THE METAPHYSICS OF GOD AND CAUSAL POWERS

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Abstract: On traditional theology, God is said to be omnipotent. This means, roughly, God has all power. But there remains a powerful question: how is it that God can interact with the world? There are objections such as the pairing problem that purport to show only spatiotemporal causes can link with their effects, ruling out a traditional conception of the divine. Through undermining the pairing problem, a way is paved for the neo-Aristotelian idea of causal powers to be developed, defended, and applied to God. After this, I utilise God and/or causal powers to offer various solutions to particular areas of philosophical theology. This thesis will argue that a causal powers ontology ('Powerism') is a possible model for traditional divine action, and if adopted provides explanatory benefits in various areas within philosophical theology.

‘Introduction’

On traditional theology, God is said to be omnipotent. This means, roughly, God has all power. But there remains a powerful question: how is it that God can interact with the world? There are objections such as the pairing problem that purport to show only spatiotemporal causes can link with their effects, ruling out a traditional conception of the divine. Through undermining the pairing problem, a way is paved for the neo-Aristotelian idea of causal powers to be developed, defended, and applied to God. After this, I utilise God and/or causal powers to offer various solutions to particular areas of philosophical theology. This thesis will argue that a causal powers ontology (‘Powerism’) is a possible model for traditional divine action, and if adopted provides explanatory benefits in various areas within philosophical theology.

In the first chapter, I explore Buckareff’s relatively recent (2016) view that Kim’s pairing problem undermines traditional theology. He recommends moving to a pantheistic or panentheistic concept of God in order to avoid the problem of spatiotemporal pairing, which can be illustrated in the following way: suppose Tom looks out the window, and sees, to his amazement, a boulder crashing into a smaller tree, lying downhill from the boulder. The tree is obliterated. Tom’s philosopher friend Bill looks at Tom and asks, ‘What was the cause of the tree falling?’ Tom rolls his eyes but plays along. ‘It was the boulder,’ he says. ‘The boulder has a particular mass, and speed, and force is mass times acceleration, and the tree has a mass…’ ‘Yes, exactly!’ Bill exclaims. ‘Now what can we learn from this?’ Tom pauses and responds: ‘That all cause-effect pairings consist of objects in spatiotemporal relations.’ This is the problem to be undercut. Once it is undercut, however, the question remains: how can a non-spatiotemporal God cause anything within the world?

This leads to the second chapter. In it, I introduce a neo-Aristotelian metaphysics of causation, focusing on Powerism, or a causal powers ontology. This causal powers ontology is meticulously explained, following the work of Koons and Pickavance (2015, 2017) as exemplars of the contemporary version of the concept. After this is articulated, chapter three deals with potential objections to Powerism, and how several responses to those objections might go.

Chapter four has another potential problem in terms of negative causation. Whereas Buckareff was the 'villain' of chapter one, he is definitely the 'hero' of chapter four. I adjudicate potential responses to the problem posed by negative causation. What is happening when negative causation occurs? It appears, *prima facie*, that nothing brings about something, which at least looks on the surface to be metaphysically absurd. In examining the cases where someone can achieve their objective by doing nothing at all, it appears as though an account for negative causation can be applied.

Chapter five articulates what is going on within continuous causation. Continuous causation is said to be a singular process, where said process is metaphysically more fundamental than any constituent parts of the process might be. This distinguishes it from discrete causation. Discrete causation is made up of a finite number of links in a chain, one after the other. On discrete causation, the links involved in the chain must be finite, or else nothing would ever occur (a cause-effect relationship would have to migrate from one link in the chain to the next, moment-by-moment, forever, never reaching the end). On continuous causation, though, the infinite series of events is metaphysically fundamental, meaning that there are not a series of causal links, one after the other, that constitute the causal process. Rather, it is simply a case of, for example, Jane willing to raise her hand, and her hand being raised. This is opposed to the idea of Jane's willing to raise her hand, and several steps taking place that culminates in her

hand being raised. The idea on continuous causation is that *Jane* is raising her hand, not that she is merely activating a process that culminates in her hand being raised. Continuous causation comes into play in explaining how it is that God can exercise his causal powers in the physical world and not need to form discrete causal, physical links (e.g., God is not causing a physical series of events, like tipping an initial domino, but rather engaging in each causal process under review directly).

There is another potential for objection in all of this, and that is found in chapter six. 'Tanner's Two Rules' discuss Kathryn Tanner's two rules for theological discourse. These rules, ones which I dub *No Univocity* and *Limitless*, if applied, leave a view of God and causal powers as impossible. I address both of these rules and argue that deleterious consequences for theology follow as a result; thus, these objections to Powerism should be jettisoned.

Chapter seven is where I finally have the 'rubber meet the road' in terms of applying the work we have done before to God and causal powers. Conditions for agency, types of powers, and other concepts are discussed. I argue for which powers would be present in God and which would not, and why a causal powers theorist might diverge slightly from the account I offer within the chapter.

Once this is complete, in chapter eight I seek to show a couple of areas in which God and causal powers provide an explanatory advantage in various areas of philosophical theology. I first explore the idea of the laws of nature, and what impact objects and creatures with causal powers would have on the laws. The upshot is that I conclude objects' having causal powers results in the laws of nature being a reflective description of all the various ways all the various things in the universe can possibly interact. Another area of exploration is in terms of miracles: what counts as a miracle, and how can causal powers affect this idea? God may suppress active

or passive powers of objects to bring about a miracle (as what could have happened in the burning bush of Moses and Exodus 3), or he may use the idea of objects' having tendencies to exercise their powers and know when they will fail to so exercise. God, in putting his stamp of approval on such events, gives these events religious significance, and so fulfils the suggested criteria of what it takes to be a miracle. Finally, I apply the idea of causal powers to the logical problem of evil. I suggest that if God wants the kinds of creatures that the universe in fact has, he must accept the causal powers of the various objects interacting in ways that bring about natural evil (suffering); if he wants humans, then he will have to accept having the kinds of creatures that have the ability to exercise their causal powers for evil rather than good.

The final chapter deals with conclusions and areas for further research. I have found there are a number of fascinating directions to take causal powers in, ways that I simply did not have time to explore. First, within the chapter on the problem of evil, I only deal with the *logical* problem of evil. What about other problems of evil, like the various kinds and amounts of evil, or the gratuitous problem of evil, or even the soteriological problem of evil?[1] There remains significant questions about what is going on within the resurrection bodies of Christianity, and whether causal powers have any specific or significant role to play in these (with respect to a comparison with our current bodies). What about the Incarnation of Jesus Christ? What happened when the Second Person of the Christian Trinity took on a human nature? How might a causal powers ontology inform that?

Such questions are fascinating, even though they lie beyond the scope of this work. Nonetheless, I am convinced that a causal powers ontology can be very fruitful when applied to

[1] For those readers wondering, the soteriological problem of evil is the problem generated between an all-loving God and the fact that, on traditional theism, not everyone is saved and enjoys heavenly bliss.

various areas of philosophical theology. Rather than making God in our own image, I believe this may be a reflection of how we as humans are made in his.

Chapter One - 'Buckareff's Challenge for Traditional Theism'

Andrei Buckareff has recently argued for the following two claims regarding God and divine action:

(i) Traditional theism does not have the metaphysical resources necessary for us to be theological realists about divine agency.

(ii) Theological realists should endorse some species of the embodied God thesis (Buckareff, 2016, p. 214).

In this essay, I first articulate Buckareff's argument for the embodied God thesis (EG). Then, I examine his support for his first premise (a premise that is somewhat reminiscent of the major premise in the kalam cosmological argument—hereafter 'the *kalam*'). This premise claims 'Any spatiotemporally located state of affairs is caused by something that is spatiotemporally located' (p. 218). Another key premise, the third in his overall argument for the embodied God thesis, is that 'If God's actions are spatiotemporally located, then God is spatiotemporally located' (ibid.) I then give reasons to think that this third premise may be plausibly undercut (and may rely almost exclusively on his first premise).

1. The Argument for EG

In order to understand Buckareff's argument for EG, one must first understand the terms he uses. The claims he makes are inextricably tied to how he uses particular terms stipulatively; once understood, they provide a framework within which Buckareff's argument can be accurately understood. Without them, one may be at a loss for understanding the first claim given in the introduction.

1.1 The Terms Defined

The first term used is *theological realism*. This is the conjunction of two theses: *theological cognitivism* and *true theological statements*. First, *theological cognitivism* is 'the thesis that at least some of our positive theological statements about God's attributes and agency express what we accept or believe and that the statements are truth-apt' (Buckareff, p. 213). Second, the term *true theological statements* can be taken at face value: they are statements about God that have the property of *being true*. Thus, theological realism claims both that at least some statements we make and accept about God are truth-apt and some of these statements are, in fact, true.

The second major term is *traditional theism*. This term covers Anselmian divine perfections (hereafter 'perfect being theology') and also describes a deity who intervenes in human, earthly, and cosmological affairs. It can be succinctly summarised by the following: 'God is an agent who acts in the universe and is an immaterial substance without spatiotemporal location' (Buckareff, p. 214). Thus, the fundamental problem with traditional theism in Buckareff's first claim is one of correspondence; as it turns out, the God of perfect being theology and traditional theism either cannot correspond to what we really believe about God or else what can actually be claimed as true about God.[1]

The final major term is the *Embodied God thesis*. This is the claim that 'God's actions are spatiotemporally located and God is spatiotemporally located' (Buckareff, p. 214). The major argument Buckareff gives for the embodied God thesis leads to this conclusion and, by default, eliminates traditional theism. This accomplishes the second of the two initial claims.

[1] To be fair to Buckareff, he is not claiming that those who support traditional theism are being disingenuous. I am merely listing the two conditions involved—failure to achieve even one of which is sufficient for the failure to achieve theological realism. Buckareff ends up focusing on the 'truth' condition rather than the 'belief' condition.

1.2 The Main Argument

Part of the background of Buckareff's argument comes from the way in which we can discuss divine action. *Theological realism* requires that we are able to speak in at least some univocal ways about God and his actions. Similarly, some of these univocal ways of speaking of God and his actions must be 'truth-apt.' Further, he assumes an account of ontological truthmaking such that a theory or sentence holds only those things as ontological commitments that are required in order to deliver the truth of the sentence or sentences within the theory (p. 217).

One can see also Buckareff needs the assumption that God performs *discrete* actions within spacetime (or that such is needed for theological realism). This rules out claims that God has one eternal act that generates the universe in its act of existing (e.g., Thomism). The importance of this is to reveal some preliminary understandings of divine action and metaphysical commitment leading into Buckareff's main argument.

The main argument provided is a seemingly complex piece of reasoning. It involves nine steps, and shows each derived conclusion along the way. The import of this argument in the dialectic between traditional and alternative theists lies in the argument's *prima facie* acceptability; the premises *do* seem, initially, to be quite modest and plausible. If this is the case, the traditional theist has much to explain and account for in order to rebut successfully the embodied God thesis. Here is the main argument Buckareff provides for the embodied God thesis:

> P1. Any spatiotemporally located state of affairs is caused by something that is spatiotemporally located.
>
> P2. The causal consequences of God's actions in the universe are spatiotemporally located states of affairs.

C1. So God's actions are spatiotemporally located.

P3. If God's actions are spatiotemporally located, then God is spatiotemporally located.

C2. So God is spatiotemporally located.

P4. At any moment, God intentionally sustains the entire universe.

P5. Given that (C2) and (P4), then God is omnispatial.

P6. Given that God is omnispatial, then God is embodied in some way as the universe.

C4. So God is embodied in some way as the universe. (p. 218)

Premise P2 is fairly uncontroversial, given it simply claims that such actions as 'God parts the Red Sea at time *t*' have effects that are located in spacetime—in this case, namely, the effect of the Red Sea parting is such a spatiotemporally locatable state of affairs. Thus, C1 is just a deductively derived conclusion from P2 and P1. C2 is derivable from C1 and P3 by *modus ponens*. P4 represents a commitment that all traditional theists assert, where 'intentionally sustains' refers to 'discrete intentional actions.' P5 follows from C2 and P4 due to the following reasoning: If God intentionally sustains the entire universe at every point *x* along spacetime, then for every *x*, God is spatiotemporally located at *x*. But this means God has the property of *being located at* x, *for every* x. This entails that God is omnispatial (since *being omnispatial* is nothing more than to be located at every point in space). P6, according to Buckareff, does not attempt to adjudicate between forms of pantheism or panentheism, and he takes it that 'it is not too much of a stretch to assert that the universe embodies God somehow if God is omnispatial' (p. 219).[2] Finally, C4 is an inference from P6 and the contention that God is omnispatial (which is derived

[2] While this essay will not contest premise P6, it is interesting that Buckareff does not provide any argumentation for it directly. One might be forgiven for asking why it is that God's omnispatiality entails the universe's embodying God in some way. Even still, traditional theists (which include among them so-called 'classical theists') have warned against God being located in spacetime for fear of a similar result (see especially Geisler, N. (2001) *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election*. 2nd edn. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, p. 107-15.).

from the reasoning that leads to P5 and all prior premises). This leaves only P1 and P3, both of which shall be addressed later in this essay. We shall turn next to the support given for P1.

2. The Pairing Problem

The primary support Buckareff gives for (P1) is what is commonly known as the 'pairing problem.' In this section, I sketch out the pairing problem as represented by Buckareff. This problem is originally explained by Jaegwon Kim (2005) and (2011), and has received special attention in recent years.[3]

2.1 The Pairing Problem Explained

The pairing problem deals both with the philosophy of action and the philosophy of mind. While it was developed primarily to deal with issues of mental causation, it held a foundation in the philosophy of action and causation broadly considered. The idea being employed is that there are 'causal relata' involved in every event within the physical universe. Buckareff appeals to the event of the rock striking the glass window and causing it to shatter. The pair of objects involved is the rock (call it *A*) and the glass window (call it *B*). The 'constituents' of the event of *B*'s breaking each have a spatiotemporal location. So, what occurs in these relevant locations allows us to say that *A* and *B* 'pair up' so we can correctly say that *A* causes *B*'s breaking (Buckareff, p. 220).

The way Kim puts it is to think of it in terms of solely physical events. Suppose there are two guns (One and Two), simultaneously fired, and what results are the simultaneous deaths of Adam and Bob. Kim asks, 'What makes it the case that the firing of [One] caused Adam's death

[3] Kim has explained this argument (and the underlying reasons behind it) in other places as well; cf. Kim, J. (2003) 'Lonely Souls: Causality and Substance Dualism', in O'Connor, T. & Robb, D. (eds.) *Philosophy of Mind: Contemporary Readings*. New York: Routledge, pp. 65-77.; Kim, J. (2009) 'Mental Causation', in McLaughlin, B.P., Beckermann, A. & Walter, S. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 29-52.

and the firing of [Two] caused Bob's death, and not the other way around?' (2005, pp. 78-79) The answer, he claims, is to discover a pairing relation between the purported cause and effect. This relation (call it *R*) would hold between One's firing and Adam's death but not One's firing and Bob's death (and between Two's firing and Bob's death but not Two's firing and Adam's death). What is a good candidate for *R*?

The best candidate, Kim thinks, is spatiotemporal location. One and Two must be located at appropriate distances and aimed at Adam and Bob, respectively, in order to accomplish bringing about the result. Kim writes, 'It is these *spatial relations* (distance, orientation, etc.) that help pair the firing of [One] with Adam's death and the firing of [Two] with Bob's death. Spatial relations seem to serve as the "pairing relations" in this case, and perhaps for all cases of physical causation involving distinct objects' (p. 79).

If this is the case, then, it seems difficult for mental causation to account for *R* with respect to mental-to-physical or even mental-to-mental causation. This is because of a principle Kim calls M*, which is the following:

> M*: It is metaphysically possible for there to be two souls, A and B, with the same intrinsic properties such that they both act in a certain way at the same time and as a result a material object, C, undergoes a change. Moreover, it is the action of A, not that of B, that is the cause of the physical change in C (Kim, 2011, p. 52).[4]

The question that arises from M* is one of discernment: how is it that we can say which of A or B caused the change in C? It does not seem possible to have spatiotemporal relations hold between mental-type substances and physical-type substances. If this is so then the pairing problem for causal relations between the mental and the physical remains. The reason spatiotemporal relations cannot hold is summarised by Buckareff: the souls are 'literally

[4] It is important to note what Kim needs here is sameness of causal powers. He writes that if one is inclined to reject that there really can be two souls with identical intrinsic properties (as I am inclined to do), one does not need this *precise* formulation in order to make the pairing problem a significant one for interactionist dualists (cf. Kim, J. (2011) *Philosophy of Mind*. Third edn. Boulder, CO: Westview Press., p. 60, n. 23).

nowhere, if "where" implies some location in space-time' (2016, pp. 220-21). Since spatial relations plausibly constitute *R*, and mental substances cannot participate (by definition) in spatiotemporal locations, then there is no *R* for any causal event that occurs. It therefore follows that the preferred account (at least for Kim) does not have any room for the mental to act upon the physical.[5]

The same, Kim claims, holds for mental-to-mental causation. There is no causal nexus the structure of which allows for one mental substance M^1 to pick out another mental substance M^3 on which to act such that we can discern why or how it is that M^1 is acting upon M^3 and not a third mental substance (namely, M^2) doing so. The upshot of all this is that mental causation cannot even get off the ground, whether dealing with physical or purely mental causal events (pp. 53-54). He underscores the point by stating, 'Each of us, as an immaterial entity, would be entirely cut off from anything else, whether physical or nonphysical, in our surroundings. Can you imagine any existence lonelier than an immaterial self?' (2005, p. 85)

Recall the pairing problem is set as the primary motivation or support for P1, which is that any spatiotemporally located state of affairs is caused by something that is spatiotemporally located. Since P1 is a crucial piece of the main argument given for the embodied God thesis by Buckareff, the pairing problem is significant as well. In the next section, I give reasons to think the pairing problem for mental-to-physical causation can be undercut.

[5] Buckareff represents this argument as a *reductio ad absurdum* in the following manner:

1. Either C or C* causes E $((C \vee C^*) \rightarrow E)$.
2. There is no spatiotemporal causal nexus for either the pairing $(C \rightarrow E)$ or $(C^* \rightarrow E)$.
3. If there is no spatiotemporal causal nexus for either the pairing $(C \rightarrow E)$ or $(C^* \rightarrow E)$, then it is not the case that C or C* causes E (or $\sim((C \vee C^*) \rightarrow E)$).
4. Therefore, it is not the case that C or C* causes E (or $\therefore \sim((C \vee C^*) \rightarrow E)$) (Buckareff, p. 220-21).

2.2 The Response to the Pairing Problem

In this section I endeavour to undercut the pairing problem as an argument against mental causation through multiple objections. By 'undercut,' I mean something different than 'rebut.' When one rebuts an argument *A*, she provides some argument or set of evidences such that they justify the belief that *A* is false. More modestly, one undercuts an argument *A* when she provides reasons for thinking that the *justification* for *A* is false or otherwise does not truly justify *A*. First, I explore the idea that the problem may be merely epistemological (something Buckareff addresses directly in his essay). Second, I discuss the objection there may be no *R* needed (in the way Kim suggests); it may be the case that a causal pairing between substances is not a necessary condition of causation, perhaps in part because causation may be a primitive concept. Third, drawing on relatively recent work, I suggest within Kim and Buckareff's dialectic a pairing relation may rely on a general principle that is unmotivated, especially for immaterialists. Finally, I explore whether or not the pairing problem (and P1) suffers from question begging.

2.2.1 IS THE PROBLEM MERELY EPISTEMOLOGICAL?

In facing his first objection, Buckareff entertains the possibility that perhaps the pairing problem merely describes an epistemological worry (2016, p. 221). It could be that either C or C* causes E, so that even if we do not know which one it is—even if we *cannot* know—nonetheless E is caused, and caused by one of C or C*. Thus, the problem is merely epistemological. His response to this is to claim it is precisely the point that no causal nexus exists in spacetime such that the mental substance and the physical substance can be causally paired together; if this is the case, then what we have is more of a *metaphysical* problem (p. 221).

In epistemological debates one can discern the difference between 'It appears there is no reason for *x*,' and 'It does not appear there is any reason for *x*.' On the latter construction, one is

merely explaining the circumstances *as they appear to her*; there may or may not be any reasons for *x*, but currently they are not available. On the former, the claim is that the state of the evidence suggests there are, in actuality, no reasons for *x*. One is far stronger than the other; one is merely epistemological.

On Kim's formulation of the argument, it is clear he needs the stronger construction. When the implied claim 'If there is no causal nexus spatiotemporally that pairs a purported mental substantive cause with its physical substantive effect, then there is *nothing* that can pair the mental with the physical' is used, Kim must mean 'It appears there is no pairing relation between the mental and the physical,' not 'It does not appear there is a pairing relation between the mental and the physical.' If Kim means the weaker construction, then the problem is simply epistemological, by definition. There are several counterexamples from science that show simply because it is not currently understood how something works, it does not follow that it will never or can never be understood. Similarly, simply because it does not appear there is such a pairing relation, it does not follow that there is no such relation (Jehle, 2006).

Buckareff, however, anticipates this kind of reaction and argues against it accordingly. The point, he writes, is that there really cannot be any such pairing relation between the mental and the physical, since the mental is not spatiotemporally located, and any successful pairing relation must be of the spatiotemporally located kind (p. 221). Thus, we are left with an in-principle metaphysical, not merely epistemological, problem even with this weaker construction.

However, it seems to me Buckareff may be missing the force of the epistemological objection; it runs deeper than it may first appear. When he claims 'Specifically, we have difficulty explaining the occurrence of *E* because it *cannot be paired up* with the event that explains its occurrence' ((p. 221) emphasis added), he is assuming the pairing relation *R* is such

that it is (or must be) spatiotemporal (and be constituted therefore by spatiotemporal properties such as *being* x *distance away from the physical substance*). It seems to me the epistemological objection is to *this* claim.

This can be shown by the following question: what is the justification for thinking that *R* is only (or can only be) constituted by spatiotemporal relations? Kim's answer can plausibly be taken to be the following: we observe this kind of causation all around us, and it makes sense to discuss causation in terms of the physical (especially in terms of spatiotemporal location). He writes, 'Prima facie, spatial relations have the right sorts of properties . . . . In general, causal relations between physical objects or events appear to depend crucially on their spatiotemporal relations to each other' (2005, pp. 85-86). He adds, 'It seems plausible that ultimately spatial relations—and, more broadly, spatiotemporal relations—are the only way of generating pairing relations' (2011, p. 51). But it is difficult to discuss or even formulate principles that make sense of causation with respect to mental substances. Kim shows this difficulty when he confesses, 'It is a total mystery what non-spatial relations there can be that might help distinguish, from the point of view of an immaterial soul, between two intrinsically indiscernible physical objects' (2009, p. 33). In attempting to answer which mental relations could serve as effective candidates for *R*, he writes, 'It is difficult to think of any [such relations]; I don't think we even know where to begin' (ibid., p. 34). Thus, *R* is plausibly constituted by spatiotemporal locations (see (Kim, 2003), (Kim, 2005), (Kim, 2009), and (Kim, 2011) for this reasoning or reasoning supportive of this chain).

There does exist confusion in the literature regarding whether or not Kim intends his pairing problem to be necessary or 'ordinary' when it comes to modality. Bailey et al. (2010) take Kim to be speaking in terms of necessity, while (Jehle, 2006) takes both formulations and

finds them both wanting. Nonetheless, Jehle does mention Kim seems to deny necessity; hence, there is confusion as to which is actually correct.

There is a very real sense in which this dialectic may parallel the one in the problem of evil. At first the logical problem of evil is employed, to which a coherent possibility is presented that defeats the problem. After this an inductive or 'evidential' problem is developed, and that has various responses. However, crucially, it is not the case that a successful response to both problems is the same. It seems to be the same with the pairing problem: the 'logical' pairing problem and the 'probabilistic' pairing problem. The probabilistic problem gives the same reasoning, but simply concludes, 'Probably, the pairing problem excludes mental causation upon the physical (and probably mental-to-mental causation, too!).' Either Kim intends his pairing problem to be logical or probabilistic. If logical, then I contend he lacks an argument because our ordinary observation of causation around us does not entail the necessity of pairing. If probabilistic, then I contend while our ordinary observation does establish causal pairing, the ordinariness is not strong enough to support Buckareff's use of the pairing problem in his argument. Both versions of the problem will be explored below.

It is against the logical problem that I would like to push back with the epistemological objection. Kim's reasoning seems to be that we do not know of a way *R* can be or is such that it holds between mental substances and other substances for causation, so spatiotemporal locations are the only candidates.[6] But this is consistent with the following: For all we know, *R* can be or is such that it holds between mental substances and other substances for causation (or, in the case of Buckareff, between mental events and bodily actions). That is, we can epistemically conceive

[6] Kim does formulate his argument in terms of 'substances,' where he apparently takes something to be a substance just in case it is an 'independent existent' (Kim, J. (2005) *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough. Princeton Monographs in Philosophy* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press., p. 80). For the purposes of a *reductio,* Buckareff appeals to non-spatially located mental *events* interacting with spatiotemporally located bodily *actions* (p. 220-21).

of a state of affairs that includes a mental substance and physical substance being causally related such that the former can bring about a change in the latter (or, we can epistemically conceive of such a state that includes mental events being paired up with bodily actions such that the events are the causes of the actions). This relies on a plausible principle of epistemic conceivability: If *x* is epistemically conceivable, then *x* is epistemically possible. It then follows that it is at least epistemically possible. If this is so, what we have is, for the moment, an epistemological problem. This is not something directly addressed by either Buckareff or Kim.

It is clear that Buckareff is using the logical pairing problem (p. 221), but what is less clear is whether or not his argument needs it. While he only appeals to the logical version, all he might need is for the pairing problem to support sufficiently the belief in (P1), the premise that 'Any spatiotemporally located state of affairs is caused by something that is spatiotemporally located.'

Given the dialectic above, Buckareff can utilise the probabilistic version. The dialectic can be represented like the following: We see causation in the physical realm, and we know there must be a causal pairing relation, *R*. But what could satisfy *R*? It seems the only candidates we see are physical, spatiotemporal relations that hold between the objects in question. The response from the objector would be to say that yes, this *seems* to be so, but this may be only an epistemological problem. There is a relevant difference between 'It appears there is no *R*,' and 'It does not appear there is any *R*.' Finally, Buckareff can respond that spatiotemporal relations are, plausibly, all we have; and we would expect to see more or different options were they to exist. Thus, we can justifiably say that it appears there is no *R*.

Thus, while the epistemological objection succeeds against the logical modal version of the pairing problem, it does not successfully affect the probabilistic modal version of the pairing problem. Other objections will need to do the work.

2.2.2 Causation as a Primitive Concept

It may be the case that a causal pairing (of the kind Kim needs) between substances is not a necessary condition of causation, perhaps in part because causation may be a primitive concept. If this were so, it would mean causation is fundamentally unanalysable.[7] The spatiotemporal constitution of *R* would be irrelevant, since there would be no *R* in which to fit mental constitutive properties or 'locations' or anything like that. In other words, it could be that causation is direct and immediate.

This fits in with Cartesian dualism quite well. For Descartes, there was no ghost in the machine. Arthur Danto explains by way of analogy: 'A pilot turns the ship by turning the wheel, and he turns the wheel by moving his arms. But he does not do anything of the same order to move his arms—he *just* moves them, immediately and directly' (1989, p. 221). This can be thought of in terms of 'basic actions,' where an action qualifies as basic just in case it is performed directly, and not by means of some other action.

Descartes (1962), in *Meditation VI*, believes that there is an intimate connection between the mind and body. Even though he brings up the metaphor of the pilot and the vessel, it would be a mistake to characterise this as a mere 'ghost-in-the-machine' account. There is a special and direct connection of the mind to the body. He gives this reasoning for it: 'If this were not the case, I should not feel pain when my body is hurt . . . but should perceive the wound by the understanding alone, just as a pilot perceives by sight when any part of his vessel is damaged' (p.

[7] By this I merely mean to assert that causation is in some way fundamental, metaphysically, and does not break down into several (perhaps infinite) parts. Rather, causation is just a direct relation that one 'agent' has toward the thing that it affects.

94). Thus, the pilot-vessel metaphor is not to be taken as a fully sufficient one for what Descartes has in mind.

This connection is so intimate and direct that it holds symmetrical causal powers; that is to say the mind can affect the body and the body can affect the mind. Descartes thought this connection was primarily located in the brain (or at least in some small but important part of it). Regardless of the particular location in the brain, if causation between a mental substance and the physical substance to which it is conjoined is direct and immediate, then there are no spatiotemporal relations composing set *R* needed.[8]

Descartes' view may be supported by the theories of powers and continuous causation. Causation can be either discrete or continuous. Discrete causation involves the cause-effect pair (or 'agent-patient' pair, where the agent is the actor and the patient is the substance acted upon) having a finite number of distinct points that connect the cause to its effect. Continuous causation has an infinite number of 'instantaneous stages,' stages which Koons and Pickavance (2015) describe as 'each causally prior to' a later stage and causally posterior to an earlier one (p. 201). An agent *A* exercises its power at some time *t*, and at *t* a patient *P* begins its process of motion (or of *P*'s being affected by *A*). That process continues as an 'undivided continuum of events' (p. 201) into the indefinite future, until such time as the process is interrupted, whether by *A*'s ceasing to act or some other action taking place. This distinction is crucial for the dialectic.

The theory of powers, or 'Powerism,' asserts that causal powers are metaphysically fundamental. Things have causal power in virtue of the actual powers that thing possesses. There

[8] It is worth noting what motivated Descartes with respect to this reasoning was, in fact, the possibility of this relationship being put into place by the omnipotence of God (p. 91). Because he could not doubt his existence, and thought his essence was being a thinking thing that was 'unextended,' and he knew he had a body with which he was closely connected that was not a thinking thing but nevertheless extended, he knew he could exist separately from his body. Thus, it is because Descartes believed God could create or actualise whatever Descartes could conceive 'clearly and distinctly' that he believed two substances (mental and physical) were in existence. This means it will not do to follow the same motivation, for that would be to beg the question against Buckareff and Kim. Instead, one should appeal to a conceivability argument on its own or some other line of reasoning.

can be active powers, as when a fire heats an object near to it, and there can be passive powers, as when an object heats up in virtue of being near a fire. When *A* exercises its causal power on *P*, then *P* undergoes some specific causal change and a new causal relation exists between *A* and *P* (p. 64). When Powerism is combined with continuous causation, one can see *A* actively produces a change in *P* at a time *t*, not as discrete points in a causal chain, but instead as a continuous process grounded fundamentally in innate causal powers possessed by both *A* and *P*.

Cartesian interactionism would benefit from continuous causation and Powerism by moving away from Kim's idea of a causal pairing relation *R* altogether. Such *R*'s tend to involve discrete rather than continuous causation. Since causal powers are metaphysically fundamental to the things that possess them, and since causal links are actually continuous processes, Cartesian interactions can be direct. If this is so, then no *R* is needed, and the pairing problem does not hold.

This response works well against the logical pairing problem, since it appears to be at least one way causation *could* go. However, one may claim that it does not work as well against the probabilistic pairing problem. Kim has considered a kind of continuous causation. In (2003), he considered it as an alternative to the pairing relation *R*. He described it as a continuous causal link, and concluded that it raises more questions than it answers. Specifically, he claims that continuous causation simply begs the question. The question concerns the pairing of one particular cause to one particular effect. Kim believed this could not be done without postulating an intermediary in between the two relata, and this would just raise a new pairing problem between the causal object and the intermediary, which requires another intermediary object, and so on *ad infinitum.*

However, Kim seems to be treating continuous causation as though it were made up of an infinitely divisible number of discrete points; he treats it as if it were a causal chain with definite, individual connecting points. Koons and Pickavance, while not speaking about Kim or the pairing problem, pointed out this error when they wrote, 'The error in this way of thinking . . . is that it tries to understand continuous causation in terms of discrete causal links, as though continuous causation simply consists in an infinite chain of binary causal connections. We should instead take seriously the idea that . . . [it] involves an undivided continuum of events' (p. 201). So there is not *A* acting on some intermediary that brings about a change in *P*. Instead, *A* and *P* are related through a continuous causal process that relates by active and passive powers (properties possessed essentially by the objects that have them). Moreover, this can be independently motivated for someone who finds Powerism and continuous causation to be plausible, thus avoiding both a question-begging charge and the probabilistic pairing problem. The upshot is that the probabilistic pairing problem can be undercut if Powerism and continuous causation is correct.[9]

2.2.3 Is The Problem Unmotivated for Immaterialists?

A third objection is that the pairing problem may be unmotivated for immaterialists; that is to say that it might rely on a general principle to which immaterialists (and others) are not necessarily committed. Bailey et al. (2010) derive a general principle they call 'Kim's Dictum' from the following two premises:

1. Necessarily, for all *x* and *y*, if *x* causes *y*, then there is a relation or relations, *R*s, such that their holding makes it the case that *x* causes *y*.
2. Necessarily, a spatial relation is among the *R*s. (p. 351)

[9] While it is always open to Buckareff to object either to Powerism, continuous causation, or both, it nonetheless remains that an independently motivated account will give the opponent of the pairing problem sufficient grounds to say the probabilistic version has been undercut.

One of the first problems for many is that Kim's Dictum rules out models of the universe where the singularity was caused, given that the singularity is supposed to represent the boundary point for the existence of space itself. This might not be too compelling, since perhaps the pairing problem will be seen as evidence that such models are not correct, after all. It is, however, a cost to the view that some may not be willing to pay (especially immaterialists). In fact, the objection that the pairing problem rules out such cosmological models seems to qualify as question-begging in and of itself. If cosmological models establishing a beginning to the universe are constructed independently of the pairing problem dialectic, then to assume that the models are ruled out given the pairing problem is not only to commit the immaterialist to a principle that is unmotivated for her, but to beg the question against her also. Such beginnings plausibly show an external cause to the universe (such as in the *kalam*); if this is the case, then such a cause would be non-spatiotemporal (Craig, 1979, p. 149).

The next objection concerns a question: why does Kim think that Kim's Dictum is needed? That is, why does he think that an *R* is needed? While he does not say, Bailey et al. have a potential answer: there is a generality condition that is needed to satisfy causal relationships. This condition is represented as follows:

> Generality Condition: Necessarily, if *A* and *B* share all of their non-haecceitous properties, then *A* is no more qualified than *B* to count as the cause of *C*. (Bailey et al., p. 352)

Something like the generality condition above is needed in order to support Kim's Dictum for the pairing problem. This is because if this condition fails, *A* and *B* could share all of their non-haecceitous properties, and yet *A* could stand as more qualified than *B* to count as the cause of *C*. If this occurs, there just is no more pairing problem to be solved for immaterialists,

for it is no longer necessarily the case that spatial relations are among the *R*s that pair up cause and effect. (Bailey et al.) posit another, crucial issue the pairing problem has with respect to most immaterialists' view of freedom (a libertarian-style of free will). They ask us to consider a world with two persons—named Tim and Tom—who share all the same non-haecceitous properties. No property of Tim or Tom causally determines a particular free action prior to the moment of decision. Thus, they have the ability to cause *A* or to refrain from so causing. Suppose Tim actually causes *A,* and Tom does not. In this case, the generality condition fails, since the two are identical in their non-haecceitous properties and yet Tim is indeed the cause. Note Kim cannot complain that the inability to distinguish the cause is the real meaning of the generality condition, for then the pairing problem is *merely* epistemological (a situation Kim and Buckareff want to avoid). Thus, for anyone who holds to libertarian freedom, the pairing problem is unmotivated.

This works well against the logical pairing problem, but does it work against the probabilistic version? It does not appear that it does. The probabilistic pairing problem would rely on our observation of the world around us; every causal relatum we can observe seems to be paired with its partner in spatiotemporal relations. The Tim-and-Tom story does not seem to argue against that. The generality condition is not needed to support the probabilistic pairing problem—only a sufficiently informed induction is.

2.2.4 Does the Problem Beg the Question?

An important question to consider about the pairing problem is whether or not it begs the question against mental causation from the beginning. First, consider the logical pairing problem. This concludes that it is metaphysically impossible that mental causation takes place. The reasoning given is that we observe this kind of causation all around us, and it makes sense to

discuss causation in terms of the physical (especially in terms of spatiotemporal location). But it is difficult to discuss or even formulate principles that make sense of causation with respect to mental substances. Thus, *R* is plausibly constituted by spatiotemporal locations. Of course, this does not establish metaphysical impossibility. In fact, it seems consistent with the following: for all we know, *R* is or can be such that it involves mental relations. Thus, in order to proceed with the logical version, one must rule out, in advance, any such relations. But this is to beg the question against the immaterialist.

Second, consider the probabilistic version. The same reasoning supports, in a much better way, the conclusion: probably, the only effective candidates for *R* are spatiotemporal in nature. This seems to assume some principle like the following:

> **NO MENTAL**: If mental relations could or do sometimes stand for *R*, then, probably, we would expect to be in a position to know about them from our observation of the causal relata around us.

However, NO MENTAL seems unwarranted. As Hume might remind us, all we can observe is one physical thing moving and acting on some other physical thing.[10] In fact, it seems in order to believe NO MENTAL one must already know that, in fact, physical causal relations are all there are. A defender of mental causation might very well argue we are not in an epistemically advantageous position to be able to observe anything beyond physical causation, so that restricting our reasoning to NO MENTAL is tantamount to assuming mental causation does not take place. Hence, it may be that both versions of the pairing problem are question begging. If these lines of objection are successful, it means the pairing problem has been undercut for the immaterialist; it also means the support for P1—Any spatiotemporally located state of affairs is

[10] Nothing in my response here hinges on accepting Hume's account of causation being 'reducible' to mere 'constant conjunction.' It is enough to note Hume's point entails accepting that we only witness *physical* events with our physical faculties.

caused by something that is spatiotemporally located—is similarly undercut. There is another premise I will challenge in the next section.

3. Actions and Spatiotemporal Location

This section examines the support for P3—if God's actions are spatiotemporally located, then God is spatiotemporally located—and seeks to undercut the plausibility of this premise. I contend P3 either derives its plausibility from the success of P1, or else can be undercut by the immaterialist. I first examine P3 while relying on P1, since Buckareff seems to do this (2016, p. 225).

3.1 P3 Relies on P1

First, Buckareff intends for P3 to be defended, at least in part, on the basis of the results of his discussion of P1. He writes, 'If the reasoning in the prior section is cogent, then the results should generalize to God's actions' (ibid.). If the pairing problem succeeds, then there is no principled way to pair up God's causing some action in spacetime with its intended effect. In short, God cannot act within spacetime without also being located in spacetime (since spatiotemporal relations constitute the *R*s needed to satisfy the pairing of causal relata). If we have already undercut the pairing problem, then P3 does not pose a threat on this basis. There is, however, another way Buckareff might defend P3.

3.2 God's Actions Occur within God

Buckareff invites us to think of divine actions as occurring *within* God. First, suppose that divine actions are basic actions, where an action qualifies as basic just in case it is performed directly, and not by means of some other action. No matter where or how God causes a basic action, he does so directly (and hence basically). This basic action results in the effect being located

spatiotemporally, with the located action also occurring within God's being. While Buckareff clearly intended this line of thought to come from causal pairing (so that God's actions that must be spatiotemporally located must also leave God as spatiotemporally located), his thinking can be modified in support of P3.

It may be that if these actions occur within God, then since the causes bring about their effects, something within God brings about these effects. Perhaps this means since God is acting within spacetime, and these actions are in God, that God is in spacetime. This does, at first, appear to be quite plausible. Again it seems to me, however, that the plausibility comes almost entirely from the causal pairing problem and P1. Absent P1 there seems to be no reason to affirm that if God's actions are located in spacetime, then God is in spacetime.

However, there may be a human analogue with respect to basic actions. Any human performs some basic action in order to causally interact with the world. When she does so—indeed, *every* time she does so—both she and her actions are located in spacetime. It would seem a bit silly, at least on the surface, to think she is causing things while not being located spatiotemporally. But in fact this response too begs the question against the immaterialist-interactionist. While this is plausible, the question is whether or not mental causation is really possible. Indeed, this is the precursor, in reasoning, to the pairing problem as given by Kim (see Kim's statement that '"I wasn't there," if true, can be sufficient for "I didn't do it."' (2005, p. 86)).

Further, there may be positive reasons for thinking that divine causation can take place without spatiotemporally locating God as within (or identical to) the universe.[11] First, consider agent causal theories in the philosophy of action. If God agent causes at the level of intentions,

[11] Whether God is located within the universe or whether God is the universe depends on whether a version of pantheism or panentheism is true; this is not something that concerns Buckareff.

then, absent the pairing problem, God's causing of his intentions secures the resultant effect (which is located in spacetime). The discrete action *x* of God brings about the effect *y*, where *x* and *y* are both located in spacetime. But *x* is God's agent causing his intention to bring about *y*. Given this and omnipotence (a view held by traditional theists), God's intentions secure *y*. On this scenario, it at least appears as though God can be outside of spacetime agent-causing his intention *that* y *comes about*, without ever himself being within spacetime. If the immaterialist view of action is justifiably held, then it can be applied to God as well.

Second, there is the issue of being located *at* or *within* some object or location (where there is a relevant distinction to be made). Suppose there is a little girl who wants to play in the mud (as children are sometimes wont to do). She forms the mud into a separate block. As the day goes on, the block hardens somewhat but remains pliable. She pokes the block once or twice, shaping it and acting on the block as she desires. She makes distinct changes to the block each time. At time *t*1, part of the block *s*1 acquires the property of *being concave*, and her action of *making* s*1 concave* is also located at *t*1 and *s*1. This much seems clear. However, what seems less clear is whether or not the girl is located at *t*1 and *s*1. In fact, as she pokes the block of mud, it seems somewhat silly to say 'the girl is located *within* the block of mud' is true. Instead, what is likely going on is that the girl is *partially* located at the specific points of the block of mud. Even if we extrapolate this to God, it will not follow that God, being omnispatial, is fully located at every point within spacetime. Instead, something like a partial location of God at the spacetime points is going on.[12]

[12] This is a consequence that may not sit well with many classical theists, who want to maintain a strong view of the 'doctrine of divine simplicity,' which maintains that God is not composed of any metaphysical parts—including properties. A full account of partial location and its application to the doctrine of divine simplicity could be undertaken with the compatibility of the former with a somewhat weaker version of the latter in mind.

I have examined Buckareff's main argument for the embodied God thesis; specifically, I have examined his support for P1 and P3. I then undercut the support for P1 by giving four plausible reasons to undercut the two distinct versions of the pairing problem. Finally, I gave reasons to think that P3 may be plausibly undercut (and may rely almost exclusively on his first premise in any case).

Chapter Two - 'The Metaphysics of Causation'

The next several chapters aim to expand and defend two positions introduced in the prior chapter: *powerism* and *continuous causation*.[1] Powerism is the idea that things possess causal powers in a metaphysically fundamental way, while continuous causation is the view that instead of some cause-effect pair being connected by one or more causal links in a chain, it is actually connected by continuous processes. We have seen in the previous chapter that Cartesian interactionism (or any interactionism of the mental variety) would benefit from continuous causation and powerism by moving away from Jaegwon Kim's idea of a causal pairing relation *R* (where *R* holds 'between' the cause and effect). Such *R*s tend to involve discrete rather than continuous causation. Since causal powers are metaphysically fundamental to the things that possess them, and since causal links are actually continuous processes, mental interactions can be either direct or such that they do not require discrete links. If this is so, then no such *R* is needed, and the pairing problem does not hold. In this chapter I intend to do the metaphysical groundwork for an account of divine agency and action by discussing powerism. It may be that a successful defence of these concepts can be useful in a positive account of divine causation.[2]

In order to build an account of divine agency and action in causation, one must have in place a basic metaphysics of causation. Below I sketch out first what I mean by an agent, then

[1] These terms are specific to Koons, R. C. and Pickavance, T. H. (2015) *Metaphysics: The Fundamentals.* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell. and Koons, R. C. and Pickavance, T. (2017) *The Atlas of Reality: A Comprehensive Guide to Metaphysics.* Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell. A more common term is 'causal powers ontology.'

[2] By 'divine causation' I mean simply what others mean when they speak of 'divine action' (though there are distinctions needing to be made). I will also use the term 'divine agency' throughout. By 'divine agency,' I mean to communicate that God is an agent—a being endowed with causal powers who has the capacity to act to bring about some state of affairs—and this differs from causation/action. I will discuss these terms as I use them below.

how I am using the terms 'causation' and 'action.' After this, I aim to discuss powerism and objections and responses to that position.

1. 'Agency,' 'Causation,' and 'Action'

In this section, I attempt to provide a basic definition (or describe conditions for supervenience) of the terms 'agency,' 'causation,' and 'action.' These terms are all important not only to understanding the metaphysics of causation, but also for the concept of God and any model of how he might act on and/or in the world.[3] These definitions/descriptions are taken to be assumptions I make necessary for the discussion (although, no doubt, these could all be larger discussions themselves).

1.1 Agency

Abraham notes much has gone on in the literature surrounding divine agency. Nonetheless, 'there is little consensus as to how best to identify the core issues to be addressed.' (2017, p. 2) Even though this is the case, I endeavour to stipulate working supervenience conditions for agency. I suggest 'agency' for an action is, minimally, a state which supervenes on a subject *S* when: a) *S* has rationality, b) *S* has free will,[4] c) *S* is endowed with various causal powers, d) *S* intends to do some action *A*, and e) *S* performs *A* freely.

I argue these form the necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for agency.[5] I briefly examine each in turn.

[3] Since this is aimed at traditional theists, I am following convention in referring to God as 'he.' Nonetheless, this is to say nothing of whether God has a gender, what that might be like, etc. These are debates beyond the scope of this discussion.

[4] At present, I do not attempt to adjudicate debates over accounts of freedom, though this may become relevant in the next chapter.

1.1.1 *S* HAS RATIONALITY

If *S* is irrational, it hardly makes sense to classify *S* as having agency. She must be capable of exercising rationality in thought or toward some end in order for her to be an agent with respect to some action or decision. This is why we do not consider people who have been sufficiently mentally impaired to be acting as agents. While irrationality excludes one from being an agent, what about a-rationality? A-rationality occurs when a subject is neither rational nor irrational. Consider a basic plant, which exhibits neither rational behaviour nor irrational behaviour. Can this plant be an agent? It seems not. Any account of agency that accommodates involuntary instincts, or even non-action in some cases,[6] cannot be the account of agency one pursues. A full account of rationality will not be pursued here, but minimally rationality may be thought of as pursuing 'suitable means to . . . [an agent's] ends.' (Kolodny and Brunero, 2016)

Admittedly, this may have strange results. If Susie believes the best way to make friends with a tiger is to run from it, and if she wants to make friends with the tiger, then this account of rationality suggests Susie should run from the tiger. Appropriate behaviour for survival, but odd, given that it surely is not the best way to make friends with a tiger. This example suggests what is rational is an intended action, *given one's belief-desire complex*. The curious result is one may be acting rationally even if one's beliefs, desires, or both are themselves irrational (ibid.).

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[5] One might argue that another condition is needed; namely: *S* is morally responsible for *A*. But this may just be entailed by *S*'s having the property of *being an agent* (rather than forming one of the separate conditions for agency).

[6] In other words, if a plant or other being does not possess rationality with respect to some act, then it fails to fulfil a necessary condition of agency: this also means the proposed agent is rational with respect to some act, and not simply that the proposed agent *possesses* rationality in general. For example, if Smith is usually rational, but takes a pill that, unbeknownst to him, makes him irrational for a brief span of time, we would not think Smith is exercising agency in any of his actions during that time. On the other hand, if Jones were to refrain from taking that pill and appeared to act normally, possessing rationality as she normally does, we would think Jones has agency with respect to some particular action occurring during that time. Interestingly, if the Smith case were changed so that he took the pill knowing the outcome, we might think Smith has agency even over the irrational actions. This may be an issue of consequences of agential actions themselves being examples of a kind of 'indirect' agency. The lesson here may be that the rationality condition is more complex, perhaps something like '*S* has rationality or had it with respect toward an action that entailed or resulted in some other action.' Cases of non-action that may be sufficient for agency will be explored below.

Nonetheless, acting or intending to act for reasons (and doing so in accordance with those means-ends reasons) does seem to count as an agent acting rationally.

1.1.2 *S* HAS FREE WILL

Depending on one's view, she may argue that *S*'s having rationality is a sufficient condition for *S*'s having freedom of the will, or *S*'s having freedom of the will is a necessary condition for *S*'s having rationality. In either case, freedom of the will seems to be an indispensable condition for *S* having the property of *being an agent*. Another interesting connection might be made between freedom of the will and agency: freedom of the will may be an application of the idea that an agent has causal powers. In other words, it may be that freedom of the will is one or more among several causal powers an agent possesses. In Clarke and Reed (2015), they note, 'Powers are often implicit in what accounts of free will require. Powers of some kind are implicated in an agent's having rational capacities . . . .' (p. 6)

One could take this to suggest freedom of the will is simply subsumed under a complex of the other suggested conditions, or even a product of these. However, it seems to me freedom of the will is deserving of its place as a separate condition for the following reasons. First, the exercising of powers is not always necessary for some willing to be free. Consider the idea (explored more below) of bringing about one's will by a failure to act at all, such as in the case of allowing some event to occur that aligns with one's will.

Second, the other conditions do not themselves give rise to free will. Conditions a), c), and d) possibly can take place without freedom of the will, and even if they cannot it is not their presence, individually or jointly, that results in free will (e.g., one does not have rationality, and so *on that basis* have free will; one does not have intentions, and so *on that basis* have free will, etc.); it seems these are, at best, themselves *results* of free will, and not the other way around (at

least on a) and d); on c), it seems obvious some things can have causal powers and not have freedom of the will at all, such as inanimate objects). Condition e), of course, does not *give rise to* free will, but *assumes* it. Third, and finally, we often take freedom of the will to be an integral part of agency for purposes of moral responsibility (in ordinary cases).

In this chapter I do not intend to provide and defend an account of freedom of the will (this will be done in a later chapter). However, freedom of the will might be discussed as the idea one is free with respect to the *willing* of their actions. (2015, pp. 8-10) If one can freely will her actions, then this does not necessarily entail that she is just free to do *anything*. For example, I am not now free to start speaking Russian. However, I am free to will to learn to speak Russian (again, causal powers/capacities are relevant).[7]

This freedom with respect to our own wills seems to be fundamental to analyses of agency. If an accused murderer stands before a courtroom and claims he did not have the freedom to will to murder his victims, *and the court believes him*, then he will not be found guilty. Implicitly, freedom of the will is so important as to be a necessary condition for any subject to have agency at all.

1.1.3 *S* IS ENDOWED WITH VARIOUS CAUSAL POWERS

This will be fleshed out more in the sections that follow (specifically, in the explanation and defence of powerism). In this section my aim is to show why possessing causal powers is a necessary condition for agency. In a causal powers account, particular substances have capacities

[7] One might rightly ask whether there are situations where external constraints prevent one from freely acting in some way. Suppose one is locked in a prison and wills to get out. Although she may be willing to get out of prison, she cannot do so. Is this a counterexample to the necessary and sufficient conditions for the supervenience of agency? It seems not, since condition e)—*S* performs *A* freely—is not fulfilled in cases of external constraint. Hence, this is not a counterexample to the criteria. Could this serve as a counterexample to the idea of free will I am positing above? As an account sufficient for action, certainly; however, this is mostly an account of willing to do some action (rather than the successful attempt at an action itself).

and powers at their disposal, and these powers are generally thought of as active (in some cases there may also be passive powers; see below).

It is difficult to conceive of *S* being an agent while not having any causal powers. If one cannot bring it about that *A* from powers that she possesses, it is hard to say *S* is an agent who is intentionally acting, freely, for reasons. In other words, causal powers seem to be a necessary part of the other conditions jointly considered. If one is freely, intentionally acting for reasons (which are rational), then one is plausibly doing so from a place of causal powers.[8]

1.1.4 *S* Intends to do Some Action *A*

Many of the traditional analyses of action deal with the concept of intentions. Whatever the details, there is a usual, basic agreement that intending to do some act is a necessary condition of an agent's undertaking some action. Clarke and Reed (2015), although rejecting intentions as *sufficient* for agency, seem to have invested in the idea for agency nonetheless. Not all are involved in such agreement. Abraham considers the idea that intentions are necessary conditions for actions. He relays a scenario that runs somewhat as follows: Suppose Jen is drawing on a piece of paper. She does so voluntarily, but, as it turns out, she does not think about *what* she is drawing—or even *that* she is drawing—while doing so (it is a case of 'doodling'). It seems we have a true case of action even without intention; this is a counterexample to the criteria given above. (2017, p. 3)

In response, I suggest that while this may show intention is not required for *actions*, it is still required for *agency* (in his defence, Abraham did not claim intention failed to be a necessary condition for agency; he claimed this for actions). Further, it may be that this fails to be the counterexample it needs even for actions. Take the doodling case. What makes it so persuasive

[8] I realize this is somewhat controversial, as not everyone takes a causal powers ontology to be the truth of the matter. A defence of causal powers will be undertaken below, including a response to some objections dealing with causal powers and agency.

as a counterexample is the fact that the action is initially undertaken *voluntarily*. It would not be very persuasive if suddenly Jen just found herself doodling, as though awakening to find she had been sleepwalking. So in order to count as an action of the relevant type (an *agential* action) while avoiding intention as a necessary condition, the action proposed must be voluntary and non-intentional. Let us consider Jen's volition, then. At some point, she must have willed to bring about the state of affairs *doodling on a paper*. But it is precisely at this initial, voluntary point that it looks like intention is involved; her will to act was about doodling on a paper, and she intended to do so. This is so even if Jen never thinks about doodling thereafter. It thus seems intention can be a part of even this supposed counterexample. If so, then intentions remain a critical component of agency, for without it, it is unclear how an agent is acting freely and rationally with causal powers to bring about a state of affairs.

1.1.5 *S* PERFORMS *A* FREELY

At first glance, this appears to be the same as the freedom of the will condition. However, careful consideration will show two distinct differences. First, it is not enough merely that the other necessary conditions are present in the agent. This is because *S* could be coerced to do some action, even though *S* is normally free, rational, intentional, etc. It has to be the case for *A* that *S* is performing it (not that *S* is being used as an instrument by some other being acting as an agent). If *S* is not performing it, it seems impossible for *S* to be an agent with respect to that action. Second, and flowing from this first difference, *S* must perform *A freely*. Suppose *S* has freedom of the will, has an intention(s), is rational, has causal powers, and she even performs *A*. It is still possible for her to perform *A* non-freely. Having a free will does not entail every act one performs is free; it only entails that at least some of them are. *S* needs to perform *A* freely in

order to be acting as an agent with respect to *A*. With these conditions in place, the distinction between causation and action will be discussed.

1.2 Causation and Action

On one level, the terms 'causation' and 'action' are often used interchangeably. In normal discourse this is completely acceptable. For the sake of clarity, we should stipulate a difference (one which will be explored in more detail below). A *causing* seems to be an agent or substance bringing about some effect; in the cases of agency, it seems to be an agent's directing her causal powers toward a particular end or ends. An *action* is the outcome of the cause. In other words, all actions have causes, but not all causes are outcomes. Causes produce actions. In that case, we can easily see where causes and actions would be consistently joined. This means an agential action is when *S* as an agent causes *A*, where *A* is the action that is the outcome of the cause. With these distinctions in place, we now turn to the discussion of Powerism.

2. Powerism

'Powerism' is the name given by Koons and Pickavance (2015), (2017) to their causal powers account of causation. It can be taken to be a kind of neo-Aristotelian account of causation (but need not be so). In this section, I examine powers and dispositions, the account of powerism according to Koons and Pickavance, and then evaluate objections to this account.

2.1 Powers and Dispositions

Koons and Pickavance distinguish three kinds of powers and provide some helpful definitions of terms that will be needed in order to understand powerism. The three kinds of powers discussed are active powers, passive powers, and immanent powers. Koons and Pickavance note the following about an active power: 'A property *P* is an *active power* if and only if, necessarily,

whenever a thing has *P* there is the possibility of its producing a specific kind of effect *E* on some other thing under specifiable conditions by virtue of having *P*.' (2017, p. 88) Fire is a great example of this. It has the active power of heating up objects that have the power of being heated. This property of fire meets the conditions of being an active power because it produces that effect on some other thing (the thing that has the power of being heated) under specifiable conditions (coming into relevantly close proximity to fire, because fire has the relevant property, such that the object is heated).

The second kind of power discussed is a passive power. Koons and Pickavance write, 'A property *P* is a *passive power* if and only if, necessarily, whenever a thing has *P* there is the possibility of its being affected in some specific way *E* by some other thing under specifiable conditions by virtue of having *P*.' (p. 88) Ice is a great example of something that has a passive power. Ice has the property of *being such that it melts when in close contact with temperatures above 0° C*. This property qualifies as a passive power since, given *P*, it is possible for ice to melt, so long as appropriate specifiable conditions obtain (namely, in this case, when it comes into contact with fire). Now ice's ability to melt may be an active power itself.[9] However, in the case of fire interacting with ice, the fire exercises its active power of *heating up objects capable of being heated when in close proximity* on the ice, which has the passive power of *being capable of being heated when in close proximity to objects with the active power of heating*. The significance of substances having passive powers is twofold: first, there are no substances that are simply acted upon; all substances have causal powers of some sort, in every situation.

[9] This may be why there is some resistance to the idea of passive powers. Suppose ice melts, and the runoff directly lands on a thin piece of paper, weakening it. The ice (water) has produced a change in another object under specifiable conditions. This is pretty clearly a case of an active power. But it does not follow from this fact that there are no passive powers. All that follows is the interesting case that at least some passive powers are also active powers—just under different specifiable circumstances.

Second, every cause-effect pair will be related at least in part by these powers; causal powers ground cause-effect relationships.

The third kind of power is referred to as an immanent power. Koons and Pickavance helpfully define an immanent power as the following: 'A property *P* is an *immanent power* if and only if, necessarily, whenever a thing has *P* there is [sic] possibility of its producing some intrinsic change in itself under specifiable conditions by virtue of having *P*.' (p. 88) Take the case of a moth becoming a butterfly. The moth has the property, within herself, of *becoming a butterfly*. If she did not have this property as a moth, then she would not become a butterfly. Under the right conditions, the moth becomes a butterfly, thus revealing she had this immanent power all along.

Under their account of powers and dispositions, properties can also be either a *resultant* or a *tendency*. Here is their definition of a resultant: 'A property *P* is a *resultant* if and only if, necessarily, whenever a thing *x* has *P* at *t*, there is some earlier time *t'* and some passive or immanent power *M* such that *x* has *P* at *t* by virtue of its having exercised *M* at *t'*.' (p. 88) There are two such examples to explore. First, take the moth-to-butterfly case again. While the property of *becoming a butterfly* was an immanent power, it is in virtue of this immanent power being exercised at a particular time that the moth acquired the property of *being a butterfly*. *Being a butterfly*, then, qualifies as a resultant of *becoming a butterfly*. Another interesting case is discussed in a footnote above. Suppose ice melts, and the runoff directly lands on a thin piece of paper, weakening it. The ice (water) has produced a change in another object under specifiable conditions. The ice has the property of *cooling the paper* in virtue of its passive power of *being capable of being heated* being exercised (at least in these specific circumstances). Thus, we can see resultants can also be active powers.

Koons and Pickavance define a property as a tendency in the following case: 'A property *P* is a *tendency* if and only if, necessarily, whenever a thing has *P* there is a certain likelihood or propensity for it to exercise one of its active or immanent powers under specifiable circumstances by virtue of having *P*.' (p. 88) The advantage of including this definition is that it explains, in part, why fire heats up objects that have the passive power of being capable of being heated up. If fire had this active power, but not a tendency to exercise that power, we may encounter strange scenarios where fire does not burn. One is reminded of the burning bush of Exodus 3 in the Torah of Judaism and Christianity; if there were no tendencies, it may well be just another everyday occurrence. With these three kinds of powers in place, as well as the definitions of resultants and tendencies, powerism itself can now be defined and evaluated.

2.2 Powerism Defined

Powerism is an account of things having causal powers and is a particular form of a causal powers ontology. But what are these 'things' to which I have referred? Generally, by a 'thing' I mean a 'substance,' where a substance is some object that possesses properties, has unity of those properties and/or parts (if the object possesses them) at a particular time or times, and has capacities, according to Moreland and Craig (2017, pp. 196-98). These capacities can be what they call 'first-order' capacities and 'second-order' capacities (ibid, pp. 197-98).

A first-order capacity is the ability to exercise a power. To borrow from a previous example, I am free to write in English; I have a first-order capacity to write in English. A second-order capacity is the capacity to have a first-order capacity; it is the ability to develop the ability to exercise a power. For example, I have a second-order capacity to have the first-order capacity to write in English (otherwise, I could never have learned to write in English). Another second-order capacity, naturally, would be my ability to write in Russian. It is not currently a first-order

capacity for me, but it is something that, in principle, can be developed into a first-order capacity. These capacities are grounded in the nature of these substances, such that for an entity to lose these innate capacities, it would no longer be what it was; it would cease to exist, and a new entity would come into being (ibid., p. 199).

These capacities are, broadly speaking, causal powers. Substances possess powers and dispositions in themselves, as properties (whether as universals or in particulars only) Koons and Pickavance (2017, p. 106).[10] These substances are distinct from one another by their *haecceity*, or *thisness* Moreland and Craig (2017, p. 200). According to Moreland and Craig's account, substances are individuated from each other in part by making a distinction between the natural kind to which multiple substances may belong (which will include these substances sharing many, or perhaps even all, of their natural properties, which include causal powers) and the haecceity that is the individual substance (ibid.).

The individuated substance is a concrete entity; however, there is an abstraction that describes the substance and all of its properties, referred to as an essence. An 'essence is an abstraction, standing for a person [substance], composed of all and only essential properties. If the creaturely essence is the abstraction, then the instantiated person in a possible world made actual is the concrete particular.' (Everist, 2015, p. 10) This is Alvin Plantinga's view as well: 'Now suppose we define Socrates' *essence* as the set of properties essential to him. His essence is a set of properties, each of which is essential to him; and this set contains all his world-indexed properties. . . . No *other* person has all of these properties in this set.' (1977, p. 51)

A 'world-indexed' property is:

[10] The question of whether these properties are universals or particulars need not be explored now; however, the adjudicating of this question may become necessary as questions about powerism arise.

> one that some essence has in a particular [possible] world. So if [Randal] has the property *being married to Jodi in W*, while he does *not* have the property *being married to Jodi* essentially (because he is not married to Jodi in *every* possible world in which he exists—[in fact, there are many worlds in which Randal is not married to Jodi]), he does have the . . . [property *being married to Jodi in W*] essentially (since in every possible world in which [Randal] exists, the world-indexed property is had by him; it would not vary from one world to the next whether or not [Randal] is married to Jodi in *W*) (Everist, p. 11).

Supposing, for the sake of argument, Randal's having the property *being married to Jodi in W* is not essential, then it would follow there is some world W^n such that in W^n Randal does not possess the property of *being married to Jodi in W*. But this indicates that in W^n it is true that in *W* Randal is not married to Jodi. This contradicts the propositional truth behind the property *being married to Jodi in W*; namely, that in *W* it is true Randal is married to Jodi. In short, it would be the case both that Randal is and is not married to Jodi in *W*, which is absurd. The solution to this *reductio* would be to do away with the supposition that such world-indexed properties are not essential.

However, an objection could be the following: there seems to be no difference between world-indexed properties and accidental properties. But if there is no difference, and if world-indexed properties are essential properties, then there is no difference between essential and accidental properties. In other words, there are no accidental properties.

There are at least two related ways one could reply to this objection. First, the properties that are essential are only the world-indexed properties. It is an accidental matter which world is actual. Thus, while the property *being married to Jodi in W* is essential for Randal, the property *being married to Jodi* is not. Only if which world were actual were a matter of necessity would the identification of essential and accidental properties take place. The objector can always respond such a move results in a substance's nature dictating what one does, and this contradicts the needed agency in a causal powers ontology.

This leads to the second response. One can always posit these essential properties are not *intrinsic* properties (thus, 'essential' properties basically refer to properties possessed by essences specifically). In this case, an intrinsic property *P* is such when everything that composes the ground of *x*'s having *P* is found within *x* (Koons and Pickavance (2017, p. 51)). Now we can see that non-world-indexed properties fail to be intrinsic properties, for they do not satisfy this definition. This is because the property for Randal *being married to Jodi* has as at least part of its ground the state of affairs *Randal choosing to marry Jodi in W* and *the actual world being W*.[11] Of course, the actual world being *W* is not exactly up to Randal (though he does make it up in part); at least, it is not *entirely* up to Randal, so that *being married to Jodi* is not grounded entirely in Randal, and thus is not an intrinsic property. If this is not an intrinsic property, then there are differences between essential properties (properties belonging to an essence) and accidental ones.

So then, substances have causal powers and dispositions they possess in themselves as properties, and these properties are plausibly essential properties insofar as they are world-indexed (when relating to the abstraction of an essence). David Lewis's thinking can be applied to these kind of properties when he writes of 'counterfactuals *de re*'(1973, pp. 36-43). For Lewis, these properties need to be grounded by something concrete.[12] In contrast to Lewis's concretist view of possible worlds (but seemingly in agreement with the idea there needs to be something in virtue of which such counterfactuals are grounded) is Luis de Molina's view. Molina took

[11] For now we leave interesting discussions on whether or not the term 'actual world' is merely an indexical pointing to the world Randal happens to inhabit, designated world *W*.

[12] Hence the idea of concretism when it comes to possible worlds, and eventually counterpart theory. See Lewis, D. (1986) *On the Plurality of Worlds.* Oxford: Blackwell., as well as Chihara, C. (1998) *The Worlds of Possibility.* Oxford: OUP. In the latter, Chihara provides some criticisms of Lewis's theories.

counterfactuals to be 'special, primitive properties' Koons and Pickavance (2017, p. 85) that constitute a kind of external relation between the holder of properties and the concrete world.

However, one can see a potential problem on the horizon. How can we determine which cause is a real cause in a cause-effect pair? The pairing problem (or at least the epistemological concern behind the pairing problem) rears its head once again.

Suppose there is an apparent case of overdetermination, where there could be two or more causes for a particular effect (think of the morbid case of someone being hit by a moving vehicle at the same time he is experiencing a massive heart attack: both are sufficient causes for the effect of death, but which one caused it?). Koons and Pickavance (2017) suggest this problem is a real one, though it is only epistemological. They write:

> Where there is symmetric overdetermination . . . the question of which potential cause is a real cause is simply the question of which potential agent is actually connected, by a real process, with the effect. This may be impossible for us to determine empirically, but there will always be a fact of the matter in the things themselves.[13] (p. 107)

Thus, it is the substance itself that is part of a real causal process with the effect. Advocates of powerism can also use the term 'agent-patient pair' to describe the cause acting on the effect; the agent acts to bring about a change in the patient, whereas the patient passively receives the change (in virtue of its having passive powers). If we combine the ideas of substances with that of essential properties, we then see substances possess powers essentially, as a part of their *thisness*.

Real substances possess haecceities, as previously mentioned. Koons and Pickavance suggest some properties also have a *thusness*, or a *sicceity* (p. 109). If they did not, then

[13] This is why I believe powerism assists in the pairing problem of the previous chapter. In adjudicating which is the real cause of some event *E*, Kim and Buckareff give spatiotemporal relations priority. While undoubtedly these can and do play such an explanatory role in *identifying* causes of *E*, a causal powers ontology describes the powers as properties in the things themselves. Thus, spatiotemporal relations do not confer powers or are not the things in virtue of which powers are present.

properties are individuated based on their powers; a particular abstract 'causal profile' (a set of powers some substance has in virtue of its being that substance) is sufficient to individuate some property. However, such an account seems implausible if we want to apply it for all properties. Suppose we take two possible worlds, our actual world and another world resembling ours in all relevant respects except for one: instead of the inhabitants of that world (call it *W'*) perceiving the colour red, instead, in *W'*, they perceive the colour red*. Red* shares all of the same active and passive powers as red. This means that all of the phenomenological experiences that people have in relation to red* mirror those same phenomenological experiences of red. However, in *W'*, no one has the experience of red, only of red* (by stipulation). If this view of red and red* is even possible, it means that it cannot be the case that all properties are individuated on the basis of their powers (or causal profile). There must be something that individuates these properties.

On this view, for at least some properties, there can be two properties, both of which confer precisely the same set of powers. If this is correct, then what individuates one property (call it P1) over another (call it P2)? Sicceities provide an answer. If nothing else, one might think P1 has the property of *being identical to P1*, which is a property that P2 does not have. If this is so, then substances possess powers essentially (at least in some cases).

Of course, the opponent of this specific view of powerism could always insist that the story of red and red* is implausible, after all. Because the phenomenology is precisely the same, one may argue, there's just nothing to distinguish them; in other words, there is no red* in *W'*, there is only red and its corollary phenomenological experiences. In this case, nothing major hangs on properties not having a sicceity. Even though this is a neo-Aristotelian view, one could always seek to apply a theory of universals to the properties and mesh these views together. It will be important to maintain a haecceity, or at the very least a kind of theory of essences, to

distinguish objects that apparently have the same set of causal powers (e.g., *this* robot, Model X, is not identical with *that* robot, Model X, despite them having the same set of causal powers).

Furthermore, to argue that a distinction can be shown in P1 and P2 by claiming the property P1 possesses the property of *being identical to P1* while P2 does not is just to beg the very question at hand. Properties such as P1 and P2 or red and red* either are or are not identical. While it is true that if the scenario given above with red and red* is even possible, then something like sicceities for properties are viable, it seems as though red and red* are not really possible, after all. I confess I do not understand what it means to have red and red* have identical profiles and phenomenology and yet be different. In fact, if one is trying to understand whether or not red and red* are identical, and one argues they are not in virtue of the fact that red has a property red* does not—namely, the property of *being identical to red*—then one already has to know red and red* are not identical, which begs the question. In any case, what is needed is not the precise Aristotelian-style scholasticism of haecceities and sicceities, but rather something to individuate substances.

However, it is worth noting not all properties possess their causal profiles essentially; it seems some may do so accidentally. In Koons and Pickavance, an advocate of powerism may hold that there are some 'pure non-powers, properties which have their causal profiles contingently' (2017, p. 117). A good candidate for these may be spatiotemporal properties. The idea is that these properties do not act in any way themselves; they merely provide an environment or occasion for other substances exercising powers. Even if such properties do have powers, a possible world can be conceived of wherein material substances only have the immanent power of inertia, in an inert world, and are made of 'ghostly matter,' so that these material bodies simply pass right through each other. If this is so, it seems correct to say there are

still spatiotemporal properties (e.g., *body 1* was *x* distance away from *body 2* at time *t*, *x – 1* distance away at *t'*, etc.), even if these properties are not exercising—indeed, cannot exercise—any powers. If this is right, then spatiotemporal properties count as pure non-powers, since they do not have their causal powers essentially (ibid., p. 117-18).

One might be tempted to object even in these cases spatiotemporal properties have particular causal powers, but that they simply cannot engage them in that possible world. But in this world, the material bodies under consideration only have immanent powers. These powers, along with the ghostly matter, mean the bodies can pass through each other, coming closer, and then going farther away, at different times. In other words, their movements give rise to spatiotemporal properties, but by definition, these properties do not seem to possess any powers. Instead, one must argue that the scenario described is not possible, after all. Without such an argument, it seems spatiotemporal properties qualify as pure non-powers. I do not have an example for a pure non-power that is not a spatiotemporal property; however, if there is a pure non-power that is not spatiotemporal, then we can say the following: 'A *pure quality* is a fundamental, non-spatiotemporal property that has its fundamental powers' accidentally (ibid., p. 117).

Thus, a substance that has these causal powers (whether active, passive, or immanent), and has a tendency to exercise these powers under specifiable circumstances, can engage in cause-effect pairings, where it can act either as an agent (bringing about some effect on a patient) or a patient (having a change brought about by an agent acting as a cause). The nature of the causal link will be explored more below, in a chapter on continuous causation. In the next two chapters I explore objections to powerism and evaluate potential responses.

Chapter Three - 'Objections to a Causal Powers Ontology'

The previous chapter may have made it seem as though powerism is without difficulty or challenges from other philosophers or systems. This would be very misleading if not for the present chapter. In this chapter, I articulate four different objections to powerism and attempt either to undercut them or augment the account of powerism such that it remains a viable option for the metaphysician.

1. The Laws of Nature are Necessary

The laws of nature are not typically taken to be metaphysically necessary by a majority of people. After all, one could imagine a world where water freezes at some other temperature, or gravity is *not quite* what it is in this world, etc. This conceivable world, then, indicates the laws of nature are contingent, and thus entails it is implausible the laws of nature are necessary (Koons and Pickavance, 2017, p. 118). However, a consequence of powerism is that substances possess the causal powers they have in terms of their haecceities or essences; thus, the collection of substances present in our actual world can only act according to this collection of powers (so long as we are describing properties that are fundamental powers). But then nothing can be both our actual world *and* operate according to a different set of laws. The laws of nature describe the physical interactions of all of the substances in the universe. Given substances possess their causal powers essentially, we could imagine another world with all of the same substances with all of the same sets of causal powers. In fact, this is what *any* world containing these substances would be like. This means the descriptions the laws give about substances and interactions would not vary from world to world. 'Laws of nature that do not vary from world to world' is just a

longer way to describe laws of nature that are necessary. This is, as was argued for from the conceivability aspect, implausible, and thus this is a reason to think powerism is false.

The objection of the prior paragraph can be expressed in a propositional argument:

LAWS: If powerism is true, then the laws of nature are necessary.

LAWS (A): Substances possess their causal powers essentially.

LAWS (B): If substances possess their causal powers essentially, then their causal powers do not vary from world to world.

LAWS (C): So substances' causal powers do not vary from world to world.

LAWS (D): If substances' causal powers do not vary from world to world, then substances have the capacities to interact (using their causal powers) in the same way in *every* world.

LAWS (E): The laws of nature are descriptions of how substances can interact in the physical world (using their causal powers).

LAWS (F): So substances have the capacities to interact (using their causal powers) in the same way in *every* world.

LAWS (G): So the laws of nature are descriptions of how substances can interact in the physical world, using their causal powers, and these descriptions (propositional sentences) are the same in *every* world.

LAWS (H): But propositional sentences that are true in every possible world are necessarily true.

LAWS (I): Thus, the laws of nature are necessarily true.

CONCEIVE: The laws of nature are not necessary (because we can conceive of other possible worlds with differing laws).

CONCEIVE (A): If we can conceive of something, this is *prima facie* evidence of it being metaphysically possible.

CONCEIVE (B): We can conceive of other possible worlds where a different set of laws is true.

CONCEIVE (C): Therefore, we have *prima facie* evidence of a different set of laws being metaphysically possible.

Therefore, powerism is not true.

I have provided what I take to be a *prima facie* plausible line of reasoning for both **LAWS** (see *LAWS A-I* above) and **CONCEIVE** (see *CONCEIVE A-C* above). Depending on one's understanding of 'necessary,' one may plausibly deny either LAWS or CONCEIVE. Suppose Alice wants to deny LAWS. In order to do so, she must focus on LAWS' conception of necessity. Alice may argue the laws of nature are *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*. In other words, the laws of nature describe the states, powers, and capacities of the substances involved in a given world. If the necessity were a metaphysical necessity over the whole of any possible universe, then this would lead Alice to believe that the substances that are actually in existence would be the only substances that could be in existence. But Alice knows nothing in powerism demands that we take this track.[1] She can reason that if there were to be *other* substances, then there would be *other* laws. This is due to those other substances having particular causal powers. Basically, Alice would amend *LAWS (D)* to *LAWS (D'):* If substances' causal powers do not vary from world to world, then substances have the capacities to interact (using their causal powers) in the same way in *every* world *in which they exist*.

[1] There is the potential to argue for just such a modal collapse on powerism. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

Note one who presses the LAWS/CONCEIVE objection cannot complain that Alice cannot postulate these other possible substances, because she is relying on the same conceivability principle they are. They further cannot complain the laws cannot be different after all, for this is simply what Alice, an advocate of powerism, would say about the particular substances in our world. Given Alice's reasoning, she can say the laws are necessary *given the kinds of substances we have*. In other words, the laws are what we might call *conditionally necessary* (where we mean that *given* this actual world, with these actual substances and causal powers, these are the laws that *must* be in force). In this case, Alice can deny LAWS because she denies the laws of nature are necessary in the same sense as the objector must intend. Thus, she can avoid the conclusion.

Suppose Jen wants to deny CONCEIVE. She does not engage in the definition of necessary—or at the very least, her interlocutor may allow it for the sake of argument in this part of the discussion. She agrees with the objector in LAWS' reasoning such that the laws are necessary. However, Jen attempts to undermine CONCEIVE by arguing that conceivability does not necessarily entail actual, metaphysical possibility. This is a difficult line to take. It is not because people argue conceivability necessarily entails metaphysical possibility, but because it is a widely held view that conceivability at least functions as a good guide to metaphysical possibility.

Jen need not deny conceivability functions as a generally good guide to metaphysical possibility.[2] Instead, she can just argue for basic constraints on this principle. First, she can admit this principle means conceivability provides some *prima facie* reason to think whatever is under consideration is metaphysically possible. However, there may be a good reason to think that

[2] Indeed, in a previous chapter I rely on just the sort of general principle advocates of CONCEIVE are using here. Jen would, then, not be denying any of *CONCEIVE A-C*. She would simply deny the use of CONCEIVE here.

what is under consideration is not metaphysically possible, *ultima facie.* In Jen's case, she must believe the benefits from believing powerism's claims outweigh the plausibility of there being another world with precisely the same substances with different laws. Using a kind of Moorean shift, Jen can argue that, on powerism, these substances do not have different causal profiles, and so the laws of nature cannot be different with respect to the same set of substances in various worlds. This would not be begging the question, since Jen is not assuming powerism is true. Rather, she is saying this is precisely what we would expect were powerism true, and the intuition she has that the laws could be different does not remain when she considers these substances with their causal profiles. In other words, Jen does not have the intuition that the objector needs in order to be successful: that the set of substances there are in the actual world really could have all the same causal powers and yet the laws of nature be different. So we see there are at least two ways to oppose the objector's argument above.

There may be yet a third way. Suppose in addition to Alice and Jen, Materialist Marilyn arrives. Materialist Marilyn does not think sicceities individuate properties, but instead believes 'properties are individuated by the set of powers they confer' (Koons and Pickavance, 2017, p. 110). This would mean each individual substance is picked out by the particular set of powers, uniquely. In other words, 'There are no sicceities, since it is impossible for two distinct powers to have the same causal profile' (ibid., p. 111). There seem to be two problems with this response: first, it seems to face the same question as the nominalist might. If every substance has its own unique causal profile, then in virtue of what do two objects have the same powers? Suppose Jim and Bob both appear to be walking down a street. On Marilyn's view, Jim and Bob only *appear* to be exercising the same power. In reality, they are exercising *walking-1* (in the

case of Jim) and *walking-2* (in the case of Bob). The answer is that they do not seem to have the exact same powers, and non-nominalists will find this implausible.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, this does not seem to circumvent the possibly differing laws objection. If these objects have only their causal profiles, and their profiles are unique to them such that there are no sicceities for these properties had by these substances, then in varying worlds where the substances appear the laws describing their causal powers will not differ, either. This is enough to make Marilyn's objection interesting, but not enough to overcome the initial objection.

The objection that on powerism the laws of nature are necessary and this is implausible has at least two main lines of potential refutation.[3] We have seen this is a conditional necessity (not a full-blown metaphysical necessity), and the intuition that the same set of substances with the same exact causal profile of powers could be in another world governed by a different set of natural laws is rendered suspect by powerism. This, however, is a cost of powerism, since Jen must uphold the principle of conceivability being a good guide to metaphysical possibility even while saying it is not a good guide in every case, specifically this one.

2. The Unavailability of Patchwork Principles

A kind of recombination or 'patchwork principle' is often at play in discussing modal metaphysics. In other words, we often get our understanding of what is possible from our imagination of parts of what the world is actually like and re-combining them. For example, the question, 'What would the world be like if the Allies had lost World War II?' attempts to take

[3] There is an interesting discussion that could happen with respect to God and the laws of nature. Perhaps God can make it the case that the laws are prescriptive; in varying worlds, the laws governing objects could vary as well. Perhaps substances' powers are less descript and far-reaching (e.g., *A* has the capacity to have the capacity to *x*); this can be explored in a later chapter.

pieces of the world that are real—the prime minister of the UK in the 1970s, the state of the Danish economy in the 1990s, etc.—and recombine them into a picture that one might think is possible, given the relevant parameters. This is a vital part of discussing how things might have been, and what alternative possibilities there are. Without it, a kind of modal collapse ensues (at least epistemologically), wherein there really is only one possible way things could have gone.

An objection may be that if powerism is correct, then the patchwork principle of recombining elements of our world to discuss different possibilities in different possible worlds would be unavailable to us (p. 118). This is because of the laws of nature being necessary. These laws thus hold across worlds; thus, one might think there are no other worlds to discuss, since the laws turn out to be deterministic. In other words, if powerism is true, any talk of true counterfactuals would be trivial. As such, our modal knowledge is greatly undermined. This objection gives us, if successful, a fairly strong reason to think powerism is false. The objection may proceed as our prior one did, in a *modus tollens* form of argumentation:

1. If powerism is correct, then we cannot make use of patchwork principles.
2. But we can make use of patchwork principles.

   Therefore, powerism is not correct.

Koons and Pickavance give the reasoning behind (1) above: 'If the laws of nature are both metaphysically necessary and deterministic, then there is only one possible world that begins as our world does, namely, the actual world' (ibid.). So the laws are determined (they must be what they are) and they are metaphysically necessary (they hold across worlds). In this case, it is difficult to see how any other world obtains.

There is one way such a world can be imagined (in a very broad sort of way): worlds that are 'alien;' alien worlds are worlds containing, whether completely or at least partially, properties

which are 'never instantiated at all in the actual world' (ibid.). In the cases of alien worlds a modal collapse is avoided; there is more than one possible world. However, the recombination principle is off the table, since we cannot very well recombine the various parts of *our* world (since alien worlds have properties totally foreign to ours).

At first blush, one may want to make use of the earlier discussion on conditional necessity. Given the types of things (and hence powers) that exist, these are the laws of nature that must obtain. However, this does not seem to help the advocate of powerism escape the argument; at least it does not in a way that she would find ultimately helpful. This move would help to deny (2) in the objector's argument above; it turns out we cannot make use of patchwork/recombination principles after all. This is such a highly counterintuitive result, however, that it may be sufficient by itself to doom powerism.

Perhaps a better move would be to embrace (2) while denying (1). It is better to embrace patchwork principles and affirm powerism than to lose either of these things. There is a route to take for powerists: deny that the laws of nature are deterministic. The powerist must also deny that the laws of nature even could possibly have been deterministic (ibid., p. 119). This interesting dialectical dynamic is a definite cost to powerism, since, just as with the laws being metaphysically and conditionally necessary, it is somewhat counterintuitive.

An engaging way to understand how the laws of nature could be necessary but not deterministic is to put it in the following terms: the laws of nature are *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*. That is, the laws of nature *describe* what things in fact do rather than *dictate* what they must do. If the laws are descriptive, then they are indeterministic; nothing about the laws themselves causally determines anything.

Neither is this an *ad hoc* move by the powerist. One must recall that on powerism, things not only possess active and passive powers, but also have *tendencies* to exercise those powers. Recall that a property that is a tendency is defined as follows: 'A property *P* is a *tendency* if and only if, necessarily, whenever a thing has *P* there is a certain likelihood or propensity for it to exercise one of its active or immanent powers under specifiable circumstances by virtue of having *P*.' (p. 88) The advantage of including this definition is that it explains, in part, why fire heats up objects that have the passive power of being capable of being heated up. If fire had this active power, but not a tendency to exercise that power, we may encounter strange scenarios where fire does not burn. In the case of indeterministic, descriptive laws, it naturally turns out that the laws are probabilistic. In this case, the laws describe what things have a tendency to do when their relevant powers causally interact. These tendencies need not be so 'loose' as to have anomalies occur every few instances. Instead, these tendencies can be so 'tight' that a deviation can have an astronomically small chance of occurring.

The other condition on powerists in this objection remains: she must claim the laws are not even possibly deterministic. This is because if the laws of nature were possibly deterministic, it means there is some possible world such that deterministic laws govern it. But powerism maintains all things have causal powers, and it is these powers, and how they interact, that give us a full description of the laws governing a particular world. If some possible world has deterministic laws, then it is not causal powers informing what goes on in a possible world; that is, it would simply be an odd, contingent feature of our world that causal powers happened to be in play (and this seems quite unlikely). Instead, a possible world with deterministic laws would

not even have the kind of things the world of the powerist has.[4] Thus, it does not seem even possible that the world is deterministic with respect to the laws of nature.[5]

By positing indeterministic laws as a consequence of powerism, one can undercut (1) in the argument above. This is because (1) required determinism, and indeterministic laws with tendencies in describing causal powers preclude determinism. As a result, patchwork principles can still be used in recombining elements of our world with what could have happened.[6] In sum, the laws are what they are necessarily, though they simply describe what powers a thing has, rather than dictate what that thing must do.

3. The Intentionality Objection

It seems as though if powerism is true, then something like intentionality is present in the very fundamentals of reality. Koons and Pickavance (2017) describe a property as intentional 'if it essentially involves some relation to another thing or to a situation, without entailing that that other thing or situation be actual' (p. 119). To use a classic example, I can think of a golden mountain without that mountain existing. This would mean my property of *thinking about a golden mountain* involved a relation to another thing or situation, namely, the state of affairs of a golden mountain or the object of the golden mountain, and neither of these things need be actual in order for me to have that property.

[4] To emphasize, this is because the kinds of things the powerist world has are things that have causal powers in their essence; a removal of causal powers from an object means the object no longer exists. Thus, any deterministic world precludes the kinds of objects we have now, and thus would qualify as an alien world.

[5] This may have an impact on any discussion in which God is determining the laws of nature; if powerism is right, God may only be able to do so by creating other kinds of things, or alien things.

[6] This is especially true for things that possess libertarian freedom. One might be sceptical of the claim, for example, that fire may fail to exercise its active power of burning objects that are capable of being burned (even if only once in a trillion years), but if at least some things possess libertarian freedom, it is at least somewhat more plausible these things would use their libertarian freedom and act in ways contrary to what they normally do. At the very least, *indeterministic* laws means (at least exhaustive) causal determinism for action seems to be out.

Causal powers are fundamental properties of essences, on powerism. Thus, these fundamental powers are 'built' into every thing or concrete object that exists in the universe. Given our basic definition for a property's being intentional, combined with the fact of causal powers' being fundamental properties, we see that causal powers are intentional, and they are fundamental to the basics of reality (what exists). These causal powers are about a thing's capacity to act on other things, at other locations, in various situations, etc. For example, the vase has the passive power of *being shattered* in appropriate circumstances (involving, say, the force of a rock being thrown at it, amongst other factors). So the vase's passive power of *being shattered* is about these various circumstances, whether actual or (in most cases) merely potential. This is the case even if a particular vase's power is never exercised.

Yet it seems truly odd, if not downright counterintuitive, to claim the fundamental nature of reality itself has this *aboutness* or intentionality. Further, some may object to the idea of causal powers as fundamental. Some may want to eliminate intentionality by reducing every apparent case of it to non-intentional facts. This can be a problematic move since it seems no one has truly succeeded in such a project (ibid.).

Alex Rosenberg (2012) argues there is no intentionality, no aboutness in the world, etc.[7] He writes, 'Instead of holding that he [Darwin] made purposes scientifically acceptable, one could argue that he rid nature of purpose. . . .We may go on to infer there is no meaning, nor any real intelligibility to be found in the universe, or at least none put into it by anyone but us' (ibid., p. 107).[8] In his debate with William Lane Craig, Rosenberg claims objects in the universe, and even

[7] Rosenberg here only argues that such is one plausible interpretation of what Darwin accomplished in his theory of natural selection; he elsewhere seems to embrace fully such a view. See Rosenberg, A. (2011) *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company., and Rosenberg's debate with William Lane Craig at Purdue University.

[8] Even here it can be argued this meaning put in by us is not what Rosenberg called 'real' meaning—that is, objective meaning and purpose. This is rather *subjective* meaning.

the universe itself, are not about anything. Craig summarises the view in this way: 'Dr Rosenberg boldly claims that we never really think about anything' (2013). The reduction of intentionality into mere physical facts and states of the universe entails that, literally, *nothing* is about anything. Craig rightly argues that Rosenberg's view entails we never think about anything. However, Craig argues that he is certainly thinking—about the implications of the argument, about his response, etc., and so, using *modus tollens*, he can infer the falsehood of the view.

If intentionality cannot be reduced to non-intentional facts or, less controversially, if no one has yet succeeded in such a reduction, then the powerist does not need to give up her powerism on account of this objection alone. Additionally, the vase example earlier this section can provide another way we might think about intentionality in nature. A vase can have a power (in our example it is a passive power) that is never exercised. This is mirrored by merely possible scenarios and events that never take place.

If the exercising of causal powers is a process, we can suggest there are cases of processes that have an outcome or outcomes that never come to pass, and we do not find these cases to be mysterious. To use Koons and Pickavance's example, an animal could be crossing the road at the moment it is struck and killed by a vehicle (2017, pp. 119-120). The outcome of the animal actually crossing the road is never realized, and yet it was clearly in the process of doing so. What we have here, then, is an intentional property about a state of affairs that is never brought about. The point is this: an intentional property may be present with respect to a state of affairs or object that never comes to pass or into being. If we do not find these kinds of cases sufficiently mysterious as to disqualify them from consideration, then so we should not find the

same kind of cases sufficiently mysterious, simply because it comes at the level of fundamental reality. It seems no principled reason excludes intentionality from being 'built into' reality.

4. The 'Overpowered' Objection

One potential criticism of powerism is that, in postulating active and passive powers, and that things possess both, the powerist has an overpowered account of causation. She does not need more than, say, active powers to account for the causal mechanisms of the world. This can be seen in the example of fire and ice. Suppose fire has the power to *make ice melt* (in virtue of fire's heating up things that come into relevantly proximate contact). If this is so, why think that the ice needs a passive power of its own (namely, the passive power of *being able to melt*)? It seems active power is good enough to account for the cause-effect relationship (p. 120).

Why might this be a problem for powerism? It is not necessarily, as Koons and Pickavance mention, that we are not sure which powers, active or passive, are more fundamental (ibid.). That can be an issue of a different sort (one of the coincidence of the appropriate pairings actually working in cause-effect relationships), but it does seem that we can prefer active powers to passive ones. Without active powers, nothing seems to engage the causal relationship. In other words, nothing acts as the cause within cause-effect pairings.[9]

The problem instead seems to be that powerism posits both active and passive powers; perhaps a causal powers ontology ought to prefer only active powers. It seems that if *G* exercises some active power *F* such that *F* has the ability to make *Gs H*, then there is no need for *G* to have the passive power of *becoming H* when in contact with *F*'s exercised active power. A

[9] However, this particular way to view the problem may itself have a response. Suppose that in order for a cause to truly be a cause both active *and* passive powers must work in concert. Something along these lines will be explored below.

causal pairing seemingly only needs one or the other, and simplicity considerations come into play. As with properties, causal powers can range in terms of level of description. For example, I have the property of *writing a PhD thesis*. Yet I also have a more *specific* property, namely the property of *writing a PhD thesis on the metaphysics of divine causation*. This concept of a fine-grained property can also be applied to active powers. Fire has the active power of *heating up objects*; fire also has the active power of *heating up objects capable of being heated under specifiable circumstances*.[10]

If this is correct, it seems to follow that causal pairings need the patient (the object acted upon in a cause-effect relationship) to have the capability of changing in the relevant way. One can always deny that objects possess these kinds of fine-grained powers, though it seems at least somewhat plausible for us to describe powers in this way. A good reason for one denying fine-grained powers might be the following: it seems the concept of a fine-grained power is derived from the more 'basic' power. In other words, the power of *heating up objects capable of being heated under specifiable circumstances* seems like it is derived from the more basic power of *heating up objects*. If this is so, the latter entails the former; one does not need the fine-grained power in order to see that the basic power grants or allows for the fine-grained power. This seems reasonable enough.

This may not work for all cases of powers, however. Consider the power to speak. If Jim has the power to speak, this basic power does not entail just every fine-grained power that could be imagined as associated with or derived from it. For example, Jim's power of *speaking* does not guarantee he will have the fine-grained power of *speaking Russian*. This fine-grained power

[10] It should be noted, however, that not all powers can be fine-grained without limitation. Suppose Jen does some evil act (say, stealing bread from the poor), and that this act comes from a power, namely *stealing bread from the poor*. It surely is more plausible to say that Jen has the power to *grasp bread* in various circumstances as essential to her, and not *stealing from the poor*. Perhaps one may simply 'bite the bullet,' and not really see this as much of a problem, but it is worth noting.

would have to be developed in specifiable conditions. This at least suggests there is some difference between the powers. However, one could always argue there is a difference merely in terms of the order of capacities. If Jim has a first-order capacity to speak, that does not entail a first-order capacity to speak Russian. However, he does have a second-order capacity to speak Russian; Jim can develop the first-order capacity to speak Russian. While this is certainly correct, it is not clear the distinction lies in the order of a capacity only. In other words, if there are no fine-grained powers, we should expect even these capacities to be identical. If a fine-grained power picks out different capacities from the basic power, this suggests such powers are not identical and thus the fine-grained powers are distinct from the basic powers in their descriptions.

George Molnar distinguishes between what he calls 'basic' properties and 'derivative' properties (2003, pp. 28-29). Derivative properties are ontologically dependent on basic properties. What this seems to indicate for powers is that powers such as *speaking Russian* are derivative from basic powers of *speaking*, full stop. This seems to work with a fine-grained account of properties.

Molnar also discusses Armstrong's view of 'complex' properties.[11] If an object *a* possesses the property *F*, and possesses the property *G*, then it seems *a* possesses the conjunctive property *G&F* (and *F&G*) (pp. 34-35). A natural objection concerns an unnecessary inflation of one's ontology. But it seems one can argue there really is a difference between *having F* and *having G* and *having F&G*. Suppose Amanda has the property of *being intelligent*, and suppose Ben has the property of *being sensitive*. It would certainly make a difference for Amanda to have both the properties of *being intelligent* and *being sensitive*! This may strike one as more than a little

[11] Just what it is for a property to be complex is not easy to say, nor agreed upon by everyone (Molnar, pp. 33-34).

unfair, though, since the point is supposed to examine whether there is a difference for the same substance to possess both properties and yield this complex property of Armstrong's.

In at least some cases, it may mean something more to have both properties. Take cases of *being ambidextrous*. If Amanda is ambidextrous, she can use either her left hand or her right. In this case, Amanda is left-handed *and* she is right-handed.[12] *Being ambidextrous* communicates something more for Amanda than *being left-handed* or *being right-handed* does. This is not exactly what Molnar has in mind, though. The best way to represent it in the case of Amanda is to say she has the property of *being right-handed* and *being left-handed* and *being right-handed & being left-handed*. Further than this, she also has the property of *being left-handed & being right-handed*.

It is this kind of property to which Molnar objects. He writes, 'If conjunctive properties are not additional to the conjuncts, then they are not causally and dispositionally additional to the conjuncts' (ibid., p. 35). One could respond by indicating such a property as in Amanda's case at least means something more than the individual conjuncts do. Another objection of Molnar's, which I took to be a good one, is that there is no principled reason to exclude the property *G&F* if we also accept *F&G*. If one responds by saying we need only one of these properties and so are not committed to both, Molnar can reply by saying one must still know which of the two ought to be preferred. This intuitively makes sense: if we agree Amanda has the complex property *being right-handed & being left-handed*, then it seems we have no reason to exclude the fact that she also has the property *being left-handed & being right-handed*; if we insist Amanda only has one of these, we still must know which one—and this seems wholly arbitrary.

[12] Someone may rightly object that to be right-handed is just to use one's right-hand primarily; we can simply amend the example to Amanda possessing the property of *being such that she can use her right hand for all ordinary tasks*, and the same for the left hand.

It seems to me there are two potential responses to this. First, Molnar has brought up an epistemological worry, to be sure, but it is simply that—an epistemological worry. While an advocate for Molnar could respond that the epistemological problem highlights the fact there is no reason to prefer either complex property and so no reason to postulate either property, Amanda could respond by saying *being ambidextrous* requires that she is both right-handed and left-handed. However, this does not require *both* that she is both right-handed and left-handed, *and* that she is both left-handed and right-handed. This is essentially the second way to answer this objection. Amanda's *being ambidextrous* requires her *being right-handed & being left-handed*, but it does not require her to be so in any particular order. She can simply suggest the order does not make a difference and argue *being right-handed & being left-handed* is not a distinct property to *being left-handed & being right-handed*, since both are just descriptions of the property *being ambidextrous* (and if two such properties are identical to a third, then it follows the two properties ought to be considered identical to each other). However, even if one does decide she does not embrace any fine-grained powers there remains a reason to accept passive powers as needed in cause-effect relationships.

Suppose there is the paradigmatic instance of cause and effect that we have been using: fire and ice. Fire has the active power of *heating up objects*. For the sake of argument, suppose this active power is all that is needed in the cause-effect relationship of heating the block of ice. What does it mean for the block of ice to lack the passive power that a causal powers ontology would suggest it has? It seems it would indicate that the block of ice does not even have the *capacity* to melt (for this is all that it means to say the block of ice has the passive power of *melting*: that it has the capacity to melt, and *vice versa*!). Thus, when the fire and ice come together in proximate contact, while the fire can heat objects, the block of ice, by stipulation, lacks even the capacity to

be heated. If some thing *G* lacks the capacity for some state *H*, then *G* will never become *H*, no matter how much power *F* has. If *F* could cause *G* to *H*, then it turns out *G* was capable of becoming *H*. But *G*'s capability to become *H* just is an instance of a passive power. Thus we see both active and passive powers are necessary to form the cause-effect relationship. Neither of these powers is derived from the other, but both work in concert, and there is no overpowered circumstance on powerism.

In this chapter, I have outlined four main objections to a causal powers ontology. After explaining them, I evaluated each, and gave reasons to think the advocate of powerism could answer them. In the next chapter, I explore the idea that a causal powers ontology requires absences to be able to function as causes, what options there may be for the powerist, and what implications all of this holds.

Chapter Four - 'Absences and Negative Causation'

Powerism seems to entail that absences have causal powers. It is completely natural to speak as though events are caused by absences (e.g., 'the hole in the road caused me to swerve,' 'the absence of an object between the firing pin and the bullet causes the gunpowder to ignite,' etc.). Koons and Pickavance note absences can also be caused; they can be effects of 'positive' causation. The example given is one of a vehicle swerving to avoid an accident (ibid.). In this case something positive caused an absence as an effect. They mention explicitly why this is a problem for the proponent of a causal powers ontology: 'Powerism requires that we attribute causal powers to absences. But only *things* can have powers (whether active or passive), and absences aren't things!' (p. 120, emphasis in original) In the case of so-called 'negative causation' there is an unacceptable reification of nothingness going on. In this chapter, I aim to give responses to the charge that negative causation poses a special problem for a causal powers ontology. I discuss a few proposed solutions to the problem before tentatively settling on one.

There are at least three main lines of response one can give to this objection. First, one may reify absences, at least those that are directly relevant to the operation of an object or process. This is more or less biting the bullet of the problem listed in the first paragraph of this section. Second, one can try a kind of disjunctivist account: there are real causal connections in the cases of positive causation, but when it comes to negative causation explanations are good enough. If a positive cause upholding a particular state of affairs is removed, then this absence is a sufficient explanation for the state of affairs that obtains as a result. Third, one can deny negative causation is real. All instances of causation are themselves positive. There seems to be

some doubt about this, given there do seem to be negative causation cases such as the one listed above. Each of the three main responses shall be discussed below.

1. Reifying Absences

Reifying absences shall be discussed first, since it embraces part of what motivates the main objection. The idea is that the reification of nothingness (or absences) is an unacceptable metaphysical cost. Having to bloat one's ontology to include absences seems too high. For example, consider the human person Mary. Mary lives in Europe during a particular time and does particular things. She has a particular causal profile and brings about many events. However, if we reify nothingness and absences, it would seem we would be committed to the nearly absurd proposition that the actual world is 'filled' with all of the events Mary did *not* cause. Further, at all of the spatiotemporal locations where Mary is not present, one must postulate the lack of Mary in all of those locations. So, both the lack of Mary and the lack of all the things Mary never did are nearly everywhere throughout all of space and time.[1] Surely something has gone wrong.

However, the response of reifying absences need not be so extreme. One does not need to reify *all* absences in order to get the desired result. She can reify only absences that work in concert with some positive power or set of powers (whether active or passive) to bring about an effect in a cause-effect relationship. The advantage is the ontology of objects is not bloated beyond what may be necessary to account for negative causation. When one says 'The hole in the road caused me to swerve,' the reified absence (i.e., the hole) was involved with a positive

[1] In truth, the lack of Mary and/or the lack of the things Mary did and/or the lack of things she never did can occupy *every* point in spacetime. This is because at every spatiotemporal point at which Mary does not exist, both the lack of her existence and the lack of everything she ever did and the lack of everything she did not do would be 'present;' at any particular spatiotemporal point at which Mary does exist, the lack of all the things she never did and the lack of all of the things she did at any *other* spatiotemporal point would be 'present' also.

power of *swerving* and a passive power (say, the capacity of the driver to be acted on by road conditions). The upshot is that this embraces, rather than denies, negative causation, but limits negative causation's influence.

The reified absences account of a lack of things with respect to negative causation is likely best paired with a 'privative' account. Things 'ought' to function a particular way in order to work properly (this is an instrumental ought). When their proper function is impaired due to an absence, this can be referred to as a privation (in other words, the lack of something that should be there in order for the mechanism to run correctly). So the lack of Mary (and her actions and non-actions) in distant parts of spacetime certainly does not need to be reified, since nothing about Mary's presence is needed for that point in spacetime to function correctly. On the other hand, perhaps Mary's absence in a parent-child relationship makes a difference to the operation of that relationship, and so her absence (say, by death) is reified alongside positive causal powers that contributed to her absence; her lack of existence is a privation of her parent-child relationship (p. 611). While the cost of reifying absences due to privations is far less than reifying absences full stop, it is still unmistakably an increase in the metaphysician's ontology, and she should only accept it if there is not another sufficient explanation with fewer ontological commitments.

2. Causation in Terms of Explanation

The second response shall be discussed in this section. This response is to say that while positive causation has a connection between real causes and their effects, negative causation has an explanation that holds between cause and effect, rather than a real connection. A real causal connection holds between events or things (or states of affairs) to say that one such event or

thing brought about another (Koons and Pickavance, 2017, p. 605). Here is an example between two events: *Jim's throwing of the rock* caused *the rock to shatter the window*. However, a causal explanation holds not between events but between two different facts (or truths). The causal relation holds in terms of explanations of one truth in light of the other. For example, the truth "Jim throws the rock" caused the truth "the rock shatters the window" because Jim's throwing the rock *explains* the rock shattering the window. These explanations stand as more fundamental for causal relations than things. The advantage is, as Koons and Pickavance (2017) note, an ontological one, since they have a simpler account of the things that exist (i.e., they do not require such things as causal relations to exist).

One can ask in what sense does one fact explain another in terms of causation? The three main kinds of accounts listed are a 'nomological-deductive theory,' a 'counterfactual conditional theory,' and a 'probability theory' (p. 593). The nomological-deductive theory will not work for powerists, since this theory claims causal explanation works in terms of deducing *q* from *p* along with the laws of nature. However, the laws of nature are not determined for powerists, and if so, one will always have as an open possibility that *q* does not follow from *p*; the upshot is the nomological-deductive theory does not work as a way to view causation in terms of explanation of two or more facts.

2.1 Counterfactual Theory of Explanation

The counterfactual theory of explanation also might not be available to powerists. This is because, basically, the counterfactual theory states that for *p* to be the cause of *q* means that if *p* had not been true, then *q* would not have been true. This account may not satisfy cases of overdetermination or multiple variables. Take the counterfactual, 'If President Kennedy had not been shot, then he would not have died [on 22 November 1963].' This may or may not be true.

Suppose for the sake of argument that it is and call it Kennedy-1. Suppose also that Lee Harvey Oswald shot President Kennedy (as is the case in the actual world). It seems Kennedy-1 is a great example for the counterfactual theory, since 'if Kennedy was shot, then he would have died' both fits the form and is straightforwardly true (since this is, in fact, what happened). Thus, these theorists can claim the truths 'Lee Harvey Oswald shot President Kennedy' and 'President Kennedy died' have a causal explanation (running from the former to the latter).

Now suppose we have a counterfactual, Kennedy-2, that is the following: 'If Oswald had not shot Kennedy, then someone would have.' If Kennedy-2 is true in the world where Oswald shoots Kennedy, then, strangely, it looks as though Oswald's shooting Kennedy does not count as a cause of Kennedy's death.[2] This is because it is not true that if Oswald had not shot Kennedy, then Kennedy would not have died (since, *ex hypothesi*, someone else would have shot him, and he would have died). Perhaps one might respond that there is no reason to think Kennedy-2 is true in the actual world; fair enough, though it remains there is some possible world *W* such that both Kennedy-1 and Kennedy-2 are true; if so, the counterfactual theory will exclude explanations we would ordinarily take to be causes.[3]

2.2 Probability Theory of Causal Explanation

This leaves the probability theory of causal explanation. This theory suggests there is some background set of truths *K* for *p* and *q* such that, given *K* and *p, q* has a greater probability than given *K* alone (without *p*). The initial attraction seems to be in the probabilistic nature of the theory, given that powerists will typically understand laws of nature to be probabilistic. Thus, a

[2] My objection is a cousin (though it does differ) of Koons and Pickavance's 'preemption' objection, wherein two marksmen shoot at a target. The first marksman hits the target a millisecond before the second one does, so that the first marksman should count as the cause of the target's death. However, on the counterfactual theory he does not, since it is not true that had he not shot, the target would not have died (p. 597).

[3] Or 'things,' 'events,' etc. I wanted to avoid begging the question against the explanationist here. It is also worth noting that if certain theories are correct, then Kennedy-2 is likely true in this world; nothing hinges on accepting these theories, however.

powerist should hardly be surprised it turns out that causal explanations in nature also have a probabilistic nature. For an example, the truth 'Randal strikes the window with a brick,' raises the probability that the statement 'the window shattered' is true, since some truths included in *K* will be dispositional concerning the window (e.g. the window's fragility, the level of force required for the window to shatter, etc.), Randal (e.g. the strength of Randal, the force he usually applies when throwing bricks, etc.), and the brick (e.g. the brick's speed as it struck the window, the brick's mass, etc.). So, *K* and *p* raise the probability of *q*, and in this way we can say *p* causally explains *q*.

Let us return to the Kennedy-1 and Kennedy-2 case. Kennedy-1 states 'If President Kennedy had not been shot, then he would not have died [on 22 November 1963].' The positive counterfactual is 'if Kennedy were to have been shot, then he would have died,' and this seems straightforwardly true. In the probabilistic theory, it seems this works, since the background knowledge involved with being shot and shootings raising the probability of death are all well established.

However, what about worlds where a modification of Kennedy-2 is true? As a reminder, Kennedy-2 is 'If Oswald had not shot Kennedy, then someone would have.' Suppose a modification of Kennedy-2 is true in a pair of worlds, *W* and *W'*, where in *W* Oswald shoots Kennedy and in *W'* he does not. In this modification (call it Kennedy-3) Oswald and another shooter (say, at the grassy knoll) will both attempt to shoot Kennedy. In *W'*, Oswald fails to shoot Kennedy and someone else at the grassy knoll does. The truth of 'Someone shot Kennedy' raises the probability that Kennedy dies. In *W*, Oswald shoots Kennedy, but also someone else at the grassy knoll does. On the probability theory, can we still say that the truth 'Oswald shot Kennedy' causally explains the truth 'Kennedy dies'?

It seems not. Given *K* includes another shooter at the grassy knoll, Oswald's shooting Kennedy doesn't seem to rise to the level of causal explanation for the truth that Kennedy dies over the grassy knoll shooter.[4] To be specific, it seems that both cases are causally sufficient for explaining the result. But this means functionally, whether we examine the grassy knoll shooter or Oswald, we find we cannot label either of them the cause of Kennedy's death, which seems absurd. An explanationist might have a way out here: suppose they strengthen their claim by adding both Oswald and the grassy knoll shooter as causes (jointly) of Kennedy's death. This can be answered by what has been called 'preemption' (p. 596). Suppose Oswald fires a millisecond before the grassy knoll shooter (and suppose that this indicates his bullet will arrive first), and that Oswald's bullet kills Kennedy. In this case, the grassy knoll shooter can be said to raise the probability of Kennedy's death, but clearly the truth 'the grassy knoll shooter fired a bullet at Kennedy' does not causally explain the truth 'Kennedy died.' Thus, the probabilistic theory includes cases as causal explanations that we would not ordinarily want to include.

If we do not want to reify absences or see causation in terms of explanation, there remains an option for understanding these cases of negative causation. I explore this final option in the section below.

3. Causation is Not Negative, but Always Positive

The final option for answering the challenge brought by negative causation is to deny that any such thing as truly negative causation takes place. All instances of causation involve

[4] There's a potential objection here: two bullets typically raise the probability of death over one. But it is worth pointing out that the probability is *comparative*. That is, what we need is to know whether Oswald's shooting Kennedy raises the probability of Kennedy's death, given the background knowledge we have of the grassy knoll shooter and Oswald's shooting Kennedy, over the probability of Kennedy's death given our background knowledge (including the grassy knoll shooter) alone. If we stipulate *W* is a world where the grassy knoll shooter has just as high of a probability of killing Kennedy given the background knowledge there, we have a stalemate.

something positive that occurs somewhere along the causal process and supposed instances of negative causation can be explained in this way also. This can be somewhat counterintuitive since it does at least initially appear as though we have genuine instances of negative causation. Buckareff argues (2018) that what he calls 'basic omissions'—where the agent does not omit by doing something else (p. 5)—pose a problem for causal accounts (such as powerism). What Buckareff calls omissions can easily translate into what we have called 'absences' earlier. At least some instances of omissions are not problematic for causal power-based accounts: namely, those omissions where an agent omits to act by doing something else (e.g., when Nadia drives past the drowning child in order to get to work on time, she has omitted to save the child *by* continuing to drive (p. 7)).

However, basic omissions are, as noted above, failures to act that are not due to performing any sort of action; they quite literally are 'omissions' in the sense of doing nothing. This is problematic for a causal powers ontology/theory of action because, as it turns out, we have a case of an absence one would want to use in a discussion of agency and moral responsibility. To return to Nadia, if she witnessed a child drowning as she sat by the pool and she simply remained in her seat, wanting the child to drown, then it is both the case that she has 'exercised' a basic omission *and* she is morally responsible (as an agent) for that child drowning. Yet on a causal powers view it appears as though a proponent would not have the resources to affirm this state of affairs as true.

As Buckareff notes, some may want to argue that no such *basic* omissions occur; people who appear to do nothing or omit to act are in reality acting (omitting to act by acting) (Buckareff, 2017, pp. 5-7). However, the thought experiment with Nadia seems to be a live possibility, and the case certainly is not identical to other cases where Nadia has to 'buckle

down' and ensure she remains seated to watch the child drown instead of help. For Buckareff, causal accounts cannot yet tell a sufficient story for *intentional action* (since, in his thought experiment, the woman is quite literally *doing nothing* to achieve her result).

But when it comes to *intentional agency*, Buckareff believes this account works. This is because 'the agent's proximal intention to omit is causally productive' (p. 8). A causally productive action can lead to agency. In order to understand this, the ideas of intentional action and intentional agency should be briefly defined. An *intentional action* should be identified as an outcome of causings. A *causing* is a manifestation of all one's causal powers interacting (perhaps these powers are even directed toward some particular end or manifestation). An *outcome* is the causal product of these manifestations of interactions of causal powers. So causings lead to an outcome, since the manifestation of interacting causal powers leads to the result, or causal product. This means causings lead to an intentional action.

On a causal theory of action that Buckareff espouses, intentional agency is identified with causal processes, which supervenes on the state of affairs of a causing and outcome together (Buckareff actually identifies causal processes with a causing and outcome together, p. 10). The upshot of all this is that an intentional action occurs as an outcome of causings, whereas intentional agency occurs with a causal process, which includes the outcome as a proper part. Thus, Nadia may not be *causing* an omission (since all causation produces *something*), but she is exercising *agency* in causing her intention that the child drown (pp. 14-15).

Now it may appear that Buckareff is describing a counterfactual account of explanations discussed above. I do not intend to exegete Buckareff rigorously here. However, I believe that either he is not articulating the same exact kind of account or else it is not subject to the same objection that we articulated above. What follows is my explanation of this.

First, I will discuss how Buckareff's account differs from counterfactual explanations as listed in 2.1 above. In the counterfactual explanations, something *S* counts as a cause of some event *E* if it were the case that had *S* not acted, *E* would not have occurred. While Buckareff appeals explicitly to counterfactuals, he does not assume, in the case of Nadia, that if Nadia had not 'acted,' the event of the child's drowning would not have occurred.[5] Instead, he argues that:

> 'If Nadia had not intended that the child drown, then she would not have intentionally omitted to save the child from drowning' (p. 14).

Nadia has a kind of guidance control on her intention that the child drowns, and she does not intend to omit *by* doing something else (it is a basic omission). So counterfactually Nadia is not said to cause the event, but instead she actively causes her intention to omit to act, and the counterfactual above functions as a truthmaker for her omission. While in the counterfactuals-as-causal explanation account above the relevant counterfactuals function as truthmakers, these counterfactuals-as-truthmakers only explain her intention to omit, and this intention, coupled with her guidance control and set of causal powers, is sufficient to achieve the result (even while not causally producing anything).

Second, I will contend even if one decides the counterfactual explanation account discussed above and Buckareff's account are sufficiently similar, Buckareff's version is not subject to the same complaint. The objection above is that there is the possibility of a counterfactual being true such that it rules out the cause it is supposed to explain. Consider again the counterfactual, 'If Oswald had not shot Kennedy, someone would have.' The problem was supposed to be that Oswald, even in the case of shooting Kennedy, would not counterfactually count as the cause of Kennedy's being shot, which is absurd.

[5] The fact that the counterfactual is not 'If Nadia had not "acted," then the child would not have drowned' is not merely due to the somewhat trivial fact that by omitting to act Nadia is not doing anything at all, and so not acting in any real sense.

Buckareff's Nadia case is not subject to this, since the counterfactual explanation is not Nadia being the cause of the child drowning, but of her own intention. It seems straightforwardly true if one does not intend some state of affairs, then one does not intentionally omit the action that would prevent that state of affairs.[6] If this is so, then we have a counterfactual explanation not subject to the objection above.

It is for these reasons I think Buckareff's Nadia case illustrates a solution wherein negative causation is not real (nothing is being causally produced), yet this is not a solution identical to any others we have discussed. If an intention is directed toward an omission, then we have a causing plus an outcome, which is a causal process and hence intentional agency. If an intention is directed toward an outcome that requires an omission, then we have a causing plus an outcome, which is a causal process and hence intentional agency. At this point, I endorse this solution over the others. However, a reification of some absences may be necessary if Buckareff's account is shown to fail. Either way, negative causation need not eliminate a powers ontology as a theory of causation. In the next chapter, I will augment Koons and Pickavance's metaphysics with continuous causation, a neo-Aristotelian account, as well as discussing agent-causation at the level of intentions.

[6] 'All else being equal' is a clause that ought to be added.

Chapter Five - 'Continuous Causation'

This work used concepts of both powerism and continuous causation to undercut a particular view in an earlier chapter. While powerism has largely been explained in prior chapters, continuous causation has not, beyond the basics. The burden of this chapter is to recapitulate the basics of continuous causation. I argue adopting an account of continuous causation gives us an explanatory advantage in terms of how things seem to us to be caused by people in ordinary circumstances. In turn, this will set up the following chapter on God and a causal powers ontology (thus fleshing out the skeletal metaphysical structure thus far laid out).

1. An Account of Continuous Causation

In what follows, I intend to sketch out a basic account and defence of continuous causation. I first will discuss causal processes with respect to traversing any kind of temporal gap. Two major categories of accounts for these processes will be considered, with continuous causation coming out on top.

1.1 The Problem of Causal Processes

However one investigates the cause *C* of some event *E*, at the moment *E* is brought about, either *C* is simultaneous with *E* or temporally earlier than *E*.[1] Suppose that an agent *A* is the cause of some change in the patient *P*. Is *A*'s acting on *P* (the cause of the change in *P*) simultaneous with the change in *P*, or temporally earlier than the change in *P*?

If the causal act is temporally earlier than the change, then there is a temporal gap (Koons and Pickavance (2015, p. 200)). If there is such a gap, then how can *C* be the cause of *E*? Koons

[1] While it is epistemically possible that some effect could precede its cause in time, this arrangement does not affect the discussion within this chapter.

and Pickavance take it that there is a good reason to deny that such a gap can be traversed between an agent and a patient in a causal relationship. But what might that reason be? It is not immediately clear in their major works on the subject.

In Williams (2019), the author seems to argue for accepting the opposite conclusion. Though he does not address Koons and Pickavance here, he nonetheless contends that we naturally might think of causes operating at a distance—with or without intermediary physical particles or causes that link together. Williams writes, 'We tend to think of tiny pockets of the world as causally isolated from the rest, but nevertheless allow that the right sort of power—however distant—could still influence the outcomes of that pocket' (p. 145).

Williams is quite right that, as it turns out, spatial distances are not necessarily a problem. They do not preclude causes acting on their effects. One should not, however, use Williams' insight here to claim he would disagree with Koons and Pickavance.[2] In other words, while Williams surely would say a cause need not be 'local,' such a cause would still be acting according to a causal *process*. Whatever else this causal process may be, it is still the process of the agent *A* acting on *P* such that *A* can be said to produce a change in *P*.

Let us focus on the reason a temporal gap, specifically, results in not being able to link a cause *C* to its purported effect *E*. This can be called the *problem of causal processes*. Either *A* is in causal contact with *P* at time *t* such that *A* brings about a change in *P* or is not in causal contact with *P* at time *t* such that *A* brings about a change in *P*. If *A* is in causal contact with *P* at time *t*, then there is no temporal gap, and so this is not relevant to the present discussion. But what if *A* is not in causal contact with *P* at *t*?

[2] Indeed, elsewhere (p. 136, n. 44) Williams seems to agree with them concerning causal processes being one endless sequence—something pivotal to continuous causation.

If it is not, then in what sense is *A* the cause of the change in *P*? By definition, *A* brings about a change in *P*. So, if *A* and *P* are both involved in a causal process and *A* acts at *t*-1 and *P* undergoes this change at *t*, what causally occurred between *t*-1 and *t*? This is the force of the temporal gap, or the problem of causal processes. One might be tempted to reply that the effect merely took some time (in this case, one moment) to appear from the cause. But this would be mistaken. The cause acts at *t*-1 and is either causally productive at that moment (that is, it is a real cause) or it is not. If it is, then it is a cause in virtue of its effect being at that moment, and thus there is no temporal gap of which to speak—the effect would be simultaneous with the cause's acting (or its process). If it is not, then it is not a cause (since causes have effects). So, it either is not acting as a cause or else it is but no temporal gap appears. The conclusion is there must be causal contact from *A* to *P* in order to bring about a change in *P* from *A*, at a particular time(s) *t* (+1, +2, etc.). So, when an agent *A* acts on a patient *P*, *A* must be the cause at the same exact moment *P* undergoes the change (the effect).

1.2 Defining the Terms: Discrete Causation and Continuous Causation

A key discussion that must take place is whether or not causation is discrete or continuous. Huemer and Kovitz (2003) discuss both a *sequential* as well as a *simultaneous* theory of causation. According to the former, a cause leads to its effect such that the effect is temporally later than the cause. However, they argue, 'Causes and effects [many times] seem to occur at the same time. The *simultaneous theory of causation* holds that causes always occur simultaneously with their *immediate* effects' (p. 556, emphasis in original). Using these basic descriptions, sequential causation can be understood as a form of discrete causation, while simultaneous causation can be considered a form of continuous causation (as discussed in 1.1 above).[3]

[3] Obviously, the terms are not completely synonymous. Mainly, this is because the authors of the article took themselves to be saying something in addition to 'simultaneous' by adding 'continuous.' This is likely best

Huemer and Kovitz take discrete causation to be sequential, in that they use Hume's argument to show that, on a particular conception of time, causation must be sequential (p. 560). Sequential causation requires that causal processes are done over a length of time, since time has individual moments. For Hume, as well as proponents of sequential causation, there must be a smallest unit of time, and for any such smallest unit, there is another unit in sequence. If this is true, then for any smallest unit of time, and any extended causal process, the cause *C* must occur prior to its effect *E*, such that *C* is at time *t*, and *E* is at *t*+1. One may be forgiven for asking why we ought to think this is the case. It is so, Hume argues, due to the following: suppose that *C*1 causes *C*2, which in turn causes *C*3. If causation is simultaneous, and not sequential, then no temporally extended processes can take place, since *C*1, *C*2, and *C*3 would all be simultaneous. The causal process's parts would all occur at the same moment (ibid.).

This aligns well with ideas on discrete causation. One may recall that discrete causation involves the cause-effect pair having a finite number of distinct points that connect the cause to its effect. It occurs over a causal process where each causal connection is a link (so that to say *A* caused the change in *P* entails that *A* moved on 1, which moved on 2, and so on, so that there is a finite number of discrete causal links between *A* and *P*). Kim (2011) seems to be committed to the idea of causation as discrete, in that he holds some relation *R* must hold between cause-effect pairs (*A* and *P*) and that spatial relations are the best candidates for *R*. In his brief discussion of continuous causation, Kim (2003) believed a continuous causal link (as he referred to it) would necessitate an infinite series of intermediary objects between the initial causal object and any given intermediary. Thus, if causation is discrete, it is temporally extended over a finite number

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explained by the idea that simultaneous causation is best understood as involving continuous causation (a loose analogy is that the properties of *being triangular* and *being trilateral* are not identical but are co-extensive).

of points. Given that a finite number of points will differ (the moments will not all be the same moments), they will not be simultaneous, but instead sequential.

A more formal definition of discrete causation is given by Koons and Pickavance as follows: 'The causal connection between *x* and *y* is *discrete* if and only if *x* and *y* are causally connected, and the linear causal order consisting entirely of events between *x* and *y* is finite' (2017, p. 613). So, on this definition, *x* causes *y*, but does so in that *x* causes *z* and *z* causes *y*. Further, the causal chain so described is finite. An example of this would be Jane willing to raise her arm. She causes her arm to raise by her brain sending a particular electromagnetic signal to a particular muscle, and that muscle triggers a series of muscles to move in a particular direction, etc.[4] So one can see that for any causal process *CP* that is discrete, *CP* must also have its causes precede its effects (and this rules out continuous, and hence simultaneous, causation).

The alternative is a *continuous* form of causation. Continuous causation involves all events being connected by a single, real process; 'a real process is a temporally extended whole that is more metaphysically fundamental than any of its unextended, instantaneous parts.' (2015, pp. 200-01). Koons and Pickavance (2017) give a formal definition of continuous causation as follows: 'The causal connection between *x* and *y* is *continuous* if and only if *x* and *y* are causally connected, and there is an infinite linear causal order consisting entirely of events between *x* and *y*' (p. 613). One will recall from an earlier chapter continuous causation has an infinite number of 'instantaneous stages,' stages which they (2015) describe as 'each causally prior to' a later stage and causally posterior to an earlier one (p. 201). An example of this would be Jen willing to raise her arm. Jen undertakes the causal process of willing to lift her arm, specifically by exercising her causal power to do so. This simultaneously begins the process of motion of her arm's being

[4] It is not vital that we get the complete or even the fully accurate details of this movement down. What matters is that we have a finite series of causes in a causal process.

raised (the effect). That process continues as an 'undivided continuum of events' (p. 201) into the indefinite future, until such time as the process is interrupted, whether by *A*'s ceasing to act or some other action taking place. If it is not so interrupted, then the process begins with Jen willing to exercise her power to raise her arm and her arm in fact being raised.

This fits Huemer and Kovitz' idea of simultaneous causation well. They contend that causation involves a continuum, and, unlike discrete causation, one cannot identify a particularly smallest part. This has consequences for spacetime as well. They write, 'Temporally extended events are not conceived as being "built up" from some smallest units. Rather, every event is already a temporally extended whole, which can be divided into indefinitely many parts, each of which is itself a temporally extended event' (p. 560).

This can be reconciled with continuous causation in the following way: Huemer and Kovitz' temporally extended events can be linked with Koons and Pickavance's temporally extended wholes. The event of *C* causing *E* is itself more metaphysically fundamental than any of the indefinitely many parts that one might divide it into. Therefore, these infinitely divided parts are not metaphysically constitutive of the event. The divided parts are also themselves temporally extended events, which are instantaneous stages rather than discrete links.[5]

One may notice that Huemer and Kovitz' idea of temporally extended wholes being divided into indefinitely many parts, each of which also is temporally extended (but simultaneous with each other), and Koons and Pickavance's idea of continuous causation involving a metaphysically fundamental temporally extended whole with infinitely many

[5] It is important that parts-as-temporally-extended-events are instantaneous rather than discrete or sequential, since, amongst other issues, one would face a problem of causal processes taking an infinite amount of time to complete. Let each divided part be numbered from the initial act of *C* on *E*, and each moment be represented by t or $t+n$. Then part 1 takes place at t, 2 at $t+1$, 3 at $t+2$, and so on. However, since the number of parts is ∞, the number of moments to complete any given causal process will be $t+\infty$, suggesting that no causal process will ever be completed. But some causal processes *are* completed. Hence, by modus tollens, temporally extended events within a larger temporally extended event are instantaneous stages.

unextended parts are contradictory. This is largely, I think, in the details. Nothing major seems to hinge on which particular detail is correct—the indefinite parts being temporally extended but instantaneous or the infinite parts being temporally unextended but also 'instantaneous' in virtue of the fact of being part of the more metaphysically fundamental causal process.

I think it may be best to conceive of the parts that one may divide causal processes into as being temporally extended. This way when one says that causation is continuous or that the cause and effect are instantaneous, one is not led to say that an entire event is unextended. One may be forced to say this if one were to think about continuous causation in a discrete manner. For example, one could reason in the following way: given that every part of the causal process is temporally unextended, the process is itself temporally unextended. But this treats the process as though it were built up from the parts. In other words, the process is supervenient (or does not exist, if one were a nominalist) on the parts, instead of the causal process being metaphysically fundamental. However, having an indefinite number of extended events that are part of a more fundamental process that are simultaneous helps avoid that. On the unextended view, *C* causes *E* at *t* and the cause produces the effect at or across time(s), where the infinitely many parts are not temporally extended. On the extended view, *C* causes *E* at *t* and the cause produces the effect at or across time(s), where the infinitely many parts are temporally extended.

1.3 Which to Prefer: Discrete Causation or Continuous Causation?

While a brief discussion has been made on both discrete and continuous causation, which should one prefer—continuous or discrete? It is my burden to suggest a continuous causation should be embraced, at least in certain individual instances.

The questions remain: are all instances of causation continuous, or discrete? The answer I pursue here will be that neither is precisely true: there are both instances of discrete causation

and instances of continuous causation. Why think there are some instances of continuous causation? It seems less natural to think of causation as discrete. While it surely makes sense to think that Jen causes her brain to send an electrical impulse to a muscle, and that muscle responds by contracting, and another muscle responds by moving, and so on such that Jen raises her arm, it does not make sense to think that Jen only directly causes one aspect of this. If Jen causes only the brain impulse (or, alternatively, if Jen's brain causes only the impulse), then she only causes her arm to raise in a colloquial sense. This may be an acceptable cost; it is akin to saying, "the sun rises," even when we know it does not.

This retort does not seem to get at the force behind the objection to discrete causation. In the case of the sun's rising, we know it is literally false because we have scientific evidence and reasoning to back it up. We accept the colloquialism as literally false but helpful because we know better. But it does not appear to be the same case with discrete causation. That is, we do not have similarly compelling scientific evidence and reasoning such that we need to hold discrete causation to nearly the same degree as we do the sun rising. Thus, the intuition that objects cause effects—even when there is an intermediary part or parts within the whole process—is not so easily defeated.

The highly intuitive nature of objects causing effects and not merely other, intermediary causes is not the only recourse. Recall that one could take the idea of continuous causation to involve a temporally extended whole which is more metaphysically fundamental than its infinitely many parts, while having its parts temporally unextended. An interesting consequence of this may be that causes need not be only simultaneous with their effects; some causes may be able to precede their effects (temporally) as well. Here is an argument based on Koons and Pickavance (2017, p. 614):

1. If all causation were discrete, then it would be impossible for earlier events to cause later ones.

    a. This is because discrete causation must be fully simultaneous with its effect.

        i. Causation cannot exist where there is a temporal gap between cause and effect.

        ii. If causation cannot exist where there is a temporal gap between cause and effect, then causal processes require both cause and effect exist at the same time they are in their causal connection.

        iii. So, causal processes require both cause and effect exist at the same time they are in their causal connection.

    b. The cause *qua* cause must begin at the same time as its effect—if it pre-exists or 'post-exists' the effect, then it is not the cause *qua* cause; but this implies causes are fully simultaneous with their effects.

2. But we do think at least some earlier events cause later ones (or at least that such is possible).

3. Therefore, it is not the case that all causation is discrete.

There are plausibly two ways out for the proponent of discrete causation. First, one may deny (1). The proponent of discrete causation could claim that it does not follow that discrete causation requires simultaneity of cause and effect. But what about the argument against operating at a temporal gap? As noted, this argument is supported both by work done by Koons and Pickavance as well as Huemer and Kovitz. The sub-argument of (a, i-iii) is logically valid, and thus one or more premises must be denied in order to escape the conclusion.

The answer, hinted at by Huemer and Kovitz (though they are not addressing this argument directly), seems to be that (i-iii) are sufficiently ambiguous such that they do not establish the conclusion. They write that a Humean would solve the problem of temporal gap by saying that a non-zero distance can be resolved by 'contiguous' temporal points (2003, p. 562). This would mean that (i) is, strictly speaking, false.

To see why, suppose there is a causal process *P* such that *C* and *E* are constituent members. Further stipulate *P* is a discrete causal process. The discrete causal proponent wants to be able to say *C* is a cause of *E*, and that *P* has a finite number of points within. Let *P* be *C*→*C*1→*C*2→*E*. Let *C* be at time *t*, *C*1 be at *t*1, *C2* at *t*2, and *E* at *t*3. Temporal points *t*, *t*1, *t*2, and *t*3 will all be contiguous; they will each be touching the moment 'next' to them. For *P*, *C* is the cause of *E*, given that it contributed to a causal chain that culminated in the effect. We can once again appeal to the case of Jen and the raising of her arm, where Jen's brain sends a signal to muscles that contract and move such that her arm raises into the air. This causal process is discrete, since each member is causally connected, and the process contains a finite number of events or causal actors. Hence, (i)—that causation cannot exist across a temporal gap—turns out to be false after all.

There is a certain sense in which the discrete causation proponent has in fact confirmed a version of (i): namely,

i'. Individual causal links must not occur over a temporal gap.

In this case, (i') is supposed to show that discrete causation can occur. But now the same problem rears its head. If (i') is true, then each part of *P* will be simultaneous. For *C* will have no temporal gap between itself and *C*1, and the same goes for *C*1 and *C*2, etc. A quick reply could be that this is not a problem where the process is said to take place instantaneously (ibid.). Another reply could discuss instances of *C* and *E* as temporally extended events, where *C* directly causes only *C*1 within *P* (ibid.).[6] These replies do not falsify (i'), however. They merely use it to highlight that temporally extended causal processes mean the individual causal links in the chain only cause each other directly. *C* is only the cause of *E* in an indirect sense. To return

[6] Interestingly, Koons and Pickavance's argument here is based on the idea that these events within the causal process are not temporally extended. This is not a principle shared by everyone, and as will be seen, makes a significant difference in the response available to the proponent of discrete causation.

to the case of Jen's willing that her arm should raise, Jen only causes her arm to raise in an indirect sense; she does not directly raise her arm as she would on continuous causation. Thus, we see the proponent of discrete causation can avoid the force of this argument, but only by way of sacrificing direct causation of a cumulation of a causal process. This is a cost to discrete causation.

There is potentially another way of escape from this argument. Perhaps the advocate of discrete causation may complain that nothing has been shown as to the plausibility of earlier events causing later ones. Maybe the whole point of discrete causation teaches us a lesson, namely: earlier events cannot cause later events. Note this response cannot be pressed by the same person who pushes the initial objection, since the objection undercuts the idea that discrete causation requires no temporal gap, while this objection embraces it for the sake of argument. In this case the attempt is to undermine:

(2) But we do think at least some earlier events cause later ones (or at least that such is possible).

One may accuse the advocate of continuous causation of simple question-begging on this front; she has assumed not all causation is discrete in her defence of (2). One remedy for this would be an argument showing possible examples of events preceding other events, where we take the former to have caused the latter. There is a hint of such an argument in Koons and Pickavance (2017, p. 614), and I briefly sketch out such an argument below.

1. If some causes are not earlier than their effects, 'then we could never explain anything by reference to things existing at earlier times' (ibid.)

2. But we can explain things by reference to other things existing at earlier times (e.g., the ball that was thrown at time *t* was the cause of the window's breaking at time *t+1*; putting it in event-causal terms, the cause of *the window's breaking* at *t+1* was *the ball's being thrown at the window* at *t*, which caused *the ball's striking the window* at *t+1*).

3. Therefore, some causes are earlier than their effects.

The first premise can be affirmed since an affirmation that all causes are either simultaneous with or later than their effects will involve only reference to explanatory causes (acting as such) existing at the same time or a later time. The second premise seems innocent enough, also. There seemingly is nothing objectionable about the object of the ball being thrown and being the cause of the window's breaking a moment later (or in event-causal terms there does not seem to be anything objectionable about the event of *the ball's being thrown at the window* at *t*, which caused the event of *the ball's striking the window* at *t+1*).

But it seems even here the advocate for discrete causation could resist. In terms of the object, while it is true the ball exists at the moment prior to it causing the window to break, it is not true that it is acting as the cause of the window's breaking the moment prior to its breaking. In event-causal terms, it is not true the event of *the ball's being thrown at the window* at *t* directly causes the event of *the ball's striking the window* at *t+1*. Rather, the former event can be said to be the direct cause of the latter only if there is no temporal gap between the two events. If the events are temporally extended, then the former event is causing the latter in a simultaneous way (the cause is acting on the effect at some shared moment, even if some temporal parts of the causal event lie *earlier than* some temporal parts of the effect event; this is also true even if some temporal parts of the effect event lie *later than* some temporal parts of the causal event).[7]

After all of this, one could still argue that (2) is supported by an appeal to the usefulness of continuous causation here. That is to say that metaphysical causal processes are fundamental, and cause-effect relations can participate in that with earlier-than/later-than relations, since it is the causal process that allows for simultaneous causation (so as not to violate the idea of no

[7] It is in fact this kind of response that Huemer and Kovitz take to Robin Le Poidevin when they write, 'The relevant cause must be the ball's exerting a (varying) force on the cushion over some finite time interval. And the corresponding compressing of the cushion will also be occurring during exactly that time interval' (2003, pp. 563-64).

causation across a temporal gap). In other words, continuous causation explains the intuition we have that some causes are earlier than their events, while upholding the idea that there is a metaphysical causal process that involves cause and effect having an infinite number of events, with no smallest event. It can also preserve the idea that causation is simultaneous (it is the continuous nature of the process that avoids the temporal gap). Thus, while a proponent of discrete causation could in fact be consistent in holding her view, the advocate for continuous causation could say hers is more intuitive, preserving the advantages and avoiding the pitfalls of discrete causation. In the next section, I undertake to defend continuous causation against possible lines of objection.

2. Some Objections to Continuous Causation

There are, in fact, at least two major kinds of problems brought out for continuous causation: the *infinite regress problem* and the *problem of monism*.[8] Each of these problems purports to show that taking on continuous causation leads to deleterious consequences or else undermines any justification for preferring continuous causation or any explanatory power it may have. In this section, I undertake to show that neither of these problems have as much force as they purport *prima facie*.

2.1 The Infinite Regress Problem

Infinite regresses pose problems for particular positions or arguments precisely because they remove any explanatory power for the phenomena reported. In the case of continuous causation, if there were to be an infinite regress, it would rob this idea of its ability to account for real, metaphysical causal processes. In fact, when one raises the infinite regress problem against

[8] These names are my own to describe the issue as straightforwardly as I can.

continuous causation, she does so with the assumption that an infinite regress does not allow the metaphysician to use this form of causation as an explanation. This assumption is not without foundation. Suppose before some object *x* could come into existence, *y* had to, and prior to *y*, *z* had to, and so on and so forth, *ad infinitum*. Suppose further that the relationship between *x*, *y*, and *z* are explanatory, so that *x* is only explained due to the infinite series of objects prior to it. If prior to every object some other object must explain it (to an infinite degree), then we will never explain the series of objects culminating in *x*. So far, so good.

Jaegwon Kim has developed a kind of infinite regress problem for continuous causation in (2003). He described this kind of causation as a continuous causal link. He believed continuous causation could not work without postulating an intermediary in between any cause and effect. For Kim, prior to any cause-effect explanation, in between the two objects there would need to be another object. This was due to continuous causation's involving an infinite series of events along the continuum of the causal process. But if there would need to be another object connecting any given pair of objects, for every pair of objects, then this new pairing (the object *o* to connect the cause and effect and the cause *C*, say) would itself need an object *o1* to connect *o* and *C*. The process can be repeated for *o1* and *C* and every pairing generated thereafter. Another way to look at it is this: if *E1* causes *E3*, and there is an intermediate event *E2*, should there not, on continuous causation, also be intermediate events between *E1* and *E2*, and between *E2* and *E3*, and so on *ad infinitum*? We would then have a problem of ever realising the ultimate event (the effect) to be explained.

The response to Kim seems to be that he is treating continuous causation as though it were made up of an infinitely divisible number of *discrete* points; he treats it as if it were a causal chain with definite, individual connecting points. Kim is treating the individual events as

though they *constituted* the metaphysical causal process. On continuous causation this is not so. The events do not themselves constitute the causal process. Instead, the process is metaphysically fundamental, and the events lie along a continuum of causation.

These thoughts from Koons and Pickavance are very informative: 'The error in this way of thinking . . . is that it tries to understand continuous causation in terms of discrete causal links, as though continuous causation simply consists in an infinite chain of binary causal connections. We should instead take seriously the idea that . . . [it] involves an undivided continuum of events' (2015, p. 201). Continuous causation is a single, unified continuum of events. What this suggests to us is that if discrete causation were to be causal processes made up of (constituted by) an infinite number of causal *relata*, then the infinite regress problem would apply to it. While an interesting and worthy note, this means the infinite regress problem against continuous causation has not been established.

Perhaps we should not move so quickly. It is still true that later events along the continuum are dependent on earlier events on the continuum, and it is still true there are an infinite number of such events along the continuum. So it seems the infinite regress problem still applies. For every event *E*, there is some *E* that comes before it, such that *E* (the original) never arrives in the causal chain.

Koons and Pickavance (2017) distinguish between a *grounded* and *ungrounded* infinite regress; they believe continuous causation is an instance of a grounded infinite regress, and so is unproblematic. A grounded infinite regress includes each event's 'dependency relation' being grounded in the whole process, which itself is not one of the members (and thus is independent) and does not itself give rise to a further infinite regress (pp. 616-17).

The solution, I think, is somewhat different to what has been outlined above. Their solution seems to be somewhat similar to the one I favour for Zeno's paradoxes. My main distinction will be not to highlight it as an infinite *regress*, grounded or otherwise. This is because, once again, the events do not themselves constitute the metaphysical causal process. The process is itself more fundamental. This mirrors the solution to Zeno's paradoxes, in that the paradoxes can be solved if one understands the distance to be crossed as existing independently of any divisions one might wish to make; so too the causal process exists metaphysically independently of any divisions of events one might wish to highlight.

2.2 The Single Continuous Process Objection

Suppose that one is convinced that continuous causation ought to be the way we understand how an agent and patient pair up (or how a cause acts on its effect, depending on the philosophical nomenclature one wishes to employ). If this were so, it still seems we have a different problem. How many continuous processes are there? If each instance of causation has a metaphysically fundamental component (the process), then it seems as though there is one instance of continuous causation connecting all of reality. In this case, it means all instances of causation are actually a single, unified, and continuous process. In other words, some kind of monism must be true, in that all processes are really just one (Koons and Pickavance (2017, p. 616)). A good picture of this would be an intricate series of dominoes, spreading out in multiple directions, each domino falling due to the one(s) before it.

This also suggests an objection based on the idea of freedom of the will. It runs something like this: If we have freedom of the will, then there is not merely one unified continuous process for causation. But there is merely one unified continuous process for causation. Therefore, we do not have freedom of the will. The upshot is if one likes freedom of

the will, she should deny there is merely one unified continuous process for causation, which is the supposition we started with above.

In framing an answer, it is important to understand *for whom* precisely these objections are a problem. The freedom of the will objection is only problematic for those who are both committed to the idea of freedom of the will and that causation is continuous. The monist objection is a problem only for those who both are committed to continuous causation and opposed to monism. So, if the proponent of continuous causation falls outside of these constraints the objections do not cost her anything. But what of those who do fall within these categories?

For the monist objection, the defender of continuous causation can undercut the plausibility of all of causation being linked by one continuous process. She can do so by appealing to the modal principle whereby one intuits that there are indeed other possibilities. If Jane thinks hard about how things could have been, she can imagine worlds both far and near. Near worlds would include worlds where everything was as it is in Jane's world, only at that moment she is considering what flavour of ice cream she loves best (for an example). Far worlds would include worlds where Jane does not even exist; she thinks instead of a world populated only by alien creatures of the imagination. So long as her imaginings do not involve any kind of logical or metaphysical impossibilities, what Jane is doing is thinking of alternate possibilities—or ways the world might have been. Because the world really could have been different, and because the monist objection suggests it could not have been, it follows the monist objection is mistaken in its defender's claim that all causation is one continuous process.

Perhaps this has all been too quick. After all, the monist objector can simply state that the initial conditions (or the first domino in the above metaphor) could have been different, and if

the initial conditions could have been different, then the outcomes also could have been different. For the theist take: if God had so decided (or been inclined or influenced, on non-free accounts of divine action), he could have moved or prodded or caused any number of different initial scenarios, and these would also have potentially yielded many different ways things could have been. The upshot is merely imagining alternative possibilities does not necessarily get Jane out of the grip of this objection.

Here Jane can introduce a supplement to her initial response. Jane can contend that the possibilities she is imagining are real possibilities; they are (when in reference to her and some action she has taken) *things she really could have done*, in the moment. This is not the case when it comes to this kind of monist causality. Now a classical-styled response would be that when Jane does some action *x* at *t*, Jane could have done *y* at *t* iff the relevant conditions had been such that had they occurred, she would have done *y* at *t*, and thus Jane's imagined possibility to do otherwise (as we have been describing it) is not linked to a real ability, in the moment, to *actually* do otherwise.

This response is flawed due to the following: it supposes Jane's intuition is faulty after all. It assumes, within the dialectic, that she is incorrect about intuiting that she really could have done something differently in the moment. This varies from the earlier dialectical strategy of the objector countering that even if Jane is right about intuiting other possibilities, it does not undercut the objection. True—Jane's mere intuition does not *show* that the objection is wrong. But it is perfectly consistent and non-*ad hoc* as a response. In other words, her intuitions give her reason to think a monist theory of continuous causation is not really what is going on, after all. It is important to note in the dialectic that this objection does not claim to show that all processes are really one; it attempts to suggest that the best explanation of fundamental processes is that

there is really only one process (or, more modestly, that causal monism of the relevant sort is a possibility to which Jane and her ilk must respond). The upshot is twofold: while objectors can cling to this view (there is only one continuous process and there is no free will), anyone who already has a motivation to think that there is free will, or continuous causation, or both, can retain that motivation, unmoved by the objection. Without an independently motivated objection, the monist may well fall into question-begging territory.

Also notice this works just as well with the objection stating if causation is continuous, then there is no freedom of the will. Jane can reject the major premise in this implicit argument just in case she has good reason to think causation is continuous and that there is freedom of the will. It turns out her thinking in terms of alternate possibilities gets her such freedom.[9] Continuous causation does have its upside, especially when conjoined with a causal powers ontology.

A positive way to put the continuous causation defender's response is like this: there are metaphysically real causal processes that are discrete from each other. These discrete processes are themselves continuous. Therefore, a cause and effect can be involved in such a continuous process, and yet there is still a terminus of the effect being brought about. This account does not involve any apparent incoherence and avoids the above objections, while treating them seriously.

In the next chapter, the ideas of the causal powers ontology and continuous causation will be applied to God. Specifically, the next few chapters will apply Powerism, agency, miracles,

[9] It will not do for the freedom of the will objector to retreat to the classical-styled argument against Jane as sketched out above. This is because the classical argument is one for *compatibilism*—the thesis that free will and determinism are compatible. If Jane (or any defender of continuous causation) is a compatibilist, then she will agree that such a scenario is possible and simply affirm it describes a free scenario. If she is not, she will simply state that such a scenario does not really describe a true case of alternate *possibility*; it is not really possible for her to do other than what she did, after all. All of the classic dialectic follows.

and the problem of evil to divine action, to see what implications there are within philosophical theology.

Chapter Six - 'Tanner's Two Rules and Univocity'

In this chapter, I examine a model of (talk of) divine action—specifically, that of Kathryn Tanner (and her classical theist/linguistic model). I argue this either does not have the same advantages as adopting a causal powers ontology or can gain them only at various costs. This chapter functions as an objection/reply style of dialectic between ideas applied from traditional theology to object to a causal powers ontology.

1. Kathryn Tanner's 'Two Rules' View

In this section, I endeavour to explain Kathryn Tanner's 'two rules' view for theological discourse (i.e. God-talk), which seem to rule out real discussions of a causal powers ontology applied to God. Tanner's rules form an important part of how divine action is construed precisely *because* proper theological grammar really does indicate something true about God.[1] In embracing these grammatical rules, Tanner is endorsing 'the slogan of Quine in his invitation to make the semantic ascent from direct talk about the object of our language to the language in which we talk about the objects of our language' (Abraham (2017a, p. 189)). As these two rules are explained, I offer some reasons for thinking they are undercut, and thus God-talk about causal powers is permissible.

1.1 Rule One: No Univocity

Tanner (2005) indicates that presumed incoherence about Christian theology stems from a modern tendency to discard traditional 'rules' for God-talk within the theological realm (p. 5). Her solution is to recover these rules and apply them to various instances of controversial God-

[1] This is despite the fact that for Tanner the project is more about functional aspects of referring to the divine rather than 'truth and epistemology' (Abraham (2017, p. 189)).

talk. It is precisely because there is an ignoring or misapplication of the rules, in her view, that God-talk seems to result in incoherence. The upshot is appropriate and consistent use of the rules will result in coherence in God-talk (ibid., p. 9); unfortunately, this also leads to the exclusion of causal powers and its concomitant ontology when applied to God.

The first rule will be called *No Univocity*, simply enough. It states:

> *No Univocity*: 'Avoid both a simple univocal attribution of predicates to God and world and a simple contrast of divine and non-divine predicates' (p. 47).

There are two parts to *No Univocity*, each of which are important for understanding Tanner's reasoning and its application. The first seems to contain a negative description of attribution of predicates to God. A plausible restatement of this part of the principle is that no attribution of divine predicates is univocal. That is to say, 'God . . . is so utterly different from creatures that nothing whatever can be attributed univocally to both,' (Schoen (1990, p. 124)) according to Aquinas.

While Schoen above takes a less-than-sympathetic view to Aquinas, it is worth noting he highlights the problem Aquinas wished to confront. There needed to be a middle way between God-talk being univocal and God-talk being equivocal. He found an analogical way of speaking about God; the result of this is that no God-talk (concerning the divine essence) is univocal. Consider his reply to the second objection in the first article of Question 13. Aquinas (2007) writes, 'And as God is simple, and subsisting, we attribute to Him abstract names to signify His simplicity, and concrete names to signify His substance and perfection, although both these kinds of names fail to express His mode of being, forasmuch as our intellect does not know Him in this

life as He is' (p. 60). For him, this was a matter of the limitations of human (creaturely) understanding.[2]

Since no attribution of divine predicates is univocal, it means applying specific causal powers to God cannot be done (at least in the way this project aims). This is because all such statements about God and causal powers will be literally false. Such statements may be analogical, but wherever the analogy lies, it will not illuminate our understanding of God as he truly is in himself. So, *No Univocity* means no attribution of divine predicates is univocal.

To see further how this results in a particular challenge one should examine further commentary on Aquinas. Kretzmann (1997) summarises Aquinas as follows: 'What he's noting here really amounts to no more than our inability to locate [God] . . . within any of our taxonomic schemes or conceptual frameworks' (p. 91). Additionally, these conceptual frameworks provided a way of knowing the things in the world that needed to be explained. For Aquinas and Kretzmann, one could hardly explain the ultimate explanation of the world by using the world itself. As such, arriving at positive knowledge of God could only come from saying what God is not. If we can only say what God is not, and if we cannot look to the world to provide a kind of positive explanation for divine action, then it follows that this proposal is inconsistent with God and a real causal powers ontology.

What of the injunction to 'Avoid . . . a simple contrast of divine and non-divine predicates'? This is the other side of the same coin from the first part of the statement. Such a contrast, for Tanner, has deleterious effects; avoiding such a contrast will work wonders for the causal efficacy of God as the creator of all within the world (pp. 47-48). Being able to contrast (in a simple manner) divine and non-divine predicates is not possible if no attribution of divine

[2] Cf. Aquinas on his reply to the very next objection, wherein he explains, 'But demonstrative pronouns are applied to God as describing what is understood, not what is sensed. For we can only describe Him as far as we understand Him' (ibid.).

predicates is univocal. It also means God's transcendence is upheld, argues Tanner. God and world are not only not identical but are, at bottom, utterly distinct and unlike one another (at least when it comes to univocality). The principle is easily restated in negative terms as well as the first: no divine and non-divine predicates can be simply contrasted. This is important to avoiding extremes.

For a concrete example, suppose we attribute to God and Steve the predicate *is loving*. 'God is loving' and 'Steve is loving' could be seen as univocal statements, thus violating the first part of *No Univocity*. Or they could be seen as equivocal statements, forcing us to say we do not even *remotely* understand what it means to say 'God is loving,' as it is simply opposed to the human predicate *is loving*. Only by avoiding both making divine predicates univocal and simply contrasting divine and non-divine predicates can we rescue the function of modern God-talk from incoherence. Thus, *No Univocity* entails that however we might want to use causal powers, it will not be as simple as applying to God predicates of powers as we have analysed them in prior chapters. Let us turn now to Tanner's second rule below.

1.2 Rule Two: Limitless

If Tanner's first rule (*No Univocity*) is about preserving God's transcendence, then her second rule is about preserving God's agency in the world. It is clearly important to her that God not be so utterly transcendent that he is not actively present in some real way. This rule can be referred to as *Limitless*:

> *Limitless*: 'Avoid in talk about God's creative agency all suggestions of limitation in scope or manner' (p. 47).

There are two restatements of *Limitless* that can help clarify what Tanner means here. First, the *scope* of God's agency is universal. There is nothing in the world on which God's creative agency fails to act. The second restatement is that the *manner* of God's agency is immediate or

indirect (ibid., pp. 47-48). For Tanner, this rule means that God is 'the genuine source of everything that is, *in* all its diversity, multiplicity and particularity, without the need for any indirection' (ibid., p. 48, emphasis in original). Because God creates by knowing and willing, every creature (and every part of creation) is created in all of its actions, and that directly by God. Thus, there is no sense in which God is failing to cause all events as their First Cause, and no sense in which God is using mediating causes to bring about events.[3]

A brief example would be the following: God creates the world (he performs the initial act of creation). When God does so, he not only creates the initial conditions of the universe, but he also is knowing and willing for all states of the universe to follow. While Tanner's view by no means requires a particular view of time, it might be best for the example to view God's creating a spatiotemporal block. All points of creation lie along the block; all creatures would have time-slices of themselves along the block.[4] God would be ordering all events along the block in his knowing and willing, and God's doing so would be via direct agency—perhaps similar to McCann (2012) and McCann (2016). Thus, God's creative act encompasses all of creation, including all events, and is direct.

Consider this statement by McCann (2016): 'God does not as creator cause the world to exist by doing something *else* that causes it to exist . . . Rather, we should understand the world in all of its history to be the immediate product of a single act of creation on God's part' (p. 248, emphasis in original). Strictly speaking, God does not cause our actions as much as he exercises

[3] Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Tanner notes she will not deal with the implications this may have for the problem of evil. She contends in an endnote, 'Note well that . . . God creates only what is good. . . . It may very well be that evil is not intelligible on that score but perhaps it should not be' (p. 174, n. 12). One might well respond that evil is a privation (as in an earlier chapter, perhaps an instance of negative causation) that God does not cause. But surely God is causing a person who kills another person with a knife to thrust the knife in, killing them (even if God is simply creating and willing the first person in their causing of the other to die). It is not the case there is no answer; it is instead curious that none should be offered in this dialectic.

[4] Again, I am not trying to wedge a particular view of time as much as I am trying to illustrate a way in which *Limitless*'s application can be understood.

divine agency in conferring existence on our actions (inasmuch as God confers existence on everything). The intent here, by both Tanner and McCann, is to preserve human responsibility in actions and to avoid saying God is making human choices for them. In the next section, I undertake to show there are reasons to think the rules, as they are, can be undercut.

2. No Univocity?

One will recall the rule presented in *1.1* above—*No Univocity*—and its claims that attribution of divine predicates is univocal, and no divine and non-divine predicates can be simply contrasted. The inevitable result of this is theological statements such as 'God is loving' and creaturely statements such as 'Steve is loving' cannot mean the same thing. They are not, however, meant to be equivocal statements (statements that have entirely different meanings). Instead, these statements are meant to be analogical. Abraham (2017a) notes, 'In sorting out how to think about divine action we begin afresh, I propose, with the full range of our discourse about divine action in all its complex specificity as we find it in Scripture, in the tradition of the church, and in our own lives' (p. 204). This may seem to require, *pace* Tanner, some univocity after all.

2.1 An Argument for At Least Some Univocity between God and World

Here is an argument, with support following, for such a conclusion when it comes to talk of divine action:

1. All statements purporting to tell a truth about God are either univocal, equivocal, or analogical (for every individual statement *S*, *S* is either *U*, *E*, or *A*).
2. If all *S* is *E*, then nothing is known about God (including that God is such that *S* is *E*).
3. If all *S* is *A*, then there are certain conceptual parts of *S* that align with concepts found in the world.
4. But these 'concept alignments' just are of the *S*-is-*U* kind.
5. So, at least some *S* is *U*.

Premise (1) is simply exhausting the options when it comes to God-talk and predicates. Univocity, equivocality, and analogy seem to be the only categories we have. One might wish to argue that the category of metaphor represents a distinct and live option for a thinker. However, Wessling (2013) has noted that even if we entertain the idea of God-talk as metaphor, we can still ask whether the statement is univocal or equivocal (pp. 93-94, n. 7). It seems one or the other (or analogy!) must be true. Premise (2) states the epistemological consequences of equivocality: if every concept of God is completely different to any worldly concept, then nothing is or even can be such that it is known of God. This would have the self-refuting consequence of not even knowing that God is such that concepts applied to him are equivocal (since that is itself a concept found in this world, and thus at least one divine predicate would be univocal with a predicate found in the world).

Premise (3) is a bit trickier. It claims that if all statements about God are analogical, then there are certain conceptual parts of the statement that align with concepts found in the world. It is here that a proponent of analogy will want to push back. It is not immediately clear why such a proponent would need to accept that there are 'concept alignments' within the doctrine of analogy. A proponent of analogy could say something like the following: analogies show us similarities, or areas of overlap, between two concepts. However, we cannot pinpoint precisely where those concept alignments, or areas of overlap, are; we cannot say exactly what the areas of overlap are. An example given by Wessling is one of God and Samson, with the predicate *is strong*. While 'God is strong' and 'Samson is strong' are both true, and not equivocal, one cannot say precisely in what ways Samson's strength maps on to God's strength (p. 96). This, one might think, excuses the proponent of analogy from having to agree that there are certain conceptual parts of the statement that align with concepts found in the world.

This does not appear to work on premise (3), however. This is because the concept of analogy *agrees* with (3) that there are indeed conceptual alignments found between the two predicates. Return to the predicate *is strong* for God and Samson. The proponent of analogy is not denying there is a commonality between 'God is strong' and 'Samson is strong' (this, after all, is the whole point of analogy); she is simply claiming 'no one is able to precisely delineate what aspects of human conceptions of strength apply to God' (ibid.). So it seems one is obliged to accept premise (3) after all.

What of premise (4)? As a reminder, (4) is:

4. But these 'concept alignments' just are of the *S*-is-*U* kind.

(4) is where the proponent of analogy can use the above reasoning to object. (4) does more than claim there are concept alignments. It makes the further claim these concept alignments are univocal concepts between God and world. 'That is not necessarily true,' the proponent of analogy may reply. 'While there are concept alignments, you have done nothing to suggest the doctrine of analogy as given above does not apply. It could be that no one can say what these common concepts are or how they perfectly align between God and the world.'

2.2 Partial Univocity and Additional Meaning

Wessling seems to grant this as his argument for at least some univocity is aimed elsewhere. I freely admit it may not be easy to identify exactly where the overlap occurs between divine and creaturely (or worldly) predicates. I do think a few clarifications Wessling makes, combined with a brief contribution of my own, suggest this is not a promising reply. First, consider what Wessling calls 'partial univocity.' *Partial univocity* occurs when a predicate has the same sense in both divine and worldly uses, but 'this predicate might have either additional or abridged meaning when applied to one of its referents' (p. 94). A predicate has *additional*

meaning in cases where it has more meaning when used to speak of God than it does when used to speak of something in the world; a predicate has *abridged meaning* in cases where it has a restricted or 'constricted' meaning when used to speak of God compared to when it is used to speak of something in the world (ibid.).

An example of additional meaning Wessling gives is the predicate *is wise*. When one says of the divine, 'God is wise,' and says of the creature, 'Jane is wise,' it must mean more when applied to God than when applied to Jane. When 'God' is taken to be the referent of traditional theology, he is usually considered to be omniscient (or something relevantly similar), and thus knows all and uses his knowledge in divine providence. An example of abridged meaning Wessling gives is the predicate *is speaking*. When one says of the divine, 'God is speaking,' and says of the creature, 'Jane is speaking,' it must mean something constricted when applied to God than when applied to Jane. This is because humans are complex entities that require physical elements to speak (e.g., their bodies), whereas God has no such need.

Now the point of the preceding has been to suggest that, if not for the details of the doctrine of analogy, at least partial univocity would need to be on the table. The details of analogy that make it differ from partial univocity include the idea that one does not know where and/or precisely how the conceptual alignment takes place between God and world. My contention is this will collapse into either partial univocity or equivocality.

The argument, which includes premise (4) above, is that such statements really do have the same meaning at some point in the concept, and these identical-meaning points are called concept alignments. The response from defenders of analogy is to say that there are concept alignments, but that we simply do not know precisely where they are. But this is just to admit that the concepts can be at least partially univocal, after all. It undercuts the motivation that one

had to promote analogy. The motivation for analogy is not primarily the idea that we simply cannot know certain fine details about divine predicates and how they map on to the world; the motivation is that God is so utterly transcendent that such predicates *do not map at all*, but rather there are some similarities in some vague sense such that we can at least grasp in some limited way that similarity. So, suppose the proponent of analogy sticks to her guns, and insists such predicates do not really have true concept alignments. In this case, what we have is a case of two utterly distinct predicates being used for the same idea. In such cases we have an equivocation. The proponent of analogy can move the other direction, however. She can argue that analogy is not the thesis that concepts do not map at all from divine to world. But if they do map on to each other, then in what sense is there an analogy rather than a real univocality—at least at some points of the concept in question?

Duns Scotus saw something similar, though he went in another direction with his idea. When in critique of the doctrine of analogy, he argued that if the concepts were indeed not univocal, such that they were really distinct from each other, this would destroy all knowledge of God. But we do have knowledge of God; therefore, these concepts must indeed be univocal (Labooy, 2014). Rather than eliminating transcendence, Scotus sought to preserve it, and believed the only way to do so was via univocality. He asks us to imagine the concept of a will—a distinctly creaturely one—and imagine it does not always choose the right thing to do. This is obviously an imperfection. However, suppose we took the concept of our human understanding of will and applied it without such imperfections (p. 57). This seems accessible enough in its basic form and appears to be a prime example of what Wessling means when he speaks of additional meaning. It also does not mean that Scotus thinks the divine can be fully grasped, as he sought the real distinction between the divine and the created (p. 56).

In such cases, the motivation for analogy is undercut, due both to epistemological concerns in largely abandoning transcendental ones in one instance, and due to its being unnecessary to preserve a real distinction between God and the world in the other. If this is so, premises (3) and (4) are solidly in place. Whatever these concept alignments turn out to be—say, that God loves the world is true as we understand 'I love my brother' is true—it seems at least these are univocal. This also does not mean there is no place for analogy. All that is supposed to follow is that not everything can be analogical at the expense of the univocal.

What follows from this is that at least some statements about God are univocal. This may not be a desired result for the proponent of analogy. What to do about it? One could just insist that some statements about God really are equivocal, after all.

Suppose a proponent is fine with this result. Maybe it is the case that *some* statements about God are in fact equivocal (including the concept alignments). But this result will not do, since it entails that there are not really any concept alignments among these statements. As discussed above, this leads to not simply some but *all* statements about the divine being equivocal. So, the proponent of analogy is faced with a choice: she can allow for univocity or else submit to equivocality. The upshot is there is reason to think Tanner's *No Univocity* rule is not binding for theological discourse.

3. An Evaluation of *Limitless*

A discussion of Tanner's two rules would not be complete without an evaluation of the second rule as well. This rule was called *Limitless*, and stated:

> *Limitless*: 'Avoid in talk about God's creative agency all suggestions of limitation in scope or manner.'

One might recall from earlier in the chapter the restatement of *Limitless* included the idea that no God-talk should limit the scope or directness of God's agency in the world. God's action is immediate on all of his creation, and the scope covers all of creation. I contend if *Limitless* is correct, then some form of divine determinism is true. This result is undesirable for many traditional theists. Thus, while this is not a knock-down objection to Tanner, it does display a cost to her view on *Limitless* such that it will be unavailable to many who Tanner would like to adopt it.

3.1 The Objection from Divine Determinism

According to the *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 'theological determinism is the view that God determines every event that occurs in the history of the world' (Vicens). One might think there is sufficient ambiguity in the term 'determines' such that a defender of even libertarian varieties of freedom would be able to embrace it, Vicens notes. Thus, the kind of determinism in play here is causal. Note well what this indicates: those espousing a causal account that covers God and every event meet the definition for a theological determinist account.

Tanner clearly wants to avoid a determinist account of God as a tyrant (cf. p. 142, where she notes the traditional problem of divine sovereignty ruling out human freedom). Nonetheless, she seems to have trouble articulating an account that successfully avoids this problem. 'God's creative powers must be said to extend to all created existence, including presumably any power or efficacy that created beings themselves have. [It] . . . must be said to found created being in whatever mechanical causality . . . or self-determining agency it might evidence' (p. 86). For Tanner, God creates agents in their act of creating, and any agent who creates or causes is simply doing what God conferred existence upon.

McCann (2016) takes much the same route when he argues that 'We should understand the world in all of its history to be the immediate product of a single act of creation on God's part, in much the way a melody . . . is the immediate product of the creative activity of a composer' (p. 248). The composer analogy is especially telling. Whatever powers the musical notes may have within the world of the song, it is the composer that develops or creates (rather than discovers) the melody. Similarly, in an author-character relation, while the character may make free choices *within the realm of the story*, the real reason the character does anything is because she was caused to do so by the author.

McCann hints at a possible defence against determinism here, however. Even though God is causing things in the world, because God is transcendent and acts above the world, he cannot be said to bring about things in precisely the same way (ibid.). God, as primary cause, simply provides for the existence of all of our decisions and actions, he writes. McCann focuses on the idea that we still have desires (to eat a meal) and purposes (to choose to eat at a restaurant for the teleological end of eating a meal); since those desires and purposes are real, and since we really still possess causal powers, our freedom is not eliminated.

It is not clear this really preserves freedom (at least not a libertarian freedom, at any rate). It does, as McCann notes, eliminate worries over occasionalism. However, this seems entirely compatible with theological determinism (with freedom of a compatibilist variety). Strictly speaking, it is not classical compatibilism to which McCann refers (and it does not entail such). Instead, he compares it to the idea of God conferring existence on natural causes and argues libertarian freedom does not preclude such. In fact, if libertarian freedom is taken to be something like agent causation, he writes, then there really 'is no such thing as libertarian freedom' (2012, pp. 100-101).

But if God confers existence of creaturely decisions in the same way in which he confers them on natural objects, then it seems the former possess the same kind of freedom as the latter. In other words, only if we take all sorts of natural objects to possess libertarian freedom should we accept this line of reasoning. Perhaps it is not *precisely* like the case of natural objects; nonetheless, God does not violate the exercising of powers by these natural objects, and so too does he not violate the exercising of choices based on desires and intentions, and thus freedom is preserved. While exercising powers based on desires and intentions sounds freedom-preserving, it is worth asking if God creates the desires and intentions as well. If he does, then it seems more akin to a child playing with a toy soldier than it does God simply providing for the existence of real, free choices. Tanner does in fact think God creates everything in scope (this is the thrust of *Limitless*, after all), and thus we have a freedom-eliminating problem (at least when compared to libertarianism) brought on by exhaustive divine causation.

What if this is the case, and some kind of compatibilist freedom is true? Although McCann insists his view is not this kind (p. 105), it seems to be entailed by other commitments he has made. He believes the person is created in their act of willing and that God creates everything in scope, including the natures of things (cf. p. 200). If this is so, then God is not merely conferring existence on a blueprint, but rather inventing the nature and blueprint itself. It seems difficult to avoid a kind of determinism, and the only freedom available would be one that is in fact compatible with this kind of determinism.[5]

This cost may indeed be acceptable to an advocate of Powerism. Suppose one thinks that theological determinism and freedom are indeed compatible, and one accepts the basics of Powerism as articulated in earlier chapters. While this by itself works just fine, it will create

[5] It is worth noting Tanner does not focus much on the charge of determinism against her discussion, other than she believes her rules for discourse eliminate it as an option. McCann focuses almost exclusively on Lockean compatibilism, and so he manages to show that his account is not that.

problems in other areas of application. Powerism will be applied in particular ways to gain advantages in discussions, specifically on the problem of evil. This specific answer that Powerism provides will not be available to compatibilists. Thus, this would be a cost that a causal powers ontology can avoid making and is also a counterintuitive theory of freedom of the will.

3.2 The Collapse of Miracles

McCann above made it clear that his view (and Tanner's view from *Limitless*) cannot plausibly be accused of occasionalism. Occasionalism is the view that God directly causes all things, while denying causality normally presupposed within the world itself (Jordan). For an example, suppose one takes it that he is causing the ball to be thrown (or at least his arm is so causing); occasionalism claims that God is actually the one causing the ball to be thrown from the arm, and in turn God caused the movement of the arm, etc. It is clear Tanner's rules do not entail this kind of view, as *Limitless* does not mean there is *only* divine causation within the world. Further, Tanner does not subscribe to this view.

However, there is another potential problem lurking. It may be that Tanner's rules collapse the distinction between everyday occurrences and miracles. Whatever else miracles might be, they must at least be distinct from everyday worldly occurrences. For example, we would not seriously suggest that my children eating their vegetables with the evening meal is a literal miracle (even though we may colloquially say so). If *Limitless* is correct, then God's creative agency is unlimited in scope and is direct. God creates things in their natures and acts of willing (or for the sake of merely natural objects, in their states of being and their exercising of various causal powers). This creating is causal, by definition, and thus it means all events are

equally brought about by God. But God's intervention in the world on a causal basis for every event seems to rob significance from miracles.

It is here Tanner's defender might wish to remind us of *No Univocity*. This rule entails that God is transcendent of the world in such a way that God can create the natural object in its exercising of causal powers but not be in the world itself. This suggests the normal operation of the world has real powers, and thus miraculous acts would have significance. However, any account of miracles must have God acting within the world; either God's transcendence rules this out or it does not. If it does not, then God's transcendence is not a helpful answer to this problem, since God's creation of objects in their states of acting is a causal action not separate from the world, rendering it on par with any miraculous intervention's significance. If it does rule it out, then God's transcendence means miracles do not take place. Either way, the problem is with miracles and their significance or miracles in and of themselves.

3.3 Compatibility with the Free Will Defence

The free will defence to the logical problem of evil has been widely credited with solving that version of the problem. In Plantinga (1977), great pains are taken to show that libertarian versions of freedom of the will could possibly account for the co-existence of God and evil.[6] Since all that is needed to dispel the logical problem of evil is a possible solution wherein an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God could exist while there is evil in the world, and libertarian freedom presents such a solution, it follows Plantinga has solved the logical problem of evil.

Regardless of what one might think of Plantinga's solution, my contention is that Tanner and others who follow her two rules cannot avail themselves of it. In § 1.4 above, I argued that

[6] 'Co-existence' should not be taken to be an ontological commitment to evil; this is merely a figure of speech to say something like, 'The proposition "God exists" is true and the proposition "Some things in the world are evil in quality" is true.'

Tanner's rule *Limitless* rules out libertarian freedom due to its theological determinist commitments. If this is correct, and if Plantinga's free will defence depends on libertarian freedom, then *Limitless* effectively restricts access to the free will defence against the logical problem of evil.

One might argue that a free will defence can be had without resorting to instances of libertarian freedom. Bernstein and Helms (2015) argue that just such a scenario can take place (arguing their simpler free will defence encompasses both libertarian and compatibilist accounts of freedom). The upshot is even if Tanner's rules exclude libertarian freedom, they would not have the consequence of excluding the free will defence. They argue as follows, summarised in Everist (2015, pp. 27-28):

> Given that significant freedom plausibly requires the principle of alternate possibilities (the idea that one can do otherwise in any morally significant situation), then there will be some state of affairs *S* in some world *W** such that *S* in *W** will be identical to *S* in a world *W* (in which the agent Eve freely goes right) up to the moment of some morally right action *A* that Eve is considering. Further, while in *W* Eve freely does *A*, in *W** Eve fails to do *A*, and thus goes morally wrong. Here is the point: 'Eve can disobey God in *W** only if God exists (since a person cannot disobey a non-existent being) . . . It follows that *W** includes God's existence and an instance of evil. Hence, the consistent conjunction' here entails that God and evil can possibly be instantiated together. (Bernstein and Helms, pp. 200-202)

If they are correct, they have discovered a unique and simple way to preserve the free will defence without libertarianism. However, it seems this does not succeed. First, their provision for alternate possibilities just seems to be a description of libertarian free will. While they note that alternate possibilities are not needed for their account to work, this seems unlikely. What motivates the conclusion is the idea that there is such a world *W** where Eve goes wrong and God exists; this supposition directly comes from the principle of alternate possibilities. One cannot utilise a principle until one has reached the desired philosophical location and then abandon it, as in the so-called 'taxicab fallacy'(Craig, 2010, p. 57).

Second, this kind of response may not impact the logical problem of evil much at all. Everist again:

> If any [part] of the atheist's argument from the problem of evil had any prior force, that force should remain even after the telling of their story: we should still wonder how it is that an all-good God would not instantiate a morally perfect world with agents possessing morally significant freedom if he could do so. (p. 28)

In other words, Bernstein and Helm's account does not answer the force of the logical problem of evil if it does not make use of libertarian freedom. If it does make use of such freedom, then there is not an example of a free will defence without such freedom. Thus, Tanner's two rules, as far they rule out libertarian freedom, rule out an answer to the logical problem of evil as well.[7]

Tanner's two rules have been important not because they are completely antithetical to a causal powers ontology. When it comes to the problem of evil, for example, a causal powers proponent may not even embrace the free will defence. The reason these positions I have described above make a difference is because I will be applying causal powers to these various areas; giving up on these areas, then, is a significant cost for anyone wishing to use causal powers in the way I am going to use them with respect to God and various philosophical and theological areas. In the next chapter, I sketch a model of what it would look like for God to be endowed with powers from a powers ontology, including adopting an agent-causal view (as well as showing God satisfies conditions for agency as given in an earlier chapter) and continuous causation.

[7] Tanner herself seems to recognize a similar problem (as noted above) when she writes, 'The intelligibility of evil if a theologian follows our rules is a further question not addressed in this work. It may very well be that evil is not intelligible on that score but perhaps it should not be. Sin is an impossible possibility . . .' (p. 174, n. 12).

Chapter Seven - ‘God and a Causal Powers Ontology Applied’

In this chapter, I argue that we can apply the causal powers ontology sketched out in other chapters—along with the idea of continuous causation—to God, and that this will have various advantages in philosophical and theological areas. After a discussion on the conditions for agency, there will be a section on God and the various types of powers and capacities—and whether these individually apply to him. God and continuous causation will be discussed, and finally God and agent causation will be examined. These major areas will provide enough to go on to apply a causal powers ontology to gain advantages in several philosophical and theological areas.

1. God and Conditions for Agency

In an earlier chapter, I suggested ‘agency’ for an action is, minimally, a state which supervenes on a subject *S* when: a) *S* has rationality, b) *S* has free will, c) *S* is endowed with various causal powers, d) *S* intends to do some action *A,* and e) *S* performs *A* freely. I had also argued these formed the necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for agency. While these seem intuitive in discussions on merely creaturely agents, a question looms large in this project: Do these criteria apply to God? That is to say, do these criteria even make sense when applied to the divine, in light of what has been covered? I turn now to the five criteria, each in turn.

1.1 God Has Rationality

God, on traditional theism, exhibits rational behaviour. This is evidenced in claims often made by traditional theists about God in responses to various versions of the problem of evil. In the greater-good defence (or theodicy), for example, it is often claimed God had overriding good

reasons for allowing the evils in the world that he did (Tooley, 2015). In sceptical theism, the idea is that we cannot (apart from divine revelation) know God's reasons for allowing some particular evil (cf. (Dougherty, 2014) and (McBrayer)), but this presupposes that God does have some reason or other for what he is doing or revealing (or some reason for revealing or not revealing). In response to the soteriological problem of evil, God is said to organise the world in such a way that those who would have rejected the Gospel would not have believed it even if they heard it (Craig, 1989). In each case, there is an underlying presupposition that God is rational.

In the previous discussion on rationality, an example was given of a *belief-desire complex,* where one is acting rationally in cases where the agent holds a particular belief or set of beliefs about accomplishing a particular desire (or set of desires). Given this complex, a particular behaviour is rational just in case it acts in accordance with those particular beliefs about achieving particular desires that have formed into intentions. This has particular implications that differ for non-divine and divine persons. Suppose a non-divine being thinks the best way to make friends with a fierce animal is to run away from it, desires to so make friends, and acts accordingly. This non-divine person has acted rationally, even though they have a clearly mistaken belief. No such problem attends an omniscient God, since God will have no false beliefs.[1]

For an example, suppose (as traditional theists do) that God created the world. In the beginning, God had a desire to create the world; this desire formed into an intention to so create. God also had a belief[2] that the best way to create would be to use his power(s) to bring about the

[1] Even if one rejects omniscience for God, most of what matters is that God does not actually have false beliefs. If someone's account of God precludes omniscience but includes that God does not possess false beliefs (and that he does have quite a bit of knowledge), this discussion will apply equally.

initial state of the world (and he believed something about what the initial world-state ought to be to achieve particular results). God would also have known how best to govern the world, what kinds of creatures he would need to make, what the laws of nature would be, if he even ought to create the world, and so on. All of these behaviours would be eminently rational, since God was omniscient, and would have known how best to achieve his ends.

1.2 God Has Free Will

Not only does God have rationality, but God has free will as well. It is true that divine freedom can be a very divisive topic. While much can be said (and has) about divine freedom and its extent, what is important for this condition is that God has freedom at all. Howard-Snyder (2017) argues that God not only has freedom but has 'morally significant freedom' as well (p. 651). This morally significant freedom entails the ability to do good and evil (that is, in a given situation God could choose to do good or he could choose to do evil). She argues God possesses this freedom because it is a great good (ibid.).

While God's freedom is often thought of in libertarian terms, it is this concept of libertarian freedom that has been the subject of critique. Rowe (2004) has argued 'God's absolute perfection would leave him no choice other than the choice to create the very best world' (p. 88). If this is so, Rowe thinks, then God does not create of his own freedom. In fact, given what is meant by 'world,' God does nothing with respect to the objects and persons in existence from a place of freedom. Since everything God has brought about has been constrained (by the necessity of his own nature), God is not owed thanks (p. 151). For the purposes of this project, if God does not act freely, then he does not act as an agent; if he does not act as an agent, then God's acting in the world looks less like a personal account and more like an impersonal

[2] This can be said anthropomorphically for those who do not take God's knowledge to be such that he has beliefs.

account of the divine. Since a major focus of this effort is to appeal to traditional theists, such impersonal accounts will not work. Thus, if Rowe is correct, this project does not get off the ground.

How to answer Rowe? First, it might be the case that what matters for freedom is source incompatibilism. What matters is that the agent herself is the source of the action and not some constraint external to the agent. Note well the contention is not that something outside of God forces him to create the world; indeed, on this view, it is possible that God refrained from creating at all. It simply argues if God is going to create, it must be the very best possible world. It is possible Kane's notion of Ultimate Responsibility (UR) comes into play here. The idea behind UR is that the agent is ultimately responsible for their character or will (2005, p. 121). While it is surely right to say that God does not have will-setting moments on traditional theism, and UR probably does not strictly apply to God, it can give some insight. God's character is not constrained by anything external to him, and he is responsible for it in that he is a necessary being (the will-setting condition is more plausible for created, finite beings rather than an uncreated, necessarily existent one). If this is right, then God could still be a free agent in bringing about the world.

Mooney (2015) argues this is precisely Edward Wierenga's strategy in responding to problems of God's freedom. Since God's desires, intentions, and beliefs are all internal to his own nature, there is no external force constraining him, and so God can still be free (p. 222). Mooney draws on the distinction between possible and feasible worlds to suggest it may be the case God is presented with a set of equally good worlds feasible for him to create (pp. 225-227). If God is presented with a set of equally good worlds to actualise then nothing—whether external or internal—constrains God such that he cannot be free in creating the world.

What about Howard-Snyder and her contention that God's freedom is morally significant? This is relevant precisely because it is very nearly the opposite view of Rowe's. Far from requiring that God creates the best world, her view entails God could have created a very, very bad world instead. Her argument is the following:

1. Morally significant incompatibilist free will is a great good.
2. Morally significant incompatibilist free will requires the ability to do wrong or at least the ability to do worse than one does.
3. If one is essentially morally perfect one cannot do wrong and one cannot do worse than the best one can do.
4. If a certain feature is a great good, then God possesses that feature.
5. So, God is not essentially good. (p. 651)

Minor qualms about the equivocation between 'good' and 'morally perfect' aside (and they are very minor), this is a logically valid argument. It is important to note Howard-Snyder takes 'morally significant incompatibilist free will' as a great-making property, where the latter is commonly represented in literature to be something that it is metaphysically better for some being to have than to lack (p. 653). Her discussion is germane because we do not want to preserve divine freedom at the expense of what is taken to be an essential property of God (for traditional theists).

One possible line of response to Howard-Snyder focuses on the first premise—that such free will is a great good—and whether or not the justification for premise 1 does the job she needs it to. In premise (4), Howard-Snyder argues that God possesses this great good because it is a great-making property. 'God is supposed to be the greatest possible being,' she argues (p. 653), so naturally he would have this kind of property. But it is not clear that she argues for morally significant free will as this kind of great good in her justification for premise (1). She does argue that it 'makes one a better being' (p. 651), and so it would seem to indicate this kind

of great-making property *prima facie*. However, some of her justification fits and some of it may not.

Her first line of evidence is that the response to the problem of evil relies on morally significant freedom, and that because it is such a great good God allows the possibility of evil in his creation (ibid.). It is not clear that the responses to the problem of evil appropriate the concept of free will being a great-making property for beings, however. Plantinga (1977) argues that such morally significant freedom is a great-making property, but for *worlds*—he does not make the extension to beings on a scale of value-commensurability (p. 30). This distinction is not trivial—it simply is not true that to reject or refrain from accepting premise (1) means giving up on the response to the problem of evil. There are some things that would make for better worlds that do not necessarily make for better beings. Suppose all the best worlds have evil in them (Plantinga, 2004); while this would make the property *having evil* a great-making property for worlds, it is far from clear that such a property would function as a great-making property for beings. While these worlds would entail there are beings with morally significant freedom, it does not entail that it is better for beings to have than to lack this property, for any being.

Second, there is the potential for conflation of two different terms: 'morally significant freedom' and what we might call 'morally responsible freedom' (p. 652). Either Howard-Snyder believes morally significant and morally responsible freedom describe the same thing or she does not. If she does, then she may be begging the question against those who espouse God's essential goodness. Plausibly, God is only a moral agent if he has moral duties; plausibly, God only has moral duties if he is given commands, and an essentially morally perfect God does not give himself commands (Craig, 2007). If God is essentially good, then it is not clear premise (1) gets off the ground; conversely, morally significant freedom is only a metaphysically great-making

property if God is not essentially perfect. My suggestion is that morally responsible freedom is a great-making property for created beings.

If Howard-Snyder does not take these concepts as identical, then it looks as though morally responsible freedom is a species of morally significant freedom. If this is so, her premises should be amended to include that kind of morally responsible freedom. It is this moral responsibility doing all the work; the reply above about God not being a *morally responsible* agent also applies.[3]

In an earlier chapter, I suggested that freedom of the will might be discussed as the idea one is free with respect to the *willing* of their actions (Clarke and Reed, 2015, pp. 8-10). This comports well with traditional theistic conceptions of God's willing that such-and-such state of the world take place, or God's willing the world into existence (cf. Brown (2019) and Cook (2019)). A quick word is needed about agency as I am using it. I am using *agency* here in a causal, rational sense, rather than a moral sense above. This may strike one as *ad hoc*, since for the creature I tend to apply agency to include moral responsibility. There is a good reason motivating this move, however. While I reject complete equivocality and complete analogy as it relates to God, I affirm God's distinct being from the world (in other words, I do affirm some version of his transcendence). God is not simply another being among many, even if he is a being. If God is morally perfect, then he is free (even if not subject to any other particular commands). God is an agent who acts causally in and on the world, while remaining distinct from it. In addition to rationality and freedom, there are three other conditions for agency God fulfils.

[3] Craig is most often using this in the context of the Euthyphro discussion, explaining that God does not have moral duties because he is the centre of moral goodness and grounds objective moral values.

1.3 God is Endowed with Various Causal Powers

In this account, God has various capacities and causal powers at his disposal, and God at least possesses active powers. In a section below, which types of powers God possesses (active, passive, immanent, etc.) and whether God has tendencies and resultants will be explored. If God does not possess causal powers, then it is difficult to conceive of God being an agent (even in the causal-specific way we have sketched out). If Powerism or something relevantly like it is correct, then God would possess at least some set of causal powers. A quick word about the language of 'endowed': I am not here attempting to say God gets his powers from somewhere, as though there is a source from which God's causal powers are derived. Instead, I affirm with the theistic tradition that God possesses these powers of his own nature (this is the story with objects and their causal powers, too). Because more will be said about the specific application of a causal powers account to God below, we will take our leave of this point for now.

1.4 God Intends/Intended (at some time or times) to Do Some Action A

Intentions seem to form a necessary condition for exercising of causal agency. If *S* does not intend to do *A*, then it is unclear how *S* is exercising causal agency in *A*. For a concrete example, suppose a man unintentionally knocks over a vase resting near him. All else being equal, we do not hold the man morally responsible precisely because of this lack of intention—it indicates a lack of agency in causing the vase to fall and break. On the other hand, the positive intentions exhibited by the agent in an action form a crucial component of this account. If God has a desire to do some action and forms an intention to undertake that action, that action will be undertaken unless it is interrupted—whether by a counter-intention or something else.

This 'something else' is a very interesting point. It should not be taken to mean that something else actually has power to cancel out God's intention to do something directly.

Instead, this is a species of God's counter-intending some action. Suppose God intends to do *x* at *t*, just in case at *t*-1 *p* is false. As a matter of fact, *p* is true at *t*-1, and so God has a counter-intention that entails he will not in fact do *x* at *t* after all. It need not follow that whatever made *p* true had decisive power over God's intentions or actions; God simply decided that if a particular counterfactual were true, he would act in a way different to his 'original' intention. In either scenario, then, it is God who has complete control over his intentions.

Abraham (2017b) gives a wonderful example of divine intentions in the Christian tradition via the person and work of Jesus Christ. Abraham does not want to focus on simple instances of individual divine actions and attempt to reconstruct the larger narrative or picture of divine intentions (pp. 14-15). Instead, he looks to understand divine actions in terms of God's intentions in sending his Son Jesus, as explicated in the Christian doctrine of Incarnation (p. 17). This intention to send Jesus into the world is done out of a larger plan of divine governance leading to reconciliation of God and world. It is precisely these intentions (*to send Jesus*, *to save*, *to reconcile*, and so on) that show divine agency in the world.

The philosophical and practical/theological instances above suggest that God is acting as an agent (or is at least fulfilling one or more necessary conditions of being an agent) even if a particular intention does not come to pass. This raises a biblical objection: is it not the case that God declares all his intentions will come to pass in Isaiah 46.10? Strictly speaking, the biblical text is not a philosophical one and is not dealing with our concept of intentions. It also speaks of God's pleasure rather than intentions. Next, God accomplishing all of his pleasures is linked implicitly with his purposes (v. 11), so that it is what God purposes (rather than merely what he intends) which is in view. God's intending something in a conditional sort of way and purposing it are clearly different. God may have many reasons for conditionally intending to do some

action but instead purposing some other action—and this is especially true when dealing with human free creatures. All divine purposes will be accomplished, whereas not all conditional intentions (as we understand them here) will be. In this case, it seems God's intentions form a proper part of his agency.

1.5 God Does A *Freely*

An attentive reader might recall when this condition was discussed in an earlier chapter that the main motivation behind adding it to our analysis was that it could be the case that a potential agent was coerced or otherwise does not perform *A* freely. Without such *A* being free, it is difficult to see how *S* is an agent. One might be tempted to think this does not apply to God; after all, who or what could coerce God or render him unable to perform *A* freely?

While such a question is legitimate, it does not precisely strike at the point of the condition. The point is not that God *could* so be coerced, or that God *is in fact* not free, but rather that a necessary condition of agency is that God is in fact free. God's being an agent with respect to performing or causing some action *A* entails that he performed it freely, and God's performing *A* freely is a necessary condition of doing such as an agent. These five conditions form the necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for agency, and there seems to be good reason to think all five apply to God. When arguing from the lesser to the greater, if merely human creatures have such conditions and powers, then their Creator has them as well. These conditions also have been sometimes understood to apply to God by traditional theists. In the next section, we will examine the various types of powers God is said to have, answering some questions about this account in the process.

2. God and Types of Powers

This section will deal with God and various types of causal powers he might have. In this section, it is important to distinguish between what Lowe (2013) calls *tokens* of powers and *types* of powers (p. 173). A token is just an individual instance of something. In this case, a token power would be God's individual power for *God to part the Red Sea*, or for *God to love another being*, etc. These are token instances of types of powers: the power *to part the Red Sea*, or the power *to love another being*.

Some of these power-types seem communicable, while others seem less so. The power *to love another being* is an example of the former; humans engage in truly loving others all the time (some more than others). The power *to part the Red Sea*, however, seems non-communicable. Let us stipulate that any *divine power token* (an instance of a divine power) has a *divine power type* (what we will call any power which has a divine token). A divine power type is communicable just in case there can be non-divine tokens. A divine power type is non-communicable just in case there cannot be any non-divine tokens. Even if it turns out that the power *to part the Red Sea* is a communicable divine power type, the property of *omnipotence* that undergirds it on traditional versions of theism plausibly is not.

This raises an interesting distinction made by Lowe. There are causal powers (which we are largely discussing here) and there are '*non*-causal powers. . . . The manifestation of this power . . . does not *consist in* its bearer bringing about any distinctive kind of change in anything' (p. 174, emphasis in original). The example of the property of omnipotence from the previous paragraph is an example of a non-causal power. Omnipotence itself does not bring about anything. Can non-causal powers like this be of any use to God?

It seems clearly that they can. A causing seems to be an agent or substance bringing about some effect; in the cases of agency, it seems to be an agent's directing her causal powers toward a particular end or ends. An action is the outcome of the cause. If God has a non-causal power like omniscience, and if such knowledge of all true propositions helps God decide which world or world-types to actualise, then God can use omniscience to inform which causing God initiates. The outcome of that causing (in this case the actualising of the world) is the divine action that omniscience helped inform.

While the rest of this section will deal with how Powerism should be understood when applied to the divine, one would be forgiven for asking why this powers ontology should be preferred. One good reason for so preferring could be the following: traditional theology understands humans as made in the image of God (Erickson, 2013, pp. 458-459). This does not mean that we can analyse God completely by conducting an analysis of human nature; it instead means we are the way we are in part because God is the way he is.

Either the powers humans possess are *intrinsic* or *extrinsic* (or they possess both types of powers). An *intrinsic* power is a power a substance has simply in virtue of being the kind of substance that it is. The concept of 'substance' being used is the same as in Lowe, where he simply refers to 'a particular concrete object that is a bearer of properties, including powers, which can persist through time while undergoing changes in respect of at least some of these properties' (Lowe, 2013, p. 173).[4] An *extrinsic* power is a power a substance has in virtue of something (or someone) else conferring it upon them. Assume humans have extrinsic powers only; they have powers given to them by God. This is not an unreasonable position for those who adhere to traditional theology. It is somewhat intuitive and would supply an answer to questions

[4] While this account of substances could preclude certain traditional conceptions of God from counting as a substance, there one can feel free to amend the definition in relevant, minor ways (e.g., the addition of 'even if no changes occur,' or something similar).

raised by biblical accounts of talking donkeys, for example. In other words, if God wants the donkey to speak to Balaam (Numbers 22.28-30), God grants the donkey the extrinsic power of *speech*.

However, either this account of strictly extrinsic powers is not correct or else it relies on these powers deriving from intrinsic powers or capacities. This is because a substance either has the potency (or capacity) to have the power to do *x* or it does not. If it does not, then no amount of 'extrinsicality' will give them that potency (or capacity). Imagine if Balaam's donkey did not even possess the capacity to speak and God tries to grant Balaam's donkey such a power. By definition, the donkey is not even able to attain such a power. This last sentence is not quite right. Suppose God wants to give Balaam's donkey the ability to speak, and while the donkey lacks the ability, he is the kind of substance that possesses the power *to receive that ability*. Rather than provide a counterexample, this scenario actually reinforces the point: if the donkey lacked even this second-order capacity, he would not be the kind of thing that could even receive such a power. Above I mentioned that on traditional theology humans are made in the image of God, and we are the way we are in part because God is the way he is. Arguing from the lesser to the greater, if humans possess at least some of their powers intrinsically, then so does God. So what kinds of powers apply to God? I explore the answers below.

2.1 Does God Have Active Powers?

The kinds or types of powers available to the divine will depend on how they can be made to cohere with traditional theology. Since a central aim of this project is to see divine causal powers comport with traditional theology, an effort is made to minimise changes made to such theology. Perhaps the concept that comes to mind most when discussing causal powers is active powers.

Koons and Pickavance (2017) define an active power as follows: 'A property *P* is an *active power* if and only if, necessarily, whenever a thing has *P* there is the possibility of its producing a specific kind of effect *E* on some other thing under specifiable conditions by virtue of having *P*.' (p. 88) So, in the appropriate environment (say, relevant proximity for spatiotemporal objects) a substance may bring about an effect in another object. This works well with Lowe's discussion of an active power, where he takes it such powers do not need stimuli, but instead simply have manifestations of bringing about change in an object or objects (2013, p. 174).

Given this definition, does God have active powers? Consider a paradigmatic case of God and power: God's exercising his will in the creation of the universe. Since the will is an active power that an agent exercises basically (not in virtue of doing something else) (Lowe, p. 178), God can be said to have a property, namely, the property of *willing to create the world*, and such a property would enable God to bring about the world (or a change on otherwise-empty existence). Thus, it seems God has at least one active power.

But this active power is consistent with God acting out of necessity, lacking freedom. One thing a Powerist account ought to preserve is divine freedom in the exercising of those powers. In both § 1.2 and § 1.5, it is suggested that in order for God to be an agent he must have freedom of the will. So, while active powers are themselves consistent with being causally determined or manifested out of necessity, we do not need to say that about God. In fact, God's active power in creation of the world may have a powers-based explanation for why there seem to be creatures with libertarian freedom.

Williams (2019) argues, 'What is necessitated in stochastic cases is not a single manifestation type, but a prescribed *disjunction* of manifestation types' (p. 138, emphasis in

original). For Williams, it is a constellation of powers coming together that gives rise to a particular causal result. The particular result can come from a specified range of choices. For example, suppose a girl desires ice cream. She need not have access to every ice cream flavour in order to freely choose her ice cream flavour. She simply needs to have access to a range of choices: chocolate, vanilla, strawberry, etc. Her restricted range of choices does nothing to undermine her freedom. While this is true, the constellation giving rise to a power manifestation is less like the girl choosing her ice cream flavour and more like rolling a six-sided die. The result being this does not truly account for freedom of the will.

Perhaps God is not causing a constellation of powers to come together to secure a particular result. Causes can produce effects that have the same type of property. So, God possesses libertarian freedom and can create creatures who also possess such freedom. But this might suggest such creatures (e.g., humans) do not possess their power of will essentially after all (contradicting what has been said in prior chapters). This need not be the conclusion. Since in creation God is bringing about a particular change, the counterfactual 'If God had not willed to bring about creation, then creation would not have existed' is true. Thus, if God had not provided for the causal conditions necessary to ensure the existence of creatures with libertarian freedom, *including bringing about such freedom* in virtue of actualising them, then they would not have libertarian freedom (or any of their causal powers in their causal profile). In other words, a necessary condition of a free creature exercising their power of willing is that they are in the appropriate metaphysical circumstances (actually existing, amongst other circumstances) to so exercise.

What about God's direct upholding of the world? Traditional Christian theologians and philosophers have taken it that God must uphold the world or the world—and the things

within—would simply cease to exist (Winkler, 2011). One way God is commonly thought to accomplish this is by means of continuous creation. God continually creates each aspect of the world at every moment, and thus upholds everything in existence directly. It seems to me that God's upholding can be either direct or indirect, depending on the circumstances.

A direct upholding occurs when God's causal involvement is necessary, such as when God desires a particular state of affairs to come about and the current and relevant set of objects and their powers at work will not yield such (think in terms of free creatures failing to obey God, or an object whose tendencies are such that in this instance a certain power or powers will fail on the particular occasion). Suppose God wants an asteroid to strike an uninhabited planet, but the current situation is such that the tendency to exercise this power *to strike*—or *to be struck*—will fail. God could use his active power to ensure the powers will in fact exercise. This is a kind of direct upholding of the world since God is acting to ensure that regularities of nature continue uninterrupted, even when powers fail, in a kind of 'reverse miracle.'

Indirect upholding, on the other hand, occurs when God upholds something by doing something else.[5] An interesting illustration: imagine a juggler holding up a bowling pin by balancing it on a stool that she held in her palm; she is holding up the pin *by* holding up the stool. For divine indirect upholding, in preserving the conditions that allow for powers and their manifestations, God is indirectly upholding the powers and the manifestations themselves. Note this does not necessarily involve the transitivity of causes; God does not need to cause *A*, and *A* cause *B*, in order for God to be said to indirectly uphold *B*. God could cause the environment on Earth's moon to be such that Jane is able to manifest a particular power—say, of *jumping*

[5] This distinction indicates that continuous creation is not true—or at least, not exhaustively true. If someone thinks continuous creation is required, all such upholding by God will be direct. If one is unsure or does not accept exhaustive continuous creation but does want to affirm God conserves the world at all times, then indirect upholding may be available to them.

(specifically the fine-grained power to *jump high*). God need not cause Jane to jump high, nor would it even need to be the case that the moon's environment causes Jane to jump high (though, to be sure, it does act as a necessary condition for her exercising that power, supposing that without it Jane could not jump high). God indirectly upholds Jane's power of *jumping* by ensuring the moon's environment remains the same.

This raises an important question on God, active powers, and indirect upholding: If the moon's environment is the way it is due to its causal profile being the way it is, what indirect upholding is there for God to do? Suppose that the most fundamental simples that exist either could not give rise of themselves to the objects and environments which they constitute or that they could, but do not and would never exist without God (another traditional theistic doctrine—that of creation). Suppose further that God gives the initial conditions that give rise to these powers in these objects (in other words, suppose God creates). While these objects have their powers necessarily (because of the kinds of things they are), these objects do not exist necessarily. These objects exist in part because the fundamental simples that make up the universe exist. God 'confers' these powers to their bearers by creation. Thus, Powerism gives us support for linking two traditional theistic doctrines—that of creation and upholding, or conservation. God conserves *by* his active power of creation.[6]

2.2 Does God Have Passive Powers?

If God has active powers, does he have passive powers also? Koons and Pickavance write, 'A property *P* is a *passive power* if and only if, necessarily, whenever a thing has *P* there is the possibility of its being affected in some specific way *E* by some other thing under specifiable

[6] One might think also this supports the idea that God creates each thing in existence, even though we see them come about by other means (see, for example, human and animal procreation). God confers the powers necessary for procreation and is thus creatively responsible for the existence of each and every thing in existence.

conditions by virtue of having *P*.' (p. 88) Alarm bells may be going off for traditional theists, as many would not want to say that God can be affected by some external cause or influence.

Much depends on whether or not God can be said to be *impassible*. Pawl explains, 'Divine impassibility is the claim that God cannot have affects, or be affected by things.' This, coupled with our working definition of a passive power, entails that God cannot have passive powers. Lowe's definition of a passive power does not provide much succour for those who affirm impassibility: 'A *passive* power, as I understand it, is one whose manifestation or exercise always needs to be *caused* by one or more substances acting on its bearer' (p. 174, emphasis in original). Impassibility is also closely related to what Pawl calls 'strong immutability,' or the idea that God not only does not change in character but does not change in any way at all. Feser (2017), in arguing for a 'purely actual actualizer,' upholds this conclusion that God is purely actual and cannot change (pp. 33-35).

While God would not have passive powers on strong immutability or impassibility, what about cases where these theses are rejected? One hardly needs to be a process theologian to think that God might experience affections or be emotionally moved by the plight of humans. In Wessling (2013), not only is God's love argued as univocal, but this seems to entail a denial of impassibility. God really does love us—this is not merely anthropomorphic. However, this need not be an example of a passive power. It could be the case that God has a favourable disposition toward his creation and loves them upon his own creation of them. I suspect an impassibilist would offer an even stronger suggestion: God loves these creations within himself from all of eternity.

Nonetheless, if one does reject strong immutability and impassibility, it does appear that God could have passive powers (the power of *being angry* in response to some action done by a

sinful creature, for example). If we accept the working definitions of passive powers above, though (especially Lowe's), it looks difficult for the traditional theist to accept. For most to whom this project is aimed, then, passive powers will likely be off the table.

2.3 Does God Have Immanent Powers?

In our metaphysics survey in a prior chapter, I discussed three types of powers: active, passive, and immanent. As a reminder, Koons and Pickavance give this definition for an immanent power: 'A property *P* is an *immanent power* if and only if, necessarily, whenever a thing has *P* there is possibility of its producing some intrinsic change in itself under specifiable conditions by virtue of having *P*.' (p. 88) Take the case of a moth becoming a butterfly. The moth has the property, within herself, of *becoming a butterfly*. If she did not have this property as a moth, then she would not become a butterfly. Under the right conditions, the moth becomes a butterfly, thus revealing she had this immanent power all along.

One possibility for God having immanent powers is within the idea of the Incarnation. Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, took on a human nature that was not present before his Immaculate Conception. Thus, the power of *sight* (where *sight* is understood to be explicitly physical) is a new power (or a newly developed first-order capacity) because of the immanent power of *developing the power of sight* in (at least) the Second Person of the Trinity. After all, if Jesus lacked this power then he would not have had even the capacity to take on human nature (or, in the relevant example, he could not have taken on human sight—but powers can be multiplied to see the conclusion).

However, this does not show us God having an immanent power, after all. Consider that immanent powers bring about an *intrinsic* change in the bearer of such a power. The moth becomes a butterfly and undergoes intrinsic—not merely *extrinsic*—change. On traditional

theology, God does not undergo intrinsic change. Even those who deny strong immutability tend to affirm what Pawl calls 'weak immutability,' or the thesis that God has 'a constant character and . . . [is] faithful in divine promises.' Many of these would affirm God's character and nature does not change, and intrinsic changes would not take place for God. More about the Incarnation can and should be explored elsewhere, but it does not seem as though God has immanent powers.

2.4 Are Some of God's Powers Resultants?

Now that it looks like God has only active powers (or possibly active and passive powers, for those who might reject impassibility and strong immutability), one must ask if any of God's powers are resultants. 'A property *P* is a *resultant* if and only if, necessarily, whenever a thing *x* has *P* at *t*, there is some earlier time *t'* and some passive or immanent power *M* such that *x* has *P* at *t* by virtue of its having exercised *M* at *t'*.' (p. 88) A good example of this is the immanent power of *becoming a butterfly*. When the moth exercises this immanent power, it gains the property of *being a butterfly*. Thus, *being a butterfly* is a resultant.

In evaluating whether God has resultants, one may be tempted to answer in the negative right away, since the working definition involves relationship to moments in time. Many traditional theists (perhaps most) accept God as timeless (or more commonly called 'eternal'); hence, God does not have any resultants. This move is too quick. One can simply hold reference to time as a kind of fiction when applied to God (the authors of this definition assuredly did not have the divine in mind when writing it). Whatever answer one prefers for how God could do anything differently than he had before can be applied here (cf. the Incarnation and the *taking on* of human nature).

Once again, the answer may depend on one's answer to the question of which types of powers apply to God. For those who would say God only has active powers, none of those

powers or properties will be resultants. This is because in order for a power to be a resultant, it must be a resultant of an immanent or passive power. For those who think God also has passive powers, then it may be possible for God to have resultants. Again, take the Incarnation as a test case. The property of *sight* can be a resultant of the passive power of *receiving a human nature*. This admittedly requires particular views of what is going on when the Second Person of the Trinity is said to 'take on' human nature, but it does provide an example of a resultant for God, given these views.

2.5 Are Some of God's Powers Tendencies?

Perhaps one of the more interesting questions is whether or not any of God's powers are tendencies. Koons and Pickavance define a property as a tendency as follows: 'A property *P* is a *tendency* if and only if, necessarily, whenever a thing has *P* there is a certain likelihood or propensity for it to exercise one of its active or immanent powers under specifiable circumstances by virtue of having *P*.' (p. 88) This explains why we see such regularity in nature, even on Powerism. All of the various objects in the physical realm are usually going to have their behaviour governed by their causal profile (by 'governed' I do not necessarily mean 'causally determined') in that their active and immanent powers are going to be exercised in appropriate circumstances (fire has a tendency to burn objects when in relevant proximity to them; moths have a tendency to turn into butterflies, etc.).

A potential worry involves divine freedom: if God has tendencies, then it looks like he is not free. If God's behaviour is similarly governed by this set of rules (based on his properties), then those times God acts differently it is only because a tendency failed. A 'misfire' of a power is not sufficient for an exercise of free will. Thus, God does not have tendencies. But this need not follow.

First, it does not follow that if God has a tendency, then all of his powers are so governed. Suppose God has an active power of *being loving*. God will love the other persons of the Trinity from all eternity and will love all creatures. This comes from God's omnibenevolence, or his necessary goodness (Morris, 2002, pp. 51-56). Why think that *all* of God's other powers are like this? Suppose God has absolute control over their exercise, in a kind of Ockhamist voluntaristic sort of way. Why would this not be possible?

Second, it may be the case that freedom is preserved even with tendencies. God may have a tendency to create according to a divine plan, or a tendency to be loving, or merciful, etc., all under specifiable conditions. But we need not think of God as constrained by these tendencies. Take analogous cases of free creatures and ordinary objects. Both free creatures and ordinary objects have powers. Ordinary objects simply act, or their tendencies fail. The same goes for various powers of free creatures, but only those that are not volitional. The human agent remains in control over whether those powers influenced by the will are exercised (at least when it comes to the act of *willing*, in any case). Any failures would be due to things beyond the agent's control.

For an example, suppose a human agent wills to raise her hand, but the tendency she has to raise her hand upon so willing fails (maybe some electrical signal misfires or her muscles just do not respond). Her will is still free and is ungoverned by the tendency. Something similar can be said about God and his will remaining free—only his tendencies will never fail. Notice it is not part of the definition that the tendency must fail—only that it has a certain propensity to succeed. In the divine case, not everything is a tendency, and his tendencies do not themselves fail.

3. God and Capacities

A capacity is often referred to synonymously with 'disposition' (Choi and Fara, 2018). However, Bird (2016) argues this is not necessarily the case. 'Everyone thinks that things have dispositions,' he writes (p. 341). 'But it is highly contentious whether anything has a power.' What is the difference here, and how do these concepts interact with the concept of causal powers?

3.1 Bird's Argument

Alexander Bird argues dispositions and powers are not identical. This is because he takes it that nearly everyone can accept that there are dispositions—that is, that it makes sense to speak of things having dispositions. But it is simply not the case that everyone will accept that there are powers (pp. 360-61).

So what? a reader might think. What is supposed to be the problem with some people disagreeing with some terminology, especially in analytic philosophy? It is more than mere semantics. For a causal powers theorist, it is important that the powers themselves have some sort of 'ontic status;' it is important that they metaphysically exist in some way. It is not nearly so important for dispositions. A neo-Humean dispositionalist, for example, can use property-talk as a kind of fiction, and need not commit herself to the idea that there is an object *S* which has property *p* such that there are actually two objects, *S* and *p*, metaphysically in existence. In other words, when Humeans like David Lewis speak of dispositions, they do so 'in a predicatory way' (p. 361). Bird adds, 'So there is *a* common use of "disposition" that is metaphysically neutral and does not indicate that its user is committed to an ontology of powers' (ibid., emphasis in original).

This is all correct as far as it goes. So here the causal powers theorist can simply reply that powers and dispositions are similar, and dispositions need not be ontologically committing. For the causal powers theorist at least *some* of the fundamental properties need to be dispositional. But what about capacities? What are they and how to they differ from powers?

3.2 How Capacities Differ

Generally speaking, a causal powers proponent can treat a *power* the same as a *capacity*. This seems to be Moreland and Craig's (2017) take on it as they write that a substance just 'is a deep unity of its capacities' (p. 198). In this way, capacities are exactly like powers. A substance has its particular set of powers, and these powers form a kind of fundamental structure in virtue of which the substance is able to interact with the world (and is able to be interacted with in turn).

However, certain distinctions can be drawn. For example, Moreland and Craig discuss the differences between a first and second-order capacity. As an example, a first-order capacity such as *speaking English* is one in which the speaker can hold a conversation in English. A second-order capacity for *speaking English* is the capacity to develop this capacity. Much like justifying certain powers as fundamental, these second-order capacities are necessary so that capacities can be developed (pp. 197-98). In this way, because humans are the kind of creatures who can speak languages, we possess second-order capacities to speak all known human languages. Many of us, though, are sadly limited to a few or even one language developed to a first-order capacity. This is a distinction that is not typically made between the various types of causal powers.

3.3 Capacities as Applied to God

Given this explanation of capacities, how does this relate to God? It would seem as though God must have quite a few first-order capacities. Divine causal powers such as *omniscience* (or, if one

prefers, a more 'fundamental' power like *knowing*) will be first-order capacities, since God does not need to develop them to use them actively.

In fact, there are arguably no divine second-order capacities at all. This will accord well with Thomistic and other medieval Aristotelian conceptions of God as pure actuality, with no potentiality. This is because a second-order capacity is the capacity to develop a first-order capacity. Presumably, a divine being (in the Christian tradition) does not need to *learn how* to do anything. If God can create a rock, it is not the case that he needed to gain this first-order capacity by some other process, practice, or imbuing of power. Instead, he simply can create the rock. Capacities are not like cases of active powers and their exercises; they are instead abilities to do something at all, and a lack of exercise does not make the difference between a first and second-order capacity.

In Leftow (2012), God has the power to define even certain modal truths. Specifically, he can determine what 'mundane' truths there are (such as whether or not canines exist; the idea is that God, in creating a canine, thereby makes it possible that canines exist, p. 249). This is what Craig calls a 'strong voluntaris[m].' It is this voluntarism that creates a special challenge to the view I have just sketched. For Leftow, there are various ways parts of modal reality could have gone (counterpossibles, if one will), but these are only possible because of how God decreed them. In the first logical moment of creation, God exists alone, and any and all modal reality finds its ground in him/his nature. However, once God decrees to create the world (and where such a decision includes, say, creating canines, whether actually or 'modally'), this decrees which truths about the world are possible. In other words, canines are possible because God created them in his decree; had the decree ruled out canines (had God made the proposition 'possibly, canines exist' false instead of true), canines would not be possible.

McIntosh puts it this way: ‘God’s permitting something makes it possible and so within God’s power to bring about; God’s preventing something makes it impossible and so not within God’s power to bring about’ (2014, pp. 143-144). Of course, one might be forgiven for thinking there is a kind of ‘bootstrapping’ problem here. This bootstrapping problem is the second problem with God and second-order capacities.

If God can bring about certain modal truths, making certain things possible and certain other things impossible, then it is true that the capacities described by these modal truths are second-order capacities. Why? Simply because God had the capacity to make it possible for him to φ, even in cases where it is not in fact (post-decree) possible for him to φ. Thus, φ-ing seems to be a second-order capacity when it comes to God.

The bootstrapping problem with respect to modal second-order capacities is the fact that God must have the first-order capacity to make it the case that such modal truths are possible or impossible. In other words, it must first be possible for God to make φ-ing possible. This seems to suggest that, at the beginning, prior to the decree, φ-ing is indeed possible (at least in principle). This also suggests that God is able to bring it about that φ is or can be done, a first-order capacity to be sure. In fairness, Leftow is not directly commenting on the distinction between first and second-order capacities.

However, the idea that this brings about powers (or restricts them) can certainly be applied to the idea of capacities. Perhaps, when considering what God has made possible or impossible post-modal decree, one should say these are no longer capacities for God at all. After all, most traditional theologians have not had much difficulty in accepting the logically impossible as a delimiting factor of sorts on God’s power. In this same way, because God has decreed that φ-ing is impossible, this is something that even God cannot do or change. This is

because if God could change it so that φ-ing is no longer impossible, it is difficult to know in what sense it was impossible prior to that moment. So, prior to the decree these powers function as first-order capacities for God, and, plausibly, after the decree they either remain that way or else (by decree) become *impossible* for God.[7]

4. God and Continuous Causation

Continuous causation involves all events being connected by a single, real process. Koons and Pickavance write that 'a real process is a temporally extended whole that is more metaphysically fundamental than any of its unextended, instantaneous parts.' (2015, pp. 200-01). Koons and Pickavance (2017) give a formal definition of continuous causation as follows: 'The causal connection between *x* and *y* is *continuous* if and only if *x* and *y* are causally connected, and there is an infinite linear causal order consisting entirely of events between *x* and *y*' (p. 613).

The event of *C* causing *E* is itself more metaphysically fundamental than any of the indefinitely many parts that one might divide it into. This means that a causal process that is continuous is not constituted of discrete parts but instead is one infinitely extended process. In a prior chapter, simultaneous causation was used to represent continuous causation; causes can be simultaneous with their effects, and discrete causation leaves a 'temporal gap' between cause and effect. Applying continuous causation to God's causal activity gives a solution to a question posed and discussed below.

[7] This raises an interesting question, then, about which powers are essential and which are accidental. One might have thought that all powers for God are indeed essential. If this is so, then Leftow's modal projects collapses since God could not have made it the case that he could not later do something or other. While God could have made it the case that φ-ing was 'out-of-reach' for all but God, φ-ing would still be possible.

4.1 God and the Problem of the Temporal Gap

On traditional theology, God is considered the creator of the universe and all therein. A question naturally arises with respect to God and the first moment of creation: what is God's relationship to that first moment? In other words, if God creates time (and thereby the first moment), how can he do so? If God creates the *first* moment of time, it seems there is a required moment just prior to creating that moment; *ex hypothesi*, that cannot happen (on pain of contradiction). Thus, it seems God can never create the first moment of time.

Continuous causation can solve this problem. This is because, on continuous causation, there is no temporal gap (or, perhaps more accurately, the temporal gap is bridged). For an example, return to the story of Jen willing to raise her arm. Jen undertakes the causal process of willing to lift her arm, specifically by exercising her causal power to do so. This simultaneously begins the process of motion of her arm's being raised (the effect). That process continues as an 'undivided continuum of events' (Koons and Pickavance 2015, p. 201) into the indefinite future, until such time as the process is interrupted, whether by Jen's ceasing to act or some other action taking place. If it is not so interrupted, then the process begins with Jen willing to exercise her power to raise her arm and culminates with her arm in fact being raised.

Applying this example to God and the first moment of creation, God begins the causal process by willing to create the world. On traditional theology, this willing is sufficient for God to create the world. On the continuous causation account, God undertakes the causal process of creating the first moment; he does this specifically by exercising his causal power to do so. This bridges the temporal gap by simultaneously beginning the process of the creation of the universe (the initial moment or point of spacetime). Since the process is an undivided continuum not constituted by discrete events, the process is itself more metaphysically fundamental than any

event that makes up the process. While God could interrupt the process of any aspect of his creative act, assuming he does not do so, then the process begins with God willing to exercise his creative power and culminates with the object of that created power coming into being. With respect to the initial moment of time, God's mere act of willing is sufficient to bring that about.

While the processes between cause and effect are continuous, many (perhaps each) cause-effect pairings are themselves discrete from each other.[8] The preceding paragraph also makes God's initial causing of the universe/first moment of spacetime the most metaphysically fundamental of all such discrete causal processes (which processes themselves are continuous between cause and effect). On this view, God causes the event *E* at time *t* and the cause produces the effect at or across time(s), where the infinitely many parts are temporally extended. The cause-effect pairing is viewed as occurring simultaneously at the point where the cause is acting on the effect. In this way, the temporal gap between cause and effect is bridged.

4.2 God and Agent Causation

A fitting way to explain God and how he brings about causal processes is to focus on the fact that it is *he* who is bringing them about, causally speaking. Where relevant, an appeal to agent causation can help explain individual causal processes.[9] At least some singular causal processes are plausibly up to agents. For example, if I will to get up and cross the room, and I am not interfered with and I do not countermand my prior willing, I am the one who initiates and accomplishes the crossing of the room. Similarly, if God wills to cause some event *E*, and since nothing outside of God's so willing can countermand God's intention to *E*,[10] then God causes *E*.

[8] This avoids the entire history of the universe being linked together as one singular causal process. Monocausal universes seem to eliminate free will; at least, they seem to entail a kind of determinism that many may wish to avoid.

[9] It is quite right to insist that many causal processes are not connected in any direct way to agents (at least not to ordinary, 'mundane' agents, in any case). While this is surely correct, God is an agent, and so an appeal to agent causation to explain God's relationship to causality is appropriate.

God would begin any agent-causal process with a *desire* to do some action or bring about some event or state of affairs. This desire is not determinative; God could decide to undertake some action based on this desire or to refrain from taking that action. If God decides to undertake some action, then from the desire he forms an *intention* to do some action. This intention, in my agent-causal account, is what prompts an action. This action only fails to occur in cases where something else interferes (as would be the case in my crossing the room if someone tackled me) or if I countermand my earlier intention with a new intention (as would be the case if I decided I wanted to sit back down instead of crossing the room).

For God, plausibly nothing can successfully interfere with his intentions. One might think there is a counterexample within Christian theology itself: the idea of soteriology. 1 Tim. 2.4 states of God, 'who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (CSB). On traditional Christian theology, universalism is not true, so that it seems individuals can interfere with God's intentions (specifically, those people who do not turn to God for salvation). It is here that our distinctions within terminology help: God's desires are not the same as his intentions. God desires that all freely come to him, and since one cannot force someone to do something freely, intending to save all (in the agent-causal, philosophical sense of 'intending') is not something to be done.

Agents, then, such as God, can exercise causal powers to bring about some effect, and these agent-processes are discrete. That is, when God exercises his causal power to do *a* at *t*, it is a discreate process from whatever may have influenced or 'motivated' God to *a* at *t*. In the next chapter, I turn to objections to the concept of God having and exercising causal powers in agent-causal processes.

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[10] One may think there are exceptions to this, where God desires some free creature does action *A* and that free creatures does ~*A*. In these cases, one can argue God is not forming an intention to do *A* for the creature. He merely has a desire that they do so.

Chapter Eight - 'Objections to God and Causal Powers'

In the last chapter, I articulated a view of God and causal powers, continuous causation, and agent-causal processes. There are various reasons to take this on with respect to God, including simplicity (in terms of needing only a few components). However, there are three distinct lines of objection that could be levied against the idea of God and causal powers. This chapter will discuss the argument from *divine simplicity*, a commensurability objection, and Evan Fales' *mapping problem.*

1. The Argument from Divine Simplicity

This thesis is concerned with traditional theological understandings of God. Thus, the idea of divine simplicity—that God is not made up of distinct parts—is an important one. If it turns out that divine simplicity precludes this view of God and causal powers, then it provides a powerful defeater for many traditional theists.

1.1 The Argument Stated

Here is how an argument from divine simplicity against God having causal powers might go:

1. If God has causal powers (as in a powers ontology), then he is not purely actual or simple.
2. God is purely actual and God is simple.
3. Therefore, God does not have causal powers (as in a powers ontology).

Premise 1 is motivated by the idea that God does not possess properties that are not identical to his nature (and thus identical to him). Vallicella (2019) asserts, 'If God had properties in the way creatures have them, however, he would be distinct from them and so dependent on them.' Since God having dependence on something distinct from himself is

unacceptable to most traditional theists, God's having such properties as causal powers is a non-starter.

The second premise is motivated by a commitment in the theological tradition both to Aristotelian act/potency distinctions as well as God not being composed of various parts (as though God *qua* being were constituted by parts more fundamental than himself; see Feser (2017)). The idea comes from the concept of a First (or Prime) Mover. This Prime Mover explains all other motion; it explains all actuality. There is potential within every object, and that potential is at various times actualized. What explains this move from potency to act? The causal or explanatory chain cannot proceed infinitely, culminating in a first or Prime Mover. In order for this Mover to account for all movement of potency to act, it must not have any potentiality within it, and must be pure act.

1.2 The Argument Undercut

At least three responses can undercut this argument, though I freely admit that it has its draw. A first response is to say that it does not seem necessary that God is purely actual if an agent causal account is correct. The agent causal account we sketched above included God having a desire to perform some action or actions, then formulating an intention to so perform, with the intention being sufficient to carry out the action unless (in God's case) one countermands such an intention with another one. How does this help deny premise (2)?

First, desires are not identical to intentions. On an agent causal account, intentions lead to actions unless countermanded[1], and desires do not. This has explanatory power, as already noted, in that God may desire several things that never come to pass (e.g., for all to be saved, for no one to commit any evil, for no serious suffering to exist, etc.). Since desires are not identical to

[1] In fairness, countermanding intentions is something God may rarely, if ever, do. Since this is not the focus of the thesis, I do not explore that here.

intentions, this suggests that God is not purely simple, where every attribute of God is identical to every other attribute of God.

Second, since God's desires are not identical to his intentions, this suggests there are some things God could do that either he does not do or else does but at some later time. For an example, suppose that God desires for all to be saved. Most traditional theists do not think that every person will be saved. This means there is some desire of God's that presumably God could act on (he has the power to save each person) that he does not. Additionally, for those who are universalists, there is some desire of God's that he acts on later (say, at the traditional time of the *eschaton* when God brings his creation to a point of redemption to himself). But suppose a theist is not a universalist, and states God cannot fulfil that desire, since not everyone will freely choose to be saved—what then? If so, God could simply not even have that desire (since God only desires, say, that which can be done), and thus all of God's desires align with his intentions to so act, and agent causal accounts need not do anything to this argument.

In that case, even if all of God's desires align with his intentions, it still does not follow that they all are identical to his intentions. God could intend everything he desires (for example, by desiring only what he will intend to do, given the results of creaturely freedom and the types of objects that exist), but it still follows he could have intended something else (in terms of so-called 'antecedent/consequent desires'), or he could have desired something else (antecedently or consequently). This all suggests that an agent causal account shows that actuality and simplicity in their strongest forms are not required.

A second response to the argument is to argue it may be that being purely actual/simple undermines divine freedom if we take such freedom to be predicated on choosing to actualize some world *W* over some world *W'*. In other words, this is referencing a modal collapse. God is

said to be able to create a world or to refrain from so creating; creation is not an essential feature of reality, much less God himself. Mullins and Byrd (2022, forthcoming) define divine freedom as 'God is free in that God is the source of His intentional actions, and God has the ability to do otherwise with respect to His intentional transitive actions' (p. 4). If God lacks this freedom, then it will be because divine simplicity entails a modal collapse, they contend.

The argument proceeds as follows:

M1) God's existence is absolutely necessary.

M2) Anything that is identical to God's existence must be absolutely necessary.

M3) All of God's intentional actions are identical to each other such that there is only one divine act.

M4) God's one divine act is identical to God's existence.

M5) Therefore, God's one divine act is absolutely necessary. (p. 7)

One can see that (M2), (M4), and (M5) form a deductively valid syllogism. (M1) is a postulate with which virtually all traditional theists—and all theists who advocate for divine simplicity—will agree. Finally, (M3), like (M4), is a commitment of classical theism. Of course, God's intentional act to create the universe will itself be a species of (M3). This means, of course, that God's intentional act to create the universe is absolutely necessary. If God's creation of this world *W* is absolutely necessary, then it follows he could not have created world *W'*, a slightly different world to *W*. But this restriction for God applies to all such worlds *W** and following, for *every* possible world aside from *W*, the one in fact God did create. This modal collapse creates problems for our concept of divine freedom, since it turns out even God could not have done otherwise than what he did.

While some traditional thesis may want to 'bite the bullet,' most will not desire to lose God's freedom and invite the modal collapse. Mullins and Byrd assert biting the bullet not only goes against our everyday moral intuitions, but also eliminates the response of a permissive will of God with respect to evils in the world (pp. 11-12). With respect to the modal intuitions, it seems to me Mullins and Byrd are precisely on the mark. While it can be true that we have strong intuitions toward something that ultimately turns out to be false, it is a strike against a view if it cannot be lived out. Modal intuitions are one of the strongest intuitions we have; rejecting them is nearly impossible to do consistently.

I have a different opinion on their view of modal collapse and theodicies. It is true a proponent of divine simplicity who embraces modal collapse can no longer appeal to God's permissive will in allowing certain evils to occur, this is precisely because such evils *must* occur. A classical theist might think she is off the hook, since God can only be faulted with what he could control, change, or create differently. God could not control, change, or create any differently than what he in fact did. Thus, God cannot be faulted for any of the evils which occur, no matter how heinous. This seems like an advantage rather than a cost, *pace* Mullins and Byrd.

There is a response we can offer in defence of Mullins and Byrd, however. Evils being truly and absolutely necessary is not a traditional theistic doctrine. This is truly a cost, as one might think that evils themselves, insofar as they have any positive existence, are a part of God's existence. One can easily avoid this sub-objection by stipulating evils are a privation of the good, and thus have no positive existence of their own. But a problem still remains: theistic tradition usually takes it that evil, whether privation or not, is not absolutely necessary. This is a cost to biting the bullet on modal collapse.

Undermining divine freedom, modal collapse shows us that if causal powers are inconsistent with divine simplicity and the act-potency distinction for the Prime Mover, then there are significant costs to embrace. The causal powers theorist might find it more palatable to embrace powers and divine freedom than to embrace modal collapse.

A third response to the argument from divine simplicity is precisely the opposite of the last discussion. It is not clear that God's actualizing all his innate potentials is incompatible with his having some set of causal powers in his nature. All such God-talk could be considered talk of *energeia*, or divine energies. In short, one could object to premise 1 of the argument from divine simplicity: 1. If God has causal powers, then he is not purely actual or simple. Essentially, the idea is that God uses all of his causal powers, in that there is nothing that is within God that would have been different were he to have actualized a different possible world. The divine *energeia* are divine activities that God has undertaken that result in differences in the world (as opposed to differences in God). This response is inconsistent with Mullins and Byrd's response above. However, if successful, it would show a potential way forward for those who accept divine simplicity and want to accept a causal powers view as applied to God also.

2. The *Commensurability Objection*

A potentially interesting objection to the idea of God and causal powers is the *commensurability objection*. A proponent of this objection would believe God is not merely a being amongst other beings. God is not the kind of thing that is the same as other objects, just to some different degree. Floyd writes, 'Not only is God the same as his essence; he is also the same as his *existence*' (emphasis in original). The idea is that because God exists *a se* and because his

essence is identical to his existence, God is transcendent apart from any distinct thing. Creation, and all created things, are distinct from God. Thus, God is transcendent and set apart from them.

What the traditional theist would want to avoid, then, is ascribing positive properties to God as causal powers, since this would place God as merely atop the chain of being. He would be one of billions upon billions of beings, simply greater in degree rather than kind. This would be unacceptable to the traditional theist, or so the objection goes. If this were to occur, then God would fail to be something truly worthy of worship. There are three potential lines of response that will be explored below.

2.1 The 'Merely' Response

One way of undercutting this objection is what I am calling 'the "merely" response.' The merely response examines whether or not the commensurability objection really establishes what it needs to: showing that a causal powers model for God and properties results in something not worthy of worship.

My suggestion is the commensurability objection fails. The 'merely' response claims it is not clear this is really a problem: simply describing God as *merely* omnipotent, omnipresent, necessarily existent, omnibenevolent, sovereign creator, sustainer, and Lord of the universe, etc., does not seem to present a real theological problem. The intuition is that a being which is not only the greatest being there is, but the greatest being there even could be (a claim often made within traditional theism) is surely worthy of worship.[2] It is doubtful that attaching the word 'merely' in front of such traditional theistic attributes as 'omnibenevolent,' 'omnipotent,' 'omniscient' renders God less worthy (or even unworthy!) of worship. It is precisely because

[2] It is epistemically conceivable that the greatest possible being somehow fails to be worthy of worship. This would be true if, say, the greatest possible being were nowhere near morally perfect, very limited in terms of power, etc. Regardless of what it would take to qualify, a being with the traditional 'omni' attributes seems to be the kind of being who is worthy of worship.

God has these attributes that makes him worthy of worship for many in intuition, rather than a kind of 'wholly other' attribute.

2.2 The Incomprehensibility Response

By "the incomprehensibility response" I mean it is not clear that something comprehensible is being claimed when God is said not to be a being. What, precisely, does this mean? Even if God just is 'existence' itself, how does this indicate that he is not a being? It seems clear enough God is not exactly the same kind of thing that we are. It seems clear enough God is not a little above the rest of us. But it is far from clear that God is not even a being but being itself. It is far from clear what that might mean.

This takes us back to the analogical/equivocal/univocal distinctions above. Presumably, the traditional classical theists would not want to claim God's existence is not remotely like our existence at all (equivocation). If the terms were so different, it would be an utter mystery what it means for God to be 'Being' but not a 'being.' If they claimed the terms were completely univocal, it would again be confusing, since God as not-being in the univocal sense means he would not even have existence. So, the best move is for the classical theist to say God is being in the analogical sense to creaturely 'being.'

This suggests there are conceptual alignments between being as applied to God and being as applied to creatures. If there are conceptual alignments, then we know from a prior chapter that there are points of univocity within the analogical statements; there is at least some sense in which God is a being like we are beings. Insofar as this is correct, it seems the doctrine of analogy poses no threat to God having causal powers. In other words, either the claim that God is not a being with powers as properties like we are is incomprehensible, or it is analogical with some univocity in concepts functioning as 'touchpoints' or conceptual alignments and does not

threaten our view of God and causal powers as described above. There is one more potential response that can be given.

2.3 The Anselmian Radial Model Response

The Anselmian Extended Radial Model was developed by Nagasawa (2013) and (2017a).[3] The idea of the commensurability objection is supposed to be that if God has powers as properties, then he is reduced to being just one of myriad beings in existence and is not worthy of worship. In Anselmian theism, God is said to be the greatest possible being. This suggests an intuitive 'linear' model, where there are some beings greater than others, and others greater than those, and so on until one arrives at the greatest possible being. There is an acute problem with this linear model of value commensurability, however: take two different objects, such as a pencil and a small animal, such as a groundhog. How can we compare their metaphysical greatness? The standard answer is that we cannot, and so value commensurability is out of the question. Thus, we cannot conclusively make sense of God being the greatest possible being (2017a, p. 72).

However, Nagasawa suggests a so-called 'radial' model of value commensurability to get around this problem. The radial model roughly looks as follows: while it is not necessarily the case that each object is value commensurable with every other object, each object would be value commensurable, metaphysically, with 'God occupying the top link in all local chains of being' (p. 69). He defines it as follows: 'God is the being than which no greater is metaphysically possible by virtue of occupying the top link in all local chains of being, each of which contains multiple non-divine possible beings' (p. 62).

[3] In a footnote in (2017a), Nagasawa explains that he has dropped the terminology 'extended' as it no longer accurately portrays the singular radial model for which he now advocates. I leave the term 'extended' here as this is what it says in (2013).

Thus, on this radial model, God's value commensurability with all other created beings actually helps *explain* why God is a being worthy of worship: he is the being than which none greater can be conceived, in classical Anselmian theism. So, far from being something that prevents a traditional theist from accepting the concept of God and causal powers, the Anselmian-styled radial model tends to show God as a being fully worthy of worship—precisely because of his commensurability with all other beings.

3. Evan Fales' *Mapping Problem*

Evan Fales has argued against even the possibility of divine causation (1997). A Fales-styled argument against divine causation includes the idea that an atemporal God cannot possibly interact with the world, because such divine-mundane relations require a transitive temporal relation (pp. 172-183). His argument against a temporal but non-spatial God is that 'because God does not have a spatial location . . . [we cannot] speak literally of theophysical causal interactions' (p. 183). Fales adds that if something can interact with our world, then it is the case we can measure it; if we cannot measure it, then it cannot interact with our world (p. 184).

This is a kind of mapping problem similar to the pairing problem of Kim discussed earlier. If God can causally interact with the world, then we should be able to measure God's actions; but we cannot so measure God's actions and effects. All we can see in cause-effect relationships are spatiotemporal relata. If this is right, and only spatiotemporal relata can causally sync together, then traditional conceptions of God will not work. Since God, on traditional theism, is not spatiotemporally located (or does not have a spatiotemporal existence as such), then God cannot be the cause of anything. Thus, God would not have any causal powers at all. There are at least two lines of response that can be given to Fales-style objections.

First, Greg Ganssle (2014) has argued that there is something that functions as a counterexample to the mapping complaint. For Ganssle, the mapping content for volitions is intentional content. Willing to raise one's hand, for example, has intentional mental content behind it which is not accounted for completely in spatiotemporal terms. Unless one wants to be a reductive physicalist, such volitions as *willing to raise one's hand* find their causal mapping in the intentional mental content for *willing to raise one's hand*. Alice forms the intention to raise her hand, and this intention is not located in spacetime.[4] If this is right, then it is not inherent to cause-effect relationships that the relata involved are necessarily spatiotemporal. In fact, it would follow that so much of it in the world is not.

One way to combat Ganssle is to say that the relata involved for mapping cause and effect in these situations are indeed spatiotemporal. This would be the strategy of saying something like the following: no matter how we cash out non-reductive physicalism, there is something, at bottom, that is a physical substance (or a proper part thereof), and those physical things are causally responsible. Whether that makes mental properties (and/or intentional content) supervenience relations or something else entirely, the causal mapping is still itself entirely spatiotemporal.

The response from the causal powers theorist could be two-fold. First, it is simply natural to view the intentional content as the mapping content for volitions: Jane wills to raise her hand, and her intentional mental content for that willing caused the willing (and, on our version of agent causation, Jane raised her hand by so willing). That it is natural will not make it correct, of course, but there is *prima facie* a reason to hold this.

[4] Even if one decides that some form of physicalism is true for creatures and objects in the universe, one will still not locate mental content such as intentions, thoughts, etc., in the brain (as though we could point to them in an MRI). Instead, these would be mental properties of a sort.

Second, and related to the first, is there has to be some motivating factor for accepting physicalism. If the physicalism assumed is universal, then it rules out traditional conceptions of theism from the start. But since that is precisely what a Fales-style objection would be aimed at, it would be patently question-begging to do so. If the physicalism assumed is 'local,' meaning applying to the created universe and the things therein only, it cannot rule out so-called 'theophysical' causation, and thus does not apply. An argument could be developed for accepting some version or other of physicalism, but then it will be this argument doing all the heavy lifting, not the mapping problem.[5]

The second line of response to develop against Fales-styled mapping arguments is my own. It is the kind of response that grants an important insight from the objection itself to show how it does not necessarily rule out divine instances of causation (and thus does not rule out God and a causal powers ontology). What is insightful about the objection is that it reveals the important thing is the cause is acting *at* the point of its effect when dealing with spatiotemporal effects. Essentially, when one identifies a spatiotemporal effect (a very mundane occurrence), there must be some physical or spatiotemporal causal connection in some way. But not all conceivable cases of causation have spatiotemporal effects.

Suppose God is as he is conceived of (roughly) on the traditional theist account. Suppose there are such things as angels and/or demons, where we are describing entirely mental (spiritual) substances. If God causally interacts with one of these (say, to force a demon to stop acting against God's will in some way), this is an example of a conceivable causal connection

[5] To be clear, this means one would be accepting the mapping problem because they accept physicalism. This seems to make it less likely one would be convinced by the mapping problem if they were already a committed traditional theist.

that does not have a spatiotemporal effect.[6] This is relevant, because it means not all mapping content is spatiotemporal (as in the case of the other line of response from Ganssle).

Further, we can think of cases where someone or something can bring about effects in or at a specific spatiotemporal location without the cause being *fully* located in or at that specific location. Consider the issue of being located *at* or *within* some object or location (where there is a relevant distinction to be made). Suppose there is a little girl who wants to play in the mud. She forms the mud into a separate block. As the day goes on, the block hardens somewhat but remains pliable. She pokes the block once or twice, shaping it and acting on the block as she desires. She makes distinct changes to the block each time. At time *t*1, part of the block *s*1 acquires the property of *being concave*, and her action of *making* s*1 concave* is also located at *t*1 and *s*1. This much seems clear. However, what seems less clear is whether or not the girl is located at *t*1 and *s*1. In fact, as she pokes the block of mud, it seems somewhat silly to say 'the girl is located *within* the block of mud' is true. Instead, what is likely going on is that the girl is *partially* located at the specific points of the block of mud.

If we extrapolate this to God, something like a partial location of God at the spacetime points is going on. The discrete action *x* of God brings about the effect *y*, where *x* and *y* are both located in spacetime. But *x* is God's agent causing his intention to bring about *y*. On this scenario, it at least appears as though God can be outside of spacetime agent-causing his intention *that* y *comes about*, without ever himself being within spacetime. If the immaterialist view of action is justifiably held, then it can be applied to God as well. The takeaway is that it seems to be open to the traditional theist to think of non-spatiotemporal causal relata in the

[6] Some may complain that this scenario is not really possible, after all. This is not the point, however. The point is bare conceivability (here we can set aside worries that conceivability entails metaphysical possibility).

world, to think of it in terms of spiritual beings/mental substances, and to think of it in terms of the spatiotemporal cause-effect relata not necessarily being fully located at a point in spacetime.

In this chapter, we examined three kinds of objections to God and a causal powers ontology. This chapter examined objections from divine simplicity, the commensurability objection, and Evan Fales' mapping objection. In each case, the responses to these objections helped us to refine concepts about God and causal powers. In the next chapter, I turn to a couple of areas in which adopting a causal powers view of God provides some distinct advantages.

Chapter Nine - 'Miracles, the Laws of Nature, and a Response for the Problem of Evil'

Miracles are often alleged to be violations of the laws of nature (Saudek (2017, pp. 109-110)). This was, famously, David Hume's way of defining such. In response, proponents of miracles have said the laws of nature are descriptive.[1] But what is going on when God intervenes in the world? A causal powers ontology relies on every object's possessing powers and capacities, and these capacities can be exercised by each object in varying circumstances (Koons and Pickavance (2017)).[2] This account of causal powers has a significant impact on the laws of nature, including counterfactual analyses of the laws in other possible worlds. An analysis of causal powers, along with Molinism, may provide significant explanatory scope for both the laws of nature (and in a later section, miraculous events). This will be explored in the first two sections.

If God has middle knowledge, he could use it to put a "divine stamp of approval" on several—or even many—miracles.[3] The third section will feature a model wherein middle knowledge has a direct, and sometimes indirect, role in divine action, including miracles. The upshot is that miracles are not violations of the laws of nature and accepting both Molinism and a causal powers ontology can provide an explanation for both miraculous events and the laws.

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[1] Cf. Saudek, p. 116, wherein he concludes in his section on the laws of nature that they are 'indeterministic,' rather than deterministic. This suggests the laws are *describing* what occurs, rather than *prescribing* what must occur. The upshot is a causal powers ontology will be indeterministic, in contrast to some of its competitors.

[2] See also Koons, R. C. and Pickavance, T. H. (2015) *Metaphysics: The Fundamentals.* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

[3] While I am using middle knowledge for the sake of the account, any account that preserves God's knowledge of what agents would freely do in various circumstances would work for these purposes (e.g., Thomism, other versions of incompatibilism).

1. Powerism

In order to explore how Molinism fits in with the laws of nature, this section will briefly remind the reader of the powers ontology. A causal powers ontology, one will recall, is the idea that things possess causal powers in a metaphysically fundamental way. The two kinds of powers discussed here are active powers and passive powers.

Koons and Pickavance note the following about an active power: 'A property *P* is an *active power* if and only if, necessarily, whenever a thing has *P* there is the possibility of its producing a specific kind of effect *E* on some other thing under specifiable conditions by virtue of having *P*.' (2017, p. 88) Fire is a great example of this. It has the active power of heating up objects that have the power of being heated. This property of fire meets the conditions of being an active power because it produces that effect on some other thing (the thing that has the power of being heated) under specifiable conditions (coming into relevantly close proximity to fire, because fire has the relevant property, such that the object is heated).

The second kind of power discussed is a passive power. Koons and Pickavance write, 'A property *P* is a *passive power* if and only if, necessarily, whenever a thing has *P* there is the possibility of its being affected in some specific way *E* by some other thing under specifiable conditions by virtue of having *P*.' (p. 88) Ice is a great example of something that has a passive power. Ice has the property of *being such that it melts when in close contact with temperatures above 0° C*. This property qualifies as a passive power since, given *P*, it is possible for ice to melt, so long as appropriate specifiable conditions obtain (namely, in this case, when it comes

into contact with fire). Now ice's ability to melt may be an active power itself.[4] However, in the case of fire interacting with ice, the fire exercises its active power of *heating up objects capable of being heated when in close proximity* on the ice, which has the passive power of *being capable of being heated when in close proximity to objects with the active power of heating*. The significance of substances having passive powers is twofold: first, there are no substances that are simply acted upon; all substances have causal powers of some sort, in every situation. Second, every cause-effect pair will be related at least in part by these powers; causal powers ground cause-effect relationships. We can apply Powerism to God, where God is an agent (a substance meeting several criteria that possesses freedom and a set of causal powers). We have already delineated what counts as supervenience conditions for agency earlier. However, it can be stated that accepting Powerism as it applies to God may yield some advantages in discussing the laws of nature and miracles, especially when in concert with Molinism. This will be explored in the next section.

2. Molinism and the Laws of Nature

Molinism, broadly speaking, is the thesis that God, in his omniscience, has middle knowledge of what libertarianly free creatures would do in any given maximally specified set of antecedent circumstances, and it is a powerful tool for divine planning.[5] Typically, theologians have construed God's omniscience in terms of logical moments. Logical moments are used to express

[4] This may be why there is some resistance to the idea of passive powers. Suppose ice melts, and the runoff directly lands on a thin piece of paper, weakening it. The ice (water) has produced a change in another object under specifiable conditions. This is pretty clearly a case of an active power. But it does not follow from this fact that there are no passive powers. All that follows is the interesting case that at least some passive powers are also active powers—just under different specifiable circumstances.

[5] Cf. Everist, R. (2015) *Molinism and 'Divine Voodoo Worlds': A Critique of Dean Zimmerman's Anti-Molinist Argument.* M.A. Philosophy of Religion, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC. for a more extensive discussion. The explanatory material on Molinism originally appeared here.

the categories at which some things are true. They express a relationship of logical priority, and not *chronological* priority. Ken Keathley (2010) argues, 'He [God] does not go through the mental processes that finite beings do of "figuring things out." God never "learns" or has things "occur" to Him,' as they would were God's omniscience construed temporally.[6]

Middle knowledge concerns truths of what one *would* do in various sets of circumstances, called counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (CCFs). CCFs come in the grammatical form of subjunctive conditionals. Thus, where *S* is some agent, *A* is some action, and *C* is some circumstance or state of affairs, a CCF would look like this:

(CCF) If *S* were in *C*, then *S* would freely *A*.

It is called 'middle' knowledge because God has it prior to free knowledge (the creative decree), but subsequent to natural knowledge. Just like free knowledge, the truths of middle knowledge (MK) are contingent; just like natural knowledge, the truths of MK are not up to the will of God. Since God knows logically prior to his creative decree what free creatures would do in any given set of circumstances, God can utilize this in planning precisely the sort of world he wants.

So, how does this fit in with causal powers, God, and the laws of nature? Every object, on this view, possesses a set of causal powers. When we describe what each object does in various circumstances, we can imagine a book wherein we write down these interactions. Suppose Sally did this for a single object; say, a comet. Sally takes out her book and writes down every interaction she sees the comet involved in, with every other object with which it comes into contact. Sally diligently records everything about these interactions (she is extraordinarily observant and talented). Now suppose that Sally did this not only for every type of object but

[6] Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 16.

also every object that exists. If Sally did this, she would have recorded a set of causal powers for each object in the universe.

Now suppose that Sally has extreme imaginative powers, such that she can conceive of every possible interaction of every object in the universe. If Sally did this, then she has successfully written down every set of causal powers for every object and every conceivable interaction of objects possessing causal powers into a book. What she has done is 'longhand' for a 'lawbook,' or a complete description of the laws of nature. What else are the laws of nature, if not at least discussions of how all physical objects behave and interact in the physical world? So, the laws of nature seem *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*; they just tell us how objects in fact behave, rather than how they must behave. This is a standard response to neo-Humean-style arguments that the laws of nature are necessary and secure a fixed 'response.'[7]

However, this leads to an interesting point: if the laws of nature can be found in our imaginary lawbook, and yet simply describe what in fact happens, these laws appear to be what can be called 'conditionally necessary.' That is, *given* the kinds of things we have in this universe, the laws of nature *must* be what they are (if we had other kinds of things not found in our universe—'alien' objects—then we may well have other kinds of laws of nature).

An example of an alien object would be something like a unicorn; we know what a unicorn is stipulated to be, but we do not actually have unicorns anywhere in the universe. Along with alien objects can come 'alien properties.' An alien property is a property that does not appear anywhere in our universe. So, perhaps the unicorn has plenty of familiar properties, such as *having a horn,* or *being white,* but perhaps it has other properties too, such as *being such that*

[7] Saudek argues (pp. 112-113) Hume can be understood to be saying while, epistemically, we cannot understand causation as anything like necessary connections, since we do not actually observe these connections, metaphysically the world is deterministic all the way down.

it cools stars instantaneously when in relevant proximity.[8] If there were alien objects and alien properties, then we would have different laws of nature. We can already see an interesting counterfactual forming.

So, can God get just whatever set of laws he wants? The answer would seem to be 'no' as a matter of conditional necessity: if God wanted to have the kinds of objects in the universe that we do have, then these are the laws of nature we will get. Yet still it seems God could have a physical universe with some (or even all) alien objects with their alien properties and alien causal profiles (a causal profile, roughly, being an object's set of causal powers, both active and passive). Were God to have actualized this world, then God would get a different (perhaps drastically different) set of laws. If God were to do this, he would clearly be dictating (in some way) what the laws were. So, the answer is that God can do a kind of dictating as to which set of natural laws is true—given the kind of world he actualizes.

These worlds need not be infinite in number, or even remotely close. Suppose some worlds are 'infeasible' for God to actualize due to what we might call 'Molinist concerns.' If God wants a world with unicorns who dance spontaneously, but only on Thursdays, and unicorns just are not the kind of objects, metaphysically speaking, who would do that, then it would be infeasible for God to actualize a world where unicorns dance spontaneously but only on Thursdays.

This point leads to an interesting objection, especially from traditional theists and the concept of omnipotence. It seems as though God has no control over what a given object's causal profile is; he can only choose to actualize it or not actualize it. For example, God could actualize a world where something that *appears* precisely to be a unicorn dances spontaneously on

[8] Admittedly, I am resorting to 'fine-grained' properties, since I (perhaps unsurprisingly) cannot even think of what a less complex alien property might be.

Thursdays (assuming such a thing is metaphysically possible), but it would not be a unicorn. This seems to conflict with basic intuitions about omnipotence.

Here is a potential response: although this is counterintuitive, if you go far enough in philosophy—especially within philosophical theology—counterintuitiveness is the name of the game. Second, omnipotence does not include the ability to do the logically or metaphysically impossible. If objects possess their causal profiles (with all their attendant powers) essentially, then to lack that specific causal profile (or to have a different one in its place) is just to have a different object, no matter how similar. Finally, so long as this different object is metaphysically possible, then God can actualize it—provided its causal profile can function in concert with the other objects of the universe.[9]

If the laws of nature are descriptive of objects' causal powers and how they interact, and God can only control which set of laws are actual by actualizing only those worlds feasible for actualization (ruling out any world we might imagine where objects' powers rule each other out or else impossible worlds where objects possess powers they necessarily do not), then how do we avoid a kind of determinism? In other words, if the laws simply describe how things interact, and the ways of interaction are not up to God, nor up to the objects, but instead simply play out metaphysically, it seems determinism of some stripe is inescapable.

It is imperative we recognize the laws need to be indeterministic and probabilistic; if not, there is no libertarian freedom. Given that libertarian freedom is inherent to Molinism, then any discussion of causal powers, Molinism, and the laws of nature will need to involve such a conception of freedom. Since this is the case, the laws of nature must be *probabilistic*. They must describe what nearly always occurs. This has interesting consequences later, as we shall see.

[9] This is meant only to exclude those objects whose causal profiles somehow make it metaphysically or logically impossible to exist within the same universe as other objects that inhabit it.

Given, then, that there is room for libertarian freedom, the way the objects usually behave is a *tendency*; these powers have a tendency to be exercised by the objects that possess them. Koons and Pickavance define a property as a tendency in the following case: 'A property *P* is a *tendency* if and only if, necessarily, whenever a thing has *P* there is a certain likelihood or propensity for it to exercise one of its active or immanent powers under specifiable circumstances by virtue of having *P*.' (p. 88) The advantage of including this definition is that it explains, in part, why fire heats up objects that have the passive power of being capable of being heated up. It turns out fire has the tendency of exercising its power to heat objects, and so it does. This tendency may be so frequent that it occurs millions, or even billions, or times in a row, without failing once. It simply has the possibility of failing included.

Now let us return to middle knowledge. Above it was mentioned that God may be delimited in some way by infeasibility for objects that do not possess a particular causal profile. If this is the case, God would know, in his middle knowledge, which worlds were feasible with respect to his goals. So, God would know the following: 'If *x* were in *C*, then *x* would exercise causal power *p*,' for all objects and powers, and for all possible interactions. Given that the exercising of powers is in terms of tendencies rather than exceptionless generalisations, this would neither belong in natural knowledge (since it is not necessary) nor in free knowledge (since it is not up to God's will). Middle knowledge is needed for God to get the kinds of objects with the kinds of causal profiles he wants for his world. Thus, God's middle knowledge includes how alien objects with alien properties would interact with anything and everything else in various circumstances and included in God's choice of a world is a choice to co-actualize which set of laws is true. Hence, Molinism provides us with an advantage in accounting for the laws and God's rule of them, given Powerism. In the next section, I examine middle knowledge and

miracles, and articulate two possibilities for how God might make use of the former when dealing with the latter.

3. Middle Knowledge and Miracles

While miracles are a notoriously difficult concept to define (cf. Yujin Nagasawa's *Miracles: A Very Short Introduction*, (2017b)), for my purposes I will stipulate that miracles are one or more divine actions solely or cooperatively bringing about something that is outside the way the laws of nature operate (i.e., outside how causal powers have a tendency to interact or be exercised). I will discuss two possibilities (where one or perhaps even both could be utilised by God in the performing of miracles) for God's use of middle knowledge with respect to miracles.

Consider that on Molinism, God uses middle knowledge to select a particular world. God is not deistic in doing so; he also decrees how he himself will act within that world, and already knows how his free creatures would respond to him in those circumstances. First, suppose God selects a world to bring about some or even all miracles to occur. God knows the laws are probabilistic since laws are exclusively connected to causal powers and their interactions, and these objects have tendencies to exercise their power. For example, God finds a world where, at the right moment, the bush of Exodus 3 does not exercise its passive power of burning up when in proximate contact with fire (even though it has the passive power of *being burned when in proximate contact with things that have the active power of burning*), and we have the burning bush. This means God must know all the relevant counterfactuals, and he would know them in his middle knowledge. Of course, in this particular scenario, God is very active, since he speaks to Moses from the bush (depending on how this is construed, this speaking alone may qualify as another miracle, and one that would not, presumably, depend on a power failing to be exercised.

But for now I assume this is not a miracle—it is simply divine action). It is also worth noting that God intended the power to fail and intended to do so for a particular purpose (apparent divine or supernatural intent is typically taken to be a necessary factor in identifying a miracle). We can repeat this kind of divine action for some or perhaps even all miracles that occur. Miracles then depend on tendencies, and God is responsible due to his actualization of the world and the intent that it unfolds the way it does.

A natural objection arises: if God's actualization of the world and intent that the event unfolds the way it does counts as miraculous, then why not just any and every event? There is a sense in which this seems to cheapen miracles. However, this need not be the case. What makes the primary difference is that God utilises the failure of a power, whether active or passive, in the miraculous. One cannot argue counterfactually that if God had not so intended, the bush would have still not been consumed: for if God had not so intended, then presumably the bush would not have been in the exact set of circumstances wherein it counterfactually failed to exercise its passive power of *being burned up*. While this response may strike some as *ad hoc*, it makes sense given the intent of God and miracles and the mode of miracles being suggested here. Yet if it seems God is not active enough on this mode—or at least not active enough for this to account for all instances of miracles—there is a second possibility.

Perhaps God alternatively or also suppresses passive powers on occasion; the bush of Exodus 3 *would* have exercised its passive power to be consumed when in proximate contact with fire, but God took that counterfactual (known in his middle knowledge) into account and suppressed that passive power.[10] The result would be a bush failing to exercise its passive power of being burned up, and such a lack would mean it was not consumed. This also seems to be a

[10] It is worth noting God could not *remove* the passive power from the bush, since objects possess their powers essentially.

simpler way of thinking about how God might perform other miracles, such as a floating axe head in a river. It may be that God needs to suppress more than one active or passive power, and such a confluence of circumstances may not be feasible, given the contents of God's middle knowledge.

God would also know how Moses would have freely responded to such a miracle. That is, within his middle knowledge, God would know that if Moses were in *C* (where *C* includes encountering God's voice and the miracle of the burning bush, amongst other circumstances), that Moses would freely respond the way he did. Whatever God's reason for selecting the particular world that he did, this knowledge of how Moses would react would be invaluable. It goes much further than this, however. For God also knew how *everyone else who ever heard about this account* would react upon hearing it. The implications of this one miraculous event and God's middle knowledge are staggering.

We can see middle knowledge can be a tool for divine planning in at least two aspects (God knows that an object would or would not exercise a particular power, and God knows what free creatures would freely do in the face of a miracle) and in that God actualizes a world (and acts therein) accordingly.

4. Causal Powers and the Problem of Evil

In this section, I examine how a causal powers view can affect the logical problem of evil. First, I explain the logical problem of evil as classically presented. Then, I apply God and causal powers to show an advantage to explaining how it is God and creaturely evil can co-exist.

4.1 The Logical Problem of Evil

The logical problem of evil is often taken to be an inconsistent triad:

A. God is omniscient, omnibenevolent, and omnipotent.

B. God does not want evil in the world.

C. There is evil in the world.[11]

The idea behind premise (A) is that God is as traditionally conceived: he is all-knowing, all-good, and all-powerful. In short: God knows how to prevent evil, would desire the good and is perfectly good, and has the power to do away with evil. While any of these can be denied, they cannot be denied by the traditional theist, and so they are important to the project of God and a causal powers ontology. Premise (B) is the idea that God does not want there to be evil in the world; this basically flows from his omnibenevolence.[12] Premise (C) is the most difficult to deny, especially for theists and those who embrace objective moral truths. There do seem to be things that are truly evil in the world.

4.2 The Causal Powers Response

While Plantinga (1977) is widely considered to be the standard in response to Mackie's logical problem of evil, a causal powers response can be considered to augment it. A quick sketch of a response could go like this: objects possess their fundamental powers, or their causal profiles, essentially. If one were to change the causal profile of the object, then one would end up with a different object.

Suppose God desires to have humans. But more than this: suppose God desires to have humans, trees, rocks, gravity, planets, stars, and other celestial bodies, etc. Given our earlier discussion on the laws of nature and causal powers, these things are going to have an extensive (but numerically finite) number of ways in which to interact. Because of the powers of various

[11] For the classical presentations, see Mackie, J. L. (1955) 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind,* 64, 200-212.; Mackie, J. L. (1982) *The Miracle of Theism*. Oxford, UK: OUP.

[12] More could be said about (B), including whether or not traditional theists should accept this premise. But for the sake of the argument, I will accept it and move forward.

objects, at least some of them have the potential at least some of the time to bring about harms in terms of personal and/or animal suffering (or a specific kind of 'evil').

For an example, consider water in an ocean and a submerged volcano. Suppose this submerged volcano becomes active along the seafloor due to other physical processes, and suddenly erupts. This eruption, along with shifting of tectonic plates, brings about a tidal wave sufficient to wipe out a nearby atoll. This atoll is populated by humans and animals, and unfortunately many lose their homes, many are killed, and many animals are also victimized.

An interlocutor might reasonably question if God could have intervened; surely, I am not claiming that God is somehow bound by these powers of creatures, am I? Certainly not. But if God wants the kinds of creatures and objects that are in the world, then these are the causal powers and interactions they have. While God could intervene each time something negative might happen, frequency of divine intervention (in other words, frequency of miracles) might lead to disastrous consequences for character. A person may think there is no reason to refrain from pulling the trigger on a gun in anger, since God will simply make the bullet into a bubble.

This forms a segue into a defence not simply of natural evil, or suffering, being logically compatible with God, but also personal acts of evil being logically compatible with God.

The specific objection is to Mackie's implicit assertion that God would rid the world of all evil were it possible. This idea in fact suggests God would rather have refrained from creating, since this is the guarantee of perfection in any possible world. It is true that for any specific evil it is possible for that evil to be avoided. However, since human persons can exercise their causal powers indeterministically (that is, they are not forced to do what they do), God cannot, without violating their freedom, be guaranteed a world where no acts of evil take place. If God desires to create human persons, then this is a problem the world is going to face (as we

have seen). So long as anyone thinks God was justified in creating human persons at all, she ought to think, because of their causal profiles, humans and God could possibly co-exist with the former's committing evil at least some of the time.

This is somewhat standard in terms of responses to the problem of evil. However, causal powers has a particular contribution in that one cannot reply that God could have just made humans to have no propensity or temptation to do evil, or have otherwise guaranteed they are not the kinds of things that could do evil. For a causal powers theorist, humans are essentially the kinds of things that have it within their causal profile to exercise powers in ways and circumstances that entail that suffering is brought to someone, or that moral evil is committed.[13] If, on traditional theism, humans are made in God's image, and if their causal profiles are what they are essentially, and if God wants the kinds of things humans are, he has to accept the potential they have to exercise their powers for evil, both natural (suffering) and moral.

In this chapter, I have briefly articulated a causal powers view and applied Molinism to causal powers in the case of God. This yielded some fruitful results for the laws of nature and miracles. God's middle knowledge can assist God in planning what kinds of objects exist—and hence which set of laws of nature is true, and God can place a divine stamp of approval, even suppressing active or passive powers, in bringing about miracles in the world. The upshot is that miracles are not violations of the laws of nature and accepting both Molinism and Powerism can provide a helpful advantage and explanation for both miraculous events and the laws. I further provided a brief sketch of a causal powers contribution to the problem of evil, and I contend this gives the causal powers theorist another advantage to use in the arsenal against the logical

[13] This is not to provide a kind of account of evil, where evil is a power to be exercised, or evil is a thing with positive existence—nor does it necessitate that evil is a privation. These are matters that can be adjudicated by a causal powers theorist however she wishes.

problem of evil. In the final chapter, some concluding thoughts and considerations on where to go in the future will be given.

Chapter Ten - 'Concluding Thoughts: Where Do We Go from Here?'

The idea of causal powers is not new. It is decidedly neo-Aristotelian, and so is classified as ancient philosophy. It has also been used since medieval philosopher-theologians such as Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and others relied on Aristotelian views to answer questions within traditional theology. Yet there still remains fruitful areas of discussion to take place where causal powers may have positive results. Even if the results are termed 'negative,' such as would be the case if they could not be used to answer a particular question, or made a problem worse, at least that knowledge would be found.

Regarding the problem of evil, several more papers could be written on the various instances of the problem and the current dialectic. The problem of evil in terms of the amount and kinds of evil, the soteriological problem of evil, the evidential problem of evil, and so on—all of these are ripe for a consideration of what causal powers might have to say in terms of influence.

There is a related question to the problem of evil, and that is: what influence does sin have (in the traditional theistic line of thinking) on the natural state of things? In other words, are there causal powers humans possess as part of their causal profile that are blunted, or 'finked,' by sin?[1] In Christianity, a core eschatological view is that the dead in Christ shall be raised incorruptible (1 Cor. 15.52), and there is something to suggest the resurrected human body will have all sorts of abilities that it seemingly did not have before. It is also important, in the context of much of traditional theology, that the resurrected body is numerically identical to the body we have now (Mugg and Turner, 2017). If this is so, does the human body have latent causal powers that we simply cannot access now? If so, does God 'flip a switch,' so to speak, at the

[1] I owe a lunchtime conversation with M.K. Owen for this insight.

Resurrection, and activate said powers so that they can be used as originally intended? There are fascinating ramifications for such a view.

A final area of interest concerns the idea of Jesus and the Incarnation. The Incarnation is important to Christian conceptions of orthodoxy, and the idea of God taking on a human nature is a fascinating one with respect to causal powers. How do the causal powers work? Is it like a multi-track view of powers? If causal profiles are essential to the person, how can Jesus take on new causal powers (such as physically interacting with the world, something the Second Person of the Trinity cannot directly do as he is a mental substance)? Or are the causal profiles essential only to the types of things that have them? In other words, when Jesus takes on a human nature, perhaps it is the case that such causal powers are inherent in that nature. What of Jesus' performance of miracles? Is God working through him, or does he have access to more latent powers that would be present in any human? More work needs to be done in this area.

This thesis argued that a causal powers ontology ('Powerism') is a possible model for traditional divine action, and if adopted provides explanatory benefits in various areas within philosophical theology. While much work is left to be done, this thesis presented and defended a causal powers ontology, fending off objections. I then articulated a model on which God had such causal powers, involving continuous causation and agent causal accounts. Finally, I applied such a view to show explanatory advantages gained with respect toward miracles, the laws of nature, and the problem of evil.

For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen

Romans 11.36

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