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Divine Simplicity and the Theory of Action: *Extrinsic Willing and Knowing Against the Modal Collapse Argument*

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Abstract: The modal collapse argument states that the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity entails that God necessarily creates whatever he creates and also that all creatures necessarily perform whatever actions they perform. In response to these objections, many authors argue that God's willing to create this precise world and God's knowing everything about individual creatures are at least partially extrinsic or Cambridge properties (i.e., the truthmaker of the respective propositions is, in part, a fact about something contingent other than God). This paper argues for a general view of action, in which such properties can turn out to be at least partially extrinsic. Section 1 explains why responding to the modal collapse argument requires that part of the truthmaker relating God to contingent facts be extrinsic to God, and that it is only in this part that contingency lies. Section 2 argues that this can be generally so in certain class of causal relations, where the agent remains intrinsically the same no matter the precise effect produced. Section 3 shows that free volition is at some level one of those relations, and section 4 offers some brief remarks about the difficulties that still remain in the case of knowledge.

Keywords: Divine simplicity, Modal collapse argument, Divine volition, Divine knowledge, Theory of action

Among objections to the doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS) frequently discussed in recent literature, the so called "modal collapse argument" is probably the more difficult one. This criticism claims that DDS entails what Tom Morris called "extreme modal uniformity" (Morris 1985), a position according to which absolutely all things are necessary, and nothing is really contingent.

It has been rightly said that "from any critics of the DDS, this is the Achilles heel of the doctrine"(Dolezal 2011, 188). The intractability of the problem is such that this author ends up responding to it by appealing to a certain form of apophaticism:

> It should be readily confessed that the exact function of free will in God who is himself pure act is beyond the scope of human knowledge. Just as we cannot comprehend God as *ipsum esse subsistens*, we cannot comprehend the identity between God as eternal, immutable, pure act and his will for the world as free and uncoerced. Though we discover strong reasons for confessing both simplicity and freedom in God, we cannot form an isomorphically adequate notion of how this is the case" (Dolezal, 2011, p. 210).

Elaborating on a comparison that Dolezal drops in a footnote to the text just quoted[1], Eleonore Stump speaks of a "quantum theology" (Stump 2013; 2016): We know that both divine simplicity and the freedom *ad extra* of God are true, but we are unable to represent to ourselves an intelligible model that shows us how exactly that compatibility is. "Human reason can see that human reason cannot comprehend the *quid est* of God" (Stump 2016, 205). I am somehow sympathetic to this respectful sense of mystery regarding God's intimate nature and activity, but nevertheless I would like to suggest here some further considerations concerning a general account of intentional action that might shed some light in the current discussion.

But before we continue, let me clarify that the core proposal of this paper is not intended as a rigorous exegesis of Aquinas' views on the matter, but rather as a suggestion of what philosophical commitments might allow us to address contemporary objections to the traditional doctrine and conciliate a sufficiently strong version of DDS with the contingency of creatures. Whether sufficient support for this paper's proposal can be found in Thomas' writings, or whether it can be shown that such a proposal is not incompatible with anything Aquinas himself said, is a matter for further research that I am not in a position to pursue here.

The modal collapse difficulty admits various formulations, but for present purposes we can present it as follows:[2]

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[1] "This acknowledgment of ignorance may be analogous to the acknowledgement that we do not know how it is that light behaves as both a wave and a particle. The inability of account for how a thing might be does not in itself undermine the fact that a thing is just that way" (Dolezal 2011, footnote 55 of chapter 7).

[2] Some difficulties occur in logically formalizing this argument, which were recently noted by (Tomaszweski 2019). In response to this critique of the argument, see (Waldrop 2022). I will disregard these problems for present purposes, since I agree with Waldrop that the core debate in the modal collapse argument is a substantive controversy over the metaphysics of divine action and not

(1) *Modal collapse argument.* (i) If God is simple, God has no intrinsic accidental or contingent properties; (ii) it is an intrinsic property of God (a) to have freely chosen to create the actual world and (b) to know everything about the contingent individual creatures he creates; but (iii) if God freely chooses to create the actual world, it is contingent that God created it and that he created it exactly the way he created it; furthermore (iv) if individual creatures are contingently created by God, any knowledge about them is a knowledge of contingent facts and therefore a contingent knowledge; then (v) (a) and (b) are intrinsic properties that God contingently has; then (vi) God has intrinsic accidental properties; and then (vii) God cannot be simple.

Before we continue analyzing this argument, let me observe that this paper's proposal does not obviously involve any particular commitments regarding the nature of properties. I will mostly talk about truthmakers, in order to remain neutral regarding the ontology of properties. Whenever an apparent divine property is mentioned, I simply mean the truthmaker for a true proposition that ascribes something to God.[3] If the proposition in question is necessarily true, we can talk about an essential property; and if it is only contingently true, then we are talking about a contingent property. If the truthmaker is an intrinsic state or feature of God, then it will be referred to as an intrinsic or real property of God. If it is a feature or state of something other than God, then it is only an extrinsic or Cambridge property.

Premise (1) (i) follows directly from a fundamental claim of DDS, found not only in the strong Thomist version, but in almost every traditional account of DDS. Divine attributes cannot be identical to each other if some of them are essential or necessary and others are accidental or contingent. Nor can God be necessarily identical to attributes he only has contingently. And if God has contingent attributes, he cannot be an uncreated self-sufficient necessary being, completely independent from anything other than himself.

Among all possible variants of the modal collapse argument, I will discuss here those that seem to be the most severe—namely, the ones connecting divine simplicity with the two properties described in (1)(ii), both of which we would feel strongly inclined to consider intrinsic. Henceforth we shall call property (a)—to have

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something about the logic of modality. Therefore, my response in this paper is somehow putting pressure on what Waldrop calls "premise E" (Necessarily, something is a divine creative act only if it is essentially a divine creative act).

[3] Regarding the inconvenience of referring to the divine attributes as "properties" and the preferability of using the ontologically neutral truthmakers language, see (Brower 2008).

freely chosen to create the actual world— "divine volition of the contingent", and we shall call property (b)—"knowing everything about the contingent individual creatures he creates"—"divine knowledge of contingent particulars". A satisfactory solution to (1) requires a theory of volition and knowledge where properties (a) and (b), are extrinsic properties, i.e. denying premise (1)(ii).

1. An Asymmetry in the Relation Between God and Creatures

Most promising responses to (1) rely on the claim that (a) and (b) are extrinsic to God. This has been frequently connected to Aquinas thesis that the relationship between God and the world has an asymmetry.[4] This will be referred here as the "Asymmetry thesis":[5]

(2) *Asymmetry thesis.* The relationship that goes from the creature to the creator is real, but the correlative relationship that goes from the creator to the creature is only of reason.

Prima facie (2) seems obscure, or even *ad hoc*. There are nevertheless intelligible ways of interpreting it. Following Geach, we may begin by saying that Aquinas is not saying that the proposition "God creates the world" is false while the proposition "the world is created by God" is true. Both propositions are true, but the connection between them and their truthmakers differs in each case (Geach 1969, 1–2). More precisely, we can use Henninger's account of Aquinas's ideas on the ontology of relations, and say "If *a* is really related by *R* to *b*, but there is no foundation in *b* of the same type as *a*'s foundation for *R* to *b*, then there is no real co-relation *R'* in *b*, and *R* and *R'* are non-mutual" (Henninger 1987, 512).

Let us assume that what Henninger refers to as the "foundation" for a relationship is the truthmaker of the propositions that express such a relationship. (2) will thereby mean that the truthmaker for the statement "God creates this world" is not a fact about God, but a fact about this world. Thus, "creating the world" is an extrinsic or mere Cambridge property of God, while "being created by God" is a real or intrinsic property that the world has.

[4] Among many discussions of this Thomistic doctrine in an analytic framework, see (Geach 1969; Grant 2007; Grant and Spencer 2015).

[5] The asymmetry thesis is explicitly deployed at the end of the most extensive and detailed treatment of divine simplicity that we find in Aquinas' work, *De Potentia* q.7 aa.8, 9 and 10. It also appears in strong connection with DDS in *Summa Contra Gentiles* II, chapters 11 to 14.

In any case, rejecting (1)(ii) does not require such a strong thesis as (2). As Pruss observes, divine simplicity requires that all non-tautological truths that are only about God, have only God himself as their minimal truthmaker (Pruss 2008, 152–54). However, divine simplicity does not require that the truthmaker of all true propositions about God be God alone, nor does it even demand that this truthmaker be simple. All it demands is that in no case can anything that can be considered a "part" of God be singled out as the truthmaker of a divine attribution. This is important, because usually relational propositions have complex truthmakers. Their truth often demands the concurrence of facts intrinsic to both parts of the relation, and sometimes also facts that do not immediately concern the *relata*.

Consider the proposition "Socrates is taller than Polo". What makes this proposition true is likely the conjunction of at least two contingent facts: the property intrinsic to Socrates of being 180 cm tall, and the property intrinsic to Polo of being 173 cm tall. Maybe the necessary mathematical fact that 180 cm is more than 173 cm also contributes somehow to the truth of the proposition. If this is the case, the proposition will be contingently true even if one of its truthmakers is necessary, since the other two facts that contribute to the truthmaker are contingent. Even if we were to suppose that it is essential to Socrates to be 180 cm and that Socrates necessarily exists, the proposition will still be contingently true, because its truth also requires the concurrence of the contingent fact that Polo is 173 cm. In sum, for the contingency of the world not to imply a corresponding contingency of God's intrinsic states, we do not need to claim that the truthmaker of the proposition "God contingently creates the world" consists only of facts that are extrinsic to God. It suffices that the intrinsic facts about God that intervene in the minimal truthmaker of the proposition are all necessary, but that additional contingent facts that are extrinsic to God also intervene in that truthmaker. This is why Pruss states correctly, in his response to (1), that "any correct attribution to God of an accidental property has as its truthmaker God and something contingent besides God, and hence the property is at least in part extrinsic" (Pruss 2008, 158). Thus, I propose the following hypotheses as responses to (1):

(3) *Partial extrinsicness of God's relation to the world.* The relations between God and the world are at least partially based on facts that are extrinsic to God, and are not based on contingent facts intrinsic to God.

(4) *Partial extrinsicness of divine volition of the contingent.* What makes true the proposition "God freely chooses to create the actual world" is the conjunction of a necessary fact about God and a contingent fact about the world.

(5) *Partial extrinsicness of divine knowledge of contingent particulars.* What makes true the proposition "God knows the actions performed by free agents" is the conjunction of a necessary fact about God and a contingent fact about created free agents.

Accepting hypotheses (4) and (5) entails denying (1) (ii), because (a) and (b) can turn out true without involving any accidental intrinsic properties of God whatsoever. Further on, the more general hypothesis (3) allows us to dismiss any other possible variant of the argument of modal collapse. Although providing a positive and direct proof of (3) seems difficult, we can address the stronger threats to its plausibility, and then rely on the general arguments supporting DDS to justify its acceptance. Therefore, what we will do here is to argue for the plausibility of (4) and (5), addressing what seem to be the stronger counterexamples to DDS.

2. Extrinsicness of Causal Relations

However, there are some obvious reasons to consider (4) and (5) implausible. Aquinas himself is emphatic about the immanent character that cognitive and volitional acts have. These are acts in which the produced effect is identical to the producing activity itself and remains within the agent (e.g., see *Summa Theologiae* I q.18 a.3 ad.1 and *Summa Contra Gentiles* IV, 11). How, then, could we claim that their truthmaker is not an intrinsic property of God, but rather a property of the creature, which is extrinsic to God himself?

Let us remember, however, that we do not need to demonstrate that such volitional and cognitive acts are entirely extrinsic. Instead, we need only to show that they are partially so, and that the contingency involved arises solely from a contingent fact about the external object willed or known (not from the agent's or knower's immanent act). Pruss describes this situation as "radical content externalism": The act of choosing created things and knowing the actions of free agents is immanent to God, but the precise content that is willed or known through this act is extrinsic to God (Pruss 2008, 159–60).

In discussing (2), Aquinas considers some broad hypotheses on which it would be reasonable to think that a relation is based on intrinsic facts of both *relata* (*De Potentia* q.7 a.10). The first hypothesis is that of relations grounded in quantity, which seems not directly relevant for the cases here discussed. The second hypothesis that would require that the relation between God and the actual world to affect God's intrinsic mode of being goes as follows:[6]

[6] "In relations arising from action and passion or active and passive power, there is not always order of movement on both sides. Because that which has the nature of being patient, moved or

(6) *Causal relations requiring real properties in both relata.* Causal relations always require positing something within the effect (the acted, moved, or effected) but only require positing something in the cause (the mover, or the agent) when the latter obtains some perfection from the occurrence of the effect.

This idea can be defended on simple grounds of explanatory economics. Parsimony requires us not to posit any more real properties than those strictly necessary to properly ground the relation. So, if the relation we are talking about is a causal relation that does not benefit nor perfect the agent in any sense, then no intrinsic property seems to be needed on the side of the agent, nor should it be posited.

Grant convincingly argues that the fundamental assumption about causation underlying (6) is implied by popular cosmological arguments and libertarian agent causality (Grant 2007). Regarding cosmological arguments, Grant shows that if we assume that in order to make sense of *a*'s causally accounting for *b* there must be some real or intrinsic property or feature of *a* that would not be there were *a* not causing *b*, then this intrinsic feature or property of *a* must either be necessary or contingent. If it is necessary, then *a* must necessarily cause *b*, which means *b* is not really a contingent effect, which undermines the typical cosmological argument. On the other hand, if it is contingent, then such contingent feature or property becomes another contingent fact that requires a causal account according to the principle of sufficient reason used in cosmological arguments.[7] Regarding libertarian agency, according to a standard account of it, whenever an agent S freely performs an action A in the actual world W, there is a possible world W*, the same in all respects until the moment when S performs A, where S refrains from A. So, if in this account we think of S as the cause of A, then this cause, previous to produce its action, does not have any intrinsic feature or property that it would not have were it not to produce the action.[8]

This last claim is important, because we must remember that vindicating libertarian free agency is one of the main motivations frequently invoked for the rejection of DDS. But if Grant's argument is correct, and libertarian agent causality

caused must always have an order to the agent or mover, seeing that the effect is always perfected by its cause and dependent thereon: so that it is ordered to it as the cause of its perfection. Now agents, whether movers or causes, sometimes have an order to their respective patients, whether moved or caused, inasmuch as the good or perfection of the mover or agent is to be found in the effect, patient or thing moved" (*De Potentia* q.7 a.10).

[7] For a more detailed explanation of this argument, see (Grant 2007, 4–12).

[8] Again, a more detailed version of this argument is discussed in (Grant 2007, 12–15).

requires something like (6), defending DDS against (1) mainly requires an assumption that is already needed to defend libertarian free will in general. Therefore, in order to overcome difficulty (1), instead of denying the absolutely gratuitous character of God's creative act, what we have to do is to carry this gratuitousness to its ultimate consequences.

3. Content Extrinsicness Regarding Divine Volition of the Contignent

There are good reasons to think that the precise content of a volitional act need not be an intrinsic feature of the agent. Grant's argument, summarized in the previous section, is, in this regard, perfectly sound. It shows that theories defending libertarian free will typically require a model of agent causation where this occurs. For this reason, the two-step analysis in (O'Connor 1999) or in (Brower 2009, 118–20), which begins by giving an account of human agency and then gives a different account of divine agency, seems unnecessary. Neither in God nor in creatures is the content of a volitional act purely intrinsic, since it always involves an element of indeterminacy that is only filled by the actions actually performed by the agent.

A theory defending free causal agency in the libertarian sense should assume that a cause can possibly realize an effect contingently and freely. Libertarian free agency requires a theory of causation in which the sole fulfillment of the causal antecedent does not automatically and inevitably determine the occurrence of the effect. Elizabeth Anscombe rightly argued that viewing causal relations as necessary connections is a mistake of rationalist philosophers, who seem to confuse causal production with logical deduction (Anscombe 1993). Without acknowledging an element of indeterminacy in the production of an effect by a cause, analyzing an agent's action in causal terms will always require assuming that the mere configuration of an antecedent mental state makes the performance of such action necessary. Thus, it is no longer plausible that Susan, being able to study law, freely decides to study medicine, since the motives that in fact have moved her to prefer to study medicine over law were such as to make that decision necessary. However, as Alexander Pruss convincingly argues, it is perfectly possible for persons, given their intrinsic mental states at a particular moment, to be in a position to trigger different and mutually incompatible causal chains (Pruss 2008, 160–63). If this were not possible, human agents would not possess libertarian freedom.

One might argue that this neutrality of the agent's previous intrinsic mental states toward the chosen action ends once the agent internally selects one of the alternatives. However, I believe this is not quite so. When agents decide on a peculiar course of action, they are adopting certain ends: The object of their volition is not

exactly a particular action, but rather a more or less wide range of actions which are seen as equally effective for the achievement of the pursued end. In order to particularly choose and perform one of these alternative actions, the agent does not necessarily always need to issue a new volitional act. Agents might need to do so if achieving the goal requires engaging in several successive considerably different actions, until they reach their end. Nevertheless, it is not obvious that agents need to do so when the alternative actions derive practically immediately in the attainment of the desired effect.

For example, if I decide to press the space bar on my keyboard, I do not choose the precise spot where my finger will touch the key. There are certain places which I would instinctively avoid pressing (perhaps because I subconsciously dismiss the movement as too awkward), and there is a range of precision that I could not achieve even by trying. However, there is also a considerable range of alternatives among which I pick only one without any particular reason to prefer it over the others. In other words, to reach this ultimate level of determination in the action, agents do not need to issue a new volitional act distinct from the primary one by which they decided, for example, to press that button. Moved by one and the same volition, agents can freely engage in different causal chains. This does not introduce any intrinsic complexity into the original volition.

Summing up, (4) can be defended by appealing to this general claim about agency:

(7) *Partial extrinsicness of any volition.* For any agent *a* who freely produces an effect *x*, the truthmaker of the proposition "*a* freely chooses to produce *x*" is the conjunction between (i) an intrinsic fact about *a*, consisting in the internal desire of end *q*, that can be equally fulfilled by performing a range of various actions, one of which involves producing *x*; (ii) a fact about *x*, consisting in the production of *x* being the precise action freely performed by *a*.

As seen, (7)(i) is an intrinsic fact about the agent. In the case of God, it must be absolutely necessary and identical to the divine essence. However, (7)(ii) is a fact extrinsic to the agent and can therefore be contingent without undermining God's absolute simplicity.

Now, (7) seems to apply even more clearly to the volition by which God chooses to create the world he has in fact created. The key point to keep in mind is that this is not one of the scenarios described in (6)—a type of causal relationship where the cause attains a certain perfection from the occurrence of the effect. Thomas Aquinas considered that in a single act of volition God wills his own essence and also wills

the creatures. He wills the latter ordered to the former, and not insofar as they contribute in some way to his own perfection, but rather as manifestations of his goodness, i.e., as finite forms in which his own goodness can be diffused or communicated (e.g., *Summa Theologiae* I q.19 a.2). In an attempt to clarify this idea, Barry Miller suggests three different situations in which an agent can will more than one object through a single volitional act: (a) Mary wants to give her two daughters, Rachel and Allison, separate reprimands; (b) Mary wills that Rachel go to the bus stop to bring Allison home; and (c) Mary wills her brother Tom's good, but wills the Susan's good solely *qua* being Tom's daughter (Miller 1996, 109). Miller argues that situation (c) is the one that most resembles God's volitional act. Here, the relationship between the two objects is not one where they are willed independently by the same volitional act, nor is the one where they are willed as means and ends. Instead, objects are willed as ordered to one another, not insofar as one is means and the other end, but rather insofar as one is a manifestation of the other. Now, in situation (c), Mary's affection for Susan does not necessarily depend on Susan's intrinsic features or on the good things that Susan's arouses in Tom. It will only be a natural manifestation of her affection for Tom. For this reason, the object of Mary's volitional act can vary without altering Mary's intrinsic stat. If Susan is blonde, Mary loves a blonde girl, if she is a brunette she loves a brunette person: Mary's love for Susan remains always the same as long as we suppose that it's entirely based on her affection for Tom.

If God's purpose in loving creatures is sharing his own goodness, this purpose could be perfectly fulfilled by creating a world completely different from ours, or even without any world being created at all. If this is the case, determination toward one among the many possible scenarios in which such purpose is perfectly satisfied does not require a new volitional act, since the same necessary volitional act by which God could will to create countless worlds is the act by which he has chosen to create this particular one. And what makes the object of the necessary divine volition to be exclusively this world and not any other is the very contingent fact that it is this and not any other world, the one that God has, in fact, created.

This description is compatible with Aquinas's claim that divine willing of contingent creatures includes their contingency (e. g., *Summa Theologiae* I q.19 a.8). When claiming so, Aquinas does not argue that the particular contingent creatures created by God are included in God's internal volition. (7) is compatible with the idea that God's intrinsic willing includes a willing that whatever contingent effect he produces, in case he produces any contingent effect, be contingent. What cannot be pre-contained in God's internal willing is the particular contingent effect produced, not the generally contingent nature creatures would have if God created

them. What Aquinas wants to exclude when making such claims is the possibility that the creatures' contingency is due to the efficacious action of secondary causes other than God. In my argument, the contingency of the effect is due to indeterminacy in the prior volition and does not require any concurrent secondary causes. No additional cause is required to account for the required final determination of the produced effect. This is why (7) (ii) does not refer to the determining action of secondary causes other than God, but simply to a fact about the effect that consists in the production of that effect being the precise action freely performed by the agent.

This account of divine love for creatures might make some uneasy. Someone might argue that God's love for creatures is meant to reach them in their unique individuality, and therefore involves positing within God something more than the single necessary love of his own essence which manifests itself by extending indistinctly to the entire universe of possible creatures through which God could have freely shared his goodness. There must be something within God that makes the love he feels for real Susan different from the love he feels for her sister Allison or for her only possible sister Rachel. Each of them must be loved by herself and not only as Tom's actual or possible daughter. In an attempt to make this flowing of divine love a part of the intimacy of God himself without compromising his essence's simplicity, recent authors have recovered Palamas' distinction between the divine essence and divine *energeiai*. According to Spencer (2017, 136–39), Palamas' language can be accommodated with the Thomistic account and help us in this direction. All of this can be compatible with DDS as long as we insist that the *energeiai* do not posit an intrinsic contingent property on God himself, but simply modify his love intentionally by referring it to a concrete object as *terminus* of the loving relation.

A more scripture-based image might help illuminate this point is the concept of a "covenant". When an agent chooses a concrete course of action among those that could be indistinctly picked in order to achieve the goal desired, there might not be any change in the agent's intrinsic states. Nevertheless, some sort of "commitment" to the concrete action performed and its concrete results arises from the agent's choice. For example, choosing to press the spacebar on the left side instead of the right side may not introduce any difference within myself, but it relates to or commits me towards the left side in a sense in which I am not committed to the right one. Similarly, parents have a commitment to their real children that is different from the general commitment they might had have towards other hypothetical sons or daughters. This commitment might even put some constraints on the future actions available to agents, even if it does not imply an inner change in them.

4. Content Extrinsicness Regarding Divine Knowledge of Contingent Particulars

There are good reasons to think that this second case is significantly more difficult than the previous one. Both (Pruss, 2008) and Brower (2009) recognize that, in the case of knowledge, content externalism seems less plausible and introduces further difficulties. Aquinas himself puzzles us by using, in the same text of *De Potentia* q.7 a.10 where he stated the asymmetry in the relation between God and the world, cognitive relations as an example of the sort of relation that is only real with respect to the knower. Should such considerations lead us to conclude that God cannot know contingent individuals?

The arguments presented in the previous section about divine willingness are not applicable to divine knowledge. Earlier, we followed Aquinas in viewing God's contingent love for creatures as an extension of God's love for his own essence. Similarly, Aquinas believes God knows creatures through self-knowledge, since knowing himself he also knows all the limited ways in which his essence can be participated (e.g., *Summa Theologiae* q.14 a.5).[9] It is unclear how this knowledge can proceed from God's self-knowledge if the exact outcome of voluntary actions is not included in the preceding internal volition. In that case, God's knowledge would be unable to reach the contingent individuals he creates via pure introspection of his internal volition. It would rather seem that knowing himself would only allow God to know all the effects he might create, but not the precise ones he has actually produced. Whereas in the case of volition it might seem plausible to say that the precise content remains outside of the volition itself, in the case of knowledge it would seem that such knowledge would be insufficient if it does not include individual creatures in their individuality.[10]

[9] Aquinas does defend that God can have knowledge of particular creatures, but he is very careful to give this kind of knowledge a particular treatment. Regarding this, we must be careful to distinguish those passages in which Aquinas argues that God can have a general knowledge of possible creatures, from those in which he further argues that God has knowledge of the contingent individuals he actually creates. For example, at the end of *Summa Theologiae* I q.14 a.14 Aquinas says that "by knowing his essence, God knows the essences of all things, and whatever could happen to them". In this case, Aquinas is simply talking of a knowledge of the essence of creatures and of whatever could happen to them. Such claim does not involve *per se* a knowledge of the particular contingent creatures God has actually created, i.e., a knowledge that reaches such creatures in their individuality. It only involves a general knowledge of the creatures God could bring about.

[10] I believe that James Dolezal's treatment of this topic in his book has a shortcoming here. He explains at length how Thomas can say that creatures are known by God in the same act by which he knows their essence, insofar as in that essence is included the possibility of producing such effects and that this knowledge of their own creative possibilities must be included in the knowledge that God has of himself (Dolezal 2011, 175–77). Nevertheless, this speculative-practical knowledge will

I believe there are two fundamental solutions to this issue, both of them briefly explored by Alexander Pruss:[11]

(8) *Partial extrinsicness of divine speculative knowledge.* Whenever God knows a particular creature *x*, what makes true the proposition "God knows *x*" is the conjunction between (i) an intrinsic necessary fact about God, consisting in the divine essence being such as to speculatively know whatever happens to be the case without suffering any intrinsic change depending on the precise content of his knowledge; and (ii) a fact about *x*, consisting in *x* being the case, and therefore *x* being among those things that God knows.

(9) *Partial extrinsicness of any fabricative knowledge.* For any agent *a* who freely produces an effect *x*, what makes true the proposition "*a* knows *x*" is the conjunction between (i) an intrinsic fact about the agent, consisting in the agent's self-knowledge, which includes whatever the agent freely chooses to produce; and (ii) a fact about *x*, consisting in *x* being the precise effect the agent has chosen to produce.

As Pruss explains, solution (8) involves adopting a theory of knowledge that is most certainly false for the human mind but may be true regarding God (Pruss 2008, 163–65). Basically, he suggests a *naïve* version of the Cartesian representationalist model: The mind's eye watches phenomena as they appear on a screen, and the seen phenomenon is absolutely distinct from the mind's eye itself. Thus, the difference between contemplating the phenomenon "feeling cold" and contemplating the phenomenon "feeling hot" is extrinsic to the mind's eye. This model allows God speculative knowledge of creatures, but makes divine knowledge absolutely distinct from human knowledge. Because in human knowledge it is obvious that knowing *x* rather than *y* involves a difference not only in the things known but in the knower himself.[12]

Nevertheless, some texts of Aquinas might ground a reading on this direction. For instance, in *Summa Theologiae* (I q.14 a.16 ad 2) he states that being derived from the known thing is not a feature of speculative knowledge as such, but an accidental

allow God to have a generic knowledge of the things he might eventually create, but it will not include a knowledge of those things he has contingently decided to create, unless we extirpate the possibility of God creating things other than those that were presently created. The latter is what Dolezal seems to conclude in the final chapter of his book, in which he says that divine freedom is indubitable, but clearly cannot be analyzed in terms of counterfactual openness (possibility of doing things different from what he actually did) (Dolezal 2011, 188–212).

[11] For longer discussions of these and other similar solutions, see (Grant 2012).

[12] Nevertheless, (Grant 2012, 259–69) explores accounts of knowledge *prima facie* defensible where such an outcome can be avoided.

feature it has as long as it is human speculative knowledge. In the body of that article, Aquinas defends that God's knowledge of creatures is both speculative and practical, but he does so by introducing some distinctions. Knowledge can be speculative if it either (i) concerns things that are not produced by the knower, (ii) considers speculatively things done by the knower—defining them, distinguishing from other possibles thing the agent could make, considering some universal predicates that should be applied to them, etc.—; (iii) considers how something might be made by the knower without actually willing to make it. Of these three kinds of speculative knowledge, it is obvious that (i) cannot be applied to God's knowledge of creatures, whereas (iii) seem to concern only a general consideration of the creatures God could possibly make and not a knowledge of the contingent particular creatures he has actually created. Regarding (ii), there are two possible positions that could be plausibly defended. One of them is to say that (ii) does apply to particular individuals God actually created, and therefore admitting that God's knowledge of contingent particulars can be speculative. In this case, our solution to the modal collapse argument will involve embracing (8). The other possible position is assuming that (ii) also concerns a general consideration of the creatures God could make and not a knowledge of the particular individuals he has actually created, and accordingly concluding that God's knowledge of contingent particulars is only practical or productive. In this case, DDS will require us to embrace (9) and consider that God's knowledge of singular creatures is not speculative, but fabricative. God knows himself as causing finite beings, and it is by causing them that God knows them (*ST* I q. 14 a.8 and a.11).

Fabricative knowledge is possible because the intentional production of something grants a certain knowledge of it. The existence of this knowledge that is not speculative-observational was lucidly defended by Anscombe (1963), and it constitutes a central element in both Aristotelian and Thomistic thought. To take an example from Anscombe herself, which Peter Geach brings up precisely because of the asymmetry that Thomas postulates in the relation between the world and God (Geach, 1969): When musicians perform a piece in which they must play a string of notes at great speed, they cannot take the time to listen to each of the notes played before or to see the movement their fingers have made so far before playing the following note. However, it is obvious that musicians know all the notes already played, since otherwise they would not know which note to play next. This knowledge of the part of the piece played so far does not have an observational source but arises from the very performance of the action.

However, this account of divine knowledge puts some more pressure on (7). If the precise action chosen by agents is not necessarily fully determined in their

internal act of volition but depends on its concrete performance in order to attain full individuality, how can agent's self-knowledge include knowledge of their precise effects? At the end of the day, we have argued that what concrete effect is effectively produced is not a fact about the agent but a fact about the effect. This might cast some doubt on the usefulness of the pianist analogy, because though its plausible to claim that performers know what notes they play because playing the music piece is a deliberate action they perform, it's less plausible to assume that such knowledge reaches levels of determination of the action that are not included in their internal volition. The musician might know whether or not a particular note has already been played, but not the exact place where every piano key was pressed each time (or at least not *via* fabricative knowledge).

So, what was said at the end of the previous section about agents' peculiar commitment to the precise actions performed as ultimate concrete objects of their choosing, becomes even more significant in this context. Though this commitment is not something intrinsic to agents, it nevertheless acts as a constraint of which agents should be aware by the sole fact of knowing themselves and being aware of the actions they have freely performed. This conclusion might be easier to accept in the case of God, a perfect and almighty agent. Human agents lack full self-transparency regarding their own actions: They have partial awareness of the concrete choices they have made, but they never have complete knowledge of the precise effects brought about by their decisions. Especially when facing a range of possible outcomes that seem completely indistinguishable in their relation to our desired goals, we might have troubles in trying to sort out the precise action we choose and the concrete effects our choice produced. Yet perhaps God's perfect and deeper knowledge does include full self-transparency in the required way.

Conclusion

Much has already been written on divine simplicity and the modal collapse argument. Though recent logical developments in these discussions seem attractive, a broader examination of underlying theories of action and knowledge might also be worthwhile. DDS could inspire novel accounts of human agency and fabricative knowledge featuring partial content-extrinsicness. Can such accounts be coherent and convincing? Do they conflict with traditional religious doctrines, such as free will or moral responsibility?

The idea of a God whose knowledge and creation of the precise creatures he makes is not an intrinsic feature might seem, at first glance, monstrously cold and alien to classical theism. However, at the end of sections 3 and 4 we talked about

certain external "commitment" agents have towards the precise effects they produce. This commitment acts as some sort of constraint, arising from the very performance of the action and linking agents to their effects in an irreversible manner, though it does not necessarily involve an inner transformation. It is intriguing to associate such external commitment with what theistic religions have historically described as a "covenant". Developing such a concept within the framework suggested in this paper could lead to further exploration of the theological and philosophical implications of our argument.

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