identifying an individual in different possible worlds since it just is the property of *thisness*.)

[18] Zagzebski, "Individual Essence and the Creation," 139.

[19] Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 9–13.

Interestingly, Zagzebski relates her thesis to propositions about nonexistent entities. She recognizes the long history in philosophical semantics concerning how difficult propositions about nonexistent entities are. "If in some possible world W the proposition expressed by "Socrates does not exist" is true, who or what is it that has the property of not existing?"[20] Haeccity seems enough for the linguistic convention, but what can ground the truth value of statements of non-existence?

Non-Existence Has an Actualist Ontology

The question Zagzebski poses seems easy to answer if the frame of reference remains within the possible world that she avers: The entity in the world, 'Socrates in W', has the property of not existing. Indeed, conceiving worlds as total sets of propositions, "books" of compatible ideas, allows an existential negative. The problems lay precisely in the fact that the definitions of truth and existence are modally indexed and, therefore, multivalent. One does not need to reach to a metaphysical object, such as an individual essence of Socrates, and claim the essence must have the property of "not existing"; on her hypothetical, the entity within possible world W does possess a property of "not existing."

The issues are relatively straightforward. Conceived above the metaphysical array—with reference to every possible world—existence *just is* a question posed of a world with respect to a proposition or object. *"Is X found in the set of propositions asserted in the world; is Y in the book?"* Considered beneath the array (now in that realm of ontology which is actuality) the question of existence literally means *"Is X actual?"*

A truth-maker in this possible worlds ontology is a matter of assertion in a world: *A proposition is true in the world, and objects exist in the world, iff it is found in that world*. Considered with respect to actualism, truth is a matter of existence,

[20] Zagzebski, "Individual Essence and the Creation," 140. The same question ("what makes the possible worlds more than a linguistic convention?") animates Alvin Plantinga, "Actualism and Possible Worlds," *Theoria* 42 (1976): 139–60.

comporting in the real world with its modal instantiation. Non-actualism must give an account of truth beyond actual existence. Divine mental existence is just such a plausible account. In fact, I would prefer not to treat non-existence in a world as a property possessed at all, as if in every world where Socrates does not exist, the proposition "Socrates does not exist" must appear. Another, less metaphysically heavy, way to meet the same need is to have God's immediate mental comprehension of the world as the truthmaker for "Socrates does not exist."[21]

Thus, each term—when teased out in terms of the modal issues presented here—bears precisely two frames of reference, semantics which we employ in everyday life (thus the actualist semantics is more common in ordinary language). This analysis yields a simple observation that seems now to stand up quite sturdily: propositions about nonexistent entities belong to the semantics of actualism; propositions about nonexistent entities are not to be found in possible-worlds semantics but in the manner of speaking that maintains a register which pertains to the actual world. Thus our ordinary language, which often "posits a negation," should not be considered inelegant; what such language does is to assess and evaluate the logical relations between possible worlds and make an existence claim (based on actualist ontology) on the dependence relationship between the world which now pertains. The relationship pertains because one world is actual. The actuality of that world itself is what allows for the positive assertion that unpacks in something like the following way: *"X does not exist, where X refers to any entity which is compossible with various possible worlds and exists in that sense, but is not in fact actual in the actual world and therefore does not exist in that sense."* The phrase "X does not

[21] Many of the problems associated with Berkeley's idealism relate to how certain qualities can occur in an object and be related to other objects in space and time, as well as in causal and other relations. The volume argues that language in Berkley is precisely the mechanism by which structured "representation of the physical world" can allow us "to make accurate predictions at minimal cognitive expense." In Berkeley, the relevant semantics in this regard is a divine semantics, and language can sustain a general theistic metaphysic of modality. Kenneth L. Pearce, *Language and the Structure of Berkeley's World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

exist" is true in this picture, but its truth value was not merely a factor of metaphysics; its truth value is logically dependent on actuality.

This picture yields a deeply significant intuition: a rich theory of modal metaphysics must put possible worlds and ontology into conversation. Possible worlds and ontology were inextricably linked in David Lewis's modal realism, who thought that the possible-worlds had to be real for modal truth values to obtain.[22] His proposal being unbelievable for many, possible-worlds analysis became, for most, mere linguistic convention. Yet, concern for the truth value of modal propositions always follows non-realist models. The notion of "logical moments" that is explicitly set forth in theological frameworks for divine knowledge is necessary and helpful in metaphysics generally to distinguish a semantics that pertains to the world-array and a separate semantics that pertains to the world-array-in-light-of-the-world-actualized. Via a theological modality, one can gain the benefits of Lewisean realism without the intellectual Everest of believing that every possible world is actualized (as Lewis did). The problem for a godless metaphysical picture, then, is how the propositions and objects might properly be related *sans* a mind. The glory of theological models for modality precisely is that divine intellection is naturally fit to provide the intellectual furniture of the "logical moments" whereby the possible worlds themselves, the decision of which world is actual, and the truth-relations and counterfactuals logically subsequent to actualization are neatly separable according to a model of the divine mind.[23] Divine deliberation is a model of

[22] David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 1–96. I cite Lewis's exposition of his modal realism. For his peculiar use of *actuality* as a term of mere indexicality rather than of ontology, see pp. 92–94. Lewis does defend a kind of actuality—but without a companion concept of the non-existence. Instead, *non-actual* means something more like "not adjacent to the actual world" (i.e., the world supplying the index). For his many philosophical inheritors, the knotty question of realism became the weak ballast on which Lewis's might balloon of possible world's analysis flew.

[23] Brian Leftow argues, "Note finally that theism without a theist theory of the necessary faces" a problem:

> If necessary truths' ontology were independent of all *divine* thought, uncreated and causally inert, how can we make sense of *God's* knowing necessary truths? So theists need a theist modal metaphysic to make sense of God's modal knowledge. This suggests, incidentally, that appeal to God cannot defeat

divine knowledge that furnishes an account of possible-worlds' grounding—not only a ground for the worlds themselves, which follows a traditional account of divine ideas (exemplarism), but also a ground for propositions between worlds and about worlds that are logically subsequent to the will-to-create (counterfactuals). Theology can supply precisely what modal philosophy needs, a grounding for the truth value of propositions that contain modal operators. Since God's knowledge includes the relation of every possible world, the truth of modally-rich propositions lies within divine deliberation.

Counterfactuals Have an Actualist Ontology

Counterfactuals are themselves precisely not counterfactuals *prior to the inherence of those truth-properties which depend on their relation to the actual world*. In other words, "counterfactual" is itself not a property that can be assigned to any proposition or entity across the array of possible worlds generally but is a relative property necessarily inhering for all worlds that are not the actual world after the divine decision to create. For the reasons above, divine knowledge is deliberative, and deliberative divine knowledge constitutes the truth-functions of worlds.

Counterfactuals Cannot Be "Used" to "Choose"

In Christian theology concerning providence, one commonly hears various forms of this question: "Does God use counterfactuals of creaturely freedom in choosing which world to create?" This phrase has applied the semantics of the standard model of modality improperly. "Counterfactual" denotes a truth relation of the sort that is dependent on an actualist ontology. *Counterfactual* simply does not inhere in propositions or objects in worlds *without an actual world.* Only *with an actual world*, can all the true propositions of other worlds be counterfactuals, a truth-relationship that the

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> [the] problem if the ontology of modal truth consists in platonic entities he did not create and is not sustaining. (Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013], 75)

I simply want to take Leftow one step further and ask how the *truths* of Platonic entities be *modal* without a mind to relate them. A theistic modal metaphysic solves problems most metaphysicians have.

divine mind knows and constitutes. Where there is an actual world ("logically subsequent to the decision to create") counterfactuals logically ("automatically," if you will) apply and inhere in all relevant propositions and objects in all worlds that are "now" (in the sense of logical subsequence) non-actual. To model counterfactuals as any kind of intrinsic characteristic of individual entities seems an insurmountable task. *Counterfactual* is a relational attribute, which obtains when God's mind (1) relates worlds and their true propositions, (2) to the decree to create the world he wills and (3) entails (logically subsequent to that divine deliberation) counterfactuals of every kind, including those of creaturely freedom.

Metaphysics in Traditional Arminianism and Recent Molinism

Logically entailed by the Arminian supposition of libertarian human freedom in the world (not across possible worlds—but *in* the actual world) is the complete ontological feasibility of only one possible world. Because the free creatures possess libertarian freedom in the world, a possible-worlds modality is excluded. Here are the two notions in view (supposing that I drank coffee yesterday):

> "Concerning my drinking coffee at time t1, could I have refrained from so doing in this world?"
>
> or
>
> "Concerning my drinking coffee at time t1, could I have refrained from so doing in another possible world?"

This prong of analysis divides the Arminian and Molinist, connecting the latter with Calvinists. In other words, Molinist and Calvinist modalities both employ the second notion above, not the first. Recent Molinist proposals have unsurprisingly aligned many evangelical thinkers with contemporary philosophical use of modal logic. [24] With the

[24] Standard Molinist discourse attempts no other claim. In other words, when Molinist writers make good on their own appeals to libertarian freedom, they do not appeal to constituents within the actual world but to the "array of possible worlds and their constitution of *possibilia* in the real world" (that is, "to the metaphysics of modality"). Stated most simply, Molinists appeal to the metaphysics of modality to support

foregoing argument, I also conclude that any Arminian use of possible-worlds modality would be literally absurd, for, on its face, it includes the metaphysical counterfactual operator *could* within just-this world, when *could* on all standard models of modality literally means "in another possible world." Thus, the Arminian will need to develop an alternate modality to retain coherence.

Reminders from Last Chapter

The last chapter treated the existence of persons and the nature of freedom within divine thought. The comments in the chapter found various views at loggerheads due to sloppy use of possible-worlds modality. Speaking of worlds with a more disciplined semantics has a salutary and clarifying effect: if one says that something in the actual world "could have been otherwise" the statement is cogent *iff* it is taken to indicate an appeal to the array of non-actual worlds, in other words, a code-switching into metaphysical discourse. If the "could have been otherwise" claim is taken to refer to *this world and this world only*, then it is absurd. The actual world just is a *world*. A world is a total true set of propositions. In a total world-book of propositions "Act *A* at time *t*" simply will or will not occur. Only when analyzing all worlds can any claim be made about what "could or could not" occur. By definition, one "total true set of propositions" has no modality within itself.[25]

Divine Intellection and Modality

Modality instead takes shape when possible worlds (1) exist mentally and (2) are related mentally. Consequently, modality turns on the same question common to metaphysical questions (e.g. abstract objects, the worlds themselves, etc.). Do they exist

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libertarian freedom; such libertarian freedom is to be understood, therefore, in a modal sense. Like non-apophatic Calvinists, therefore, the Molinist affirms that the Creature could do otherwise (due to the nature of other worlds) but not that the creature will do otherwise (due to the nature of the actual world).

[25] On this semantics, "would or would not" denotes the "will or will not" of another (but non-actual) world of relevantly similar qualities.

necessarily (and thus "from themselves") or do they exist from God? The Christian philosophical tradition is uniquely positioned to answer the question of modality due to modality's irreducibly mental nature.[26] In other words, modality refers to a semantics of possibility in the actual world that itself refers to or denotes the relation of true propositions in worlds with other true propositions in other worlds. Modality's ontological grounding just is God's *active intellectual relation* of worlds.[27] Divine logical knowledge provides ontological grounding that cannot otherwise be achieved. Modality, on standard possible-worlds metaphysics, requires intellection.[28] Platonism's forms cannot account for a complex modality. Aristotle's unmoved mover helps the Philosopher analyze *events*. But the Christian God and divine ideas akin to Augustine's conceptualism

[26] Picking up on the concept of Gottlieb Frege, whose notion of "thoughts" is often associated with, or identified with, *propositions*, Michael Jubien expresses concern about these "natural realm-mates of Platonic properties and relations" that could seem "to exist independently of minds and the spatio-temporal realm." Michael Jubien, "Propositions and the Objects of Thought," *Philosophical Studies* 104, no. 1 (2001): 47. In such a case, "to have a propositional thought, say to believe, is to stand in a certain special relation to a specific proposition. This proposition is either true or false, and gets to be so according to whether it accurately represents the world (or part of the world)" (47). These concerns are valid for secular theories of "total true sets of propositions," yet the concern does not apply if the propositions exist dependently on infinite mind, whose mind offers the "standing" in a "certain special relation" to other specific propositions.

[27] Bob Hale defends the notion that logical knowledge is inferential:

> At least some of us, at least some of the time—when not in the grip of radical sceptical doubt—are inclined to believe that we know, for example, that if we infer a conclusion from two true premises, one a conditional whose consequent is that conclusion and the other the antecedent of that conditional, then our conclusion must be true, or that we know similar things about other simple patterns of inference. If we do indeed have knowledge of this sort, it is what I mean by logical knowledge. Logical knowledge is, roughly speaking, knowledge about logic—such as knowledge that a certain principle of inference necessarily preserves truth, or that every proposition of a certain form must be true—and so is not the same thing as knowledge that is gained by using logic, i.e., inferential knowledge. That is not to say, of course, that logical knowledge can't be inferential. On the contrary, it is barely open to question that—if there is any logical knowledge at all—there is a lot of inferential logical knowledge. For example, if we know that the introduction and elimination principles for the conditional are truth-preserving, we can surely get to know, by inference, that the principle of hypothetical syllogism (i.e., transitivity of the conditional) is so too, not to mention other, less obvious and more recondite, examples of putative logical knowledge. (Bob Hale, "Basic Logical Knowledge," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 51 [2002]: 279)

[28] Modality is the most glaring weakness of Quentin Smith's proposal that the world could be neither a divine creation, nor a brute fact, but its own cause. Quentin Smith, "The Reason the Universe Exists Is That It Caused Itself to Exist," *Philosophy* 74, no. 4 (1999): 579–86.

with respect to the Platonic array upholds modality, which is not an entity. At least the Platonic interlocutor is coherent to claim that necessary entities might be independent of God. But relations of propositions between worlds are neither entities nor brute facts, and thus the discussion favors theism. A God whose active knowledge is the source of all worlds is the guarantor that (1) all worlds relate to one another and that (2) those relations of divine intellection constitute modal realities.

Application to Human Language

A statement of summary and conclusion is needed. Divine intellection undergirds ontologically the existence of worlds. The act of creation makes one world the actual world metaphysically. If the nature of worlds depends on God, all the more so does the relation of worlds. The same divine intellect that knows the worlds *into* existence knows the worlds *in* their existence. Because God knows the worlds in their existence, the divine mind likewise contains propositions relating all worlds to one another, even relating discrete propositions between worlds. Therefore, modality (all possibility) rests upon the active relation of worlds and their propositions. Human modal semantics simply refers to those very same relations in the divine mind and makes our human discourse about possibility very real but never beyond scrutiny. Human modal statements have value with respect to truth or falsehood as an appeal to the true propositions of highly and relevantly similar worlds. The divine mind knows such relations perfectly, and that knowledge is what makes modality metaphysically actual. Divine intellection prevents modal collapse. This modality upholds the truth-aimed nature of human modal talk. Libertarian freedom with its emphasis on possibility refers to possible worlds. Freedom of inclination with its emphasis on the character of the actual agent refers to the actual world. The central claims of Molinism and Calvinism, in a possible-worlds discourse, are

consonant with one another due to the fact that one engages in the semantics of modality and the other in the semantics of actuality.[29]

Conclusion

This chapter sketched a new model of individual essences and divine ideas based on divine deliberation. These issues have their own records of writing and historical patterns of debate, though a theory of divine ideas is a deeply traditional *loci* and individual essences are a product of more recent modal metaphysics. However, in both conversations the question of grounding and ontological status is paramount. I referred to the ontologically dependent status of necessary mathematical truths in chapter 2 in order to show how individual essences may be a useful concept in modal metaphysics, while still remaining dependent on God.

I contended that individual essences are unworthy as candidates for brute facts. Instead, the dependence relationship runs from the possible world to the individual essences, and it is precisely the divine mind that by knowing individuals across possible worlds with relevant similarities constitutes such individual essences. Further, I argued that nonexistence has the same actualist ontology. Propositions that negate existence can have a truth value but only logically subsequent to God's will to actualize the world. I defended the same view with respect to counterfactuals, arguing that they cannot be counterfactual logically prior to the inherence of truth properties in the actual world.

In other words, without the divine will to actualize one world, the truth remains only a statement of coherence within that set of propositions—not a statement of relation to reality. God's will to actualize the world makes that world's propositions *true* and the contrary propositions of every remaining world *counterfactual* (and the counterfactual propositions in relevantly similar worlds useful for modal analysis). Therefore, all of modality depends upon divine intellection: i.e., God's natural knowledge of all

[29] Since they analyze such things and refer to them in different senses, they cannot be contradictory. Contradiction obviously requires that sentences use terms in the same sense.

possibilities and their relationships, as well as his ultimate end, logically subsequent ends, and his will to create the most fitting world.

CHAPTER 11

MODES OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE AND MODES OF DIVINE BEING

The great tradition most fulsomely presented in a writer like Aquinas could be called a "maximal theological model"—a model of theology proper that contains a sum of all metaphysics. Not without reason have defenders of classical trinitarianism and creative exponents of orthodox trinitarian theology involved themselves in metaphysics. In its own way, classical trinitarianism involves various forms of a maximal metaphysical model. Theology has not been averse to maximal theological models that include a sum of metaphysics within theology proper, and this dissertation may be seen as an attempt to include a missing (yet standard) need in any metaphysic: an account of modality, a theory of possibility. To involve modality in the constructive theology of God more explicitly does not obstruct but extends such projects in theology proper. A proposal such as a 'deliberative model of the divine will-to-create' will be accepted and rejected by various thinkers; however, this phenomenon need not cut merely along the well-worn or traditional lines because many of this thesis's main features could be usefully incorporated in the major models of God (e.g. Thomist, Scholastic Reformed, Edwardsean Idealism, etc). In such a spirit, may it be that a dialogue would commence that more profitably models the infinite God so that finite minds might worship more completely.

This third and final chapter that sets forth divine deliberation begins by finishing and filling out an argument already attempted: a more elegant account of Karl Barth's views of divine ontology and "God's election of himself." The chapter proceeds to defend inferential knowledge in God, which, combined with God's immediate knowledge, creates a more total picture of divine knowledge that ought to be called

deliberative knowledge. This line of thinking clarifies from another angle the claim that divine deliberation constitutes counterfactuals, so the chapter concludes by applying the point to some key metaphysical issues in divine providence.

Necessity (and Aseity) in Karl Barth's God

Revelation discloses certain key truths concerning the divine will-to-create, so theological insight must be included in any Christian philosophical model. The act of necessity, the act eternal and in every possible world, is Trinitarian love. Holy writ intimates that necessary, eternal love between Father and Son grounded by divine will the act of contingency that defines all creation: for the Father to glorify the Son. If this is what Karl Barth meant by the "rift" in the divine being, the break that brought contingency out of necessity, then we have an answer to the question of how a necessary being can will-to-create.

Bruce McCormack, perhaps Barth's most eminent contemporary interpreter, sets forth a doctrine from the *Church Dogmatics* in which the primordial decision of election is at least in some sense constitutive of the Trinity itself.[1] Paul Molnar, another eminent Barthian scholar, has objected to McCormack's proposal that Barthian Trinitarian doctrine is subsequent to divine election and will. God's life, *ad intra*, Molnar insists cannot be posterior to God's work *ad extra* in any sense. Significantly, a more enriched theory of modality nicely situates the *ad intra*/*ad extra* distinction and answers many of the theological concerns in the perennial debates. Just as writers such as Molnar and others in the tradition are keen to protect, God *ad intra* is utterly complete in himself, depending on the world for no quality of his nature and not constituted in his Trinitarian life by the exercise of free will for election.

However, many of the concerns Barth registers are valid, illuminating, and penetrating with respect to the tradition. Barth's concerns, however, are far better situated

[1] Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realist Dialectical Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

at the fountainhead of modality, rather than of all metaphysics. In other words, the primacy of election, the matter of God's choosing his own mode of being *for us* is not best understood as the way in which the divine constitutes *himself* ontologically but as the way in which the divine-with-his-world constitutes *himself as he is with his world* ontologically. Barth's concerns treat how the Creator is found as such in his mode of being with the world. These questions are modal, rather than generically metaphysical. They inquire about the world so constituted, about the divine mode of being—without expressly scanning the options and hammering out a model with respect to the theory of possibility—instead pushing all those questions into traditional metaphysical discussion. The question properly does not concern divine metaphysics generally but divine modality particularly.

Therefore, a model of divine deliberation stands upon the growing possible worlds consensus with respect to metaphysics in order to develop a more rich modality that maintains the tradition's *ad intra*/*ad extra* distinction while incorporating the modern insight that human reason knows God not as he is in himself, transcending all worlds, but as he is in his mode of being toward us, that is, as he is the actual world.[2]

[2] One ought to caveat this claim. As should become clear in the exposition of the model, if God is a speaking God in the world he creates, then the creature could (and often does) learn and know of the divine life not only through such channels as are within our world's mode of being (natural revelation, events of history, linguistic utterances that describe actions in the world) but also through one channel that provides knowledge that transcends such modality (divine speech—but not divine speech *per se*—divine speech that speaks in a register beyond our world's modality, that refers to God's life *ad intra*). Human knowledge content related to such speech would remain subject to the finitude of us and our language; this commonplace linguistic observation, however, does not limit the very fact that God, as the talking God, can by his own linguistic nature refer to the mode of being he has created and in which he participates, as well as the mode of being he enjoys *ad intra*. Humans have every reason for optimism with respect to the sheer fact of linguistic communication, even as we have every reason for humility with respect to our epistemic apparatus. Still, it is a commonplace of linguistic phenomena that a speaker, any speaker, can conceive of and refer to multiple modalities, and the same is true of God himself. In this way, the question of whether God can speak about the modality of this world (*ad extra*), as well as the modality of his inner life (*ad intra*) are not somehow a novel, impenetrable discussion. In fact, the discussion is nothing other than the traditional question of whether God can speak (and humans can hear) *at all*—about which we have excellent grounds for optimism. Evangelical optimism about divine communication notwithstanding, the question of whether God may reveal linguistic teaching about his life *ad intra* just *is* the question of whether he can reveal linguistic teaching at all.

Another argument brought against McCormack's conception of the Barthian teaching is that including the incarnation in the divine Triune constitution undermines the very nature of grace; in McCormack/Barth picture, grace is literally no longer gratuitous! Instead, a possible-worlds view creates a model of the divine will-to-create in which God constitutes himself in his mode of being with respect to the world precisely by choosing that world with the maximal greatness of grace, that world with incarnation and atonement. What rescues Barth's conception of God's electing his own "mode of being in the world" is a theory of divine deliberation that includes possible worlds.

George Hunsinger has written in opposition to the McCormack model as well. Hunsinger claims that the Barthian notion of "Jesus Christ as the subject of election" does not suppose in any fashion that the eternal Son did not exist apart from such electing. Rather, the Son elects to be Son *incarnandus* in Jesus Christ.[3] Michael Dempsey summarizes the contention:

> God remains Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the perfection of his own pre-temporal, supra-temporal, and post-temporal eternity and yet chooses for himself to be in covenant relationship with the world. This does not mean that the being of the Son was constituted by this decision, but that the decision for election was made out of the abundance of God's perfect and complete Triune being.[4]

The entire register of this debate is off-kilter, which the words of Dempsey crystallize. At issue is not the *being* of the Son but the *mode of being with respect to the Son*. The issue is not properly ontological, having to do with the divine ontology *per se*, but having to do with what world God might create and, by entailment, what "possibilities of being" he thus decrees for himself. The discussion need not ensnare its interlocutors in that more heavy and serious ontology of God *in se*—but must only take on a divine modal ontology, how God wills *himself to be in the world he creates*.

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[3] George Hunsinger, "Election and the Trinity: Twenty-five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth," in *Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Michael Dempsey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). Hunsinger (surprisingly) appeals by analogy to perichoresis to explain how the incarnate son and the eternal son could be related in this way.

[4] Michael Dempsey, introduction to Dempsey, *Trinity and Election*, 10.

Dempsey's pattern of speaking later in the essay is actually harmonious with this point: "God exists as three persons in one eternal being with two simultaneous modes of existence: God exists first in himself and then reiterates his prior Triune being in a free and gracious act of self-determination for the sake of the world."[5] Thus some model for how God might engage in "a free and gracious act of self-determination for the sake of the world" must be constructed. A theological saying like this is manifestly not self-interpreting. A deliberative model of modality and the divine will allows the world to operate in a manner that is truly self-determinative, while maintaining the true sense in which God's action is both (1) gracious and (2) "toward the world"—while avoiding also any sense in which God bears "responsibility toward" the world or, worse, depends on it. Possible worlds analysis situates actualist ontology in the actual world, while allowing God's life *ad intra* (and the form of the worlds themselves) their own ontology separate from actual relationships. The opposition to McCormick has revealed one thing for certain: Barth scholars and classical Trinitarians alike maintain a distinction between divine ontology and God's fully actualized relationships with the world. One cannot oppose McCormack's rendering of Barthian actualist ontology without this commitment.

Kind(s) of Divine Knowledge, Inferential, and Immediate

Considering the volume of literature devoted to divine knowledge generally, how few monographs and essays are devoted to *how* God knows particularly, is quite surprising. The dearth is even more acute when controlled for those monographs and essays that are aware of and in conversation with contemporary work in metaphysics. No

[5] Dempsey, introduction to Dempsey, *Trinity and Election*, 11. Dempsey refers to "two simultaneous modes of existence," which presents no real difficulty for standard ontology. The question of whether "three persons in one eternal being" exist with "two simultaneous modes of existence" is a matter in need of further exposition and clarification, especially since Dempsey says that "God exists first in himself and then "reiterates" his prior Triune being. On its face, language like *first* and *then* is temporal. Most interpreters would expect to read his comments charitably as a kind of logical succession ("first" and "then" in that sense). This standard distinction rescues the picture through appeal to divine knowledge (i.e., Logical subsequence rather than temporal subsequence, divine thoughts rather than space and time).

doubt the lack is at least partly explained by the need to bracket aspects off the very items of energetic controversy. For example, George Mavrodes in his essay "How Does God Know the Things He Knows?" does not answer the question in a way that "depends on any rather special view as to whether God knows future contingent propositions, for example, the counterfactuals of freedom."[6] The prodigious productivity of the concepts of counterfactuals of freedom and the semantics of future conditionals has advanced genuine metaphysical knowledge (through eminent and elegant model-making), while motivating writers like Mavrodes to "set to the side for now" the aspects of *how* the Omniscient One knows the new metaphysical neighbors.

The claim that Mavrodes explores (and he is careful to note that it is an *exploration* rather than a *defense* or intellectual *commitment*) is the proposal that "God knows everything that he knows *by inference.*"[7] More particularly, Mavrodes explores what it would look like to defend the following claim: "For every proposition that God knows, He knows that proposition by inferring it from one or more other propositions that he knows."[8] Mavrodes admits that the proposal, so unpopular, has hardly been considered. Mavrodes sets the postulate against the backdrop of Aquinas's rejoinder to the question of "whether the knowledge of God is discursive." Aquinas clearly denies any such possibility and does so mirroring Aristotle's arguments to this effect. Mavrodes points out that Aristotle's

> general strategy consists of speculating about what sort of knowledge would be *appropriate* for God, given that God must be supreme in value and excellence. And while Thomas apparently rejected Aristotle's conclusion about the knowledge of the humblest and vilest things in the world, he does not reject the general strategy of

[6] George Mavrodes, "How Does God Know the Things He Knows?," in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas Morris (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 346–47.

[7] Mavrodes, "How Does God Know?," 345, emphasis original.

[8] Mavrodes, "How Does God Know?," 346.

> Aristotle's argument. On the contrary, Thomas along with other medievals, himself appeals to this pattern of argument.[9]

Of course, in several key areas—especially the assertion of divine knowledge regarding "humble and vile things in the world," Aquinas follows the Christian tradition and confession in rejecting the Aristotelian view that the purity of the divine thought would allow God to think only about thinking.

Mavrodes deepens his potential case by exploring peculiar points relevant to inference when the field of knowledge is infinite. That "circular patterns of inference are *epistemically* illegitimate" is a commonplace with respect to finite knowers. Even the most grandiose finite chain of inference "must terminate somewhere in items that are not derived from still further pieces of knowledge."[10] Having admitted the illegitimacy of circular inferential knowledge, Mavrodes asserts, "I think that these conclusions [about finite knowers] are true. *But this line of argument does not apply to an infinite knower.*"[11]

Mavrodes makes a point here that relates to Héctor-Neri Castañeda's well-known indexical theory of knowledge.[12] An utterly impressive piece of speculation, Castañeda's proposal is an abductive marvel. At the center of his concern lies the following quotation:

> The idea that there is an underlying world order that abides but that we cannot specify at a given moment is the permeant assumption that not only unifies each personal life but also unifies all of us as members of one epistemic community. The assumption of a deep-seated world order that sustains our actions, but an order we cannot specify beyond some particularly relevant regularities, is need to plan action and count with our being able to carry out our plans.[13]

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[9] Mavrodes, "How Does God Know?," 348–49. I.e. Mavrodes refers to the "what sort of knowledge is *appropriate*" pattern of argument.

[10] Mavrodes, "How Does God Know?," 349. The informal fallacy of circular reasoning.

[11] Mavrodes, "How Does God Know?," 350.

[12] Héctor-Neri Castañeda, "The Theory of Questions, Epistemic Powers, and the Indexical Theory of Knowledge," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1980): 193–238.

[13] Castañeda, "The Indexical Theory," 223.

Castañeda lands indexicality within the very categories of justification and truth: to be knowledge, cognitive states are related indexically to some world-order. In other words, our every claim to knowledge implies a claim to be able to refer to the "world-order."[14] Keith Lehrer registers concerns about some of Castañeda's proposal: coherence in all indexicals seems too high a bar for knowledge. Instead, 'coherence and indexicality' should be situated as degrees of justification but not as justification *per se*.[15] Lehrer is exactly right, yet a feature of Castañeda's theory, a special kind of knowledge due to coherence in all indexicals, can be preserved in God. After all, in God's knowledge, coherence in all indexicals is exactly the case.

Responding to three primary objections, Mavrodes addresses the first two in order to defend the possibility of a "beginningless and noncircular series" which is entailment-complete, in other words, with no "halting problem" in its inference. The third objection he addresses is of special significance: "*Objection 3*. The supposition that God knows by inference imports an intolerable *temporality* into the divine nature. Therefore God has no inferential knowledge."[16] Mavrodes interacts with the sum and substance of Aquinas's own concerns along these lines, who considers succession and causality to be the two "mode[s] of discursion." Curiously, Thomas frames his *respondeo* precisely in human terms; he says such discursiveness cannot be "according to succession only, as when we have actually understood anything, we turn ourselves to understand something else; while the other mode of discursion is according to causality, as when through principles we arrive at the knowledge of conclusions" (*ST* A.7.). The remainder of Thomas's argument refers to his theology proper whereby God "sees all things in one

[14] Castañeda's proposal is interesting and fruitful, though not without its problems. In particular, his proposal throws into question whether many (most?) people ever arrive at knowledge of many (most?) things.

[15] Keith Lehrer, "Coherence and Indexicality in Knowledge," in *Agent, Language, and the Structure of the World: Essays Presented to Hector-Neri Castañeda, with His Replies*, ed. Hector-Neri Castañeda and James E. Tomberlin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 253–70.

[16] Mavrodes, "How Does God Know?," 353.

thing alone, which is himself" (*ST* A.7.). God does not see any discreet thing separately and directly. "Hence as God sees his effects in himself as in their cause, his knowledge is not discursive (*ST* A.7.)."

Simultaneity for Divine Eternity, Simultaneity for Divine Inference

Little space can be given to the issues related to God and time. However, Mavrodes is keen to point out that views both of divine eternity and divine timelessness can accommodate the proposal under consideration. The exponent of pure divine eternality, who denies any temporal index in divine knowledge propositions, also, Mavrodes argues, cannot make a claim with respect to simultaneity: "Simultaneity is just as much a temporal relation as is priority or posteriority. If it is really the case that temporal relations cannot apply to God, then simultaneity cannot be the truth about the divine experience."[17] Having chased out any temporal relations or indices, eternal-God theorists should be more careful to avoid it with terms like *simultaneity*.

Mavrodes's brief interaction with the view (towards which he still takes a relatively optimistic posture) opens an important line of inquiry—perhaps the same line of inquiry that the eternalist would take in reply—namely, that simultaneity itself should not be taken in this case as a literal temporal index but as a metaphorical rendering of a literal reality. The reality more literally explained, is that of propositions, *arrayed in their various dependence relations without respect of time*. Speaking within such a frame, one might easily refer to one proposition's being "before" or "after" another, which in this case obviously does not refer to time but refers to the dependence relation among the propositions. Since the eternal God knows the propositions "inferentially" in this form—*arrayed in their various dependence relations without respect of time*—then God's knowledge has no index of time in relation to the entire array of propositions. Such would

[17] Mavrodes, "How Does God Know?," 354.

likely be the reply of the eternalist to Mavrodes and, paradoxically, the reply links up with and advances one of his most fundamental insights.

Having referred to Thomas's second reason for "rejecting the discursiveness of the divine knowledge" (i.e. "because to advance thus is to proceed from the known to the unknown"), Mavrodes formulates the substance of Thomas's claim: "for any propositions, *p* and *q*, and any knower, K, if K knows *q* by inference from *p*, then there is a time at which K knows *p* and does not know *q*." Mavrodes is "inclined to think that" the proposition fails. Mavrodes argues that the proposition's "appeal probably depends upon a confusion between the *process* of inferring, as it occurs in ordinary human contexts, and the *result* of the inference."[18] *Inference* is no mere way of referring to a process by which knowledge is gained but also a term denoting logical relationships among propositions (even truth-making relationships). Mavrodes is right both to separate the two items in the terminology and to recognize that all conversation partners should have done so from the beginning: after all, if *inference* be defined as "that action by which a mental substance engages in the process of gaining justified knowledge," then *inference* is, by the force of its definition, related to finite mentality (and finite mentality, to be sure, is in many ways and at many times engaged in just this kind of inference).[19] Consequently, whatever is discussed under the heading of "divine inferential knowledge" is definitionally exempted from the human sense above. "Divine inferential knowledge" remains only relevant for the sense of the term that pertains to the results of inference, in other words, the *dependence relationships that pertain among propositions*. This kind of

[18] Mavrodes, "How Does God Know?," 356.

[19] Elia Zardini pushes back against the view that complete and true belief concerning indexicals in a given situation or state of affairs is necessary for knowledge (in which case only God would have any!). In particular, she asserts procedural logic, indexical belief, and action form a nexus of personal knowledge that does not necessarily relate to metaphysical reality—an argument key for humans but inapplicable to God. Elia Zardini, "Knowledge-How, True Indexical Belief, and Action," *Philosophical Studies* 164, no. 2 (2013): 341–55.

knowledge can fit into Christian doctrine; more maximal divine knowing only more clearly upholds a vision of the maximal God.[20]

Immediate Knowledge

Indeed, the cash value of Mavrodes "exploration" is the fact that it unifies divine knowledge in one mode (inference) and then sketches the distinctions of inference proper to an infinite knower. Theologically, one might properly say that the nature of inference is determined in God with appropriate caveats for how it might be described *as a process* in the final creature. Maximal divine inference (knowledge *of* and knowledge *through* all dependence relationships) unifies the mode of God's knowledge, is proper to aseity, and seems a safe and natural appendage of any commitment to a theological model of modal metaphysics. In other words, if the possible worlds of metaphysics are themselves the product of divine intellection, then God inferentially (and immediately) knows all dependence relationships. In fact, God's act of knowing *just is* the truthmaker for propositions about such dependence relationships.

Emphatically, all knowledge in God is not inferential. Mavrodes has likely overstepped here—due in fact to the necessity of modal distinctions. For example, that God knows necessary truths (such as those related to his own essence) by inference seems dubious.[21] Knowledge-by-inference comports with all contingencies, while knowledge-by-intuition remains the proper justification structure for God's knowledge about himself and other necessary objects (even if those necessaries are divine ideas).

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[20] Mavrodes is careful to show that whether God "engages in [the process of inference] everlastingly" or whether "God performs an eternal act (an eternal inference) whose temporal 'shadow' appears as an everlasting process of inference" does not negatively impact his original exploration. In fact, both theories A and B of God and time, as well of multiple models of God's act and essence, can uphold it. Mavrodes concludes the article with an appreciation of a postulate that "makes the divine knowledge all of one piece, *a single mode* operating everywhere" (which favors classical Trinitarianism). "Would that itself be a mark of the divine perfection, that in God (unlike what is in finite creatures) there is only a single, perfectly unified and all-encompassing mode of knowledge?" Mavrodes, "How Does God Know?," 361.

[21] Necessary knowledge of God's essence did not come in for analysis in Mavrodes's essay.

Divine Deliberation: A Formal Definition of a Kind of Knowledge

We have arrived, therefore, at the formal need for the term *divine deliberation*. A formula may usefully show why such a term is needed:

> Knowledge of multiple forms (intuitional + inferential + volitional) + plus multiple modal operators ("could," "would," conditionals) = divine deliberation

Multiple kinds of knowledge that are at multiple "levels" of possibility must be denoted with a unique term. This knowledge, I argue, is deliberative. What is objectionable in the semantic meaning of *deliberation* and *deliberative* is exclusively related to human forms of deliberation that magnify our creaturely finitude and failings. Therefore, the modifier *divine* safely removes such content and is the most useful way to capture how the divine mind knows (1) both intuitionally and inferentially and (2) at multiple modal levels (actual, possible, what *might* and *would* conterfactuals are compossible with a particular actuality, etc.).

Truthmaker Theory: Applying Deliberative Divine Knowledge to Molinism

In his recent publication *Contemporary Theology: An Introduction, Classical, Evangelical, Philosophical and Global Perspectives*, Kirk MacGregor includes a section in his chapter "Philosophy of Religion and Analytic Theology" relating the Molinist response to open theism. The volume is organized thematically and MacGregor details how (1) the open theist critique and (2) its rejoinders have shaped contemporary theology, broadly conceived. Furthermore, among those critiques, those incorporating middle knowledge are uniquely not a repristination or reassertion of a merely traditional Christian position. MacGregor opens the statement with a curious claim: "While some analytic theologians are open theists, the majority are Molinists . . . who attempted to reveal the shortcomings of open theism."[22] So far as it goes, the statement is correct with respect to the numbers of analytic theologians committed to open theism and Molinism,

[22] Kirk MacGregor, *Contemporary Theology: An Introduction, Classical, Evangelical, Philosophical and Global Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 315.

but colossal numbers of analytic theologians adhere neither to the Molinist nor the openness view. Molinists, MacGregor points out, believe that the anthropomorphic texts of scripture point to the "literal truth" that "God's sovereignty does not consist of arbitrary decrees functioning irrespective of free human choices"[23] (MacGregor does not cite the poor soul who framed God's sovereignty as *arbitrary* this way). "Rather, the divine decrees take into account and are conditioned by what God middle-knows the free acts of creatures would be in all worlds possible for God to create given libertarian freedom. Middle knowledge is God's prevolitional knowledge of all counterfactual truths, including counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (CCFs)."[24]

Molinists do not affirm, as open theists do, "that the nonexistence of the future renders it logically unknowable. The only property that a proposition P must meet to be logically knowable is truth, and future tense as well as counterfactual propositions possess truth values."[25] Again, MacGregor's assertions are an assertion-*that* rather than an assertion-*how*. That truth is a property possessed (atemporally?) by both present and future tense statements is asserted, without a model of *how*. Metaphysically, possible worlds modality can support MacGregor's assertion about the possession of such truth values but may do so in a way that alters some traditional patterns of Molinist argumentation. However, any such model that might be employed in MacGregor's case would need to include the notion that "counterfactual propositions possess truth values"; this claim that MacGregor makes with respect to all counterfactuals (not, in fact, only those of creaturely freedom) is again an assertion-*that* and would benefit from a broader model for such modal claims.

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[23] MacGregor, *Contemporary Theology*, 315.

[24] MacGregor, *Contemporary Theology*, 315.

[25] MacGregor, *Contemporary Theology*, 315.

Divine Deliberation Constitutes Counterfactuals

An example of the need for precise language is as follows: the way in which a counterfactual can be true or false cannot help but be contested since *counterfactual* is itself defined with a particular relation to actuality and truth, namely, *contrary-to-factness*—a proposition alternate and opposite of that proposition which is true. For the semantics to work, therefore, *true* is operating at multiple metaphysical levels (i.e. the "true" proposition related to which the counterfactual *just is* counterfactual and a second level wherein a counterfactual is either a "true" counterfactual or a "false" counterfactual). Without more precise language whose semantics are disciplined according to a model, such apologetic applications of modal metaphysics could devolve into mere convenience that might misapply metaphysical language.[26]

Disciplining the Molinist language in this regard creates key problems. In possible-worlds thinking, such worlds are comprised of complete sets of propositions which are "stated positively" for that world: the "total true set of propositions." However, whether a world possesses internally propositional statements that are modally synthetic (that combines within itself propositions of another world) is another matter altogether. All worlds left unactualized are, by definition contrary-to-fact, and their (contrary) propositions are counterfactual propositions. If W3 is the actual world and the proposition 'Charlie eats cake at t1' is true (in actualized W3), then W7 and its proposition 'Charlie eats ice cream at t1' is counterfactual. However, neither Lewis, nor other metaphysicians of possible worlds has the worlds to include propositions of the form "Since W3 is the actual world, W7's proposition 'Charlie eats ice cream at t1' is true under the auspices of its own modality but counterfactual under the condition of W3's actuality." The "book" of the actual world's propositions does not contain non-actual (and thus counterfactual) propositions of other worlds. The mind of God, however, perfectly models how such

[26] On Lewis's possible-worlds semantics, a counterfactual is a proposition that fails to obtain in the actual world; while a "true counterfactual" is one that fails to obtain in the actual world but is in the propositions of an adjacent or "neighboring" world. David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 20–27.

propositions can be related between worlds, constituting, at a new level of modal reality, the truthmakers for counterfactuals.[27] Counterfactuals are modally synthetic, and the "total true set of propositions" that make up a world can contain only its own modality. The mind of God, by immediate inference, does know all synthetic propositions that relate worlds to one another.

So, when humans speak modally, we refer not to conditions in the world's themselves but to *the relationships known between worlds by God himself*. On standard modal semantics, to assert a proposition P *"if H were in W, he would do X at t3"* is to point to the fact that, in W, H *does* do X at t3. Thus P is true, yet its truth value *as a counterfactual* depends on a conjunction of the proposition that 'H does X at t3 in W' and the proposition that 'W is not the actual world'. W is not the real world but, together with its propositions, is counterfactual; by transworld identity, what is true of the individual essence in another world can relevantly be stated in the actual world by means of subjunctive conditionals; thus, the proposition in the actual world (ontologically) is counterfactual. The divine mind is the basis for (1) the conjunction of propositions from different worlds, (2) the subordination of all of them to the auspices of the actual world, and (3) the subjunctive conditionals by which counterfactuals can be true.

In the World, None "Do Otherwise"

My claims here, such as they are, do put many theologians in the position aptly described by Gilbert Ryle:

> There often arise quarrels between theories, or, more generally, between lines of thought, which are not rival solutions of the same problem, but rather solutions or would-be solutions of different problems, and which, none the less, seem to be irreconcilable with one another. A thinker who adopts one of them seems to be

[27] Kenneth Pearce argues first that the will "of an omnipotent being would be perfectly efficacious" and basis this perfect efficacy capacity to differentiate between true and counter possible conditionals. Pearce answers objections by arguing that "the divine will is . . . the ground, rather than the cause, of its fulfillment." Kenneth Pearce, "Counterpossible Dependence and the Efficacy of the Divine Will," *Faith and Philosophy* 34, no. 1 (2017): 3.

> logically committed to rejecting the other, despite the fact that the inquiries from which the theories issued had, from the beginning, widely divergent goals.[28]

Whole swaths of the Molinist and Calvinist programs are actually coherent when traced out according to the standard account of possible worlds. Of course, interlocutors could object—but they still should develop a pattern of speech that accounts for the metaphysics of their modal claims, whether via possible worlds or some other road. Molinism and Calvinism are an especially interesting comparison because they are amenable to both possible worlds thinking and divine creation of a particular world that he knows meticulously. My central contention is that the discussion veers off course and the views appear at loggerheads when the search for modality is pushed within this world, when the "could be otherwise" semantics of freedom are included *within this world* (rather than across worlds), when counterfactuals are treated as a simple, rather than synthetic, truth proposition. Analysis within worlds is not where the meaning lies, but transworld analyses.

God's will-to-create includes knowledge of what each person will in fact do exhaustively in that world. In critique of Calvinism, William Lane Craig says, "God's complete sovereignty excludes any genuine possibility of man's choosing in any circumstances other than as he does choose."[29] The quotation seems to advance a trivial point because, on Molinism, (as well as Arminianism, for that matter) other factors "exclude any genuine possibility of man's choosing in any circumstances other than he does choose." In fact, none of the three positions that Craig details in the article actually propound a model where, in circumstances of choosing, one *will* choose other than as he does. If one wants a "world" in which an agent can do other than the total true set of propositions, then he or she is asking for a contradiction. In possible-worlds modality, the

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[28] Gilbert Ryle, *Dilemmas: The Tarner Lectures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 1.

[29] William Lane Craig, "Middle-Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapproachment?," in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 144

actual world will not be otherwise. Open theists contend with Molinists (who all employ possible-worlds modality), Calvinists (some of whom employ possible-worlds modality), and Arminians precisely because God's creation *will not be* other than God foreknows, regardless of the theological model. In a world, none "do otherwise." The truthmakers of counterfactuals require Transworld analysis, and divine deliberation shows how the divine mind can ground such truth.[30]

Theodicy

God's will-to-create includes knowledge of all worlds and a judgment on the sum of each. Philip Quinn points out that one must judge possible worlds in order to test what might be "better" and if there might be a "best." The divine will-to-create is moved to create a world, and theories in theodicy must consider the sum of moral value in the world, rather than the good or evil of one event. Possible worlds analysis reframes theodicy because it naturally requires the thinker to consider the total evil in the world and the total outcome of the world and, last, the fact that to actualize the world is to exercise judgment (and not human judgment!). At this intersection modality and creation are tightly bound together: what moves the divine will to judge the world best in the sense of its being "worthy to create"?[31] Answers to the inductive problem of evil have benefited enormously from possible-worlds analysis; not only in tightly-argued papers but increasingly in thinkers' instincts, the question of theodicy is whether, in sum, God ought to create the world and the question of permitting this or that evil is seen only under the auspices of that world, only as part of the total measure of its goods and evils.

[30] Divine deliberation provides such grounding for the Calvinist and Molinist models. I do not see at all how neo-Molinism's *might*-counterfactual can create a set of propositions that is compossible as "books of possible worlds" or that, frankly, contain anything beyond trivialities. If the future is open not just in the ontological but also the modal sense, then future conditionals do not have a truth value and no mechanism grounds statements as true or false and grounds their alternates as counterfactuals. Thus, I argue, neo-Molinism fails. Elijah Hess, "Arguing from Molinism to Neo-Molinism," *Philosophia Christi* 17, no. 2 (2015): 331–51.

[31] Philip Quinn, "God, Moral Perfection and Possible Worlds," in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Michael Peterson (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1992), 301.

Conclusion

This chapter completed the model of divine deliberation; it reconsidered God's knowledge by reevaluating Karl Barth's concept of God's electing himself, by considering whether God has inferential knowledge and volitional knowledge, alongside his immediate knowledge. Since God is in every possible world, to will a world's actualization and creation *just is* also to will certain propositions about God's own life within that world—which we may properly call his mode-of-being in the world. I argued that Barth's problem is his collapsing unnecessarily all the metaphysics of God into what is a right and proper modal insight. I contended that Barth's rescue is found in simply reiterating the plain insight that the transcendent God (in actualizing the world) elects himself in the sense described above. God's decision to create solves what Karl Barth described simply as the "rift in the divine being" and clarifies what one may mean, together with Barth, if he or she confesses that God in some sense "constitutes himself in the world by electing Christ." Counterfactuals are modally synthetic, and the "total true set of propositions" that make up a world can contain only its own modality.

I traced the argument of George Mavrodes to the effect that God has inferential knowledge, though I do not find his claim that all God's knowledge is inferential to be persuasive (or even in some way needed or fitting for a better understanding of God and the world). In particular, Hector Neri-Castañeda's proposal that the true structure of justification requires coherence in all indexicals provided a valuable insight into the kind of knowledge God has (though Castañeda intended his thesis as a problematic for human knowledge). These moves paved the way for an important claim for divine deliberation: "knowledge" (which includes the concept of belief-justification) *just is* a dependence relationship—simultaneous dependence relationships—known among the propositions in God's mind. Further, the propositions in God's mind can be mapped with volitional conditions: "Since God's will is to glorify the Son through incarnation and atonement, only worlds with these glories are candidates for his will."

I argued that divine deliberation ought to be the definition supplied to account for knowledge that is of multiple kinds (inferential, immediate, volitional) and knowledge that thereby creates and operates at multiple modal levels (*could*, *would*, *should*). Where divine knowledge of propositions synthesizes knowledge that is both immediate and inferential (and, further, that involves the divine will) such propositions are known *deliberatively* and this kind of knowledge is called *divine deliberation*.

I sought to reinforce this argument with another observation that I believe corrects the contemporary discussion: counterfactuals are "modally synthetic," having truth properties that inhere only when related across worlds. Some mind, I argued, must account for the plausibility of the relation across worlds, the divine mind. Divine deliberation, as a model, supplied the very possibility of truth-values for counterfactuals. The mind of God, by inference, constitutes all synthetic propositions that relate worlds to one another. So, when humans speak modally, we refer not to conditions in the world's themselves but to *the relationships known between worlds by God himself*. Divine deliberation can account for the synthetic truth value of counterfactuals and—because of this accounting—freedom, providence, and theodicy may be considered only within the constraints of an actual world and its total true set of propositions, in contexts where counterfactuals are used for analysis.

CHAPTER 12

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation built a case for divine deliberation. Divine deliberation is a model of the divine will-to-create. The model of God's will-to-create requires both divine knowledge of various kinds (i.e. intuitive, logical, inferential, volitional) and of varied modal status (possible, impossible, contingent or necessary—whether metaphysically necessary or practically necessary upon certain supposed conditions). In particular, divine will, by means of the original ultimate end grounds necessity in God's determination and—through the extension of the model of God's knowledge—also accounts for the truth-making properties of counterfactual propositions in alternate worlds.

Summary

The dissertation built the case by setting forth the need philosophically for such an account of possibility, as well as the particular failure (the modal collapse) that endangers traditional God-concepts. The dissertation then explored how scripture speaks of God's purposes and intentions in the act of creation. The historical section set forth where historical theology has debated and developed concepts adjacent to divine deliberation, from the patristic to Reformation eras. In particular, concepts developed among the Reformed served as part of the model of divine deliberation: the doctrine of the decrees and a non-realist interpretation of the covenant of redemption. The historical section showed how divine deliberation is (1) orthodox, (2) comports with the tradition, and (3) to some extent, even fills its gaps and smooths its rough edges.

The philosophical construction of the model first removed obstructions on the road: the tendency of the appeal to eternity or libertarian freedom to shut down a model

of maximal divine knowing. In particular, the dissertation sketched out how modal philosophy reframes the semantics of freedom. If the reader accepts this modality, he or she may likewise accept the compatibility of libertarian freedom and source views of freedom, due to their alternate modal reference.

The model considered the nature of counterfactuals and argued that divine knowledge offers a way back to modal realism after Lewis, and this theological realism for counterfactuals (logically subsequent to the will-to-create) accounts for their truthmakers. Also, divine knowledge can furnish an ontological basis for individual essences' transworld identity. Further, this model of modality allows Christians to understand their tradition far better: many notions in the classical or maximal God-concept, comport with God-in-himself, God as considered above his presence in every possible world. However, within each world, the total true set of propositions may relate to God in the actual world in an uncomplicated fashion. In other words, since time-indexed statements in the actual world (e.g. "At time T1, God makes a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai."), refer to God-in-the-actual-world, they may do so with standard linguistic reference, not merely as an analogy for a human perception. God-in-the-actual-world is ultimately to be identified with God in himself, according to the standard rules of identity. In conclusion, I wish to offer a more complete review of work and develop some implications that offer insight and direction for future theological work.

Review of the Major Components

This dissertation now needs a review of how its components fit together. The early chapters established the need for the study. Chapter 1 demonstrated the use of modal claims that were novel or surprising in Evangelical theology and apologetics. The philosophy of modality, as well as the nature of divine knowledge, needed a more full and responsible treatment even to allow these proposals to be tested and (assuming a passing grade) to cement their usefulness. Chapter 2 grounded the need for moral philosophy generally and showed how a complex modality is a particular need for

Christian theology. Divine deliberation helps to preserve contingency, intentional action, in an orthodox doctrine of God.

Divine deliberation requires the concept of an original ultimate end. Thus, God knows his own nature and all necessary truths; God knows all epistemic conditionals in all possible worlds; God knows his chief ultimate end; God knows modally synthetic propositions (such as the comparative value of relevantly similar worlds that contain his ultimate end to glorify the Son). Therefore, we can be sure that his will-to-create determined to create a world well-suited to his ultimate end and every subsequent end.

Humans, however, cannot claim to know every end of God. What we can know is what God has revealed. Chapter 3 explored extensively candidates for God's original ultimate end in biblical revelation. However, Christian thinkers must be careful not to fill in the blanks too casually with various subsequent ends in the hierarchy. For example, that "God desires all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4) on the one hand and that "no purpose of his can be thwarted" (Job 42:2) on the other hand are biblical truisms. Further, God has intentions to display his own power and for Christ to atone for his people. As the Christian thinker synthesizes these claims, a phrase like "God wills to save the optimal number of people" is a far better theological construct than "God wills to save the greatest number of people." The former more clearly relativizes our human ability to know what that number is (even in percentages and portions) and leaves entirely up to God the notion of what is "optimal." This relativizing is so necessary because, though we can safely infer from scripture and the divine nature *that* God would save an optimal number of people, we do not know his every other subsequent end and where such ends may be in the logical hierarchy of his purposes in Christ—exactly the kind of propositions necessary to begin contemplating the "optimal" number. As I sought to show in chapter 3, we are on firm footing to claim a revealed understanding of many of God's purposes, or something like an original ultimate end in Christ, and the fact that the original ultimate end in Christ is the chief end. However, the picture, unsurprisingly, is

more shadowy and dark when it comes to the relations and hierarchies of subsequent ends that are revealed or inferred.

For this reason, models such as Paul Copan's and William Lane Craig's are useful, provided they stay close to the language of God's "saving the optimal number of people" (rather than "as many as possible"). However, the specific proposal that God ensures that all persons with transworld depravity just happen to be those who in the real world never received an announcement of the gospel may not be persuasive, though it may be quite workable. One would deduce the transworld depravity of such persons precisely because across all worlds where they hear the law and gospel, they reject God's kindness, which is meant to lead them to repentance. Thus, on this view, God is "justified" (to make a harder claim) or standing on the "moral high ground" (to make a softer claim) when he creates a world where such persons never hear the gospel.

That such a modal situation may be the case with the possible worlds must be granted; the suppositional quality of the Copan/Craig proposal is strong. However, two problems pertain. First, the umbrage taken over the fate of the unevangelized is focused on this world; appealing to other worlds is unlikely to assuage the offended. Though the concept may apply to the question, it is unlikely to apply to the questioner. Second, the Bible simply does not phrase moral responsibility in this way when it describes God's judging activity. When the Son of Man comes and "the books are opened," when humans "give an account for every careless world they utter," the books and utterances contain the actual past—and the Judge addresses what is actual, rather than what is possible. Since we humans are not approved or condemned on the basis of the possible, it seems to "vindicate" God on the basis of his offer of the gospel *in another world*. Most significant, the Bible never describes God as owing a gospel proclamation to anyone; human creatures are the ones who owe themselves to the Creator; citizens of the kingdom have the privilege to announce it; however, even to offer this modal argument concerning the fate of the unevangelized may grant the premise that God needs some explanation for

why some people never hear—or that people go to punishment due to their rejection of the gospel. The damned are in hell because they rebel against God, and the proclamation of the gospel is never owed, always gracious. Therefore, Copan and Craig may have the model right with respect to transworld properties of individuals, yet this model is far from scripture's presentation of what vindicates the actions of the Judge.

I offered an argument in chapter 10 that clearly described the nature of individual essences, grounding them in (1) the fact of their appearance across worlds and in (2a) an act of God's knowledge to comprehend not only a set of propositions true for the individual in particular worlds but also (2b) a total modal set of propositions true of him or her—which literally is the "individual essence." I find this concept of individual essences full and fair to the relevant philosophy and compelling. However, I do not see how it comports with any notion that God decides to take "this individual essence here" and "that individual essence there" and place them in "the actual" world. Those semantics simply would not work with traditional conceptions of individual essences, so someone who sought to make the apologetic gains concerning the owner vandalized sketched out in chapter 1 we need to offer a new theory and semantics to go with it.

Chapters 4 and 5 opened the historical section and revealed how the view I develop and defend comports with historic ways of speaking about God. (In fact, I remain reluctant to use some phrases that the apostolic fathers employed, such as, "counsels with himself"!) Especially in a theological context that currently is tightening what counts as an orthodox view of God, I believe the chapters 4 and 5 should create significant elbow room for divine deliberation to develop. Those now called "Classical Christian Theists" simply must recognize both that I employ systematically no patterns of speech that are not found in the tradition and that the tradition itself contains a great deal more diversity than is often assumed. In other words, the apostolic fathers were more diverse group than Classical Christian Theists are becoming.

I am critical of Thomism in chapter 2. I think Thomas's God suffers the modal collapse (more precisely, I should say "Thomas's world suffers the modal collapse"). I find Thomas in the medieval research to be the one in whom the matter of divine power was finally settled. Irenaeus himself realized the importance to "set Mind above infinity." To find a tradition in motion is unsurprising; it is even less surprising, therefore, to find individual minds in motion. Thomas, I would argue, rightly sees the cash value that the *purus actus* concept of God supplies as a repellent for certain heretical ideas about God. His God-concept powerfully keeps away these barnacles. However, he also recognizes in "On the Power of God" the great need for a modal distinction. Under the auspices of God's will to create the world, it is impossible for God to "uncreate" something within it (i.e. to make false one of its propositions that—upon the world's actualization—was true). I think one can read Thomas charitably and understand why he seeks to avoid modal distinctions in some areas and employ them in others. May we appreciate him best by continuing his project of contemplating the blessed Trinity. For my part, I have sought to do so by leaning into the modal distinctions Thomas uses with respect to God's power and by finding a way to gain what he protects in the doctrine of God proper with a consistent theory of modality.

Chapters 6 and 7 arrived in the Reformed tradition, so I more directly resource divine deliberation with theological concepts. For example, the original ultimate end favors supralapsarianism, since it places the decree for Christ as the grounding for later decrees, including that of the fall. Thus, when God chooses to create, he is in what Thomas Flint would call a "neighborhood of relevantly similar worlds." The worlds that are candidates for God's creation are those that glorify the Son through incarnation and atonement, the end given in scripture. Every world in this neighborhood includes the lapse. It is no slight to God's character, nature or power to comprehend that incarnation and atonement is logically impossible without evil. Seen in this light, Bruce Little's theodicy is a worthy addition to evangelical apologetics, though many of his individual

appeals simply do not match with standard model semantics (e.g. "God proves hypotheticals"). Further, his theodicy too often justifies divine permission via individual greater goods. I would favor what might be called the greater-world defense, rather than a view that justifies discrete wrongs by various right outcomes. To be sure, set forth in God's mind every wrong is justified in some sense, "summed up in Christ." However, the moral justification may come (1) through cumulative good effects (2) over a temporal and causal distance that prevent finite minds from following its trail. Instead, we can appeal to the great-making properties of the actual world and their overcoming the evil that is logically entailed by incarnation and atonement.

I argued that the *pactum salutis* is a useful concept. However, if any reader disagrees with that assessment, he or she can at least admit that the concept is broadly orthodox. Nevertheless, I am skeptical about whether the concept can be maintained as a *biblical* construct, an exegetical *datum*. Instead, the *pactum* is useful instrumentally, and what it describes in reality is the nature of the divine mind or an instance of what a deliberative model of divine knowledge looks like in a "snapshot," in one area of the divine decree.

Bruce Ware's concept of middle knowledge as a subset of natural knowledge comports with Jonathan Kvanvig's notion that God knows all epistemic conditionals. To be clear, God's knowledge of epistemic conditionals includes those that are within worlds and those that are across worlds, so the overlap with Ware's concept applies in the actual world. Thus, Kvanvig's epistemic conditionals include propositions like "If God creates the world in which Beatrice dies in infancy, the children she bears in a relevantly similar world will not exist." However, with regard to only one world, Kvanvig and Ware's views overlap: "In conditions *C* at time *T*, Beatrice performs action *A*." God's natural knowledge of what creatures do in every possible world establishes his modal knowledge across worlds. Thus, I think the dissertation provides a way for Calvinists to fill out a model for how all that a confession like Westminster affirms is true.

Chapters 8, 9, and 10 contained the philosophical building blocks for divine deliberation. In chapter 8, I drew out the modal concepts already in theological circulation and sought to remove obstacles for developing a theory of possibility. The most significant obstacle is freedom, and I claimed that libertarian and source views of freedom are actually not in a relationship where both cannot be true (logical contrariety). Instead, they are in a relationship where they can both be true in different modal senses. What a person does in the world, he or she does freely.

To say that a creature acts upon conditions internal to him or her in an environment conducive to agency, is to say that he or she acted freely in the real world. Meanwhile, to say the person "could have done otherwise" is tantamount to saying that he or she did otherwise in relevantly similar worlds. Source and libertarian views of freedom make claims with completely different modal references and therefore cannot be contradictory. This view of freedom not only presents a way through an intractable philosophical problem but also shows how God can know all epistemic conditionals and know meticulously the possible world that he chooses to create. Theological determinism is, therefore, very different from fatalism, and this model fully teases out how God can create a world that he knows meticulously, and how creatures are free within it—in every relevant sense in which we actually use the term *freedom*.

Consequently, the divine mind can know all true statements, including those regarding creaturely freedom. God, therefore, can know everything related to ends and goals logically subsequent to and integrated with the original ultimate end. Aside from sketching out my view of individual essences, which I reviewed above, chapters 9 and 10 highlighted other key metaphysical questions. Just as I argued that individual essences have an ontology based in the divine act of knowing, so also does this model allow for negative propositions and counterfactuals to possess their negative truth-values. In fact, I am contending that counterfactuals simply are not counterfactual without the will-to-create. Thus, prior to the will and actual creation, what may in some conversations be

called "counterfactual" should actually be described as "epistemic conditionals" (i.e. God could say, as it were, "*If world 2 is actual, then the propositions of relevantly similar world 4 are counterfactual and affect the propositions of world two in the following ways* . . . ."). Again, without the actualization of the world, the books of possible worlds just do contain all of their propositions, but no truth values. Truth and falsehood obtains upon the event of God's creation.

Further, since God's deliberative knowledge involves necessary knowledge (knowledge of his nature and necessities), inferential knowledge, modal knowledge (the relation of propositions as I have described above), as well as knowledge of his own will (for the ultimate end, for other subsequent ends), God's decision to create must integrate and unite them all. In particular, God's will-to-create a world whose total true set of propositions concerning himself matches divine *taxis* and the original ultimate end makes understanding divine will important even in constructing the model of divine knowledge. God has an original ultimate end (the glorification of the Son) and means towards that end (divine *taxis*) that fits with his eternal nature. Why God's will would be, say, for the Messiah to be from Abraham is impossible to say—not because of a deficiency in the model—but because this item of God's will is not related directly to a revealed statement or to his nature. What minimally could be said is that taking what was weak in the world and a little account among the nations reveals his gratuitous love. In fact, whenever scripture begins to describe the logical foundations of why God acted for his people's salvation, it speaks only of his *love* and *good pleasure*. Love and goodwill do not avail the human mind of logical inferences; they are for worship.

I re-situated the "modal bottleneck" of Karl Barth, arguing that because in creating the world God actualizes the total true propositions concerning himself as well. We should be careful to note that, in large measure, we come to know God-in-the-actual-world (AW), and we cannot always predicate what is true of God-in-AW to God *in se*. We do so when the economic activity is especially fit to immanent relations; we do so,

most of all, when God reveals his inner nature so that his creatures may know him. At other times, we must simply refrain. Thus, we can safely dispense with Rahner's Rule, without overreacting: its essential insight always was that whatever world God creates would still fittingly express his inner divine life. Divine deliberation, I pray, as a model of divine knowing has done just that, to reveal more expansively divine mental life.

God knows his nature and all necessary truths, all the possible worlds, his chief ultimate end, all logically subsequent ends, matters that are fitting and beautiful to his nature, matters that are fitting and beautiful to one another. God knows and unites the elect to the Son logically prior to the lapse. Thus, the lapse has a firm grounding, both in the logically prior decree and in the logically prior election. Due to that election, no possible world in the "neighborhood" remains where anyone elected into Christ is afterwards lost.

God knows the moral values of every possible world by comprehending individual essences, as well as the conditionals of each world, and comparing them with his own moral character and his plan to unite persons to Christ. Since the creation actualizes a total true set of propositions, the end is known from the beginning, the future is determined, not open, and human freedom can be referred to by "what is done otherwise" in a relevantly similar world but is better referred to simply as an individual acting for his or her ends in a context designed to produce agency. Thus, God produces a world that is the object of his meticulous knowledge. Therefore, the world's outworking and actuality are part of his providence. However, the picture of providence is not simply the operation or outworking of the world; providence also is God's specific action of every true event describing him in the "book" of the world he chose to make.

Divine Deliberation among Alternate Views

My central project is to develop a uniquely theological rendering of contemporary modal metaphysics. For this reason, the dissertation must be amenable to theology and must win its reader by elegantly arranging various theological questions.

Such a model of modal metaphysics must be able to handle a doctrine so central as the economic Trinity and make sense of various other theological proposals.

The purpose of the following section is briefly to lay out other options among modal models. The following section cannot treat "various other theological models of modality" because they have not been attempted. One should note carefully that by "theological models" I mean those that use theology proper to provide the ontological grounding for the theory of possibility. Certainly, writers who are theological in outlook still have modeled possibility in a way that comports with Christian theology but not where modality is hammered out in the doctrine of God. Aquinas, for example, is robustly theological in his outlook yet analyzes what modality accomplishes in the philosophical system as *potentia* in things, not subsumed in the *loci* of theology proper. If in the total metaphysic, possibility is modeled in another way, well and good; in that case I would not, however, refer to a "theological model of modality." For this reason, the models explored here are more strictly philosophical in nature, so I will seek to situate my thesis among other proposals that the reader may prefer.

Modal Realism

Modal realism is the thesis that "possibility" (whether possibilities themselves, propositions related to possibility, or relations between the actual and the possible) is real in some sense. What virtually the entire contemporary project in model metaphysics shares in common is its common touchpoint in the work of David Lewis.[1] David Lewis's work provided the standard framework of what a possible world is, how it works in analysis, and how possibility may affect our evaluation—moral and otherwise—of actuality. Lewis offers a compelling case for a counterintuitive notion: without realism, possible-worlds analysis fails in its explanatory power. In other words, what possible-worlds analysis accomplished, according to Lewis, required presupposing the reality of

[1] David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

the possible worlds. Hence, Lewis did posit that all possible worlds were, in fact, actual worlds.

This maneuver creates three problems for Lewisian modal semantics. First, full realism with respect to worlds requires a "non-realist" or merely semantic use of the very terms *possible* and *actual*. In other words, Lewis did have to reframe *actual* to mean, in essence, "from the vantage point of the world in which we are self-conscious." This definitional shift seems to strain part of what possible-worlds analysis gained in terms of its clarity and requires a highly counterintuitive interpretation of what is otherwise a remarkably intuitive use of possible-worlds analysis.

Second, the bar of belief is even more counterintuitive when it comes to the actual existence of all possible worlds. To be sure, what most metaphysicians believe they are after in possible-worlds analysis is precisely an ontological distinction between the actual world and the possible. To provide the force of the conclusions drawn from the possible worlds, Lewis posits them as actual. Yet, this maneuver to posit the worlds as actual removes their ontological distinctiveness. Instead, possible worlds are distinct only epistemically, that is, as a function of the mind's self-consciousness from within the world of its self-consciousness.

Third, I have my own complaint with Lewis's schema. Much of what is gained in possible-worlds analysis requires modally synthetic propositions. As I have argued above, such propositions require relating propositions between worlds, and eternally existing concrete real worlds have no evident mechanism by which they support synthetic propositions (claims with respect or truth or falsehood that have to do with the relations between worlds). Alvin Plantinga, in his seminal article "Actualism and Possible Worlds," sought to rescue Lewis's project by giving the possible worlds an actualist ontology.

What I have done is to provide Plantinga's actualist ontology for the worlds, doing so within the activity of God's mind. Thus, I consider my view a species of modal

realism, a species that—similar to the way divine conceptualism modifies Platonism with respect to abstract objects—retains the general shape of its progenitor, while making it more functional, durable and amenable to orthodox theology (by making all modality depend on the mind of God). Comporting with Christian theology is a strong point of the view, in my judgment. No Christian philosopher could rightly ignore divine revelation. Yet, even without theological grounds, I believe that actualism is the best rendering of Lewis's possible worlds precisely because it provides truth-makers for modally synthetic propositions.

Many other views described below have a similar insight with respect to actualism (that it more easily accounts for such truth-makers). But, without the divine mind or platonic self-existence providing some realism for the possible worlds, these models reduce or re-situate the application of possible worlds since it is only the human mind that is making these connections and relations between possible worlds. If it is the human mind alone that synthesizes propositions between worlds, the result can have less ontological significance. Thus, my view is that what modal philosophy has been missing is Christian theology and vice versa. Both are strengthened, I contend, through my proposal.

Modal Primitivism

The second kind of modal theory can be treated very briefly, even due to the nature of the claim. Modal primitivism claims that modal statements are of a kind all their own. They cannot be reduced to another kind of philosophical statement, nor can these modal statements be described in a different pattern of speech. Modal primitivism does allow for a very active scholarly enterprise because the connections between modal analysis and every other area of endeavor are allowed to flourish. After all, the position of modal primitivism essentially *is* the affirmation of the applicability of the primitive model operators from model logic to the real world—while disallowing other

descriptions of those operators in non-modal terms.[2] Thus, the modal primitivist is committed to one clear affirmation (*that* the model operators apply to the universe and are truth-aimed) and to two clear denials (denying the realists and the reductionists).

I have decided to treat modal ersatzism under this heading as well; its location will always feel somewhat arbitrary and uneven. Modal ersatzism posits the possible worlds as abstract objections (which, as such, have no causal relations with the actual world) or posits the possible worlds as non-real, with some surrogate or ersatz presentation of them as their actual instantiation (which, thus, can have causal relations with the world). Technically, one could hold that possible worlds themselves are abstract objects and the ersatz ("surrogate") possible worlds are those which may have some causal relations with actuality. What situates the view best is its disctinction between *de dicto* and *de re* modality, with a preference for the latter.[3] The early analysis of Plantinga and others revealed the inadequacy of conventionalism, while avoiding Lewis's full realism. Their powerful rhetorical appeal lies in the demonstration that we cannot help but commit to some kind of realism in our metaphysical talk. More recent writers have sought to work out what might be real to provide an ersatz basis for possible worlds.[4]

Modal Reductionism

The catchall phrase of "modal reductionism" is my own, yet I think it fittingly captures and clearly sets forth the following three positions: model conventionalism, model noncognitivism, and model dispositionalism (or model essentialism). Each position belives that modal discourse can be rendered in non-modal terms, that modality

[2] The best work asserting the impossibility of reducing modal language is Graeme Forbes, *The Metaphysics of Modality* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

[3] Alvin Plantinga's argument is the standard for how this view distinguishes modality simply "concerning the manner of speaking" (*de dicto*) and "concerning the thing itself" (*de re*). The standard for commending some realism (even if ersatz realism) due to the inadequacy of *de dicto* modality to account for our modal ideas is Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1994).

[4] Theodore Sider, "*The Ersatz Pluriverse*," *Journal of Philosophy* 99 no. 6 (2002): 279–315.

can usefully be reduced to linguistic convention, normative discourse, or dispositions/essence. The last, model essentialism, is in one sense not a moral theory at all. I consider it here (and in final position) because it functions similar to possible worlds in other philosophical systems. Second, it deserves a more lengthy treatment. Last, it is where many philosophers and theologians will find themselves if they resist my proposal.

Modal Conventionalism

Modal conventionalism is the thesis that modal truth depends on conventions of talk or thought.[5] This view is not, in fact, entirely contradictory to model realism. On the contrary, most model realists would follow model conventionalists in the pattern of argumentation, yet while maintaining that conventions of talk and thought are an instrumental condition of the truth value of an analysis, not the actual basis on which it depends. Modal realism argues that the truth value depends on the possible world itself (with a relatively standard-looking correspondence view of truth). In other words, conventions of talk and thought are a necessary but not sufficient condition for the truth value of model claims for the realist. For the conventionalist, proper conventions are generally necessary and sufficient. How the model conventionalist relates to view to truth will vary in a quite nuanced way depending on the view that he or she uses to relate analytic thought to the real world as a whole—which cannot be treated fully here.

Modal Non-Cognitivism

Modal non-cognitivism is a virtual facsimile of non-cognitivism in ethics. The non-cognitivist in metaethics claims that moral discourse is not descriptive of truth but merely normative for action. The non-cognitivist with respect to modality claims that model discourse is not descriptive of truth but either normative for action or expressive of

[5] Its most famous exponent is A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (London: Dover, 1936). A more thorough contemporary treatment is Alan Sidelle, *Necessity, Essence, and Individuation: A Defense of Conventionalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

emotion (or both). The view therefore is reductive with respect and truth but not necessarily reductive in every other sense.[6]

Modal Dispositionalism

Modal dispositionalism creates a realist account of possibility but not through a general theory of modality, but instead through potency concepts in actuality.[7] Therefore, the view is different in kind from the metaphysics of modality explored above and conceives possibility along lines more familiar in classical philosophy: "*p* is possible just in case some thing has potentiality for *p.*" This evaluation is based on the fact that modal dispositionalism conceives *potentia* as properties of individual objects, whether the propensity of an infant to learn language or of crystal to shatter. On such metaphysical views, actuality (the infant and the crystal) possess a nature (essence) that can be analyzed to deduce propensities towards future causes and effects (dispositions). These dispositions-to-action account for future possibilities with respect to those substances.

What can make such a thinker different than traditional accounts in Aristotle and his inheritors, is the fact that a modal essentialist contends that, upon analysis, the *potentia* of entities provides such substances with the same modal features of the other metaphysical theories. Conversation partners who reject my proposal, may find themselves adhering to a traditional essentialist rendering, such as that of Thomas Aquinas. Whether his view of *potentia* would map onto model logic, however, is unclear and the topic of a useful future research project. Thomas clearly creates possibility through the concept of potency, but does it match the operators of modal logic?

One problem with the general theory is that it applies best to items with a complex nature and seems to apply not at all to events. In other words, the theory is at its

[6] See Amie L. Thomasson, "Modal Normativism and Methods of Metaphysics," *Philosophical Topics* 35 (2007): 135–60.

[7] The finest contemporary work defending such a view is Barbara Vetter, *Potentiality: From Dispositions to Modality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

best when one analyzes the dispositional propensity of a human infant to learn language or of a dead leaf to wilt; however, the theory is at its worse when dealing with the structure of truth-making for events, whether past or future (i.e. *It is true that William and Mary restored the British monarchy.*). Further, the essentialist view is sometimes indistinguishable from some varieties of modal realism. After all, the bachelor's *potentia* to marry can not only be mapped onto *but strictly equated with* his various situations of marriage and singleness in similar possible worlds. In fact, this similarity, no doubt, is why many thinkers, such as Luis de Molina, easily transitioned into possible-worlds talk—and why I think all such thinkers need to develop a systematic account of possible worlds modality, whether they are modal realists or not.

Eight Concluding Implications

First, this dissertation will convince only some, not all, of its readers. However, as a blessed side effect of its writing, the dissertation should demonstrate that any reader it does not convince still is burdened with the task of modality. In other words, every model of God and the world must appropriately sketch in the nature of possibility, actuality, contingency, and necessity. Many theological models do not do this well, some not at all. Thus, if inheritors of other theological traditions ultimately reject possible-worlds modality, they ought to work towards another modal model.

Second, the remarkable advance that modal metaphysics has provided greatly commends models of God and the world that include maximal versions of divine knowing. Molinism and much of the Calvinist tradition speak the metaphysical language fluently. Even though such models as Open Theism and Arminianism claim that God knows all things possible to know, such definitions of divine omniscience never could themselves *account for* the metaphysics of modality. Theologians with more minimal renderings of the basis of foreknowledge would need to search out other pathways for modality. Only maximal models of divine knowing can extend into the metaphysics of possibility.

Third, the semantics of freedom defended in this dissertation ought to reshape the respective conversations in both philosophy and theology. Writers in both areas ought to ensure that the metaphysic supporting their modal semantics remains clear and disciplined throughout their arguments. Perhaps this is the last (or nearly the last) room of the philosophical mansion for possible-worlds modality to tidy up. It simply will no longer do to have any writer make claims about the "possibility to do otherwise" or about how an agent "could have" refrained without knowing whether that claim is referring to the agent in the actual world and its set of propositions or the agent construed in terms of his or her transworld identity. Of course, one could scrap possible-worlds semantics and use modal language in a completely different sense—but only after constructing or referring to a modal metaphysic that supports the alternative semantics of freedom.

Fourth, the dissertation offers a model of God *in se* who is utterly non-contingent, simple, and not acted upon. Equally, God when considered with respect to contingent actuality, has real relations with the world, does not act by means of an arcane theory (such as the theory of divine action by remotion), and is the normal linguistic referent for innumerable scripture passages that refer to God's attributes (e.g. compassionate), emotions (e.g. love), and intentions (e.g. to hear the penitent).

Quite obviously, this thesis did not intend to end a debate that did not exist when I first began the writing. Recent years have seen a conflagration surrounding what has become known as "Classical Christian Theism" on the one hand and "Relational Theism" on the other. Perhaps the proposal presented here is both more genuine and more effective because it took shape from another discipline, considered other central concerns and pressing questions, and developed in written form even before the recent flareup (which, sadly, has often produced more heat than light). Yet, at the end of the road, I must proffer this thesis as a solution to that debate as well. Under the auspices of different modal reference, one can speak both of the classical God and the relational God.

Fifth, divine deliberation's account of God's knowledge and will links up seamlessly with traditional Christian practices, such as prayer. Prayer communicates with God, yet Christian theology rightly avoids claiming that God is informed or manipulated by prayer. On the other hand, models of prayer that emphasize only the supplicant's personal transformation via the spiritual means of grace, forfeit the concept of relationship in the model of prayer. Divine deliberation can secure both, particularly because God has actualized a world with every proposition, temporally-indexed, related both to him and to the supplicant. Creaturely relations *with*—not just creaturely relations *toward*—God can be preserved in prayer by understanding God under the modal auspices of the actual world.

Sixth, a theological account for modality prefers a more richly-developed end for God's creation. Theologians easily recognize how, on some accounts, God created so that he might "have fellowship with men and women" and, on others, he created with the aim to glorify the Son via the atonement he would accomplish to save his covenant people. An original ultimate end such as 'human fellowship' hardly seems able to furnish the rich supply of subsequent ends that account for the complexity of the actual world. Further, since ends like atonement are logically impossible without a fall, theological narratives that consider God's end in creation to be "fellowship with humans until Adam sinned" fail. On this model of possible-worlds, meticulous providence is an obvious corollary to divine deliberative knowledge.

Seventh, this theological model of modality, advances a theodicy that combines elements of some theodicies already on offer to create a superior account of evil. This modality shows how it is logically impossible for God to have an original ultimate end that includes salvation without one that also includes sin. For the ultimate end—God's glory in the Spirit's applying the Son's atonement to all whom the Father gives—the total true problem set of propositions in the world must include sin. God

creates a world whose total value is profoundly good and with evil that is only logically proportional to the these inestimable values.

Further, with a clear modal perspective, the reader—even if he or she does not accept the theodicy—can easily see an apologetic defense provided by this view. Human minds can never know precisely if an instance of evil truly is gratuitous in the world's total true set of propositions. In fact, this model shows how no instance of evil is impossible to connect to a redeeming good. This metaphysic simply paves the road. Scripture drives upon it and assures Christians that God works "all things together for good."

Most importantly, clarifying the nature of possible worlds reveals how moral worth can properly be ascribed to *worlds*—not merely isolated propositions within worlds. Thus, this theodicy is quite different than the "greater good defense," which weighs good and bad occurrences over against one another (if such things can be quantified). Differently, this conception of the matter reveals how for many of the actual world's greatest goods (including its greatest one, atoning salvation) propositions of creaturely evil are entailed. Since such propositions of creaturely evil are entailed logically by the possibility of the infinite goods of incarnation and atonement, no blame can redound to the Creator. Some great-making properties of worlds require evil discrete propositions within it.

Eighth, divine deliberation, as a theological metaphysic, may better frame up modern science and account for chance occurrences. Niels Henrik Gregerson considers chance literally "beyond the reach of God's providence" no doubt due to definitional concerns; Gregerson's work is devoted to the philosophy of information, and information does not yield chance, which seems therefore not to interface with a theory of providence. No problem arises from Gregerson's definition of chance with a right model of providence. God can know all true indexed propositions in a possible world, including those that may "occur at time T1 without a causal structure." "Providence" then simply

refers to God's governance through his foreknowledge in the actualizing of the possible world. Providence is the decree in actual operation. Theological theories of modality are the most plausible way actually to coordinate chance occurrences with a larger scheme of information. After all, we do recognize chance as *chance* (and interact with it according to our recognition); in this sense, true chance is not part of the causal system. Yet, random occurrences (such as ocean waves) interact with the keel of a sailboat—while the winds interact with its sail—according to the laws of physics and the intentions of the sailor; in this sense, true chance is part of the causal system of outputs (though causality cannot be traced out on chance's input side). Chance is organized into the total informational system of the world actualized—and thus is comprehended from outside the system by the infinite mind.

David Bartholomew's book *God, Chance and Purpose* attempted to integrate contemporary science's indeterminacy thesis with theology.[8] Indeterminacy is a feature of human knowledge (on the most widely-held) interpretations of quantum theory, so concerns about indeterminacy do not apply to a mind like God's.[9] Michael Dodds

[8] David Bartholomew, *God, Chance and Purpose: Can God Have it Both Ways?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[9] William Lane Craig identifies how the metaphysics of relativity presumes the rejection of "absolute" in theories of space-time, yet the term *absolute* itself has some six possible meanings. (1) Absolute-relational: a distinction that arises in the cardinal debates between Clark and Leibniz. (2) Absolute-relative: related to claims that the "spatio-temporal structure" is independent of any reference frame. The special theory more directly relates to this distinction. (3) Absolute-dynamical: contrasting possibilities of a fixed geometric structure that shapes processes and events. The general relativity theory more directly relates to this distinction. To these three distinctions, cited from Michael Friedman, "Foundations of Space-Time Theories," Craig adds the following three: (4) Absolute-measure: a well-known relativity distinction made by Newton, anticipated even by thinkers such as Galileo. (5) Absolute-local: even if an independent reference-frame does not exist temporal location "relative to the rest of the frame of the aether is privileged over all other local times." (6) Absolute-conventional: a distinction variously upheld by those thinkers who resist that objective simultaneity relations are merely conventional. A non-arbitrary simultaneity relation requires absoluteness in some sense. Throughout the argument, then, Craig recovers senses of absoluteness alongside relativity theory, and concludes that the "application of [general relativity] theory to cosmology yields a cosmic time, which is possibly regarded as being the physical time which measures God's time therefore registers to a good degree of approximation the true time." William Lane Craig, *Time and the Metaphysics of Relativity*, Philosophical Studies Series (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer, 2001), 240.

critiques Bartholomew's view and finds the "exercise" of "an autonomous causality" inappropriate to some entity described as "chance."[10] "Unlike Aquinas, however, he does not see chance as a secondary cause under the divine influence of God's primary causality."[11] Perhaps Dodds's Thomist instincts go too deep here. One can include chance in metaphysics not as a "substance" with the power of secondary causality but as a name given to a state of affairs with an unclear causal structure (not produced by contingent minds), that becomes a cause afterward (as contingent minds interact with it). In this way, divine deliberation could be extended to include modern scientific concerns surrounding chance and indeterminacy. Possible-worlds in divine knowledge can account for chance occurrences because, though they arise without a causal structure, they still are comprehended within the set of propositions in the actualized world. This picture is best worked out through theology because God can then intend ends in the world he creates even from random states-of-affairs.[12] Divine deliberation's path toward redeeming intentionality from randomness does not seem plausible without God. Divine deliberation offers a significant contribution to an orthodox doctrine of God and to a uniquely Christian modal metaphysic. Most importantly, it solves crucial philosophical problems and creates philosophical tools through a clearer concept of God. The maximal God is most worthy of worship, and what the mind more elegantly conceives, the heart more fervently worships.

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[10] Michael Dodds, *Unlocking Divine Action: Contemporary Science & Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 214.

[11] Dodds, *Unlocking Divine Action*, 214.

[12] Keith Ward, "God as the Ultimate Informational Principle," in *Information and the Nature of Reality*, ed. Paul Davies and Niels Henrik Gregersen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 357–81.

APPENDIX 1

DIVINE DELIBERATION IN PROPOSITIONAL FORM

The following chapter sets forth the basic propositions of divine deliberation in accordance with their relations as axioms, maxims, inferences, or entailments. I attempt to use these terms in their standards senses to organize the argument. An axiom and a maxim are general truths, but the axiom is self-evident and unconditional, while the maxim is a truism under the auspices of an axiological system. An inference and entailment both carry the logical argument, but the inference may do so with evidence or reasoning, while entailments are already implicit in a previous proposition or set of propositions. The argument is my basis for the writing of the previous chapters, and I have added the headings simply for clarity and heuristic value.

Divine Knowledge

Axiom 1: God knows his nature immediately.

Axiom 2: God's immediate knowledge of his nature includes all possibilities of his creation, possible worlds.

Entailment 1, from Axiom 2: Divine inference assigns the modal status of necessity to objects, propositions, or sets in every possible world and contingency to those only in some possible worlds.

Axiom 3: Many entities, including and importantly, creatures exist in multitudes of possible worlds.

Maxim 1: Not in any one world but only in the divine mind can the qualities of these identical entities be drawn together.

Entailment 2, from M1: This action of the divine mind constitutes individual essences.

Maxim 2: Not in any one world but only in the divine mind can the truth of subjunctive conditional statements be established (because they are modally relative).

Entailment 3, from M2: By inference across all worlds, the divine mind knows, in a constitutive sense, subjunctive conditionals.

Inference 1, from Entailment 3: Divine knowledge is the truth-maker for subjunctive conditionals in two ways: some subjunctive conditionals refer in form to a true proposition in another world.

Assumption, for Inference 1: Possible worlds do not have causal powers[1] to "make true" the subjunctive conditionals of an alternate set of possibilities. Some subjunctive conditionals may refer to a proposition that exists in no possible world. In this case, the subjunctive conditional still may have a truthmaker, not causally related through the possible worlds to the divine mind but causally related through the individual essence to the divine mind.

Inference 1, Restated: Therefore, God's inferential knowledge serves as the truthmaker, whether mediated by his knowledge of individual essences or the propositions of another, non-actual world.

Divine Will

Axiom 4: Divine will creates, accounting for contingency through the original ultimate end (OUE).

Maxim 3: The OUE is best construed scripturally as the plan to glorify the Son in a world with such great-making properties as incarnation and atonement.

Entailment 4 from Axiom 4: God's knowledge already being of two kinds (immediate and inferential), with the OUE, divine knowledge is of two modes (natural and volitional).

Assumption for Axiom 4: God knows what set of worlds includes his original ultimate end and all ends related to it, and wills to create the world with maximal divine glory, centered on the work of the Son.

Inference 2, from the conjunction of Axioms 1 and 4: The divine will to create the actual world constitutes its "total true set of propositions" as actual and the "total true sets of propositions" of every other possible world as counterfactual.

Axiom 5: God's knowledge situates all worlds on a continuum, based on whether they are relevantly similar.

Inference 3, from Maxim 2 and Axiom 5: Sets (such as circumstances and decisions), as well as individual essences, can be evaluated and assessed morally by the necessary measure of God's character, as well as the contingent measure of possible worlds.

Maxim 4, from Inference 3: Circumstances and actions are universally weighed against God's character and relatively weighed against highly similar possible worlds, where individual essences are in relevantly similar circumstances.

[1] Since, on all standard theories, possible worlds are abstract, not concrete objects.

Maxim 5, from Maxim 4 and Inferences 1 & 3: God's knowledge of these modally synthetic propositions, undergirds human use of modal language (serves as referent and truthmaker for human modal language), which is therefore not subject to an anti-realistic interpretation, such as emotivism.

God's Knowledge of Himself and of the Possible

Axiom 6: A necessary being, God is in every possible world.

Entailment 5, from Axioms 2 & 6: With worlds' different sets of propositions and circumstances, God does not intend and perform the same actions in every possible world.

Axiom 7: The divine act of willing-to-create one possible world constitutes it as actual.

Inference 4, from Axioms 6 & 7: God chooses what total true set of propositions describes the actions he performs and the purposes in which he engages in the actual world.

Entailment 6, from Inference 4: In this act of will, God constitutes his mode of being in the actual world.

Inference 5, from Entailment 6 and Maxim 3: God's mode of being in the world centers on Christ.

Entailment 7, from Inference 5: Human inference from the Triune missions, returns only to this "modal bottleneck." Even reasonable supposition and conjecture based solely on divine-action-in-the-world derives answers about God's being-in-the-world, not God's being-in-himself.

Axiom 8: Revelation, linguistic revelation, is necessary to refer beyond the world's modality to describe God-in-himself.

Inference 6, from Axiom 8: Divine revelation of his life *ad intra* reveals a logical measure that the OUE must meet, that the missions would fit with the triune persons' subsistence in the divine nature and the standing (or *taxis*) of the three-in-one.

Inference 7, from Axiom 8: Scripture presents fittingness as a category of creation's sublimity and the Gospel's profundity.

Conjunction of Maxim 2 and Inferences 6 & 7: Therefore, the divine will to create is good (the purpose to glorify the Son), true (comports with the *taxis* of the Trinity), and beautiful (creation's sublimity and gospel's profundity).

Maxim 6: Divine creation includes every level of knowledge described in this proposal: immediate, inferential (at different hierarchical levels), conditional, counterfactual.

Inference 8, from Maxim 6: Since these kinds of knowledge (immediate and inferential) are at different levels of ontological dependence (one logical moment depends on others) and includes the OUE, the total will-to-create this world (its total

true set of propositions and its counterfactuals) ought to be described by *divine deliberation*.

Entailment 8, from Inference 8 and Axiom 2: In this model, the theologian can confidently conclude that every proposition in the decree for the world (whether human triumph or tragedy, whether free decision or forced coercion) is by some pattern of inference related back to the original ultimate end, the glorification of the Son in a world with great-making properties like incarnation and atonement.

Freedom

Entailment 9, from Axiom 2: The model has implications for freedom.

Inference 9, from Entailment 2 and Maxim 5: Libertarian freedom's "could have been otherwise" appeal describes freedom and moral responsibility between an entity's existence across worlds.

Inference 10, from Inference 2 and Entailment 2: Source or agent views of freedom describe freedom and responsibility within the modal constraints of the actual world.

Inference 11, from Inference 3 and Maxim 5: Libertarian appeals to freedom can be based in God's knowledge of transworld identity, while source appeals to freedom can be based in God's perfect knowledge of the total truth of the propositions, causal relations, and actions of agents in the world, and while all human linguistic appeals are tightly conscribed by the limitations of human knowing.

Theodicy

Entailment 10, from Entailment 3 and Assumption for Axiom 4: The model has implications for theodicy.

Inference 12, from Axiom 4 and Maxim 4: Since God-in-himself chose to create this actual world, its evaluation can be based only on all of its propositions and the moral value of its OUE.

Axiom 9: Human persons cannot know any possible world's propositions exhaustively, nor every goal subsequent to the OUE.

Entailment 11, from Axiom 9 and Inference 12: Human persons are not in a position to evaluate the decision of God-in-himself to create; God's ways are ultimately inscrutable.

Divine Attributes

Entailment 12, from Entailment 6 and Inference 5: The model has implications for classical divine attributes, such as impassibility and timelessness.

Entailment 13, from Inference 4: God-in-the-world acts and receives action, chiefly in the person of Christ and also in every proposition where God has decreed himself to be a concrete object in the actual world.

Entailment 14, from Inferences 4 & 5: Constituted in his mode of being in the world, God is really related to his creation in every sense, summed up in Christ (as innumerable scripture texts describe).

Axiom 10: A strong doctrine of divine aseity accurately describes the divine nature.

Restatement of Axioms 1 & 6: God knows his own nature separate from his mode of being in any possible world (i.e. God-in-himself).

Inference 13, from Axioms 1, 6, & 10: God-in-himself undergoes nothing, not by the effect of emotions or otherwise. God-in-the-actual-world (God-in-AW) as an agent acts, responds, communicates, sympathizes, judges, and all the other purposes scripture describes of his real relations with the world.

Inference 14, from Axioms 1, 6, & 10: God in himself cannot be related to time.[2] God-in-AW possesses a total true set of propositions that includes his expression of emotion, purpose, actions, and ends in temporally-indexed ways.

Taken together, these theses frame a deliberative model of the divine will-to-create that upholds standard possible worlds metaphysics, a realist view of modal language, classical theological ideas about God's nature (*in se*), and biblical statements about God's real relations with the world. Most importantly, this model of divine deliberation sums up all things in Christ and shows how contingency can be established from the necessary God by means of his purpose for an original ultimate end, an end that still fits with his inner glory: the glorification of the Son in missions both that reflect triune *taxis* and that unite human beings to Jesus through incarnation and atonement.

[2] If time is used in its more standard reference to matter and physical movement or change, not merely to succession. Even if some thinker treats God-in-himself with "an eternal succession of divine Trinitarian actions of love," for example, God-in-himself would have a different mode of temporal succession than God in the world.

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ABSTRACT

DIVINE DELIBERATON:
POSSIBLE WORLDS MODALITY AND
THE DIVINE WILL-TO-CREATE

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022
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Contemporary Christian theology regularly employs a key tool of contemporary philosophy's turn towards modal metaphysics. Philosophy's possible worlds modality has become the basis on which theologians regularly discuss both theology proper and such sub-disciplines as apologetics or the doctrine of providence. A great gap, therefore, exists in explicit Christian theological engagement with the doctrine of God and contemporary modal metaphysics. This dissertation presents key instances of this theological engagement with possible worlds thinking in chapter 1, as well as the need for careful modal thinking in relation to God's will-to-create in chapter 2. With the burden of the study in place, chapter 3 gives pride of place to scripture, evaluating key texts for what revelation might present as God's chief end in creation. Chapters 4 through 7 document and develop forerunners to a full modal theory in historical theology, whether the Neoplatonic contemplations of the Patristics, or the Medieval power distinction, whether the doctrine of the decrees or lapsarian doctrine in the Reformed. Chapters 8 through 10 provide the necessary philosophical furniture for a more complete modal theory, and construct its primary commitments and outcomes for a doctrine of God that maintains orthodoxy while extending its explanatory power more fully, even over the metaphysics of modality. Last, chapter 11 applies the model broadly to theological debates—especially providence and freedom—and evaluates their coherence.

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BA, North Greenville University, 2011
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PUBLICATIONS

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ORGANIZATIONS

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ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

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Adjunct Faculty, Boyce College, Louisville, Kentucky, 2018–2019
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Associate Pastor, Kenwood Baptist Church at Victory Memorial, Louisville, Kentucky, 2016–2017
Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Bedford, Indiana, 2017–2019
Pastor, Bat Cave Baptist Church, Bat Cave, North Carolina, 2020–