

12. A Theistic Argument against Platonism (and in Support of Truthmakers and Divine Simplicity)

Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey E. Brower

Because it seems contrary to the faith to hold, as the Platonists did, that the Forms of things exist in themselves . . . Augustine substituted concepts of all creatures existing in the divine mind for the Ideas of things defended by Plato.

—Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia q. 84 a. 5

Predication is an indisputable part of our linguistic behavior. By contrast, the metaphysics of predication has been a matter of dispute ever since antiquity. According to Plato—or at least *Platonism*, the view that goes by Plato’s name in contemporary philosophy—the truths expressed by predications such as “Socrates is wise” are true because there is a subject of predication (e.g. Socrates), there is an abstract property or universal (e.g. wisdom), and the subject exemplifies the property.¹ This view is supposed to be general, applying to all predications, whether the subject of predication is a person, a planet, or a property.²

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¹ For convenience in what follows, we will often speak of “true predications” as shorthand for the more cumbersome (but also more accurate) phrase “the truths (or propositions) expressed by true predications”. The latter, however, is what we always have in mind.

² Platonism thus involves what is often called an “abundant” (as opposed to a “sparse”) theory of properties. Of course, philosophers since Russell have been aware that there is one sort of case to which this (or any other such unified) analysis of predication cannot be said to apply, namely, predications involving the predicate ‘is non-self-exemplifiable’. As is well known, the assumption that there is a property corresponding to this predicate immediately leads to paradox (such a property must either exemplify itself or not, but in either case we get a contradiction). In what follows, we ignore this complication and

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Despite the controversy surrounding the metaphysics of predication, many theistic philosophers—including the majority of contemporary analytic theists—regard Platonism as extremely attractive. At the same time, however, such philosophers are also commonly attracted to a form of traditional theism that has at its core the thesis that God is an absolutely independent being who exists entirely from himself (*a se*), whereas everything else is somehow dependent on him. This central thesis of traditional theism (which we'll call 'the aseity-dependence doctrine') led philosophers and theologians during the Middle Ages to endorse what is known as the doctrine of divine simplicity. According to this doctrine, God is an absolutely simple being, completely devoid of any metaphysical complexity whatsoever—where this implies not only that he lacks certain obvious forms of complexity, such as those associated with material or temporal composition, but also that he lacks even the minimal form of complexity associated with the exemplification of properties. The appeal of this doctrine is that it makes it completely clear that God does not depend on things in any way at all, not even in the way that wholes depend on their proper parts or that things depend on their properties (in order to exemplify them).

One of the main conclusions of this chapter will be that Platonism is inconsistent with the central thesis of traditional theism, namely, the aseity-dependence doctrine. The inconsistency is perhaps clearest in the case of Platonism and divine simplicity, which is the characteristic medieval expression of the aseity-dependence doctrine.³ But our conclusion will be that Platonism is, in fact, inconsistent with the aseity-dependence doctrine itself (not merely its medieval expression), and, hence, that merely rejecting divine simplicity is insufficient to remove the contradiction.

continue to speak of Platonism, as well as any other theory of predication involving an abundant theory of properties, as a general or unified theory of predication, since it assumes that all predications *except those leading to Russell's paradox* can be explained in terms of properties or exemplifiables. For an example of a defense of Platonism that is considered by its author to be general and unified *in this sense*, see van Inwagen (2002).

³ We can state the inconsistency as follows: Whereas Platonism requires all true predications to be explained in terms of properties, divine simplicity seems to require God to be identical with each of the things that can be predicated of him (more on this below). But then, if both are true, it follows that God is identical with each of his properties and hence is himself a property—which is absurd since, unlike properties, God is a person and persons can't be exemplified.

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In one sense, our conclusion should come as no surprise. There is a rich tradition of thinkers—from Augustine right down to the present—who have felt pressure from traditional theism to reject the existence of Platonic forms or properties.⁴ Nonetheless, our argument stands out in important ways from other arguments in this tradition (though even if it didn't, it would still be worth pressing, if only because contemporary philosophers of religion seem to have lost sight of a significant tension that exists between traditional theism and Platonism, and hence continue to operate *as if* the two were perfectly compatible). Platonism, as we have characterized it, is a thesis involving two components: (1) the view that a unified account of predication can be provided in terms of properties or exemplifiabiles, and (2) the view that exemplifiabiles are best conceived of as abstract properties or universals. Most theistic arguments against Platonism have targeted only the second component. What distinguishes our argument is that it specifically targets the first. This difference is important, because it is often thought that the inconsistency of Platonism and traditional theism can be avoided merely by rejecting the Platonic view of properties in favor of another, such as the Augustinian view that properties are ideas in the mind of God.⁵ Indeed, some contemporary Augustinians, most notably Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel, have gone so far as to suggest that such a replacement will not only remove the original inconsistency, but also preserve the most attractive feature of Platonism from a contemporary point of view, namely, its conception of properties as necessary beings.

But if our argument is correct, the inconsistency between Platonism and traditional theism runs deeper than most theistic arguments suggest. Traditional theists who are Platonists, therefore, cannot avoid the inconsistency merely by dropping the Platonic conception of properties and replacing it with another—whether it be an Aristotelian conception (according to which there are no unexemplified universals), some form of immanent realism (according to which universals are concrete constituents of the things that exemplify them), a nominalistic theory of tropes (according to which properties are concrete individuals), or even the Augustinian account (according to which all exemplifiabiles are

⁴ Aquinas alludes to this tradition in the *first* part of the epigraph that begins this chapter.

⁵ Aquinas refers to this Augustinian view in the *second* part of the epigraph quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

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divine concepts).⁶ In fact, as we shall be at pains to show, the inconsistency will remain so long as the traditional theist continues in *any* way to endorse the first of the two components of Platonism identified above—i.e. so long as she offers *any* unified account of predication in terms of exemplifiables, no matter how such entities are conceived.⁷

Assuming our argument is sound, the inconsistency can be resolved in only one of two ways: either by rejecting traditional theism (and hence becoming either a non-theist or a non-traditional theist) or by rejecting any unified account of predication in terms of exemplifiables (and hence adopting either a non-unified account of predication or a unified account that appeals to something other than exemplifiables). For those who want to hang on to their traditional theism, we shall argue that our argument naturally leads to a unified account of predication in terms of *truthmakers*. As will emerge, such an account of predication is precisely what is needed to defend the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity against the dominant objection it has faced in the last two decades. Thus, our argument for the claim that traditional theism is inconsistent with unified accounts of predication in terms of exemplifiables can be viewed as a theistic argument in support of both the truthmaker theory of predication and the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity.

Our discussion in the chapter proceeds as follows. In Section I, we consider some of the reasons that have been given for thinking that traditional theism is inconsistent with Platonism and then briefly examine the most important recent attempt to reconcile them by appealing to some form of Augustinianism. After these preliminaries, we lay out our argument for their inconsistency, focusing in particular on the inconsistency between the traditional theist's aseity-dependence doctrine and the Platonist thesis (also included in many non-Platonist accounts of predication) that a unified account of predication can be provided in terms of exemplifiables. In Section II, we explain how the conclusion of Section I naturally leads to a truthmaker theory of predication, which

⁶ Cf. Loux (1978, 1998) for Aristotelian realism; Armstrong (1978, 1989, 1999) for immanent realism; Campbell (1980, 1990) for trope theory; and Morris (1987) for the Augustinian view.

⁷ Hence, the argument will also work against those who understand predication in terms of property instances—that is, concrete individuals standing in a special relation (namely, instantiation) to the universals of which they are the instances—as well as against those who understand predication in terms of sets and conceive of sets as exemplifiables. For a property-instance conception of exemplifiables, cf. Mann (1982, 1983); for a set-theoretical conception of exemplifiables, cf. Oliver (1996: 21–5).

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in turn provides the materials needed to defend the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity against the dominant objection to it in the recent literature.⁸

I. AGAINST PLATONISM

Traditional (Western) theism has many ingredients, including among others that God is an omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, necessarily existing, perfectly good person. This list is not intended to be exhaustive (for our purposes it will be unnecessary to provide an exhaustive list). Rather it is intended to be representative of the sorts of things that traditional theists have said about God. In addition to the things just mentioned, there is a further component of traditional theism, one that will be especially important to our discussion in what follows, namely, the aseity-dependence doctrine discussed above. That doctrine, as we will be understanding it, may be stated as follows:

AD: (i) God does not depend on anything distinct from himself for his existing and (ii) everything distinct from God depends on God's creative activity for its existing.

Each of the components of AD follows straightforwardly from the traditional conception of God as an absolutely perfect or supreme being. Thus, (i) asserts that God *lacks* a certain type of imperfection (namely, dependency on another), whereas (ii) asserts that he *possesses* a certain type of perfection (namely, that associated with having creative power extending to *all* other existing things). Moreover, each of these components fits well not only with the traditional conception of deity, but also with certain authoritative statements within the tradition. Compare, for example, the first sentence of the Nicene Creed, which also seems to presuppose that God is the uncreated creator of all things:

⁸ We should note up front that, in presenting this argument from *traditional* theism against Platonism and in defense of divine simplicity, we are not thereby committing ourselves to either the falsity of Platonism or the truth of divine simplicity, despite the fact that we are both theists. One can always avoid rejecting Platonism merely by availing oneself of a version of *non-traditional* theism, according to which things such as necessarily existing exemplifiables are *not* dependent on God. (See Wolterstorff 1970 for a defense of such a view.) Moreover, in the case of divine simplicity, one would have to do more than defend it against the dominant contemporary objection it faces (which is all we do here) to show that it is ultimately defensible.

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“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.”⁹

Although we will be speaking in what follows of the dependence of creatures on God’s creative activity, we do not mean to imply by this that created things have a beginning in time, nor even that they are contingent beings. As we understand it, the aseity-dependence doctrine is perfectly consistent with there being other necessary beings besides God, provided that they too depend on God as a created thing depends for its existing on its creator. With all this in mind, we can state the position on which we want to focus thus:

T: Traditional theism (which includes AD) is true.

Our claim is that T is inconsistent with a group of theories concerning the metaphysical implications of predication. What these theories have in common is that they offer a unified account of predication in terms of exemplifiables (though they differ over whether exemplifiables are to be conceived of as abstract Platonic entities, Aristotelian universals, concrete immanent universals, the tropes familiar from certain forms of contemporary nominalism, or the divine concepts of which Augustine speaks). We may state the thesis that is common to all these theories as follows:

P: The truth of *all* true predications, or at least of all true predications of the form “*a* is *F*”, is to be explained in terms of a subject and an exemplifiable (however exemplifiables are themselves to be conceived).¹⁰

Our argument will be that the conjunction of T and P results in a contradiction, and hence that T implies the falsity of P. Before mounting this argument, however, it will be useful to consider both what it is about T and P that appears to make them inconsistent and why so many traditional theists have thought that the Augustinian response mentioned above is sufficient to resolve the apparent inconsistency.

⁹ For further defense of the claim that traditional theism includes the aseity-dependence doctrine, see Morris (1987). Cf. the discussion of the ‘Sovereignty-Aseity Intuition’ in Plantinga (1980: 28–37) and the discussion of the ‘Ultimacy Assumption’ in Leftow (1990b: 584–92).

¹⁰ Again, we ignore complications arising from Russell’s paradox. Cf. n. 2 above. Here again it’s important to emphasize that when we speak of “the truth of all true predications” we have in mind the truth of the *truths* expressed by such predications (rather than the predications themselves).

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In “Absolute Creation,” a paper originally co-authored with Christopher Menzel, Thomas Morris identifies the source of the apparent tension between traditional theism and Platonism. According to traditional theism, which includes the aseity-dependence doctrine, God is the “absolute” creator of everything—that is to say, he is the creator of everything distinct from himself. According to Platonism, by contrast, the entities in terms of which predications are to be explained are necessarily existing beings—namely, abstract properties or universals—and hence not the sorts of thing that appear to be capable of being created.

In light of this tension, it is not surprising that many traditional theists have been attracted to the Augustinian view according to which Platonic universals are identical with divine concepts—that is, entities that, despite their necessary existence, are nonetheless dependent on God as thoughts are dependent on a thinker. Contemporary philosophers now typically refer to this Augustinian view as “theistic activism”, since according to it, the existence of properties and propositions is due to the *activity* of the divine intellect: properties are divine concepts resulting from God’s acts of conceptualizing and propositions are divine thoughts due to God’s acts of thinking or considering.¹¹

Now as Morris himself recognizes, traditional theism still presents a difficulty even for the Augustinian view:

Of course the whole project of theistic activism is to recognize some divine activity as responsible for the existence of absolutely everything distinct from God. But it would sound at least exceedingly odd to say that God creates the very properties which are logically necessary for, and distinctively exemplified within, his creative activity—properties such as his omniscience and omnipotence—to say that he creates his own nature. In fact, many people would find this suggestion incoherent or absurd. (1987: 172)

Later, Morris refers to this problem as the “circularity of God’s creating his own nature” (ibid. 173) and asks:

[I]f God creates his own haecceity [i.e. his individual essence or nature], and the existence of his haecceity is logically sufficient for his existence, as is the

¹¹ See Morris (1987). Morris reminds us that false propositions aren’t beliefs God has. They are thoughts that are considered and denied, not ones that, like true propositions, are considered and affirmed.

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case with any necessarily existent being, do we not have the result that on this view God creates himself? And of course, the very idea of self-causation or self-creation is almost universally characterized as absurd, incoherent, or worse. (ibid. 174)

Thus, as Morris recognizes, there is a tension *within* theistic activism—a tension that derives from the fact that it appears to include an objectionable sort of circularity. Unlike the tension between Platonism and traditional theism, however, Morris thinks that this tension can be resolved. For the circularity in question, he maintains, is ultimately benign.

In order to resolve the tension in question, Morris does two things. First, he presents an analogy of an eternally existing *materialization machine* (itself a material object about the size of a clock radio) that produces material objects *ex nihilo* and sustains them in existence, including its very own parts which it replaces from time to time with newly produced parts.¹² He intends this analogy to go some distance toward showing the coherence of a thing's essence depending on its own creative activity. Of course, he recognizes that the analogy is imperfect insofar as the machine doesn't produce the very properties it instantiates, but only some of its material parts. Nevertheless, he thinks it models "in central ways what the [theistic] activist alleges about God" (ibid. 176). To those who aren't persuaded by this response (and we count ourselves among them), he has the following to say:

But, strictly speaking, there is no need of any such analogy to defend the implication of activism now in view. The value of the analogy is mainly heuristic, or pedagogical. *It just seems to me* that there is nothing logically or metaphysically objectionable about God's creating his own nature in precisely the way indicated [by theistic activism]. (ibid. 176, emphasis added)

We suggest that the reason it *just seems to Morris* that there is no objectionable circularity is that he isn't clear enough about precisely what the objectionable circularity is. In fact, Morris never gets any more explicit than he is in the passages quoted above about the exact nature of the damaging circularity. In the next subsection, we will offer an argument that provides a better target for defenders of theistic activism. Indeed, we will say precisely what the objectionable circularity is and

¹² Morris (1987: 174–5).

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provide a formal argument for the conclusion that such circularity infects not only views such as theistic activism, but *any* view that combines traditional theism with a unified account of predication in terms of exemplifiableness (however the exemplifiableness are themselves understood). Thus, we will be providing theistic activists, along with anyone else who endorses a unified account of predication in terms of exemplifiableness, the opportunity to respond to our objection by pinpointing where our argument goes wrong, and thus remove the need for them to rely instead on imperfect analogies or the apparent absence of anything objectionable about their view.

Morris's second response to the circularity problem is to point out that, from the fact that God's nature is *causally* dependent on God and God is *logically* dependent on his nature (in the sense that the existence of his nature entails his existing¹³), it doesn't follow that there is any objectionable circularity. For logical dependence, like logical entailment, can be mutual. There is nothing objectionable about each necessary truth entailing every other such truth; nor is there anything objectionable about the existence of each necessary being entailing the existence of every other such being. Hence there is no difficulty with the suggestion that logical dependence (as Morris understands it) is *not* an asymmetrical relation. As for causal dependence, although it may be an asymmetrical relation, there is no reason to think that God is causally dependent on his nature (though of course the theistic activist is committed to saying that God's nature causally depends upon God). For the fact that God is *logically* dependent on his nature (in the sense noted above) doesn't imply that God is *causally* dependent on anything, much less his nature. Indeed, on any view according to which, say, the numbers two and nine are necessary beings, it will follow that each is logically dependent (in Morris's sense) on the other. But such a view needn't add that the numbers two and nine are causally dependent on each other.

We agree wholeheartedly with Morris's points summarized in the previous paragraph. From them we take the following lesson: in order to establish that there is an objectionable circularity in such a view as theistic activism, we must establish not only that (a) there is a dependence relation of some sort running in both directions between a pair of things (such as God and his nature), but also that (b) it is the *same*

¹³ As Morris points out (ibid. 176), this is a trivial consequence of the fact that both God and his nature are necessary beings.

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relation that holds in both directions, and (c) the relation in question is *asymmetrical*. With this lesson in mind, we shall now attempt to establish that there is a form of circularity that both meets conditions (a)–(c) and infects the conjunction of traditional theism with any unified account of predication in terms of exemplifiableness.

A Theistic Argument against P

Although our argument for the inconsistency of T and P is somewhat complicated, the basic idea behind it is fairly simple. If a view such as theistic activism is true, then every property (or exemplifiable) will be a product of God's creative activity. But this implies the general principle that, for any property *F*, God's creating *F* is a prerequisite for, and hence logically prior to, *F*.¹⁴ Notice, however, that in order to create *F*, God must have the property of *being able to create a property*. Here is where the trouble begins. For on the one hand, it would seem that this property (i.e. *being able to create a property*) must be logically prior to God's creating it, since God's having it is a prerequisite for the creation of *any* property. On the other hand, however, it would also seem that this property must be logically posterior to God's creating it, since insofar as it is a property (or exemplifiable), it must fall under the general principle articulated in AD, and hence be a product of God's creative activity. Evidently, therefore, in order for it to be true that God is the creator of all properties, there must be a property—namely, *being able to create a property*—that is both logically prior and logically posterior to God's creating properties. Assuming that logical priority is an asymmetrical relation, however, this conclusion is obviously absurd.

With this intuitive statement in hand,¹⁵ we can now turn to a more precise statement of the argument, extending its scope so that it applies not just to theistic activism, but to any unified account of predication in terms of exemplifiableness. To begin, let us note that our argument will establish the inconsistency of T and P by showing that their conjunction entails the following two claims, which give rise to an objectionable circularity:

¹⁴ We discuss the notion of logical priority below.

¹⁵ Brian Leftow has drawn our attention to his own intuitive statement of a similar argument (though his argument is for a less general conclusion). See Leftow (1990a: 201).

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- C1: God's creating an exemplifiable is logically prior to the exemplifiable *being able to create an exemplifiable*.
- C2: The exemplifiable *being able to create an exemplifiable* is logically prior to God's creating an exemplifiable.

Notice that C1 and C2 together entail a claim of the form "*a* is logically prior to *b* and *b* is logically prior to *a*". Assuming once again that the relation of logical priority is asymmetrical, the conjunction of C1 and C2 is impossible, for it involves circularity of the sort described in conditions (a)–(c) mentioned at the end of the previous subsection. But since T and P together entail the conjunction of C1 and C2, the conjunction of T and P is also impossible, which is what we are aiming to show.

Before stating the argument proper, we need to set out the assumptions on which it relies:

- A1. For any exemplifiable *F*, if *F* depends on God's creative activity for its existing, then God's creating an exemplifiable is logically prior to *F*.
- A2. For any *x* and any action *A*, *x*'s being able to do *A* is logically prior to *x*'s doing *A*.¹⁶
- A3. For any *x*, any *y*, and any exemplifiable *F*, if *x*'s exemplifying *F* is logically prior to *y*, then *F* is logically prior to *y*.
- A4. *x*'s being able to create an *F* = *x*'s exemplifying *being able to create an F*.
- A5. For any *x* and any *y*, if *x* is logically prior to *y*, then *y* is not logically prior to *x*.

Since the notion of logical priority plays a crucial role in these assumptions and, hence, in our argument as a whole, it requires some comment. Perhaps the best way to clarify the notion is by way of example. Consider, therefore, a whole consisting of several parts—say, an ordinary pocket watch. Its parts, we say, are *logically prior to* the whole of which they are the parts. Or consider a thinker and its thoughts. The thinker, we say, is *logically prior to* its thoughts. As these examples

¹⁶ Notice that A2 says that abilities are logically prior to their being exercised (i.e. to doings). This should not be confused with the claim that potentialities are logically prior to actualities (i.e. that *x*'s *being possibly F* is logically prior to *x*'s *being F*). Our point here is not that the latter claim is false (we aren't taking a stand on that), but rather that A2 (on which we *are* taking a stand) should be distinguished from that latter claim.

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serve to indicate, logical priority is associated with a special type of dependence. If an object *a* is logically prior to an object *b*, then *b* depends for its existing on *a* (in a way that *a* doesn't depend on *b*)—in fact, it depends on *a* in the way a whole depends on its parts or a thought depends on its thinker. This type of dependence, however, must be sharply distinguished from several other types of dependence.

First of all, logical priority must be distinguished from the type of dependence associated with being a mere *necessary condition*. The existence of a part is a necessary condition for the existence of the whole of which it is a part; likewise, the existence of a thinker is a necessary condition for the existence of its thoughts. Nonetheless, the logical priority of parts to wholes, or of thinkers to their thoughts, cannot be reduced to their being necessary conditions. For the relation of dependence that holds between parts and wholes and between thinkers and their thoughts is asymmetric, whereas the relation of *being a necessary condition of* isn't (e.g. any pair of necessary truths is such that each member of it is a necessary condition of the other).

Secondly, logical priority must be distinguished from *temporal* priority. Parts are necessarily logically prior to their wholes, but not necessarily temporally prior to them. Suppose that there existed an *eternal* pocket watch with parts as eternally existent as the watch itself; or suppose that both the watch and its parts had come into existence simultaneously. In either case, the parts of the watch would be logically prior to the whole watch even though they wouldn't be temporally prior to it. Indeed, the parts of the watch would be logically prior to the whole watch even if both existed necessarily. The same is true for thinkers and their thoughts. According to traditional theism, God not only exists necessarily but is also essentially omniscient. Thus, he not only exists in all possible worlds, but also knows—and hence has the thought—in all possible worlds that $2 + 2 = 4$. Nonetheless, he must still be regarded as logically prior to this (or any other such) thought of his.

Finally, logical priority must be distinguished from entailment (or what Morris calls 'logical dependence'). Although the existence of any necessary being *entails* the existence of any other, not every necessary being is logically prior to every other. Indeed, as the examples just given are intended to make clear, logical priority is unlike entailment in that it cannot be mutual. Although God is logically prior to his thoughts, his thoughts are not logically prior to him. On the contrary, they are *logically posterior* to him. And this is so despite the fact that both God

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and certain of his thoughts (such as that $2 + 2 = 4$) are necessary beings and, hence, mutually *entailing*.

Is there anything more we can say about logical priority, apart from the fact that it is associated with a special type of dependence? Perhaps the most illuminating thing to say is that if *a* is logically prior to *b*, then *b* depends on *a* in such a way that *a* at least *partially* explains *b* whereas *b* is not even a partial explanation of *a*. Thus, the existence of the parts of a watch explain (at least partially) the existence of the watch itself, whereas the watch does nothing to explain the existence of the parts.¹⁷ Likewise, the existence of God is at least a partial explanation of the existence of his thoughts, but not vice versa.¹⁸

In light of all this, it should be clear that the relation of logical priority is asymmetric, and, hence, that assumption A5 above is true. Also, given P (whose conjunction with T will be assumed for *reductio* in our argument), the equivalence stated in A4 seems to be uncontroversial. Furthermore, assumptions A1 and A2 are extremely plausible. The act of creating seems to be logically prior to the creature (and not vice versa); and, the having of an ability seems to explain (at least partially), and hence to be logically prior to, the exercise of that ability (and not vice versa).¹⁹ It is difficult to see, therefore, how one could plausibly deny either A1–A2 or A4–A5. Thus, the only assumption that requires any extended comment is A3.

¹⁷ It might be objected that our claim that parts are logically prior to wholes does not hold for Morris's materialization machine, which creates its own parts. After all, doesn't it present us with a case of a whole explaining the existence of its parts? Not in the relevant sense. To see why not, we need to employ time indices. Using them, the more careful way to state our claim in the text is this: the existence *at t* of the parts of a watch partially explains the existence *at t* of the watch itself, whereas the existence *at t* of the watch does nothing to explain the existence *at t* of the parts. Here is the parallel claim with respect to the materialization machine: the existence *at t* of the parts of the materialization machine partially explain the existence *at t* of the machine but the existence *at t* of the materialization machine doesn't even partially explain the existence *at t* of its parts. As we understand the example of the materialization machine, the claims in the previous sentence are true because the machine's creating and sustaining activities are temporally prior to the created or sustained existence they produce. If we are mistaken about this, and the example is, instead, to be understood as lacking such temporal priority, then the example seems to us to be incoherent—as incoherent as the suggestion that something can cause itself to come into existence from nothing.

¹⁸ God's existence doesn't itself produce the thoughts. That's why we say God's existence is only a *partial* explanation of the existence of his thoughts.

¹⁹ Of course the having of an ability isn't sufficient by itself to explain its exercise. Here again, therefore, we speak of only a *partial* explanation.

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Sentence A3 strikes us as intuitively plausible. In order to see why, we need to focus on the relationship between a property and its exemplification. In particular, we need to consider which, if either, is logically prior to the other. In our view, a property is logically prior to its exemplification. This position can be stated as follows:

A3*: For any x and any exemplifiable F , F is logically prior to x 's exemplifying F .

In defense of A3*, we note, first, that an exemplifiable, F , seems to be related to the state of affairs *something's exemplifying* F in roughly the way in which a constituent is related to that of which it is a constituent or the way in which a proper part is related to the whole of which it is a part. Furthermore, it seems that constituents are logically prior to the things of which they are constituents (and not vice versa), in much the same way that proper parts are logically prior to the wholes of which they are parts (and not vice versa). By parity of reasoning, therefore, it seems that F is logically prior to *something's exemplifying* F (and not vice versa).

Given A3*, A3 seems to follow. For consider these three things: a , F , and b 's exemplifying F (where F is an exemplifiable and a and b are anything at all). Given that we know (by A3*) that F is logically prior to b 's exemplifying F , we may conclude the following: if b 's exemplifying F is logically prior to a , then F is also logically prior to a . And A3 is just that conclusion generalized.

We turn now from our assumptions to our argument. As we noted above, we will be arguing that the conjunction of T and P entails both C1 and C2. Since the relation of logical priority is asymmetrical (by assumption A5), the conjunction of C1 and C2 is impossible. Hence T and P are inconsistent. For convenience, we'll begin by restating AD, T, P, and our five assumptions:

- AD: (i) God does not depend on anything distinct from himself for his existing and (ii) everything distinct from God depends on God's creative activity for its existing.
- T: Traditional theism (which includes AD) is true.
- P: All true predications, or at least all true predications of the form " a is F ", are to be explained in terms of a subject and an exemplifiable (however exemplifiables are themselves to be conceived).

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- A1. For any exemplifiable *F*, if *F* depends on God's creative activity for its existing, then God's creating an exemplifiable is logically prior to *F*.
- A2. For any *x* and any action *A*, *x*'s being able to do *A* is logically prior to *x*'s doing *A*.
- A3. For any *x*, any *y*, and any exemplifiable *F*, if *x*'s exemplifying *F* is logically prior to *y*, then *F* is logically prior to *y*.
- A4. *x*'s being able to create an *F* = *x*'s exemplifying *being able to create an F*.
- A5. For any *x* and any *y*, if *x* is logically prior to *y*, then *y* is not logically prior to *x*.

We will break our argument into two parts: the first part argues that the conjunction of T and P gives us C1; the second part derives C2 from our assumptions.

Here is the first part of the argument:

- 1. T&P [assume for *reductio*.]
- 2. All exemplifiables depend on God's creative activity for their existing. [From T.]²⁰
- 3. For any exemplifiable *F*, God's creating an exemplifiable is logically prior to *F*. [From 2 and A1.]
- 4. C1: God's creating an exemplifiable is logically prior to the exemplifiable *being able to create an exemplifiable*. [From 3.]

Our argument so far depends only on A1.

Consider next the second part of our argument, which derives C2 from assumptions A2–A4:

- 5. God's being able to create an exemplifiable is logically prior to God's creating an exemplifiable. [From A2.]
- 6. God's exemplifying *being able to create an exemplifiable* is logically prior to God's creating an exemplifiable. [From 5 and A4.]
- 7. C2: The exemplifiable *being able to create an exemplifiable* is logically prior to God's creating an exemplifiable. [From 6 and A3.]

To complete our argument, we need only appeal to A5:

- 8. $\sim(4\&7)$ [From A5.]

²⁰ We take for granted here that God isn't an exemplifiable, from which it follows that all exemplifiables are distinct from God. Cf. Brower (2002) for discussion of this topic.

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9. $\sim(T\&P)$ [From 1–8 by *reductio*.]

In short, traditional theism implies the falsity of all unified accounts of predication in terms of exemplifiables. The challenge, therefore, both for theistic activists and for all other supporters of T and P, is to identify a problem with our argument.²¹

Weakening the Aseity-Dependence Doctrine

One response to our argument is to try to maintain traditional theism without endorsing the aseity-dependence doctrine as defined in AD. For example, one might suggest that that doctrine need not be understood in the strong way we define it—i.e. in terms of the dependence of things on God's *creative activity*—but may be understood more weakly as follows:

AD*: (i) God does not depend on anything distinct from himself for his existing and (ii) everything distinct from God depends on God (though *not*, in every case, on God's creative activity) for its existing.

Those who favor this weaker version of the aseity-dependence doctrine, AD*, can then insist that traditional theism should be understood, not in terms of T, but rather in terms of T*:

²¹ Although we shall not dwell on the point here, it is worth noting that arguments parallel to the one just given might be constructed for the conclusion that traditional theism is also incompatible with abstract objects of other kinds (such as certain propositions and certain states of affairs). Our argument draws attention to the fact that a certain exemplifiable—namely, *being able to create an exemplifiable*—has to be both logically prior and logically posterior to God's exemplifying it. It has to be logically posterior to God's exemplifying it because God's exemplifying it is a prerequisite for God's creating any exemplifiable (and, hence, for any exemplifiable). But it also has to be logically prior to God's exemplifying it because, as A3* makes clear, every exemplifiable is logically prior to (because it is a constituent of) its exemplification. It seems that something similar can be said with respect to propositions. Consider the proposition *God is able to create a proposition*. Apparently, this proposition must be both logically prior and logically posterior to its being true. It has to be logically posterior to its being true because its being true that God is able to create a proposition is a prerequisite for God's creating any proposition (and, hence, for any proposition). But it also has to be logically prior to its being true because of a general principle, much like A3*, according to which every proposition is logically prior to (because it's a constituent of) its being true. A similar sort of argument could be constructed in connection with the relationship between the abstract state of affairs *God's being able to create a state of affairs* and its obtaining.

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T*: Traditional theism (which includes AD*) is true.

Once traditional theism is understood in this way, however, the proponent of the weaker aseity-dependence doctrine can ignore our argument above on the grounds that it fails to show that T* and P are incompatible, even if it succeeds at showing that T and P are incompatible.²²

We think there is some precedent (e.g. the Nicene creed) for understanding traditional theism as favoring the stronger version of the aseity-dependence doctrine, AD, over the weaker AD*.²³ Nevertheless, we think an argument similar to the one given in the previous subsection can be given for the incompatibility of T* and P. Except for A5, according to which logical priority is an asymmetrical relation, this argument relies on only three assumptions (two of which are modified versions of earlier assumptions, and another of which we have already encountered):

A1*. For any x , if x depends on God for its existing, then God's being who he is is logically prior to x .

A3*. For any x and any exemplifiable F , F is logically prior to x 's exemplifying F .

A4*. God's being who he is = God's exemplifying his nature.

Assumption A3* was employed and defended earlier in accounting for the plausibility of A3. And A4* is similar to A4 insofar as it says that a gerundial phrase of the form ' x 's being F ', which includes no explicit mention of exemplification, can be restated in terms of the exemplification of a property—i.e. in terms of a phrase of the form ' x 's exemplifying F '. In light of P, which is being assumed for *reductio* in this argument as well, we take A4* to be as uncontroversial as A4.

As for assumption A1*, it too is a modified version of its ancestor, A1. The idea behind A1* is this: it must be in virtue of *something* about God that everything distinct from him depends on him for its existing. But in virtue of what? According to theistic activism, it is in virtue of God's *creative activity* that all things depend on him. But not according to AD*. Nevertheless, even those who endorse AD* will, if they endorse P, agree that God necessarily exemplifies the divine nature. And, since it is in virtue of *something* about God that all (other) things depend on him for their existing, it seems that we can say, at the very least, that it is in

²² This sort of response was brought to our attention in discussions with Jan Cover and Michael Rea.

²³ Cf. also the references cited in n. 9 above.

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virtue of God's being who he is—i.e. that it is in virtue of his *being divine* or his *exemplifying the divine nature*—that all things distinct from him depend on him for their existing.

In our previous argument, we showed that a problematic conjunction (in that case, T and P) resulted in an objectionably circular statement of the form “*a* is logically prior to *b* and *b* is logically prior to *a*”. Our new argument will show the same thing, only this time the problematic conjunction will be “T* & P” and the resulting objectionable circularity will arise from the following two claims:

- C1*: God's exemplifying his nature is logically prior to the exemplifiable *God's nature* (or *being divine*).
- C2*: The exemplifiable *God's nature* is logically prior to God's exemplifying his nature.

Here, then, is our new argument:

1. T*&P [Assume for *reductio*.]
2. All exemplifiables depend on God for their existing. [From T*.]
3. For any exemplifiable *F*, God's being who he is is logically prior to *F*. [From 2 and A1*.]
4. God's being who he is is logically prior to the exemplifiable *God's nature*. [From 3.]
5. C1*: God's exemplifying his nature is logically prior to the exemplifiable *God's nature*. [From 4 and A4*.]
6. C2*: The exemplifiable *God's nature* is logically prior to God's exemplifying his nature. [From A3*.]
7. $\sim(5\&6)$. [From A5.]
8. $\sim(T*\&P)$ [From 1–7 by *reductio*.]

Thus, by slightly altering two of our original assumptions, A1 and A4, and by appealing to A3* (used earlier to explain the plausibility of our original A3), we've shown that P is incompatible not only with T but also with T*, which includes only the weaker aseity-dependence doctrine, AD*.

II. IN SUPPORT OF TRUTHMAKERS AND DIVINE SIMPLICITY

Assuming the arguments in the first part of the chapter are sound—an assumption hereafter taken for granted—traditional theists (of either

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the T- or T*-variety) have no choice but to reject P, and with it any unified account of predication in terms of exemplifiableness. The reason is that, as our earlier arguments make clear, there are at least some *divine* predications that cannot be explained in terms of exemplifiableness. Our first argument showed that traditional theists (of the T-variety) cannot ascribe to God the property (or exemplifiable) of *being able to create an exemplifiable*. But, of course, if this is right, then divine predications such as "God is able to create an exemplifiable" cannot be explained by traditional theists in terms of exemplifiableness. Our second argument established a similar conclusion, showing that traditional theists (of the weaker T*-variety) cannot ascribe to God the property (or exemplifiable) of *being divine*. Once again, however, this just goes to show that predications such as "God is divine" cannot be explained by them in terms of exemplifiableness. And perhaps there are other such properties (or exemplifiableness) that cannot be ascribed to God, and hence other divine predications that provide exceptions to P.

All this presents traditional theists with a challenge—in fact, it presents them with two challenges. The first and most immediate challenge is that of providing an account of divine predications—or at least of those divine predications that are problematic. But assuming such theists are also interested in preserving a unified or systematic general theory of predication, there is also the second challenge of explaining how divine predication relates to predication generally. In what follows, we present what we take to be the best responses to these challenges available to traditional theists. In doing so, we not only defend a truthmaker theory of predication, but also show that such a theory yields an understanding of the doctrine of divine simplicity that rescues that doctrine from the standard contemporary objection leveled against it.

The Truthmaker Theory of Predication

As we've indicated, the immediate challenge facing traditional theists is that of providing an account of the truth of predications such as "God is able to create an exemplifiable" and "God is divine." In order to meet this challenge successfully, however, they must appeal to something *other* than properties or exemplifiableness. But to what else can they plausibly appeal? The answer, we suggest, is truthmakers. In order to see why, we need to consider each of the two divine predications in question.

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Consider first “God is divine.” Like any statement involving the predication of a thing’s nature, “God is divine” is a case of essential predication: in all possible worlds in which God exists, he is divine. It follows, therefore, that God is such that, necessarily, if he exists, he is divine—that is to say, God himself necessitates the truth of “God is divine.” Some philosophers take this as evidence that God by himself, apart from any exemplifiables, can *explain* the truth of “God is divine” and they commonly express this view by saying that God is what *makes* the predication in question true, that he alone is its *truthmaker*. Indeed, as John Bigelow (1988: 128) points out, it is natural for such philosophers to generalize their view to all essential predications, so that individuals are always taken to be the truthmakers for predications of things which are (part of) their essence.²⁴

The notion of a truthmaker is, no doubt, familiar from the contemporary literature. Nonetheless, a few words about it are perhaps in order. Despite the misleading connotations of its name, the notion is *not* to be understood in causal terms (i.e. literally in terms of *making*). On the contrary, it is to be understood in terms of broadly logical entailment—as is evident from the fact that contemporary philosophers habitually speak of truthmakers as *entailing* the truth of certain statements or predications (or better, the truths expressed by them).²⁵ Although this way of speaking seems perfectly acceptable to us, we realize that it may strike some as misleading on the grounds that only truths (or truthbearers) can entail one another.²⁶ To remove any possibility for misunderstanding, therefore, we offer the following (partial) analysis in its place:

TM: If an entity *E* is a truthmaker for a predication *P*, then ‘*E* exists’ entails the truth expressed by *P*.²⁷

In what follows, we will need to speak of the relationship between a particular truthmaker and the predication it makes true. In order to

²⁴ Such philosophers standardly assume that distinct predications can be made true by the same truthmaker—so that, for example, “Socrates is human,” “Socrates is an animal,” and “Socrates is human or the moon is made of green cheese” can all have the same truthmaker (namely, Socrates), despite the fact they differ in meaning and logical form. For discussion and defense of this assumption, see Armstrong (1978: ii. 7–18, 52–9), and Mulligan, Simons, and Smith (1984: 295–304).

²⁵ See e.g. Armstrong (1997: 13).

²⁶ Bigelow (1988: 126).

²⁷ Cf. Rodriguez-Pereyra (2000: 260); Bigelow (1988: 126); Fox (1987: 188); and Oliver (1996: 69).

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avoid using the potentially misleading notion of entailment, we will speak instead of truthmakers as *necessitating* the truth of the predications they make true. Here again, however, the form of necessitation we have in mind is not causal but broadly logical.

One final observation about TM: it is intended to provide only a *partial* analysis of the notion of truthmaking. This is important because a complete analysis of truthmaking in terms of entailment would lead to obvious absurdities, including the claim that necessary truths—such as $2 + 2 = 4$ —have any existing thing whatsoever as their truthmakers. But if TM does not provide a complete analysis of the notion of truthmaking, then what, in addition to entailment or necessitation, is required for something to qualify as a truthmaker? This is a difficult question, and one that we shall not attempt to answer here.²⁸ For present purposes, it will suffice to note that even if the fact that an entity *E* necessitates the truth expressed by a predication *P* does not *guarantee* that *E* is *P*'s truthmaker, it does make *E* a candidate—perhaps even a *prima facie* good candidate—for playing this role.

With these clarifications in mind, it should now be possible to appreciate the point of our suggestion, on behalf of traditional theists, about how best to meet the basic challenge facing their view—at least with respect to the predication “God is divine.” If traditional theists want to explain the truth of this predication in terms of something other than properties or exemplifiables, they can do so in terms of truthmakers. For given that “God is divine” is a case of essential predication, and hence that God necessitates its truth, God is already a plausible candidate for its truthmaker. Notice, moreover, that the same account can be given of the other problematic divine predication discussed above, namely, “God is able to create exemplifiables.” For like “God is divine,” it too appears to be a case of essential predication (assuming that exemplifiables are capable of being created). But, then, as in the case of “God is divine,” God will be a plausible candidate for its truthmaker as well. And presumably, if there are any other divine predications that present a difficulty for traditional theists, they can be explained in the same way.

In the end, therefore, it appears that traditional theists can answer the most immediate challenge facing their view. Even so, there is still a question concerning the nature of predication in general—and in

²⁸ Cf. Restall (1996) for an attempt to answer this question by appeal to “relevant” entailment, and Smith (2002, 1999) for an attempt to answer it without such an appeal.

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particular how to reconcile it with the account of divine predication just given. This is the second main challenge facing traditional theists. Here again, however, the challenge appears to admit of a straightforward resolution.

As we have seen, what raises trouble for traditional theists is not just Platonism, but any of a group of theories that take for granted the following thesis about predication:

P: The truth of *all* true predications, or at least of all true predications of the form “*a* is *F*”, is to be explained in terms of a subject and an exemplifiable.

To this point, we have suggested that, if traditional theists want to avoid the circularity problem associated with P, they ought to adopt a truth-maker account of certain divine predications (namely, “God is divine” and “God is able to create exemplifiables”). However, it seems natural to go further and to suggest that, if traditional theists want a theory to replace P, they ought to adopt a truthmaker theory of predication generally—that is a theory that, instead of P, takes for granted the following alternative thesis about predication:

P*: The truth of *all* true predications, or at least of all true predications of the form “*a* is *F*”, is to be explained in terms of truth-makers.²⁹

By taking this extra step, and endorsing P*, traditional theists are able not only to resolve the circularity problem associated with P, but also to present this resolution as falling out of a general account of predication

²⁹ It might seem objectionable that we contrast P* with P (which is endorsed by Platonism and other theories of predication) by calling the former ‘a truth-maker theory of predication’. For P might itself seem to be a form of truth-maker theory in that, like P*, it aims to explain *why* certain predications are true by saying what makes them true (namely, a subject and an exemplifiable).

It is important to recognize, however, that in addition to explaining the truth of certain predications (or the truths expressed by them), P* invokes the notion of a truthmaker in another more fundamental way. The suggestion made by P* is that the most important feature common to all truthmakers for claims of the form ‘The truth expressed by predication X is true’ is just that they are *truthmakers*. But according to P, there is another more important feature that all such truthmakers have in common, namely, that they involve a subject and an exemplifiable. It is only because P* invokes the notion of a truthmaker in this second way that we call it (but not P) a ‘truth-maker theory of predication’.

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that is every bit as unified or systematic as P itself. In short, by taking this step, they are able to meet each of the challenges facing their view.³⁰

It is important to emphasize that the truthmaker theory of predication, as we've stated it at P*, is an ontologically *neutral* theory of predication. According to this theory, if a predication of the form "*a* is *F*" is true, then its truth must be explained in terms of its truthmaker—that is, in terms of an entity (or a group of entities) whose existence necessitates the truth of the predication in question. But in principle, there is no restriction on the nature or ontological category to which such an entity belongs. Hence this theory does not require us to say that the truthmaker for "*a* is *F*" either is or involves an exemplifiable. Indeed, for all the theory itself says, the truthmaker for this predication may be nothing but the single individual, *a*. Even so, this theory doesn't rule out the possibility of explaining at least some predications in terms of properties or exemplifiables. On the contrary, it actually invites such an explanation in certain cases.

We have already indicated that, in the case of essential predications, it is possible to take the subject of predication itself to be the truthmaker.

³⁰ Since we are primarily concerned in what follows only with affirmative (atomic) predications of the form "*a* is *F*", our statement of P* ignores the difficulty associated with claims such as "*a* is not *F*" and "there are no *F*s". These sorts of claim are often thought to be the undoing of truthmaker theory, since the only candidate truthmakers for them appear to be negative facts such as *a*'s not being *F* and *there not being any F*s. Appealing to negative facts, however, strikes many as extremely implausible. As David Lewis (1999: 204) points out: "It seems, offhand, that [such claims] are true not because things of some kind *do* exist, but rather because counterexamples *don't* exist." It is important to note, however, that we could take account of these and other related difficulties in a way that is, at least in the spirit of truthmaker theory, by modifying our account of predication. First, we could divide all (atomic) predications into two sorts: (A) those (like 'there are no *F*s') whose candidate truthmakers are negative facts (e.g. *there not being any F*s) but whose denials ('there are *F*s') are such that the candidate truthmakers for them are not negative facts but entities of some kind (namely, one or more *F*); and (B) those (like '*a* is *F*') whose candidate truthmakers are entities of some kind (say, the individual *a*, or a non-transferable trope of *F*-ness, or the fact that *a* is *F*) but whose denials ('*a* is not *F*') are such that the only candidate truthmakers for them are negative facts (*a*'s not being *F*). With this division in mind, we could then say that (A)-type predications will be true just in case there is no truthmaker for their negation and that (B)-type predications will be true just in case they have a truthmaker. In line with this, P* could then be revised as follows:

P** All true predications are such that either their truth can be explained in terms of truthmakers or the falsity of their negations can be explained in terms of the absence of truthmakers.

For further development and defense of this sort of truthmaker theory, see Bigelow (1988: 128–34) and especially Lewis (2001).

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Thus, Socrates may be regarded as the truthmaker of “Socrates is human”, just as God may be regarded as the truthmaker for “God is divine”—since in each case the subject is such that it necessitates the truth expressed by the corresponding predication. Notice, however, that the same cannot be said for accidental or contingent predications. Socrates, for example, cannot be regarded as the truthmaker for “Socrates is wise,” since Socrates does not necessitate its truth. But then what is the truthmaker in such cases? There is more than one way to answer this question, but the two most common ways appeal directly to properties or exemplifiabiles. First of all, one can say, as David Armstrong does, that the truthmaker for contingent predications are facts (or concrete states of affairs) that include properties as constituents.³¹ In that case, the truthmaker for “Socrates is wise” will be the *fact that Socrates is wise*, which includes the property *wisdom* as a constituent. Alternatively, one can say, as C. B. Martin does, that the truthmaker for contingent predications are non-transferable tropes (or concrete individual properties that are essentially dependent on the subjects of which they are the properties).³² In that case, the truthmaker for “Socrates is wise” will not be the *fact that Socrates is wise*, but *Socrates’s wisdom*—an entity such that, in all possible worlds in which it exists, Socrates exists and is wise.

It might be thought that the ontological neutrality of the truthmaker theory compromises our claim that it is every bit as unified or systematic as the alternative stated at P. After all, if the truthmaker theory of predication can allow some predications (e.g. “Socrates is wise”), but not others (e.g. “God is divine”), to be explained in terms of exemplifiabiles, then it might not seem to be a *unified* theory of predication after all.

In fact, however, the ontological neutrality of the truthmaker theory merely calls attention to the distinctiveness of the principle of unity underlying it. To characterize an entity as a truthmaker is to characterize it in terms of a certain function or role—that of necessitating the truth of the predications it makes true. In this respect, ‘truthmaker’ is similar to other sorts of functional characterization one finds in philosophy—ones that prescind, to some extent, from the intrinsic nature of the entity being characterized. Thus, just as functionalists in philosophy of mind claim that we can make progress in understanding mental states (such as pain) only if we abandon the attempt to characterize them in

³¹ See Armstrong (1997, 1989).

³² See Armstrong (1989: esp. 116–19). For a more complete development and defense of this view, see Mulligan, Simons, and Smith (1989).

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terms of a single ontological category (namely, physical or non-physical), so too, we have been suggesting, traditional theists can make progress in understanding predication in general, and divine predication in particular, if they adopt the same sort of strategy. We call the truthmaker theory of predication a 'unified theory', therefore, *not* because it explains all predications in terms of entities from a single ontological category, but rather because it explains all predications in terms of entities of one familiar functional kind.

We have been emphasizing the ontological neutrality of the truthmaker theory, not only because it is what enables traditional theists to meet the main challenges facing their view, but also because, as we now want to show, it is what enables them to go a considerable distance toward rehabilitating the doctrine of divine simplicity. Since this doctrine remains one of the most historically important and theologically influential expressions of the thesis at the core of traditional theism (namely, the aseity-dependence doctrine), this result ought to be of significant interest.

Truthmakers, Divine Simplicity, and the Category Problem

According to the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity, God is an absolutely simple being devoid of any form of metaphysical complexity whatsoever. Although this doctrine has its roots in antiquity, it received its most elaborate development and careful defense at the hands of philosophers and theologians during the Middle Ages. According to the medievals, this doctrine entails not only that God lacks the sort of complexity associated with the possession of material or temporal parts, but also that he lacks even the minimal form of complexity associated with the possession of properties. Thus, from the fact that God is simple, the medievals infer that God lacks any (intrinsic) accidental or contingent properties, and hence that all true predications of the form "God is (intrinsically) *F*" are cases of essential predication. And even in the case of essential predications, the medievals take the doctrine to have fairly radical consequences. Hence, from the truth of "God is divine," they infer that God is identical with his nature or divinity; from the truth of "God is good" they infer that he is identical with his goodness; and so on for every other such predication. And, of course, from the fact that God is identical with each of these things, they infer that each of these things is identical to each of the others.

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Ever since the publication of Alvin Plantinga's (1980) *Does God Have a Nature?*, the literature on divine simplicity has been dominated by the discussion of a particular objection to its coherence. The alleged difficulty arises from the fact that the doctrine appears to entail the absurdity that God is identical with a property or exemplifiable. Predications such as "Socrates is wise" are widely assumed (and rightly in our opinion) to require the existence of such things as *Socrates's wisdom* or *wisdom* in general—that is, some entity that can serve as the referent for a so-called abstract singular term, such as 'wisdom'. (Terms such as 'wisdom' are called abstract singular terms because they are grammatically singular in number and function as the abstract counterparts of concrete terms such as 'wise'.) But what sort of entities could serve as the referents of abstract singular terms besides properties or exemplifiables? Without an answer to this challenge, we would appear to have no choice but to assume that endorsement of a predication such as "God is divine" commits defenders of divine simplicity (which requires that God is identical with his divinity) to the view that God is identical with the property of *being divine*. For the same reason, endorsement of divine predications such as "God is good", "God is powerful", and "God is wise" will commit such theists to the view that God is identical with the properties of *being good*, *being powerful*, and *being wise*—and indeed, by transitivity of identity, that each of these properties is identical with each of the others. And so on for every other such divine predication.

Now why does this identification of God with his properties seem so objectionable? Because one of the most *obvious* things about God is that he isn't an exemplifiable. Unlike universals, tropes, or property-instances, God is a person and persons aren't the sorts of thing that can be exemplified. The doctrine of divine simplicity, therefore, seems to be guilty of making a category mistake: it places a non-exemplifiable thing, a person, into the category of exemplifiables. Let's call this familiar objection to the doctrine of divine simplicity, 'the category problem'.

Now if the doctrine of divine simplicity could be stated in such a way that it avoided this problem, that would be a significant result for contemporary discussion of the doctrine. For, as we've just noted, worries about that problem have been the main focus of the recent literature on the topic. In what follows, we will explain how the truth-maker theory of predication presented at P*, and to which we were led by the arguments in Section I, enables proponents of the doctrine to avoid the category problem. As will emerge, the solution is to recognize

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that although defenders of divine simplicity must agree that God is identical with the referent of abstract singular terms such as 'God's goodness' or 'God's divinity', they need not construe the referents of such terms as exemplifiables.

From the perspective of the truthmaker theory of predication, there is nothing problematic about saying that God is identical with his nature, goodness, power, wisdom, or any other such things. To put the point more carefully, there is nothing problematic about saying that God is identical with the *referents of abstract singular terms* corresponding to each of the true intrinsic predications that can be made about him. For in light of the truthmaker theory developed above, there is a straightforward answer to the challenge raised earlier: "What could the referents of abstract singular terms be if not exemplifiables?" Just as the defenders of Platonism (or, more generally, P) typically assume that properties (or exemplifiables) are what serve as the referents of abstract singular terms, so too the defenders of the truthmaker theory (or P*) can maintain that truthmakers play this role. Thus, it is open to the defender of divine simplicity to say that the truthmaker for predications such as "God is divine" is also the referent for the abstract singular term 'God's divinity' or 'God's nature'. Indeed, if we reflect on the fact that expressions such as 'God's divinity' are the abstract nominalizations of predications such as "God is divine," we might expect them to refer to the truthmakers corresponding to such predications. For abstract nominalizations are typically introduced precisely for the sake of referring to the entities corresponding to their concrete counterparts. But if an expression such as 'God's divinity' is understood in this way, then to say that God is identical with his divinity will just be another way of saying that God is identical with the truthmaker for "God is divine." Likewise, to say that God is identical with his goodness, power, wisdom, and so on—and that each of these is identical with each of the others—will be the same as saying that there is only one truthmaker for each of the true intrinsic predications that can be made of God. Now suppose that the truthmaker in each case is God himself. Then to say that God is identical with his goodness is just to say that God is identical with God. Unlike the claim that God is identical with a property or exemplifiable, however, this claim is perfectly coherent.

The claim that God is the truthmaker for every true intrinsic predication of the form "God is *F*" not only provides a response to the category problem, but also seems to make the doctrine of divine

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simplicity attractive in certain ways. In order to see why, consider the sorts of intrinsic predication that can be made about God, beginning with "God is divine." Like any other statement involving the predication of a thing's nature, "God is divine" is a case of essential predication. But since God is essentially divine, his existing necessitates the truth expressed by "God is divine" (since if God is essentially divine, he will be divine in all possible worlds in which he exists). But, then, for the very same reason, God himself will be a plausible candidate for the role of the truthmaker of "God is divine."

Now as it turns out, similar remarks apply to other such divine predications. For as traditional theists conceive of him, God is not only good, but essentially good (or omnibenevolent); likewise, he is not only powerful, but also essentially powerful (or omnipotent). Indeed, *if* we accept that aspect of the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity that requires that all intrinsic predications of the form "God is *F*" are cases of essential predication,³³ then the same remarks will apply to each of the intrinsic or non-relational predications that can be made about God. This aspect of the doctrine is, of course, controversial and difficult to square with other aspects of traditional theism, which appear to imply that God has intrinsic accidental properties (say, in virtue of freely choosing to do certain things, including responding to human free choices). Our purpose here, however, is not to provide a complete defense of divine simplicity, but only to show that the truthmaker theory of predication (to which one is naturally led by the conclusions of our arguments in Section I) enables proponents of that doctrine to avoid the problem that has dominated contemporary discussion of it—namely, the category problem.

In the end, therefore, it seems to us that, whatever *other* difficulties the doctrine of divine simplicity might have, it can at least be defended against the standard charge of incoherence leveled by contemporary philosophers. Indeed, as we have attempted to show, if one grants to the defenders of this doctrine the (admittedly controversial) claim that all true divine intrinsic predications are cases of essential predication, the doctrine actually becomes somewhat appealing—at least when interpreted within the context of P*. Obviously this by itself does not give us reason to accept the doctrine. But we do hope it goes some distance toward showing that the doctrine deserves further consideration than it has yet received by contemporary philosophers. At the

³³ See e.g. Aquinas's remarks in *Summa Theologiae* Ia q. 3 a. 6 for a defense of this aspect of the doctrine.

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very least, it shows that critical reflection on the doctrine needn't be focused entirely on the category problem.

Conclusion

We have now completed the two projects we set out to accomplish in the chapter: first, to provide a theistic argument against Platonism (as well as any other theory of predication that accepts P), and second, to show how this argument provides support for a certain theory of predication and, to a lesser extent, the doctrine of divine simplicity. We developed our theistic argument against Platonism in two stages. In the first stage, we argued for the inconsistency of Platonism with what we take to be the proper understanding of traditional theism. In the second stage, we argued that even if we are wrong about the proper understanding of traditional theism, and it can be understood in some weaker way, this is irrelevant from the point of view of its consistency with Platonism.

Although our theistic argument against Platonism proceeded fairly straightforwardly, the support we offered for truthmaker theory and divine simplicity is more indirect. As we suggested, the denial of Platonism seems to lead in the direction of a unified theory of predication, one that does *not* appeal to exemplifiables. Indeed, it seems to us that once traditional theists have jettisoned P (as they must if they are to remain traditional theists), a very attractive strategy—one that enables us to preserve a *unified* account of predication—is to accept P* in its place, and with it the view that truthmakers are required to explain the truth of predications. By itself, of course, the truthmaker theory of predication does not support the doctrine of divine simplicity. Nonetheless, it does enable us to make some progress toward understanding it—and more importantly, to remove what has been, at least in recent years, the greatest obstacle to this doctrine's being taken seriously by contemporary theists.

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