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A demonstration against theistic activism

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Abstract. Many theists have tried to work out coherent accounts of the relationship between God and abstract objects. Some have contended that abstracta depend on God for their existence and nature. Following Christopher Menzel and Thomas Morris, I call such a position, 'theistic activism'. In this essay, I begin by examining some motivations for holding such a position. Then, I try to make sense of how abstract objects might depend on God. Finally, I object to theistic activism on the grounds that one who holds to it is committed to the claim that God causes himself to exist and causes himself to have such properties as omnipotence and omniscience.

I

Many theists have tried to work out coherent accounts of the relationship between God and abstract objects. Some have contended that (necessarily existing) abstracta depend on God for their existence and natures (their essential properties). Let's call such a view 'theistic activism'.[1] In this paper, I want to examine theistic activism. To begin with, I will examine some motivations for holding this sort of view. Next, I want to attempt to mine out as plausible a representative of theistic activism as possible. I will attempt to show that it is quite difficult to say exactly what it would be for abstracta to depend on God. I will argue that the dependence relationship should be understood to be one of primitive causal dependence. The fact that the view is committed to such a dependence relationship may be taken by some to be problematic. For those who don't find this to be problematic, finally I offer and defend a modified version of a standard objection to theistic activist positions.

II

I will frame the discussion in terms of Christian theism. However, other monotheistic traditions will have many of the same motivations for adopting a view that grounds the existence and properties of abstract objects in God. For those that do adopt a theistic activist view, most of the issues raised in the paper will apply as well. I assume that properties are 'abundant' rather than 'sparse', as Armstrong and others think.[2] This conception of properties

[1] This is Thomas Morris's and Christopher Menzel's term. See 'Absolute creation', in *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 168.

[2] For relevant discussion of reasons for and against a fine-grained conception of properties, see David Lewis 'New work for a theory of universals', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, **61** (1983), 343–377; David

is generally assumed by theistic activists (it is by all of whom I am aware), so I don't think I'm being unfair in assuming this. (Of course, if one accepts a sparse enough conception of properties such that the 'properties' that I use in my arguments at the end of the paper – properties like 'being omniscient', 'being omnipotent', and the like – don't exist, one could circumvent the arguments there.)

Let's begin by examining some of the motivations for holding a theistic activist view. In this first section, I'm primarily interested in simply laying out some of the reasons why someone might believe that abstract objects are or must be dependent on God. In Colossians 1. 16–17, Paul says: 'For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together' (NIV). There are similar passages throughout the Bible.[3] Here Paul states (among other things) that (i) everything that exists was created by God and (ii) everything that exists is sustained in existence by God.[4] The reasoning from this sort of passage to the conclusion that abstracta depend on God is simple. Abstract objects are something: they exist. But, these sorts of passages commit us to claiming that *everything* that exists was created by God and depends on God for its existence. Therefore, abstract objects were created by God and are sustained by God.

People are often quick to point out that surely neither Paul, nor the other biblical writers had abstract objects in mind when they made statements similar to the above passage.[5] This reply seems right. It's a safe bet that Paul hadn't spent much time pondering abstract ontology; and it's even a safer bet that in writing a letter to an early church, he didn't intend to be making a statement about the ontological status of abstracta (he wasn't thinking of abstracta as one of the candidates for divine creation). However, even if Paul didn't intend to claim that abstracta are dependent on God, does that mean that one can't derive such a claim from Paul's statement? Paul wasn't thinking about, say, top quarks when he wrote this, either. However, it would seem strange for someone to claim that (in light of this biblical passage) we shouldn't think of top quarks as dependent on God because Paul and the other biblical writers didn't have these things in mind when they wrote the Bible. Rather, one might claim, that the biblical authors meant to claim that whatever (i.e. they intended to refer to everything that exists) is distinct from God is created by God, and that includes both top quarks and numbers.

Armstrong *A World of States of Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1989); Nicholas Wolterstorff *On Universals* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970); and Michael Loux (ed.) *Universals and Particulars: Readings in Ontology* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976).

[3] See Isaiah 26; Genesis 1–3; Job 38.4ff.; Romans 1.20; John 1.1ff., etc.

[4] The 'him' to which the passage refers is Christ.

[5] For example, see Wolterstorff *On Universals*, 296.

Adjudicating between these two sides would take us into complicated issues in hermeneutics and philosophy of language. But, it suffices to say that neither position is outlandishly wrong; and for our purposes, we can note that biblical passages such as the one above are one reason some cite or might cite for adopting the view that abstract objects are dependent on God.

A second motivation for adopting this view about abstract objects has to do with what many (especially those more influenced by Plato) believed about the nature of abstract objects, and more specifically, properties. Properties have been thought to be perfect exemplars of their instances. So, the property 'being red' has been thought to be a perfect representative of all the individual property instances of redness. Properties, on this view, are somehow 'more real' than their individual instantiations, and God is thought to 'look to' the realm of the 'really real' properties as models or patterns for his creation.[6] But, for God to look to something distinct from Him to aid Him in creation seems blasphemous. Surely, God needs nothing to aid Him in creation. So, the argument concludes, properties must be dependent on God. Indeed, the properties usually are taken to be dependent on God in a very special way: they are claimed to be identical to His thoughts.[7] By my lights, there's nothing wrong with abstracta serving as the 'blueprint' for creation. However, many have thought that there is something wrong with this, and it has led them to equate properties with God's thoughts.

A third motivation for claiming that abstracta are dependent on God is perfect-being theology. Some claim that it is more perfect for a being to have everything distinct from it be dependent on it, rather than to have just some things distinct from it be dependent on it. Since God has all (compossible) perfections, everything distinct from God must be dependent on him. As with the main premise in the last argument, there is not much in the way of argument to be given for or against such a claim. The case for the position seems to rest on one's intuitions about great-making properties. But, as with the last motivation, I don't share the intuition here. It seems right to claim that a being upon whom (setting aside abstracta) everything is dependent is greater than a being upon whom everything is dependent except for a particular ham sandwich in Idaho. But it seems to me that it's not at all clear that the same sorts of considerations hold when it comes to abstract objects.

[6] Not only did many medievals hold such a view, but Berkeley held a cousin of this sort of view, with his divine archetypes. Note, as well, that many of the medievals did not accept many of the sorts of abstract objects into their ontology that the modern-day Platonist does. By far, the most-discussed abstract objects for the medievals were properties or universals.

[7] This is the view of Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, among others. Each of them, in addition, held that God is simple; so, God is identical to each of his ideas, as well. Augustine and Aquinas are motivated to accept the doctrine that abstract entities are identical to God's thoughts based on the second motivation (above). See, Augustine 'De Ideis', 2; Anselm *Monologion* IV, XIV-XVI; and Aquinas *Summa Theologia* I, Q. 84, a. 5 and *De Veritate*, Q. 3. See also, Wolterstorff *Universals*, 279–297. The citations are from Wolterstorff.

Regardless, we can cite this sort of consideration as being another possible motivation for adopting a view where abstracta are dependent on God.

III

Let's turn our attention to investigating exactly what it would be for abstracta to be dependent on God. One of the initial questions that one might ask is, 'What sort of dependence relationship is claimed to hold between abstract objects and God?'. There are some dependence relationships that we can rule out. For instance, the relationship doesn't seem to be captured by the notion of logical dependence. Let's say that, necessarily, for any *x* and *y*, *x* logically depends on *y* if and only if *x* entails *y*.[8] For example, my owning socks logically depends on there existing socks. Now, we do want it to be true that the fact that there are abstract objects entails that God exists. So, it will be true that abstract objects logically depend on God. However, every necessary truth is logically dependent on every other necessary truth. Since abstracta (the ones we're concerned with, anyway) exist necessarily and abstract objects are dependent for their existence on God, it seems that God's existence also will be logically dependent on the existence of abstract objects (more on this later). So it seems we want a stronger dependence relationship than simple logical dependence.

Let's call a second sense in which things depend on God a 'non-annihilationist' sense. Let's say that, necessarily, for any *x*, any subject *y*, and any time *t*, *x* non-annihilationally depends on *y* at *t* if and only if there is some action A such that (i) *y* is able to perform A at *t* and (ii) *y*'s performing A at *t* counterfactually implies that *x* would cease to exist.[9] Suppose I stride into Big Mike's sub shop and buy a sandwich. The sandwich will be non-annihilationally dependent on me for its existence. For, there is some action A that I can perform – namely eating the sandwich – such that if I were to perform it, the sandwich would cease to exist.

On this account, we might be tempted to say that, strictly speaking, God didn't 'create' abstracta. However, they are dependent on him in that he could destroy them. I take it that every contingent object is so dependent on God. But clearly we don't want there to be some action God is able to perform such that if God were to perform that action, abstract objects would cease to exist. On such a view it would turn out that abstract objects exist contingently.[10] But, this is plainly false. So the sort of dependence relation-

[8] Throughout, I take entailment to consist in strict implication.

[9] One might construe non-annihilational dependence as a type of causal dependence if one holds to a counterfactual theory of causation. So, it might be claimed that *y*'s refraining from doing A causes *x* not to cease to exist. Then, the claim would be that this sort of causal dependence is ruled out as a candidate for capturing the dependence relationship between God and abstracta.

[10] That is, assuming the standard Lewis–Stalnaker semantics for counterfactuals.

ship between God and abstract objects isn't one of non-annihilational dependence.

Another sort of dependence relationship is conceptual dependence. Let's say, necessarily, for any *x* and any *y*, *x* conceptually depends on *y* if and only if one can understand the concept of an *x* only if one first understands the concept of a *y*. To say that abstract objects conceptually depend on God is to say that one can understand the concept of an abstract object only if one first understands the concept of God. As with previous attempts, this sort of dependence relationship doesn't capture what we're looking for. First of all, it seems that we're after some sort of ontological dependence relationship. The one we're being offered here is a semantic, or perhaps epistemological dependence relationship. Secondly, (*pace* some of the medievals) it's false that one must understand the concept of God in order to understand the concept of an abstract object.

I think that the sort of dependence relationship we're after is *causal* dependence. It's notoriously difficult to give a reductive analysis of what it is for something to cause something else to occur (it's especially difficult in this case, as we shall see).[11] However, I think that we have some sort of intuitive grasp on what it is for something to cause something else to occur. For instance, we mention causal relationships frequently in everyday discourse. On this proposal, then, God causes abstract objects to exist and to have the properties they do. This is what we want. Let us then take causal dependence to be the relevant dependence relationship between God and abstracta.

We know that, roughly, the intended relata of the causal dependence relation are God and abstract objects. But we can be more precise. On God's side, I propose that we follow Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas (as well as many contemporary proponents of this sort of doctrine) in claiming God's cognitive activity as one relatum.[12] On the side of abstracta, it will be the existence of all abstracta and all their essential properties they have that will be the other relatum. So, both the existence of the number two and the fact that it is essentially even are dependent on God's cognitive activity. Furthermore (if this isn't already clear), not only is it (the relatum) actually dependent on God's cognitive activity, but it's necessarily dependent on God's cognitive activity. Some causal dependencies are contingent. It might be the case that my oatmeal's becoming hot is causally dependent on my pouring hot water in it. However, this causal dependence is contingent. It's possible that my oatmeal would become hot if someone else were to pour hot

[11] See J. L. Mackie *The Cement of the Universe* (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 1974); and Ernest Sosa and Michael Tooley (eds.) *Causation* (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), for discussion on the difficulties surrounding reductive accounts of causation.

[12] Note that I'm not considering a view like Descartes', on which God's will or God's volitional activity would be one relatum.

water in it.[13] However, it's (broadly) logically impossible that the number two not be causally dependent for its existence and its being essentially prime on God's cognitive activity. Being causally dependent on God's cognitive activity therefore is part of the essence of every abstract object, on this view.

We are at a point to note an important feature of the divine cognitive activity (and of the Divine himself) upon which abstracta depend. It is clearly true that:

(1) Necessarily, for every world W and every *x* and *y*, if *x* stands in a causal dependence relationship to *y* in W, then *x* and *y* exist in W.

Earlier we stipulated (plausibly) that abstract objects exist necessarily. We've also just noted that it's part of their essence that they have the property 'being causally dependent on God's cognitive activity'.[14] Then we can see that in every world, abstract objects have the property 'being causally dependent on God's cognitive activity'. It follows from this fact and (1) that God cognitive activity exists in every world. Since it is impossible that God's cognitive activity exist and God fails to exist, this fact entails that God exists in every world, or necessarily. So, we can see that a view on which necessarily existing abstract objects depend on God for their existence and nature entails that God exists necessarily.

This result has interesting implications for understanding the causal dependence relation between God and abstracta. To see this, let us make a brief excursion into the world of the relationship between causal dependence and counterfactual dependence.

IV

Suppose I strike a match and a moment later it lights. Did my striking the match cause it to light? In most situations, one might be tempted to answer that it did. Suppose though, that I know that had I not struck the match, it would have lit anyway. Would we still want to say that my striking the match caused it to light? On the face of it, we'd probably be tempted to respond 'no'. So, we might be tempted to affirm the following proposition:

[13] There are some theories of event individuation on which the two 'oatmeal warmings' wouldn't be the same event. For instance, if one holds that events have their causes essentially, they wouldn't be the same event. More fine-grained event-theorists typically distinguish between event types and tokens to make sense of our ordinary event discourse. In this case, it might be claimed that if someone else were to pour the water, the token event of the oatmeal's becoming hot that occurred as a result of his pouring the water would be a distinct event-token from the token event of the oatmeal's becoming hot as a result of my pouring the water. However, both oatmeal warmings are of the same event-type. If one holds such a view of events, the claim will be that, necessarily, every token of an event-type consisting in an abstract object's having an essential property will be causally dependent on God's cognitive activity.

[14] I suppose one could deny this and claim that the dependence on God is contingent. But I cannot imagine the motivation for such a view. Furthermore, all the considerations for theistic activism in the first part of the paper would seem to point to a view on which abstracta are necessarily dependent on God.

(2) Necessarily, for any events x and y such that x occurs and y occurs, x is causally dependent on y entails had y not occurred, x would not have occurred.[15]

Suppose I strike another match, and it lights as well. Suppose I come to know that had I not struck the match, the match would not have lit. Does it follow from this that my striking the match caused it to light? Or, to state this in general terms, do we want to affirm:

(3) Necessarily for any distinct events x and y such that x occurs and y occurs; had y not occurred, x would not have occurred entails x is causally dependent on y?[16]

(3) appears less clearly true than (2) does. Immediate questions arise as to whether there can be counterfactual relationships between events or states of affairs that aren't ipso facto causal relationships. For instance, suppose Socrates had refrained from drinking hemlock.[17] Then it would have been true that Xantippe would not have been a widow. So, we have a counterfactual relationship between Socrates' drinking hemlock and Xantippe's being a widow. It follows from this and (3) that Socrates' drinking hemlock *causes* Xantippe's being a widow. However, it's not at all clear that the relationship here is a causal relationship. Clearly, in some sense Socrates' drinking hemlock *brings about* Xantippe's being a widow. But, it's not at all clear that it *causes* her to become a widow. So I'm quite tempted to think that (3) is false. However, interesting results follow if we grant it, so let's do that for a moment. If we conjoin (2) and (3) we get:

(4) Necessarily, for any events x and y such that x occurs and y occurs, x is causally dependent on y if and only if had y not occurred, x would not have occurred.

(4) is a standard reductive analysis of causation in terms of counterfactual dependence.

The Lewis–Stalnaker semantics for counterfactuals asserts the following:

(5) A counterfactual $(p > q)$ is true in the actual world if and only if (i) p is necessarily false or (ii) a world where $(p\&q)$ is true is closer to the actual world than any world where $(p\& \sim q)$ is true.[18]

[15] (2) will be false if causal pre-emption or causal over-determination are logically possible. We can assume that no such mechanisms are operative in the above example.

[16] Not only is the conditional here to be read as a counterfactual, but no person who wants to analyse causation counterfactually will want to affirm (3) when the conditional can be strengthened to strict implication and still hold.

[17] The example is from Jaegwon Kim.

[18] See David Lewis *Counterfactuals* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1973); and Robert Stalnaker 'A theory of conditionals', in Nicholas Rescher (ed.) *Studies in Logical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968). The formulation above is in keeping with Lewis, who doesn't require that there be a (relevant) closest possible world. I follow Pollock and others in using '>' for counterfactual implication.

Earlier we saw that the relata of the abstracta–divine cognitive activity causal relationship obtain necessarily. So, for instance, it's impossible that the number two fail to exist, and it is impossible for the requisite divine cognitive activity (namely, the divine cognitive activity that is responsible for two's existing) to fail to occur. According to clause (i) of (5) then, the following counterfactual is true:

(6) If the requisite divine cognitive activity were to fail to occur, then the number two would fail to exist.

(6) when conjoined with (4) entails:

(7) Two's existing is causally dependent on the requisite divine cognitive activity.

(7) is an instance of the thesis that we are after. It appears that a counterfactual theory of causation (as highlighted in (4)) will allow us to specify the nature of the causal dependence relation between God's cognitive activity and abstracta. Or will it? Clause (i) of (5) also entails that the following counterfactual is true:

(8) If the number two were to fail to exist, then the requisite divine cognitive activity would fail to occur.

(8) when conjoined with (4) entails:

(9) The requisite divine cognitive activity is causally dependent on two's existing.

Something clearly has gone wrong here. The causal dependence relationship in (9) is backwards. Furthermore, if the causal relation is to be asymmetrical, we can't have two events or states of affairs being causally dependent on each other. Where have we gone wrong? There seem to be two obvious candidates for our misstep here: (3) (which we suspected was false, and whose falsity entails the falsity of (4)), and clause (i) of (5). Let's examine each of these, beginning with the latter.

Clause (i) of (5) basically says that any necessarily false proposition counterfactually implies any other proposition. What reason is there for thinking this to be true? One consideration that might come to mind is the relationship between it and *reductio ad absurdum*.[19] Quite often in a *reductio*-type argument, we will suppose that a necessarily true statement is false. Then we will show that something absurd follows from this assumption. Doesn't the validity of *reductio ad absurdum* commit us to the truth of (i)?

One thing to note is that when we give a *reductio* where the assumption for the *reductio* is necessarily false, we don't immediately conclude whatever absurd proposition we wish. For instance, consider the following *reductio*

[19] See Lewis, 24 for the same point.

argument for 'necessarily, $2+2=4$'. Assume for *reductio* that it's false that 'necessarily, $2+2=4$'. But this assumption is necessarily false, so it implies that I am identical to Mount Rushmore. But this is absurd; therefore, we've proved that necessarily, $2+2=4$. The problem with this argument is that it begs the question. The proposition 'I am identical to Mount Rushmore' does follow from the assumption; the assumption for the *reductio* is necessarily false. But the only reason (so far as the argument is stated) I have for believing that it follows is because I believe that what I'm trying to prove is true (indeed, necessarily true, and hence its denial is necessarily false). So, the argument is epistemically circular; it begs the question.

I could try to prove that 'necessarily, $2+2=4$' via *reductio ad absurdum*. To do this, I would have to derive some necessarily false (or otherwise absurd) proposition from the denial of 'necessarily, $2+2=4$' such that I have reason to believe that it follows from the assumption for the *reductio* other than simply believing that the assumption for the *reductio* is necessarily false.[20]

I think that we can see, perhaps contrary to earlier appearances, that *reductio ad absurdum* doesn't commit us to the truth of (i). It does commit us to (at most) the truth of, for every necessarily false proposition p, there is some necessarily false (or otherwise absurd) proposition q such that p counterfactually implies q. But, this certainly doesn't suffice for the truth of (i).

Can we find another argument for (i)? I think we can. Consider the following argument:

(10) Necessarily, for every necessarily false proposition p and every proposition q, $(p \rightarrow q)$.

(11) Necessarily, for every proposition p and every proposition q, $(p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow (p > q)$.

So,

(12) Necessarily, for every necessarily false proposition p and every proposition q, $(p > q)$.[21]

By my lights, this is a sound argument. It clearly is valid, and since we're taking entailment to be strict implication, (10) is true. I also believe that (11) is true. We can see this if we consider what (11) says. To say that p entails q is just to say that there is no world in which p is true and q false; p can't be true and q be false. But surely it follows from this that if p *were* true then q would be true. So, (11) seems true. Hence, the argument is sound, and (i) seems unproblematic.

Because (i) seems to be true, we must conclude that the counterfactual

[20] Edward Wierenga makes a related point in 'God's essential perfections and philosophical logic', unpublished.

[21] This argument is taken from Linda Zagzebski 'What if the impossible had been actual?', in Michael Beaty (ed.) *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 167. Wierenga adopts the same stance in his paper.

analysis of causation as expressed in (4) doesn't adequately capture the causal dependence of abstracta on God's cognitive activity. This would be so even if we didn't have our earlier reservations about (3) (and hence (4)). There is an interesting upshot to the claim that the causal relationship can't be explicated in terms of (4). It seems that if *any* reductive analysis of causation would capture the causal relationship between God and abstracta, it would be a counterfactual analysis as given in (4). But, since not even (4) works as a reductive analysis, it seems that *no* reductive analysis of the causal dependence of abstracta on divine cognition can be given. Hence, we will have to take the causal relationship here to be primitive.

Now, though it seems as if the right sort of dependence relationship is a causal one, I still don't think that the dependence claim is at all lucid. How is it that divine cognition causes abstracta to exist? Furthermore, how is it that it causes them to exist *necessarily*? One might reply to the latter question, 'Well, in each world He causes them to exist. That's how He causes them to exist necessarily'. But this isn't the whole story. God is responsible for the fact that abstracta have the essences that they do; He causes them to have the essences that they do. Abstract objects essentially have the property of existing necessarily. So, in the actual world, God's cognitive activity causes abstracta to have the property 'existing necessarily'. This is tantamount to God's causing abstract objects to exist necessarily, from the actual world, as it were. So the picture of God's being responsible for the necessary existence of abstract objects by operating in each world and causing them to exist in that world doesn't tell the whole story. From each world, it appears as though God also causes the necessary existence of abstract objects. Understanding how God causes abstracta to exist in the actual world is difficult to understand (for me, at least). But, I find it even more difficult to understand how God causes abstract objects to exist *necessarily* 'from' the actual world.

All of this is to say that even though a causal dependence relationship seems to be the best candidate for the requisite dependence relationship, it's not without problems.

V

Let's take stock of where we are before evaluating our theistic activist account. We've claimed that the dependence that holds between abstracta and God is *causal* dependence. Abstract objects are causally dependent for all their essential properties on divine cognitive activity. Because abstract objects exist necessarily and their essential properties are exemplified necessarily, God must also exist necessarily and the requisite element of divine cognitive activity must obtain or occur necessarily. Lastly, we've just seen that the causal dependence relationship cannot be understood counterfactually; rather, it must be taken as primitive.

I believe that the account that we have sketched is the strongest candidate for a view on which abstracta depend on God for their existence and properties. However, I believe that it fails. To see this, let's consider two of the most frequent sorts of objections to theistic activism.

First, even if one doesn't have a problem with primitive accounts of causation, one may still have a problem with the notion of something's causing a necessarily existing object to exist. Indeed, this intuitive worry is sufficient to cause many to look for alternatives to theistic activism. Personally I am sympathetic to such worries. But it also seems to me to be difficult to mine out this sort of intuition into any sort of cogent argument. The attempts that I've seen rely on some sort of premise like '*x* depends for its existence on *y* entails it is possible that *x* not exist', or perhaps (to use our previous language) '*x* depends for its existence on *y* entails *x* is non-annihilationally dependent on *y*'. But it's quite likely that these sorts of premises aren't going to seem to be any more plausible to the theistic activist than the conclusion they're supporting seems to be. I think it's important to note that many find the very notion of a necessarily existing object being dependent on something else problematic. However, I think that there is another problem that is easier to mine into an argument against the view. We now turn to it.

There is a second common objection to theistic activism. The theistic activist claims that God causes properties such as 'being omniscient', 'being omnipotent', 'existing necessarily', 'being able to cause abstracta to exist', and 'having cognitive activity' to exist. She also claims that God causes His own haecceity (if there are such things, and Menzel and Morris seem to think there are) 'being God', to exist.[22] However, to claim this is to get the dependence relationship backwards. Surely, God's being able to cause abstract objects to exist must be posterior to His having properties like the ones mentioned above. And if God has these properties, they must exist. But, the proponent of this theory is committed to the existence of properties being posterior to God's causing them to exist. Thus, the objection concludes, theistic activism is false.

This sort of argument has seemed to many to be decisive. However, there is a response that the theistic activist can give at this point.[23] It might be claimed that although God's ability to cause abstracta to exist is logically dependent on His having certain properties, it's not *causally* dependent. The account would be problematically circular only if God's ability to cause abstracta to exist were causally dependent on His having certain properties, and His having these properties were in turn causally dependent on His having caused these properties to exist. There is a circle of *logical* dependence here (as there is between any two necessary truths), but there is no circle of *causal* dependence.

[22] See 'Absolute creation', 174.

[23] Menzel and Morris make this sort of move.

The opponent of theistic activism might make the following retort. Certainly, the above response is right in that if there is a problem of circularity, it is one of causal circularity. Earlier, we saw that there is a one-way causal relationship between God's cognitive activity and the existence of abstracta such as 'being the number two'. We can say that the necessary existence of 'being the number two' (or any abstract object) causally depends on God's having the cognitive activity that he does. Or, perhaps we might say that the necessary existence of 'being the number two' causally depends on God's 'being omniscient, omnipotent and existing necessarily'. However, the entities on which 'being the number two' causally depends are themselves properties. On what do they causally depend? It seems that on the activist account they wind up causally depending on themselves. But this is incoherent.

The activist might respond that there is a type/token confusion in the above retort. 'Being the number two' doesn't causally depend on the property 'God's thinking the thoughts he does', it causally depends on the token instance of God's thinking the thoughts that he does. Similarly, abstracta don't causally depend on the properties 'being omniscient', 'being omnipotent', or 'existing necessarily'. Rather, abstracta depend causally on the token instances of these properties in God. So, we don't have properties being causally dependent on themselves for their existence. Therefore, theistic activism is unaffected by such an argument.

However, I think that there are troubles lurking in the neighbourhood for the theistic activist . The reply above draws on a distinction between an abstract object's *existing* and its *being realized*, *instantiated*, or *obtaining*, etc. As we noted earlier, God causes all properties to exist, but he only causes some of them to be exemplified. He causes the property 'being red' to exist, but there are many occasions where he doesn't cause its exemplification. I may paint my car red, and in this case God would not be causally responsible for the exemplification of 'being red'. Suppose that we could show that, in causing properties such as 'being omnipotent' and 'being God' to exist, God causes them to be exemplified. Then, the theistic activist would be in dire straits. Claiming that God causes Himself to exist and to be omnipotent is all by itself quite implausible. However, if we could show that God causes Himself to exist and to be omnipotent, we also would have our causal circle. Certainly God's ability to cause abstracta to exist is relevantly dependent on His existing, and it also seems quite plausible that it is relevantly dependent on His being omnipotent. I think that we can show that theistic activism entails that God causes Himself to exist and causes Himself to be omnipotent.[24]

[24] After writing this paper it was called to my attention by an anonymous referee for *Religious Studies* that Brian Leftow has a similar argument 'God and abstract entities', *Faith and Philosophy*, **9** (1990), 193–217.

To cause something to exist is to cause its essence to be exemplified.[25] Suppose God creates a certain table which has as a part of its essence 'being red'. Then God causes the property 'being red' to be exemplified by the table when he creates it. Consider the property 'being omnipotent'. The property 'being exemplified by God' is contained in its essence. So, God causes the property 'being exemplified by God' to be exemplified by 'being omnipotent' in causing 'being omnipotent' to exist. Similar to the manner with which God causes 'being red' to be exemplified by the table in exemplifying the table's essence, God causes 'being omnipotent' to be exemplified by himself. But, surely God can't cause the property 'being omnipotent' to be exemplified by himself: how can God make Himself omnipotent? Furthermore, one might think that God's omnipotence should be causally prior to His causing properties to exist. However, on this occasion it is not. Then, if one thinks that God's omnipotence should be causally prior to His causing properties to exist, this would be an instance of causal circularity. This sort of argument will work for other properties like 'being omniscient' or 'having divine cognitive activity' (although the causal circle may be more difficult to establish with the former, and the implausibility of self-exemplification may be more difficult to establish with the latter).

Consider God's haecceity, the property 'being God'. The property 'being necessarily exemplified' is contained in the essence of this property. So, when God causes His haecceity to exist, He causes the property 'being necessarily exemplified' to be exemplified by His haecceity. Just as God causes 'being red' to be exemplified by the table when He causes it to exist, God causes 'being God' to be exemplified necessarily. However, surely this is incoherent. Here, we have the Divine causing His own existence; God is pulling Himself up by His own bootstraps.[26]

We may run the same sort of argument using propositions instead of properties. Consider the following two propositions:

(13) God exists,

and

(14) God is omnipotent.

Each of these propositions has as part of its essence the property 'being true' (at least for most orthodox theists who have thought about these issues). If

[25] I mean by 'essence' here a property or conjunction of properties that some object *o* has in every world in which it exists, and is such that it is impossible that any object distinct from *o* exemplify this property.

[26] Here, it might seem as if I'm relying on an instance of the following general principle: necessarily, if *p* causes *q* to occur, and *q* entails *r*, then *p* causes *r* to obtain. I wish to refrain from appealing to this principle . For one, it's false. Also, it seems clear that in causing something to necessarily exist, I cause it to exist. If I cause it to exist in every world, I cause it to exist in this world, too. This seems clear without appeal to the above principle.

to cause something to exist is to cause its essence to be exemplified, then in causing (13) and (14) to exist, God causes them to exemplify 'being true' – He makes them true. As we've seen, this is quite problematic.

There is yet another argument against theistic activism that trades on similar sorts of considerations. For the theistic activist (for anyone, for that matter), possible worlds (if there are such things) most likely will be abstract entities of some sort: properties, sets of propositions or states of affairs, or maximal propositions or states of affairs. The theistic activist will want to say that God is responsible for the existence and nature of possible worlds. In particular, then, God is responsible for the fact that (13) and (14) are true in all worlds. But this fact leads to familiar problems for the theistic activist. It seems that if God makes it the case that (13) and (14) are true in every world, then He makes it the case that they are true in the actual world. Here, I am appealing to something like the following principle:

(15) Necessarily, if S makes it the case that *p* is true in every world, S makes it the case that *p* is true in the actual world.

Clearly (15) looks to me to be true; if S makes it the case that *p* is true in each world, then S makes it the case that *p* is true in the actual world, too. But, as we've already seen, claiming that God makes it the case that He exists and makes it the case that He is omnipotent is quite implausible.

Hence, I conclude any theistic activist position on which all abstracta depend for their existence on God will fail. Perhaps one might claim that the 'problematic' abstract entities in question are not dependent on God's causal activity, whereas all other abstract entities are. But, this seems incredibly ad hoc. One might try to circumvent this ad hoc appearance by trying to separate abstracta that are contained in or make reference to the divine nature from those that aren't and claim that only the latter are dependent on God. However, such a distinction will be difficult to draw. For instance, one can't do it simply in terms of strict implication. Also, if there are conjunctive or disjunctive properties and propositions (and I think clearly there are), then one will still be committed to there being innumerable abstract objects that exist independently of God. This might seem to undermine the original motivation for having *everything* dependent on God. One thing is clear, though: a theistic activism on which *all* abstracta are dependent on God is untenable.[27]

[27] I'd like to thank Gordon Barnes, Alan Sidelle, and Keith Yandell for helpful discussion and comments. My thanks also to two anonymous referees for *Religious Studies* for their comments.