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DIVINE SIMPLICITY AND MODAL COLLAPSE: A PERSISTENT PROBLEM

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Abstract. In recent years the doctrine of divine simplicity has become a topic of interest in the philosophical theological community. In particular, the modal collapse argument against divine simplicity has garnered various responses from proponents of divine simplicity. Some even claiming that the modal collapse argument is invalid. It is our contention that these responses have either misunderstood or misstated the argument, and have thus missed the force of the objection. Our main aim is to clarify what the modal collapse argument in fact says, and explain why the recent responses do not succeed. In order to argue our case, we will proceed in several steps. First, we aim to systematically articulate the doctrine of divine simplicity. Second, articulate the Christian conviction that God is free to create any feasible world or no world at all. Third, argue that divine simplicity suffers a modal collapse and thus undermines God's freedom. Fourth, respond to potential objections to modal collapse. Fifth, we offer some concluding remarks.

I. WHAT IS DIVINE SIMPLICITY?

We begin our discussion by carefully defining the doctrine of divine simplicity. One cannot understand the force of the modal collapse argument against divine simplicity if one does not understand what the metaphysical claims are of divine simplicity. This is demonstrated by a recent exchange over the modal collapse argument. A recent paper accuses modal collapse arguments against simplicity of committing obvious modal fallacies, yet the paper does not attempt a definition of divine simplicity.[1] The lack of attention to what the doctrine of divine simplicity actually says is unfortunate. As J.W. Waldrop explains, when one pays attention to the metaphysical claims of divine simplic-

1 Christopher Tomaszewski, "Collapsing the Modal Collapse Argument: On an Invalid Argument Against Divine Simplicity," *Analysis* 79 (2019): 275–84, doi:10.1093/analys/any052.

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ity, the suggestion that the modal collapse argument is fallacious disappears.[2] Given this, we affirm that it is crucial to carefully define divine simplicity in order to clarify the modal collapse argument.

Our primary interest in this section is to articulate what Katherin Rogers calls the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity as affirmed by classical theism.[3] We are not focusing on contemporary versions of the doctrine that are explicitly stated to be weaker than the traditional doctrine in order to avoid problems like the modal collapse.[4] As Steven Duby points out, these weaker versions cannot adequately be considered the traditional doctrine.[5] This is because there is a systematic connection between simplicity and the rest of the traditional understanding of God as timeless and immutable.[6] According to Hugh McCann, simplicity, timelessness, and immutability are mutually entailing.[7] As Duby and James Dolezal explain, any weaker doctrine of divine simplicity would undermine timelessness and immutability.[8] Given this, we are focusing on the doctrine of simplicity as it has been widely understood in the classical Christian tradition. It is this classical conception that has been making a comeback in recent years, and we aim to show that this classical conception entails a modal collapse.

In the second century, Irenaeus articulated divine simplicity. He thought that it was necessary for maintaining God's absolute perfection. Irenaeus writes,

> He is a simple, uncompounded Being, without diverse members, and altogether like, and equal to Himself, since He is wholly understanding, and wholly spirit, and wholly thought, and wholly intelligence, and wholly reason, and wholly hearing, and wholly seeing, and wholly light, and the

2 J.W. Waldrop, "Modal Collapse and Modal Fallacies: No Easy Defense of Simplicity," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Forthcoming.

3 Katherin A. Rogers, "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 32 (1996): 165–86, doi:10.1017/S0034412500024215.

4 E.g. Oliver D. Crisp, *Analyzing Doctrine: Toward a Systematic Theology* (Baylor Univ. Press, 2019), 54ff.

5 Steven Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account* (Bloomsbury, 2016), 194.

6 R.T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2016), chapter 3.

7 Hugh J. McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God* (Indiana Univ. Press, 2012), 12–14.

8 James E. Dolezal, *God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 198–199. Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account*, 50–51.

> whole source of all that is good—even as the religious and pious are wont to speak concerning God.[9]

Irenaeus's point was that God is a being not composed of anything lesser than himself. Over a century later, Hilary of Poitiers gave a similar conviction:

> For that God is not after human fashion of a composite being, so that in Him there is a difference of kind between Possessor and Possessed; but all that He is is life, a nature, that is, complete, absolute and infinite, not composed of dissimilar elements but with one life permeating the whole.[10]

Hilary points out the ontological distinction between God and man. Humans are composites, wholes made of parts, and God is wholly unlike this, He is not composed of things lesser than himself.

The distinction between a partless creator and creatures composed of parts is a major theme among proponents of simplicity. Dolezal elucidates the doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS) as follows: "Though the doctrine has numerous positive implications for one's understanding of God's existence and essence . . . it is formally articulated apophatically as God's *lack* of parts and denies that he is physically, logically, or metaphysically composite."[11] Similarly, Duby defines simplicity as the "teaching that God is not composed of parts but rather is identical with his essence, existence and, attributes, each of which is identical with the whole being of the triune God considered under some aspect."[12] This indicates there is no composition or division in the divine nature and the consideration behind this claim is such that if God were composed of parts, he would depend on those parts to be what he is.[13]

At this juncture, it is important to note what the classical theist considers to be a metaphysical part. One might be surprised to find out just how wide-reaching the classical notion of metaphysical parts extends. According to Christopher Hughes, the classical tradition affirms that genus, differentia,

9 Irenaeus of Lyons, "Irenaeus Against Heresies," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A.Cleveland Coxe (Christian Literature Company, 1885), 374.

10 Hilary of Poitiers, "On the Trinity," in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church Volume 9: St. Hilary of Poitiers, John of Damascus*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. E.W. Watson (Christian Literature Company, 1899), 150.

11 Dolezal, *God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness*, 31.

12 Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account*, 2.

13 Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (Ignatius Press, 2017), 189–190.

forms, accidental properties, essence, and existence are metaphysical parts.[14] Thus, classical theists like Peter Lombard, deny that the simple God has any of this metaphysical complexity.[15] On this understanding, if a being is not identical to its properties or its existence, etc., then this being will be a composite object. To be sure, Hughes points out that some contemporary metaphysicians will find it curious that "existence" could be a proper part of an object, but this claim is needed to help articulate divine simplicity.[16] This is why classical theists maintain that God's essence is identical to God's existence.[17]

As Jeffrey Brower and Michael Bergmann explain, the simple God does not possess any properties, forms, immanent universals, or tropes.[18] Instead, there is the simple, undivided substance that we call God. According to Augustine and Rogers, this simple substance does not have any intrinsic or extrinsic properties because a simple God does not possess any properties at all.[19] Further, the classical theist says that God's substance cannot be distinct from God's existence because, as pointed out by Hughes, existence counts as a metaphysical part.[20]

In articulating DDS, classical theologians often say that God's attributes are identical to God's essence and thus identical with one another.[21] Yet, when the classical theologian or philosopher predicates various properties to God, she is saying that God does not possess distinct properties because the properties attributed to God are all numerically identical with His essence, which

14 Christopher Hughes, "Aquinas on the Nature and Implications of Divine Simplicity," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10 (2018), 2.

15 Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book 1: The Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Giulio Silano (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007), VIII.3.

16 Hughes, "Aquinas on the Nature and Implications of Divine Simplicity," 11–13.

17 Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God*, 188.

18 Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey Brower, "A Theistic Argument Against Platonism (and in Support of Truthmakers and Divine Simplicity," in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, ed. Dean W. Zimmerman, vol. 2 (Oxford Univ. Press, 2006). 359–360.

19 Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (New City Press, 1991), VII.10. Rogers, "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," 166. Cf. Henry Church, *Miscellanea Philo-Theologica* (I.N. for John Rothwell, 1638), 23. When connected to immutability and timelessness, Paul Helm says that God cannot undergo any intrinsic or extrinsic changes, nor mere Cambridge changes. Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time. Second* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 19–29, 87–88.

20 Hughes, "Aquinas on the Nature and Implications of Divine Simplicity," 11–13.

21 James E. Dolezal, *All That Is In God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 41–42.

in turn are identical with God's existence.[22] Of course, when one speaks of properties in this way, it is just a heuristic device; classical theists hold that God does not possess distinct properties.[23] As Rogers explains, the simple God of classical theism does not have properties because God is His act of knowing, doing, and being. Moreover, Rogers says that these acts are identical to each other such that there is only one act, and this one act is identical to God. In other words, God is act.[24] To be clear, the "is" here is the "is" of identity. As William Mann explains, "It is the most distinctive and perhaps most scandalous feature of the DDS. God is his attributes, and the "is" here is the "is" of identity."[25] When classical theists, like Thomas Aquinas, say that God's one act is identical to the divine substance/existence, they have in mind strict identity.[26] As Stephen Charnock points out, if God's will or act is somehow distinct from God, then God would not be the most simple being.[27] As Matthew Levering explains, "the distinction between God's nature and will is in our understanding; it is not a real distinction in God, given God's absolute simplicity."[28] We emphasize *in our understanding* because any distinctions that one might wish to make in the simple God fail to apply to God at all, but would rather be conceptual distinctions in our head only. In fact, various proponents of DDS say that even conceptual distinctions are altogether foreign to God.[29]

The supposed theological fecundity of DDS is that it establishes other classical divine attributes. Nicholas Wolterstorff states, "If one grants God's simplicity, then one also has to grant a large number of other divine attributes: immateriality, eternity, immutability, having no unrealized potentialities, etc."[30] Edward Feser proclaims that divine simplicity is the core of classi-

22 Katherin A. Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2000), 24.
23 Dolezal, *God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness*, 125.
24 Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 27–29. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. English Dominican Fathers (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1934), I.76 and I.82.
25 William E. Mann, *God, Modality, and Morality* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2015) 22.
26 Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.10.
27 Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (James Nichol, 1864), 387.
28 Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator* (Baker Academic, 2017), 85.
29 Rogers, "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," 167.
30 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Inquiring About God*, ed. Terence Cuneo (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 91.

cal theism.[31] He writes, "classical theism and the doctrine of divine simplicity necessarily go together."[32]

II. DIVINE FREEDOM

Again, our focus is on classical theism within Christian theology. Christian theologians have overwhelmingly affirmed that God is free in the sense that God is the source of His intentional actions, and that God has the ability to do otherwise.[33] The classical Christian tradition understands God's actions to be both "intentional and free" and takes these as "guideposts for reflection on the doctrine of creation."[34] As Christian theologians have reflected on how this relates to creation, they affirm that God is free to create or refrain from creating the universe.[35] Classical Christian theology has typically gone further and said that God's freedom to refrain from creating is grounded in the fact that God does not need to create for God to be essentially who He is. As John Webster explains, "the triune God could be without the world; no perfection of God would be lost, no triune bliss compromised, were the world not to exist; no enhancement of God is achieved by the world's existence."[36]

31 Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God*, 190.

32 Ibid., 195.

33 Eleonore Stump, *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers* (Marquette Univ. Press, 2016), 79–80. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. English Dominican Fathers (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1936) I.19.10.

34 Thomas M. Ward, *Divine Ideas* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2020), 5.

35 Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 159. Norman Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?," in *Being and Goodness: The Concepts of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Cornell Univ. Press, 1991), 208. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Baker Books, 2004), 378. David B. Burrell, "Creatio Ex Nihilo Recovered," *Modern Theology* 29 (2013), 5. Ian A. McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 43. Keith Ward, *Christ and the Cosmos: A Reformulation of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015), 19. Brian Leftow, "Two Pictures of Divine Choice," in *Free Will and Classical Theism: The Significance of Freedom in Perfect Being Theology*, ed. Hugh J. McCann (Oxford Univ. Press, 2016), 152. Jeremy W. Skrzypek, "A Better Solution to the General Problem of Creation," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 2017 (2017), 148.

36 John Webster, "Trinity and Creation," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12 (2010), 12.

One of the motivations for the classical Christian affirmation of divine freedom is to distinguish the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* from other cosmogonies that teach that the universe necessarily and eternally emanates from God.[37] In order to deny that the created universe is a necessary emanation from God, Christian theologians have offered a careful distinction within God's actions. According to Webster, a proper Christian understanding of creation involves distinguishing between God's immanent and transitive operations. God's immanent operations are actions within God that have God as their aim. Webster gives the example of the Father's begetting of the Son as a case of immanent operations. Immanent operations are acts that God necessarily performs. These are distinct from transitive actions that have an external object as their end or aim. Webster gives the example of creation as a case of transitive actions. According to Webster, transitive actions are not necessarily performed by God. Instead, they are free, gracious gifts from God.[38] Webster says that God's "work of creation is not the natural overflow of his self-diffusive being, but intentional, personal action."[39]

With this in mind, we define divine freedom as follows.

> Divine Freedom: 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.

Within classical Christian theology, the non-necessity, or contingency, of God's transitive act has long been thought of as the source of the universe's contingent existence. According to Gloria Frost, within classical thought, the contingent existence of the universe is due to the fact that God has contingently caused the universe to exist. God is the contingent cause of the universe if and only if God is free to cause the universe to exist or free to refrain from causing the universe to exist. The reason that God has the freedom to

37 Laura L. Garcia, "Divine Freedom and Creation," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 42 (1992), 192. Paul M. Blowers, *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 186.

38 John Webster, "'Love Is Also a Lover': Creatio Ex Nihilo and Creaturely Goodness," *Modern Theology* 29 (2013), 160. Cf. W.G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1 (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), 393–394.

39 Webster, "'Love Is Also a Lover': Creatio Ex Nihilo and Creaturely Goodness," 161.

refrain from causing the universe to exist is that God's perfect nature does not require the existence of the universe.[40]

This brings us to another reason Christian theologians have placed such a strong emphasis on God's freedom to create or refrain from creating the universe. Classical Christian theology says that the contingency of the existence of the universe is ultimately grounded in God's free and contingent act to cause the universe to exist. Classical Christian theology is also committed to God's infallible causal power. God's causal power is infallible in that, if God wills or causes some state of affairs *x*, then it is not possible for *x* to fail to obtain.[41] This is sometimes captured by saying that if God intentionally acts to bring about some state of affairs, then that state of affairs is hypothetically necessary. This is important to note for two reasons. First, with creaturely agents, it is sometimes the case that a creature intends to bring about a certain effect and fails to bring about the intended effect. As Rogers notes, this cannot be the case with God.[42] Second, this is worth noting as it will play a role in some of the responses to the modal collapse argument. Something is hypothetically, or conditionally, necessary if it must follow from some prior conditions that need not have obtained. Hypothetical necessity is distinct from absolute necessity. If something is absolutely necessary, it cannot be otherwise. As the classical theist Paul Helm maintains, the universe exists of hypothetical necessity because the existence of the universe is freely brought about by the intentional action of an infallibly omnipotent God.[43]

The contingency of God's free act of creating the universe is crucial for the classical theist to maintain that the universe only exists of hypothetical necessity. The worry is that if God creates the universe of absolute necessity, then everything that occurs in the universe occurs of absolute necessity as well. Why? The source of the universe's contingency is grounded in the free

40 Gloria Frost, "Aquinas and Scotus on the Source of Contingency," in *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Robert Pasnau, vol. 2 (Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), 51–57. For a discussion of this in Reformed thought, see Richard A. Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought* (Baker Academic, 2017).

41 Frost, "Aquinas and Scotus on the Source of Contingency," 46.

42 Katherin A. Rogers, "An Anselmian Approach to Divine Simplicity," *Faith & Philosophy* 37 (2020), 313.

43 Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time*, 176–177.

and contingent will of God.[44] If God's will to create the universe is absolutely necessary, and thus not contingent, then the grounds for the contingency of the universe will disappear. This is called a modal collapse. On a modal collapse, the distinctions between necessity and contingency all collapse, and in the case of DDS, the distinctions collapse into necessity.

At this point, one might wonder how the necessity of God's creative act could transfer over to everything that takes place within the history of the universe. One might be tempted to think that, even if God necessarily creates the universe that would only entail that the universe necessarily exists. It would not entail that everything that happens within the history of the universe is necessary.

We reply that this entailment might not seem obvious on certain models of God that affirm an open future, such as open theism. However, the entailment should be evident on classical theism. What is important to know about classical theism is that God's transitive act to create a universe covers not merely the beginning of the universe, but also everything that takes place within history.[45] Traditionally, classical theists say that God's transitive act of creating a universe is an infallible and efficacious decree that a specific, entire timeline should occur.[46] In contemporary parlance, classical theists like Alexander Pruss say that God's creative act is to actualize an entire world.[47] What this signifies is that the contingency of this entire timeline is grounded in the contingency of God's freedom to create or refrain from creating the universe. Hence, if God necessarily creates the universe, then everything that happens in the history of the universe is also necessary. This is a modal collapse, and classical theists like Helm wish to avoid it by affirming the contingency and freedom of God's creative act.[48]

Given the above position about God's freedom over creation, one will not be surprised to find classical theists arguing as follows. Call this the Freedom Argument. It starts with the assumption of divine freedom as defined above. From there, the Freedom Argument proceeds as follows.

44 Robert C. Koons, "Divine Persons as Relational Qua-Objects," *Religious Studies* 54 (2018), 344.
45 Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 394.
46 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 104–106.
47 Alexander R. Pruss, "Divine Creative Freedom," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig, vol. 7 (Oxford Univ. Press, 2017), 235–236.
48 Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time*, 171.

(F1) God is free to create the universe or not create the universe.

(F2) God has infallible omnipotence=def. whatever God intentionally acts to bring about cannot possibly fail to obtain.

(F3) If God intentionally acts to create the universe, then the universe cannot possibly fail to obtain.

(F4) If God's intentional act to create the universe is absolutely necessary, then the universe exists of absolute necessity.

(F5) If God's intentional act to create the universe is contingent, then the universe exists of hypothetical necessity.

(F6) Given (F1), God's intentional act to create the universe is contingent.

(F7) Thus, the universe exists of hypothetical necessity.

As we have already noted, divine freedom and (F1) are widely endorsed within classical Christian theology, including contemporary proponents of divine simplicity like Pruss.[49] They are even widely endorsed by the majority of Reformed theologians.[50] We emphasize this because Reformed theologians and other theological determinists sometimes, though not always, deny that human freedom involves the principle of alternate possibilities. Sometimes contemporary Reformed theologians say that the principle of alternate possibilities is a necessary condition of human libertarian free will, and Reformed theologians reject a libertarian conception of human freedom in favor of a compatibilist conception of human freedom. That is, they affirm that human freedom is compatible with being causally determined by God.

49 Pruss, "Divine Creative Freedom," 213–214.

50 Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought*, chapter 5, and 303–304. Cf. Dolezal, *God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness*, 188. Steven J. Duby, "Divine Simplicity, Divine Freedom, and the Contingency of Creation: Dogmatic Responses to Some Analytic Questions," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 6 (2012), 131. Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account*, 198. Paul Helm, "How Are We to Think of God's Freedom," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 61. Paul Helm, "The Augustinian-Calvinist View," in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (InterVarsity Press, 2001), 157, 182–183. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 470. Webster, "'Love Is Also a Lover': Creatio Ex Nihilo and Creaturely Goodness," 160–161.

We have two thoughts on this, both of which are related to a common confusion in theological discussions over freedom. First, the principle of alternate possibilities states that an agent acts freely if she has the ability to do otherwise. Divine freedom and (F1) are statements about divine agency, and not human agency. The Reformed theologian Terrance Tiessen states that a classical Reformed theologian is committed to divine freedom and (F1) regardless of her views on the principle of alternate possibilities as it relates to human free will.[51] By way of example, consider the following statement from the Reformed theologian, A.W. Pink on God's decree of creation and predestination:

> God was alone when He made His decrees, and His determinations were influenced by no external cause. He was free to decree or not to decree, and to decree one thing and not another. This liberty we must ascribe to Him who is supreme, independent, and sovereign in all His doings.[52]

This is a clear affirmation of divine freedom and (F1).

Second, we say that this talk of libertarian freedom and compatibilist freedom is based on a confusion. There is no such thing as libertarian freedom and compatibilist freedom. As Michael Rea points out, there is simply freedom.[53] This is a common mistake in contemporary theological discussions about freedom. To be clear, the ability to do otherwise does not belong solely to libertarians because there are compatibilists who affirm it as well.[54] Especially within the Reformed tradition of theology.[55] Libertarianism and compatibilism are not about what freedom is, but rather whether or not freedom is compatible with causal determinism. The libertarian and the compatibilist can both agree that freedom involves the ability to do otherwise. According

51 Terrance L. Tiessen, "A Calvinist Perspective in the Conversation About Middle Knowledge," in *Calvinism and Middle Knowledge: A Conversation*, ed. John D. Laing, Kirk R. MacGregor, and Greg Welty (Pickwick Publications, 2019), 208–215.

52 Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Baker Books, 1975), 15.

53 Michael Rea, *Metaphysics: The Basics* (Routledge, 2014), 153.

54 Leigh Vicens and Simon Kittle, *God and Human Freedom* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2019), 56–57. Ciro De Florio and Aldo Frigerio, *Divine Omniscience and Human Free Will: A Logical and Metaphysical Analysis* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 95.

55 Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 107. Oliver D. Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology* (Fortress Press, 2014), chapter 3. Jesse Couenhoven, *Predestination: A Guide for the Perplexed* (T&T Clarke, 2018), 103–106. Cf. Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought*.

to Rea, what the libertarian and compatibilist disagree over is whether or not freedom is compatible with determinism.[56] Our argument is not assuming libertarianism or compatibilism in divine freedom and (F1). Both libertarians and compatibilists can affirm divine freedom and (F1).

As we have already stated, (F2) is a commitment of classical theism. (F3) and (F4) follow straightforwardly from (F2). (F4) and (F5) captures the classical theist's claims about absolute necessity and hypothetical necessity. Their truth is also assumed in the classical distinction between God's immanent and transitive actions. The inference from (F1) to (F6) follows from the classical theist's understanding of divine freedom, and the classical theist's strategy for avoiding a modal collapse. The conclusion in (F7) is derived by modus ponens from (F5) and (F6). Further, (F7) is not only derived by modus ponens, it is also widely endorsed in classical Christian theology by thinkers like Thomas Aquinas.[57]

III. THE MODAL COLLAPSE ARGUMENT

There is a serious problem with maintaining (F7) and the strong classical form of DDS. Recall that DDS says that God's act is identical to God's existence. Various philosophers have pointed out that this feature of DDS is inconsistent with divine freedom. Call this the Modal Collapse Argument (MCA). The MCA has been discussed by various thinkers over the years, but it has recently been accused of logical invalidity.[58] In our opinion, the articulations of the MCA that appear to be invalid are not natural interpretations of the MCA as stated by its proponents. We believe that a natural interpretation of the argument avoids any obvious logical invalidity.[59] The argument goes as follows.

56 Rea, *Metaphysics: The Basics*, 152–154.

57 Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.83.3. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.19.3.

58 Cf. Tomaszewski, "Collapsing the Modal Collapse Argument: On an Invalid Argument Against Divine Simplicity."

59 It is worth noting that there is a general difficulty with developing arguments against divine simplicity because there is a general problem with stating divine simplicity in logical terms. Given the identity statements of divine simplicity, the doctrine cannot easily be stated in first-order logic. For discussion, see Anders Kraal, "Logic and Divine Simplicity," *Philosophy Compass* 6 (2011): 282–294. As we see it, this is a problem for divine simplicity.

(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.

(M1) is uncontroversial among classical theists. Since the time of Aristotle, God has been envisaged in Western philosophical theology as a being that exists of absolute necessity.[60] (M2) is true on pain of violating identity.[61] Classical theists need identity in order to articulate DDS, so it cannot be abandoned by the classical theist. As we noted above, (M3) and (M4) are explicitly stated in DDS by classical theists like Aquinas, Dolezal, Levering, Charnock, and Rogers.[62] That means that God's one act is absolutely necessary. Hence, (M5).

From (M5), one can begin to derive a modal collapse. Again, a modal collapse occurs when the typical modal distinctions between necessity, possibility, and contingency are all collapsed into one category. In this case, all of the modal distinctions are collapsed into absolute necessity. Something is absolutely necessary if and only if it cannot be any other way. We begin to derive the modal collapse by drawing out an implication from (M3).

(M6) God's intentional act to create the universe is identical to God's one divine act.

Before moving forward, we note two complaints from some contemporary proponents of DDS. First, some have said that there is an ambiguity in what phrases like "God's act" refer to. For example, this has led some to charge that all versions of the MCA are invalid because they wrongly assume

60 Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 40. J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (InterVarsity Press, 2017), 510.

61 By "identity" we mean the law of the indiscernibility of identicals: $(x)(y)[(x = y) \rightarrow (P)(Px \leftrightarrow Py)]$.

62 Dolezal, *All That Is In God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism*, 59. Katherin A. Rogers, *The Anselmian Approach to God and Creation* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 35–41. Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 23.1–2.

that "God's act" rigidly designates God.[63] We reply that, in the case of the simple God, the designation of God's acts in (M6) is rigid because God's intentional actions are *identical* to God's existence, as is explicitly endorsed by classical theists in premise (M3). The proponent of DDS, William Vallicella, says that the rigid designation is entailed by the fact that the simple God's act and existence are identical.[64] As Brian Leftow explains, classical theists explicitly endorse the claim that 'God's act' co-refers to God because God's act is identical to God's existence.[65] As Rogers explains, "All the terms we correctly use to describe God refer to this one act."[66] In other words, 'God's act of creation' rigidly designates God on pain of violating the identity claims of divine simplicity. To say otherwise is to abandon divine simplicity.

The second complaint is a closely related complaint to the first. It also claims that there is an ambiguity in how God's acts are being understood in the argument. In order to understand this complaint, Steven Nemes points out that there are two senses in which one can ascribe an action to God: the causal sense and the effectual sense. According to Nemes, "In the causal sense, the ascription refers to that in virtue of which God produces His effect, namely, Himself, His being with which He is identical." Nemes goes on to say that, "In the effectual sense, on the other hand, it refers to the effect which God produces, some contingently existing state of affairs, insofar as it is caused by God."[67] As Nemes explains, God is only identical to His creative act in the causal sense, but not in the effectual sense.[68]

If we understand this complaint correctly, it is saying that statements like (M6) are ambiguous between the causal and effectual sense, thus rendering the argument invalid. In reply, we say that (M6) is not ambiguous because "God's intentional act to create the universe" is speaking in the causal sense.

63 Tomaszewski, "Collapsing the Modal Collapse Argument: On an Invalid Argument Against Divine Simplicity," 280.

64 https://maverickphilosopher.typepad.com/maverick_philosopher/2018/08/more-on-divine-simplicity-and-modal-collapse.html

65 Brian Leftow, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity and Divine Freedom," in *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump*, ed. Kevin Timpe (Routledge, 2009), 28–29. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.73.4–5.

66 Rogers, *The Anselmian Approach to God and Creation*, 40.

67 Steven Nemes, "Divine Simplicity Does Not Entail Modal Collapse," in *Roses and Reasons: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Carlos Frederico Calvet Silveira and Alin Tat (Eikon, 2020), 112.

68 Nemes, "Divine Simplicity Does Not Entail Modal Collapse," 113.

In fact, Brian Leftow goes further by claiming that Thomistic metaphysics rules out reading this statement in the effectual sense.[69] By our lights, premise (M6) is referring to an intrinsic divine action because it is assuming the very popular classical view that God's actions are intrinsic to God. (However, we will later consider an extrinsic model of divine action.[70]) Further, we are assuming a fairly standard scholastic view that actions are denominated by their intended objects.[71] Hence, the premise refers to the created universe as the object of God's intentional action. Moreover, we reply that if one wished to refer only to an effect of God's act, then there are many better ways to indicate this than using terms that quite obviously refer to the cause and not the effect. For example, we take the following statement from the Thomistic philosopher Gaven Kerr to be a fairly standard, and unambiguous usage of God's act of creation. Kerr says, "The act of creation is God's making use of His power to grant *esse* to things; what is created, what one would call the product, are the creatures we see all around us."[72]

Hence, as we see it, (M6) is secure because it is explicitly endorsed by proponents of DDS. According to Aquinas, "The manifold actions ascribed to God, like intelligence, volition, *the production of things*, and the like, are not so many different things, since each of these actions in God is His very being, which is one and the same thing." (*Summa Contra Gentiles* II.10) We emphasize *the production of things* in this quote because Aquinas has the creation of the universe in view here. That is a clear endorsement of (M6). Bonaventure concurs. He says that God's awareness of what occurs in the universe, His knowledge of the things to come, His providential acts, His act of predestining this particular universe and timeline, and so on, are all the same one divine act. This one act is identical to God.[73] According to Rogers, the simple God is identical to His knowledge and action regarding our world.[74] Again,

69 Leftow, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity and Divine Freedom," 31.

70 W. Matthews Grant refers to the intrinsic model of divine action as the Popular Model because it is the most widely held view. See, W. Matthews Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality: The Dual Sources Account* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 56.

71 Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality*, 77–78.

72 Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2018), 82.

73 Bonaventure, *The Works of Bonaventure: The Breviloquium II*, trans. Jose Vinck (St Anthony Guild Press, 1963), 58–59.

74 Rogers, "An Anselmian Approach to Divine Simplicity," 310.

we have a clear, endorsement of (M6) from major classical proponents of DDS.

With that alleged ambiguity cleared up, we move on to the next step in the MCA. Here is where problems arise from trying to maintain divine simplicity and divine freedom. From (M1)-(M6), one can also infer,

> (M7) If God's one divine act is absolutely necessary, then God's intentional act to create the universe is absolutely necessary.
>
> (M8) Therefore, God's intentional act to create the universe is absolutely necessary.

(M7) is a straightforward entailment from the identity claims of the doctrine of divine simplicity. God's divine acts cannot be identical to each other if they do not share the same modal status.[75] If God's one divine act has a different modal status than His intentional act to create the universe, then the two would at best be in a constitution relation. A constitution relation is said to be a kind of sameness without identity. Divine simplicity is not interested in constitution, but rather demands identity. Identity demands that God's one divine act and God's act to create the universe have the same modal status. Since God's one divine act is absolutely necessary, anything identical to that act will also have to be absolutely necessary on pain of violating the identity claims of divine simplicity.

The conclusion in (M8) is derived from (M7) and (M5) by modus ponens. To arrive at the modal collapse, recall premise (F4), which says that if God's intentional act to create the universe is absolutely necessary, then the universe exists of absolute necessity. From (M8) and (F4), we derive,

> (M9) Therefore, the universe exists of absolute necessity.

We now have derived a modal collapse from the classical theist's commitments to DDS. This is a problem because, as we discussed in section 2, most classical theists wish to say that God's transitive acts are contingent and gracious, thus denying the conclusion in (M9). As we noted above, the act of creating this universe is meant to be a contingent, gracious divine act. On classical theism, God's intentional act of creating our universe is an infallible

75 One cannot coherently hold that God's act is modally contingent and is numerically identical to God's essence, which is modally necessary.

decree to bring about an entire, specific timeline. Thus, God's predestining particular humans, bringing about a particular plan of salvation, and being incarnate in Jesus Christ are all included in this gracious intentional act of creating. The classical theist wishes to maintain that God is free in that God did not have to perform this contingent and gracious act.[76] Yet, if these intentional actions are identical to God's absolutely necessary existence, it is not possible for God to have done otherwise.[77] To say that God could have done otherwise is to say that God could have existed otherwise, and this is explicitly denied by proponents of DDS like Dolezal and Rogers.[78] Thus, these divine actions are performed of absolute necessity, which entails that neither God nor creatures have any freedom. This is because the entire way that things are is the only way that things could be. There just is no other possible state of affairs. This is a very serious problem for classical theism.

Not only have we derived a modal collapse from DDS, but we can also go one step further and derive a contradiction between classical theism's commitment to DDS and divine freedom. From (M9) and (F7), we get a contradiction. Recall that (F7) says that the universe exists of hypothetical necessity. Again, the classical theist maintains that hypothetical necessity is not the same modal status as absolute necessity. From this, we can derive the contradiction,

> (M10) The universe exists of absolute necessity and the universe does not exist of absolute necessity.

(M10) is a clear contradiction. Hence, the proponent of DDS will need to reject one of the premises that lead to this conclusion. Which one? If she wishes to maintain God's freedom, and the source of the universe's contingency, she cannot reject (F1). If she wishes to maintain divine simplicity, she cannot reject (M3) and (M4). We don't see how, or why, any classical theist would want to deny (M1), the claim that God's existence is absolutely necessary. Moreover, as we pointed out before, the classical theist cannot deny (M2) without losing the ability to articulate DDS. It seems there aren't many options left for the classical theist at this point.

76 Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 470.

77 This is due to the transitivity of identity.

78 Rogers, *The Anselmian Approach to God and Creation*, 45–47. Dolezal, *God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness*, 198–200.

To be sure, a classical theist will insist that something has got to be wrong with the argument because God does perform contingent and gracious acts. Hence, in the next section, we will consider some possible rejoinders to the argument.

IV. POTENTIAL REPLIES TO THE MODAL COLLAPSE ARGUMENT

In this section, we survey some potential replies to the MCA. We shall argue that each attempt fails.

Rejoinder 1: Bite the Bullet.

Some classical theists, such as Rogers and McCann, are willing to bite the bullet and admit that this is the only way the world could be.[79] Thus, embracing the modal collapse in (M9). We note, however, that Rogers prefers to call it "modal simplicity," but the result is the same.[80] Rogers maintains that embracing the modal collapse is really not so bad.[81] Yet, most theologians find the modal collapse a deeply dissatisfying bullet to bite.[82] The Islamic tradition found it so dissatisfying that it condemned necessitarianism during the middle ages.[83] As Norman Kretzmann points out, most classical theists insist that God could have refrained from creating, and thus could have existed without the universe.[84] In other words, they wish to deny the necessity of God's transitive acts.

Why is this bullet so bad to bite? We shall restrict ourselves to mentioning two reasons why this option is so unappealing. First, as Leftow mentions, all of our modal intuitions scream against the idea of a modal collapse.[85] It is just so intuitive to think that the way the world is could have been otherwise. The notion that everything is absolutely necessary is deeply counterintuitive.

79 Rogers, *The Anselmian Approach to God and Creation*, 68–69. McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God*, 170. Hugh J. McCann, "Free Will and the Mythology of Causation," in *Alternative Concepts of God: Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine*, ed. Andrei A. Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa (Oxford Univ. Press, 2016), 249–250.

80 Rogers, "An Anselmian Approach to Divine Simplicity, 318"

81 Katherin A. Rogers, "Classical Theism and the Multiverse," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 88 (2020): 23–39.

82 Cf. Garcia, "Divine Freedom and Creation." Skrzypek, "A Better Solution to the General Problem of Creation."

83 Anthony Robert Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 133.

84 Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?," 208.

85 Leftow, "Two Pictures of Divine Choice," 167.

To highlight how difficult it is to accept a modal collapse, we wish to briefly mention a tension in the work of Rogers. In a recent article, Rogers tries to defend the notion that God does not have alternative options because God must perform the best possible creative act, and there is only one unique best possible creative act. Rogers claims that introducing alternative options into the divine will would not enhance God's perfection one bit.[86] This is a position that she defends at length in her article. Hence, one might be tempted to think that biting the bullet on the modal collapse isn't so bad. One can extrapolate from Rogers' position that she is denying divine freedom and (F1) of our argument, thus avoiding the entailment to (F6) and (F7), and ultimately avoiding the contradiction in (M10).[87] In which case, Rogers could maintain DDS and the modal collapse without any contradiction elsewhere in her theological claims about God's freedom.

Yet, such an extrapolation might be hasty because Rogers does seem to affirm divine freedom and (F1). At the end of Rogers' article defending the notion that God does not have alternative options, she asserts that God could have done otherwise, and she suggests that a classical theist might need to say that there is an element of contingency in the divine nature.[88] This strikes us as surprising, and we take it as evidence of just how loud the scream is of our modal intuitions against the modal collapse.

There is a second reason why accepting a modal collapse is unappealing to Christian theology. Laura Garcia points out that a modal collapse prevents one from making standard moves in theodicy. Typically, Christian theologians will wish to distinguish between God's active and permissive will in their doctrine of divine providence and theodicy. God's permissive will says that God is permitting or allowing some particular evil to occur that need not occur.[89] On this line of thought, God's permission implies that God need not have allowed this particular event to occur and that God could have done otherwise by preventing the event from occurring. Yet, when one bites the bullet and accepts a modal collapse, the notion of God's permissive will be-

86 Katherin A. Rogers, "Foreknowledge, Freedom, and Vicious Circles: Anselm vs Open Theism," in *Philosophical Essays Against Open Theism*, ed. Benjamin H. Arbour (Routledge, 2019), 95.

87 Rogers, "An Anselmian Approach to Divine Simplicity," 317.

88 Rogers, "Foreknowledge, Freedom, and Vicious Circles: Anselm vs Open Theism," 107.

89 Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 406.

comes incoherent. Why? God could not have done otherwise, so there is no sense in which God can be said to be permitting a particular event to occur. As Garcia explains, God cannot prevent an event from occurring if that event is absolutely necessary.[90] This is a serious problem for philosophers like Rogers and McCann since both speak of God allowing or permitting evil to occur in their approach to theodicy.[91] If they wish to bite the bullet on the modal collapse, they can no longer make this move in their theodicies.

Rejoinder 2: Mystery

By far, the most common response from classical theists is to appeal to ineffable mystery. One version of the mystery card says that God's freedom and the contingency of the universe are mysteries beyond our ken to understand.[92] According to the classical theist Timothy Pawl, one can appeal to mystery in theology when one is asked to give a positive account of something that is beyond one's ken. However, Pawl points out that one cannot appeal to mystery when one is faced with a derived contradiction because one's beliefs have been shown to entail a contradiction.[93] Contradictions are not mysteries. Contradictions are necessarily false.

In the case of our modal collapse argument, the classical theist has a derived contradiction on her hands—i.e. premise (M10). To avoid a contradiction, one must specify which premise in the argument that one is rejecting. Appealing to mystery in the face of a derived contradiction fails to identify which premise of the argument one is rejecting, and will thus be of little use to the classical theist. As William Hasker points out, an appeal to mystery still leaves us none the wiser as to which premise in the argument the classical theist rejects. To be clear, *nothing* about this strategy removes the contradiction.[94]

However, a classical theist might say that there is a more nuanced way to appeal to mystery that actually identifies which premise in the argument she rejects. Perhaps one might try to deny (M2) by saying that there are different

90 Garcia, "Divine Freedom and Creation," 204–205.

91 Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, 136–152.

92 Dolezal, *God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness*, 206–212. Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God*, 224–226.

93 Timothy Pawl, *In Defense of Conciliar Christology: A Philosophical Essay* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2016), 89–90.

94 William Hasker, "Is Divine Simplicity a Mistake?," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 90 (2016), 717.

kinds of necessity in God. Recall that (M2) says that anything identical to God's existence must be absolutely necessary. On this strategy, one says that God's act of creation is a different kind of necessity from God's absolutely necessary existence.[95] For example, one might say that God's existence is of absolute necessity whereas God's act of creation is of hypothetical necessity. This approach is taken by Levering. He admits that God's act is identical to God's existence, but he explicitly maintains that it is a mystery as to how the act and existence do not share the same kind of necessity.[96]

We find this approach implausible because it is impossible for two things to be strictly identical and have different kinds of necessity. There is no mystery here, there is only a contradiction. As this strategy clearly assumes, hypothetical necessity is not the same thing as absolute necessity. The non-identity of the two is built into Thomistic approaches to modality as well as to more contemporary approaches to the metaphysics of modality, so we are not engaged in some kind of question begging against classical theists in this regard.[97] Ultimately, what this strategy looks like is that one is rejecting a premise that entails a contradiction, and then replacing it with a premise that entails a contradiction. We do not advise taking this sort of strategy.

Rejoinder 3: God's Act Necessarily Exists, but the Universe Does Not

Another kind of response involves one granting that God's act of creating the universe is absolutely necessary, but denies that this entails a modal collapse. This strategy says that God's one divine act is the same across all possible worlds because God's act is identical to God. However, this strategy claims that God's act does not necessarily bring about a universe.[98] Within the context of our argument, this strategy is denying premise (F3). Recall that premise (F3) says that if God intentionally acts to create the universe, then the universe cannot possibly fail to obtain. Further recall that (F3) depends on the infallibility of omnipotence as defined in premise (F2). God has infallible omnipotence in that whatever God intentionally acts to bring about cannot possibly fail to obtain. As Bonaventure puts it, God's will "is so effective that

95 Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account*, 120.

96 Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator*, 103–105.

97 Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.83.

98 E.g. Nemes, "Divine Simplicity Does Not Entail Modal Collapse." Cf. Koons, "Divine Persons as Relational Qua-Objects," 339.

it could never be obstructed."[99] As we understand things, there are only two ways to deny (F3). First, one can deny the infallibility of God's omnipotence. Second, one can deny that God intentionally acts to create the universe.

Consider the denial of God's infallible omnipotence. We reply that this is implausible. The classical theist is committed to the infallibility of God's omnipotence. As we pointed out before, on classical Christian theology, God's creative act involves God intending to bring about a particular universe with a particular timeline. Given the infallibility of omnipotence, God's act to create the universe necessarily brings about the existence of a particular universe and a particular timeline.

It seems to us that denying the infallibility of God's omnipotence is a very high cost for the classical theist. If God's omnipotent actions are not infallible, then God could intend to perform some actions and not get the result that He intended. As TJ Mawson explains, such a God could royally bodge up history, and would thus not be maximally powerful or maximally good.[100] Hence, we don't see this as a viable option for the classical theist to take.

Alternatively, one could affirm the infallibility of omnipotence, yet still, try to maintain that God's one divine act does not necessarily bring about the universe. On this version of the rejoinder, offered by Nemes, one could say that God does not intend to bring about a particular universe or a particular timeline because God does not perform any intentional actions.[101] We say that the cost of this strategy is quite high for the Christian classical theist because it is denying anything that looks like a classical doctrine of divine freedom, creation, predestination, and providence. It does not even look like an open theist account of creation and providence. Thus, leaving us to conclude that no Christian can consistently maintain this strategy with the rest of Christian doctrine. As discussed above, the classical understanding of divine freedom includes God's intentional actions. According to Thomas Ward, it is God's intentional action that serve as a guidepost for classical Christian reflection on the doctrine of creation.[102] As the classical theist Ron Highfield explains, "God's act of creating is not irrational or arbitrary but is accompa-

99 Bonaventure, *The Works of Bonaventure: The Breviloquium II*, 62.
100 T.J. Mawson, *The Divine Attributes* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2018), 41.
101 Nemes, "Divine Simplicity Does Not Entail Modal Collapse," 116–117.
102 Ward, *Divine Ideas*, 5.

nied by God's intentions and is directed toward an end."[103] As a general rule of thumb, we advise against defending classical theism by rejecting the core teachings of classical Christian theism. Yet we say that the rejection of core classical Christian teachings goes further.

W. Matthews Grant points out several serious problems for a strategy like this, but we shall limit our focus to one problem. On this view, God's act is intrinsic to God, and God's act is the exact same across all possible worlds. According to Grant, this entails a denial of classical theism's affirmation that God has the ability to do otherwise.[104] This is because God does not, and indeed cannot, act otherwise given that His act is identical to His existence. What this means is that this strategy must deny the classical theistic understanding of divine freedom in its attempt to defend the classical theistic understanding of DDS. Again, we advise against defending classical theism by rejecting core classical theistic claims. Moreover, as we pointed out at the beginning, the argument of this paper is that DDS undermines divine freedom. This strategy seems to demonstrate that divine freedom has in fact been undermined.

Rejoinder 4: Deny that God's Act is Intrinsic to God

Grant has proposed a strategy for rejecting (M6). Again, (M6) says that God's intentional act to create the universe is identical to God's one divine act. Grant can point out that the MCA assumes an intrinsic model of divine action. On an intrinsic model of divine action, "God's acts" refer to intrinsic features of God. Given divine simplicity, those intrinsic features are identical to God. According to Grant, that would violate the classical conception of divine freedom.[105] Grant suggests that a classical theist can instead affirm an extrinsic model of divine action. On an extrinsic model of divine action, various features are reduced away. For example, God's choices, intentions, decrees, will, and actions are all reduced away to consist merely in God's causing something for a reason. Further, according to Grant "God's causing or causal act consists entirely in items that are extrinsic" to God.[106]

How does this relate to premise (M6)? By adopting an extrinsic model of divine action, one will be denying that God's act is identical to God because

103 Ron Highfield, *The Faithful Creator: Affirming Creation and Providence in an Age of Anxiety* (InterVarsity Press, 2015), 77.

104 Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality: The Dual Sources Account*, 78.

105 Ibid., 56.

106 Ibid., 58.

"God's act" refers to things that are entirely extrinsic to God. Thus blocking any inference that this divine act is identical to God.

This is a clever strategy for denying (M6), but it still leaves us wondering what "God's intentional act of creating the universe" means on the extrinsic model. If a plausible extrinsic meaning can be assigned to this statement, then this is a promising strategy for avoiding modal collapse. The problem, however, is that we cannot find a plausible extrinsic meaning for this statement. Grant suggests two. First, God's intentional act of creating the universe could simply be the causal relation between God and the universe. Second, God's intentional act of creating the universe could consist in the causal relation and the universe.[107] Grant finds the first account implausible because he thinks that divine acts are specified by their effects. What this first extrinsic model would give us is God's act being identical across possible worlds, and somehow achieving different effects. Grant finds this implausible because he thinks that different divine acts should bring about different divine effects.[108] We agree that this is implausible. As Leftow points out, this strategy solves the problem by "magic."[109]

Grant prefers the second understanding of extrinsic divine action. On this view, God's act of creating the universe consists in the causal relation of dependence between God and the universe, and the actual universe. According to Grant, "The locution 'consists in' signals that God's act of causing A just is A qua dependent on God."[110] For comparison, Grant says that this is similar to how a reductive materialist says that a mental state just is a brain state.[111] In other words, *God's act* just is the actual universe existing with the property *being causally dependent on God*. Again, *God's act* is entirely extrinsic to God, and thus not identical to God. That is precisely what distinguishes the extrinsic model from the intrinsic model. Again, according to Grant, if God's act were intrinsic to God, and thus identical to God, this would violate the classical understanding of divine freedom.[112]

107 Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality: The Dual Sources Account*, 58–59.
108 Ibid., 59.
109 Leftow, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity and Divine Freedom," 34.
110 Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality: The Dual Sources Account*, 64.
111 Ibid., 64.
112 Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality: The Dual Sources Account*, 76.

It is at this point that we say the extrinsic model reveals itself to be inconsistent with DDS because the explicit claims of DDS are that God's actions are identical to God. The extrinsic model seems to apply its extrinsic analysis to all of God's actions. For any statement regarding "God's act" that statement must be referring to something that is extrinsic to God, and thus not identical to God. This directly violates the explicit teaching of DDS that we discussed above. In particular, the extrinsic model of divine action entails a denial of (M3) and (M4) which say that God's actions are identical to each other such that there is only one divine act, and this one divine act is identical to God's existence. This renders the extrinsic model of divine action a non-starter for any attempt to defend DDS. Again, we advise that a defence of DDS should not deny the fundamental claims of DDS.

Someone might push back at this point and say that the extrinsic model is not applying this extrinsic analysis to *all* of God's actions. Instead, it is only applying an extrinsic analysis to God's transitive actions. The idea is that (M3) and (M4) can be affirmed as statements about God's immanent actions, whereas the proponent of extrinsic divine action can say that God is not identical to His transitive actions.[113] In which case, Grant's extrinsic model can be consistent in denying (M6) while still affirming (M3) and (M4).

We find this puzzling because proponents of DDS explicitly endorse (M6). Above, we cited Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Rogers endorsing (M6) as the natural understanding of DDS. Hence, we take it as puzzling that one would deny (M6) and claim to be affirming DDS. Rogers says that extrinsic divine action is even more puzzling when one considers other non-negotiable Christian assumptions. As she points out, it is a "non-negotiable Christian assumption that God's knowledge and activity engage with our changing world."[114] Further, it is a non-negotiable Christian assumption that God loves the world. According to Rogers, this is hard to square with an extrinsic account of divine action.

Rogers asks us to consider a statement like, <God made our world out of love>. What makes this statement true? We take it as obvious that what makes this statement true are things intrinsic to God like God's loving intentional action to bring the universe into existence. But the extrinsic model

113 We thank an anonymous reviewer for point this rejoinder out to us.

114 Rogers, "An Anselmian Approach to Divine Simplicity," 309.

of divine action says that this is mistaken. On an extrinsic account of divine action, this statement is not made true by anything internal and intrinsic to God like His beliefs, loving acts of will, or anything of the sort that are logically and explanatorily prior to the existence of the universe.[115] Instead, what makes it true is that the universe exists. As Leftow points out, "This is unintuitive: surely there are creatures because God wills there to be, rather than its being the case that God wills there to be because there are creatures."[116] Rogers goes further and says that this extrinsic analysis renders God's love explanatorily vacuous. Nothing about God's intrinsic loving nature or action explains the existence of the world. "Indeed, applying the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction, to say that God made our world out of love is to say something about our world, but not about God. That seems a fundamental violation of ordinary Christian belief."[117] We gather that Rogers would maintain that one ought not to defend classical Christian theism by way of denying standard Christian claims about God's love for the world.

Yet we note that Rogers goes further. She says that this extrinsic account of divine action is inconsistent with the claim that a simple God creates the universe. On classical theism, "God is the immediate cause of the existence of anything with ontological status at the time it exists."[118] She writes, it "is hard to square [extrinsic action] with the standard classical theist principles that it is God's knowledge and power that are immediately keeping created things in being and that the DDS entails that God *is* His act of knowing and causing."[119] On the extrinsic account of divine action, it is nothing intrinsic to God, and thus nothing identical to God, that is making the universe exist. So, according to Rogers, not only do we have a counterintuitive statement, but we also have a violation of DDS. By our lights, Rogers is saying that one ought not to defend divine simplicity by denying divine simplicity.

As far as we can tell, appealing to extrinsic divine action does not obviously avoid the MCA, and is not consistent with classical Christian theism. To be sure, a proponent of extrinsic divine action will maintain that it does solve the problem all while being consistent with DDS. Yet we agree with

115 Rogers, "An Anselmian Approach to Divine Simplicity," 312.
116 Leftow, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity and Divine Freedom," 33.
117 Rogers, "An Anselmian Approach to Divine Simplicity," 314.
118 Ibid., 308.
119 Ibid., 312.

Leftow when he says, "This looks uncomfortably like declaring the problem solved by magic."[120]

V. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have sought to offer an in-depth articulation and clarification of the modal collapse argument against divine simplicity. We take the modal collapse to arise from the combination of DDS with other claims that classical theists make about God's freedom and intentional act of creating the universe. We have considered the most common rejoinders to the arguments in the recent literature. There may well be more rejoinders that can be developed, but we hope that the clarifications that we have brought to the argument will help foster a better debate in the future.

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