

ARTICLE

Analyzing Aseity

Sarah Adams¹ and Jon Robson^{2*}

¹Independent scholar, Oxford and ²Department of philosophy, University of Nottingham, Nottingham

*Corresponding author. Email: jonathan.robson@nottingham.ac.uk

Abstract

The doctrine of divine aseity has played a significant role in the development of classical theism. However, very little attention has been paid in recent years to the question of how precisely aseity should be characterized. We argue that this neglect is unwarranted since extant characterizations of this central divine attribute quickly encounter difficulties. In particular, we present a new argument to show that the most widely accepted contemporary account of aseity is inconsistent. We then consider the prospects for developing a new account of aseity which avoids the pitfalls we have highlighted.

Keywords: Aseity; divine independence; divine attributes; Anselmian theism; metaphysics; religion

1. Introduction

The doctrine of divine aseity—that God, *qua* perfect being, possesses the highest degree of independence—has played a significant role in the development of classical theism. Aseity is standardly viewed as “a fundamental requirement of perfect being theology” (Craig 2016, 41) and is often employed as a justification for postulating numerous other divine attributes, such as omnipotence, simplicity, immutability, and necessary existence. Further, it has helped to underpin the classical theist’s understanding of the world at large, since God is taken to be *uniquely a se*, with everything distinct from God somehow dependent upon God for its existence. It’s surprising, then, that aseity has received very little in the way of detailed analysis in recent years, especially when compared to other divine attributes such as omnipotence and eternity. For despite the frequent appeal to this notion in discussions of other divine attributes (see e.g., Brower 2009), or of God’s relation to the world (see, e.g., Craig 2016, 13–43), aseity has not in itself been the focus of much recent critical philosophical examination. This paper has two aims. The first is to show that this neglect is unwarranted, since standard characterizations of God’s aseity quickly encounter serious difficulties. The second is to begin to consider what steps should be taken by those seeking to develop a new understanding of divine aseity, one which explicates the claim that God is “maximally independent” more fully, while avoiding the difficulties we highlight in this paper.

In section 2, we survey some key motivations for accepting the doctrine that God exists *a se*. In section 3, we briefly consider some *prima facie* plausible characterizations of aseity and highlight their limitations. In section 4, we offer an argument against a standard account of aseity which claims that—at least with respect to his existence and nature—God is absolutely independent of everything else. Section 5 introduces some further worries for standard accounts of aseity. In particular, it makes salient the ways in which such accounts have played a key role in generating some of the most prominent theistic paradoxes discussed in the literature. Section 6 considers the prospects for offering a restricted account of aseity which provides the benefits highlighted in section 4 without encountering the difficulties associated with the standard view. Section 7 offers some concluding remarks.

2. Motivations for aseity

One commonly cited motivation for accepting that God exists *a se* is the claim that this doctrine comes with significant scriptural support. Walter Matthews Grant, for example, maintains that “Christian scriptures present God as existing prior to, and thus apparently without dependence on, the creatures he has made” (2015, 1), and William Lane Craig likewise claims that the “biblical witness to God’s unique aseity is both abundant and clear.” (2014, 113). We will not, however, have much to say regarding this motivation for two reasons. First, it’s far from clear that the texts cited are apt to do the job. For example, the passage “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Psalm 90: 2 NRSV) is often cited in support of the aseity doctrine.¹ Yet, the significance of this passage seems open to interpretation. On a more straightforward reading, it reasonably points to God’s eternity rather than his aseity (though, as we discuss below, the two properties are often treated as closely linked). Others, such as James Beilby (2004, 647), maintain that God’s claim that “I am who I am” in Exodus 3:14 endorses the thought that “God’s existence and character are determined by him alone.” Again, though, it’s not clear that this passage *demand*s such an interpretation. There are, for example, those who take this passage to be primarily concerned with God’s covenant relationship to Israel rather than with any aspect of his eternal nature.² Second, our intention here is to focus on purely philosophical reasons for accepting (and, indeed, rejecting) aseity which don’t depend on the prior acceptance of any particular religious authority.

While scriptural support for aseity as a divine attribute is rather less “abundant and clear” than has sometimes been claimed, support for the doctrine within Christian tradition is far less ambiguous (with Anselm 1998, 14; Aquinas [1273] 2006, 16–17; and Scotus 1987, 89; to mention but a few, explicitly endorsing it).³ Further, and more importantly for our purposes, these writers also provide some influential arguments in favor of divine aseity. In particular, it is common to take aseity to be importantly linked to other attributes which are standardly considered uncontroversial prerequisites for maximal perfection. (Indeed, those purported links have led some to regard aseity as “arguably the most fundamental divine attribute” (Beilby 2004, 648)). For example, it has been claimed that because God exists *a se*, he must be uncreated (Anselm 1998, 16–18), that he must be omnipresent and eternal (34) and, more generally, that he must not be “lacking in any excellence that belongs to any thing” (Aquinas [1264] 2014, 43). Aquinas also maintains that God must have absolute freedom of the will since his “action depends on no other” (43). One must be careful, though, in considering such claims, to avoid affirming the consequent. Even if we accept the controversial claim that something’s possessing aseity entails its possession of the other divine attributes enumerated above, this in no way entails that possession of these attributes also entails existence *a se*. Still, we might propose—in line with Beilby’s (2004, 648) claim about the fundamentality of aseity mentioned above—that an appeal to aseity allows the theist a simple unifying explanation for God’s possession of these different attributes. If this is the case, then God’s possession of various other divine attributes could be used as the basis for an abductive argument for his aseity.

In addition, there are more direct arguments for thinking that some central divine attributes *do* entail aseity. It is, as we will discuss in section 3, commonly maintained that God’s aseity follows immediately from his general status as an Anselmian perfect being. Further, it has frequently been argued that divine aseity follows from God’s status as a creator, with Anselm claiming that “since all things exist through this one thing [(God)], beyond a shadow of a doubt this one thing exists through itself” (1998, 14). The underlying thought here, we take it, is that only a

¹As well as Craig (2014), this passage is cited in Beilby (2004, 647) and Grant (2015, section 1).

²For discussion of interpretations of this kind see, e.g., Freedman (1960).

³We focus on the Christian tradition here since it is the one with which we are best acquainted. We do not, however, mean to suggest that the aseity doctrine hasn’t played a prominent role in other theistic traditions also.

nondependent self-existent being could explain the existence of a totality of dependent objects. (A thought famously developed at length by Samuel Clarke [1705] 1998, 1–93.)

Of course, these are merely a few representative examples of a broad argumentative trend within the tradition. It is not, however, our intention to provide a complete taxonomy of such arguments (and still less to evaluate any of them in depth). Our aim is rather to highlight the important status aseity is often taken to have in relation to other central divine attributes. This will enable us to have a better idea of the desiderata which a successful account of aseity ought to meet. Whether any account *can* meet such desiderata is an issue we will return to in section 6. For now, though, we will turn to consider some standard characterizations of divine aseity.

3. Standard characterizations of aseity

The Latin term “*a se*” means “from itself.” To say that a being possesses aseity, then, is to say that it is self-sufficient, meaning that it is “*in some sense independent of all else*” (Leftow, 2003, 270; emphasis added).⁴ However, this is not particularly informative and, despite its venerable history, the claim that God possesses an important kind of self-sufficiency has received surprisingly little by way of further explication or detailed critical investigation in the contemporary literature.

It has often been taken as something of an axiom by philosophers of religion that *any* dependence relation confers an imperfection on the dependent. Brower notes, for example, that “both Augustine and Anselm defend divine aseity on the grounds that *dependency on another* is always an imperfection, and hence must be excluded from our conception of God ... If God exists entirely *a se*, he cannot depend on anything in any way at all” (2009, 107). As such, many in the tradition have simply taken it as a given that aseity precludes God from being the dependent in *any kind of dependency relation whatsoever*. Indeed, a view of this kind remains influential amongst contemporary philosophers of religion. Alvin Plantinga, for example, maintains that God “depends upon nothing at all” (1980, 2), and Douglas Pratt insists that “[a]seity denies *any form of dependence*” (1989, 14; emphasis added).⁵

However, worries arise about how to understand the claim that God is unqualifiedly independent. God’s aseity cannot preclude *any truth involving God whatsoever* from being dependent on anything besides God. Nor can God’s aseity require that each of God’s properties (in the abundant sense where, roughly, for every true predicative statement of the form *Fa*, there is a property, *Fness*, which *a* possesses) is possessed by God completely independently of everything else. Consider, for example, the properties *having created things distinct from himself*, and *having been portrayed by Alanis Morissette in the film Dogma*. God’s possession of these properties clearly depends in some way upon things distinct from God. Given this, such crude characterizations will not suffice: the theist needs to say something about *which* of God’s properties they take him to instantiate independently of everything else.

A more helpful conjunctive characterization—one frequently found in the literature—is that (a) “God does not depend on anything distinct from Himself for his existing” (Gould 2014, 2), and that (b) God is not dependent on anything else for his nature (for “his being the being he is” [Mann 1983, 268]). This characterization avoids the obvious counterexamples given above, for only the properties that are part of God’s *nature* need be possessed independently here. There is, of course, considerable controversy concerning what precisely it takes for a property to be part of God’s (or, indeed, any being’s) nature in the relevant sense. On some (purely modal) accounts, a being’s nature consists merely in those properties it possesses in every world in which it exists. However, others

⁴It’s important to distinguish self-sufficiency from self-dependence. Relations of dependence imply priority, and priority relations are necessarily asymmetric. So, the notion of self-dependence appears to be incoherent since nothing could be prior to itself. The notion of self-sufficiency, however, appears much more innocuous in this respect.

⁵Though there are some explicit exceptions to this orthodoxy. See, e.g., Shalkowski (2014).

(most prominently Kit Fine 1994) argue that there are various properties, such as *being either bald or not bald*, which all of us possess in this way but do not possess as part of our natures.⁶ It seems clear, though, that, whatever account we adopt, it won't be part of God's nature to be portrayed by a particular actress in *Dogma*. Nonetheless, even this revised account encounters difficulties.

Firstly, a genuinely instructive understanding of aseity should include, at a minimum, an explanation of precisely what kind(s) of independence is (or are) relevant here. Certainly, it will be necessary that God's existence and nature be causally independent from anything outside of himself. Nothing *caused* God to exist or to have the nature he has. This explication is hardly sufficient, though, since there is no obvious contradiction in holding that an uncaused individual might later be destroyed by something outside of itself (think, for example, of a semi-Manichean world view in which one of the uncreated primal principles is eventually able to fully obliterate the other). Similarly, on this account, there is nothing to prevent God from being the subject of some noncausal dependency relations (such as the kind[s] of relation discussed in the recent literature on grounding).⁷

Secondly, we must clarify precisely what is meant by "anything else" and "distinct from" in claims such as (a) and (b), since how we interpret these notions will affect the range of entities an *a se* being must be independent from. Consider, for example, the question of whether an object's proper parts are distinct from it. If what we mean by "distinct" here is "not numerically identical with," then it's clear that an object will be distinct from its proper parts. If, on the other hand, what we mean by "distinct" is something like "nonoverlapping" (in the formal mereological sense) then an object will not be distinct from its proper parts. While this distinction may initially seem unimportant, it is crucial to the traditional understanding of aseity that "distinct" be read in the first sense. As we will discuss further in section 5, it has standardly been assumed that any whole must be dependent on its proper parts and that being dependent in this way is incompatible with maximal perfection. This line of thinking provides, as we will explore further below, one of the primary motivations for taking God to be perfectly simple in the sense of, amongst other things, lacking any proper parts. It is, however, worth noting that this line of argument is crucially reliant on "distinct" in our account of aseity being interpreted in the first sense. Given the prominence of this reading in the tradition, we will (unless otherwise stated) henceforth use "distinct" to mean "not numerically identical with." We will, however, make sure to highlight instances where this distinction becomes relevant to our arguments.

Thirdly, we will argue that the property of aseity itself stands as an obstacle to this conjunctive characterization. For while aseity is typically supposed to be an aspect of God's nature, it is not one that could be possessed by a being who exhibits no dependence relations.

4. Against absolute EN-independence

Consider the following argument, beginning with the assumption that there exists a perfect being x , which is by its very nature such that, for any y , distinct from x , x 's existence and nature do not depend on y or on any relation which x bears to y .⁸ That is, suppose x 's existence and nature do not make it dependent on any distinct y (call this sense "absolute existence and nature dependence" or "absolute EN-independence").

- P1. There exists a perfect being who possesses the property of absolute EN-independence (assumption for *reductio*).
- P2. *Absolute EN-independence* is extrinsic to each of its possible bearers.

⁶For discussion of some of these issues see, e.g., Livingstone-Banks (2017) and Plantinga (1980).

⁷For an overview, see Clark and Liggins (2012).

⁸In what follows, we will (for ease of exposition only) largely omit the "distinct from itself" qualification.

- P3. Any property possessed in an extrinsic manner is possessed in a dependent manner.
 P4. Any individual who possesses absolute EN-independence is the dependent in at least one dependence relation (From P2, P3.)
 P5. A perfect being possesses aseity as part of its nature.
 P6. Absolute EN-independence is part of a perfect being's nature. (From P1, P5.)
 P7. A perfect being, by its very nature, is the dependent in at least one dependence relation involving something distinct from itself. (From P4, P6.)
 C. There does not exist a perfect being who possess the property of absolute EN-independence. (Contradiction from P1, P7.)

Let's talk through the premises. Since P1 is merely a statement of the standard view (which we assume for the purposes of *reductio*), P2 is the first and most obvious stage at which some controversy might arise.

What precisely does it mean for a property to be "extrinsic" and what would motivate the rather counterintuitive thought that the property of being absolutely EN-independent is one which is extrinsic to each of its possible bearers (i.e., that it is a "pure extrinsic" property)? The literature provides an embarrassment of riches when it comes to candidate answers to the question of how extrinsicness (and intrinsicness) should be defined, but each attempt to demarcate the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction is an attempt to capture the same intuitive thought: that while some properties are possessed by things independently of what their surroundings (and their relationships to these) are like, others are not.⁹ This is what underlies our propensity to group properties such as mass, charge, and concreteness into one camp, and distance, weight, and unclehood into another. The mass of an object remains constant despite any variations in facts concerning other objects that are situated around it, but weight does not: *that's* what motivates the belief that the former is, but the latter is not, intrinsic. The crux of the debate concerning the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction thus tends to center on how, precisely, to spell out the conditions under which an individual possesses a property independently of its surroundings.

Now, following Adams (2015), we hold that theists are precluded from accepting a straightforward modal characterization of (in)dependence since this would prohibit them from making any (nontrivial) claim concerning created beings' dependence on God. This holds because (i) according to the standard modal semantics, any counterfactual with a necessarily false antecedent will come out true and (ii) God, qua perfect being, is standardly taken to exist necessarily. Hence, "if God didn't exist, then neither would anything else" is true, but so is "if God didn't exist, then the authors of this paper would still exist." The theist thus needs to adopt a notion of dependence that is more fine grained than the standard modal semantics allows. For, given the necessary existence of a divine creator, there will be sentences of the form " ... depends on ..." whose truth (and falsity) is not properly analyzable into truth-at-possible-worlds—i.e., the notion of dependence will be "hyperintensional."¹⁰ Accepting that dependence is hyperintensional will allow for some claims with necessarily false antecedents like "if God didn't exist" to be nonvacuously true, and others to be nonvacuously false.¹¹ Adams (2015) suggests that grounding is a suitable notion to appeal to here since grounding relations mirror the relevant kind of dependency relation by being both hyperintensional and explanatory.¹² Further, since intrinsicness is understood in terms of dependence (or a lack thereof), theists will also require a hyperintensional notion of intrinsicness. As such, Adams suggests the following characterization: for any *x* and any F, *x*'s being "F depends (at least

⁹See, e.g., Kim (1982), Lewis (1983), Langton and Lewis (1998), and Witmer, Butchard, and Trogden (2005).

¹⁰To say that a notion is hyperintensional is to say that it creates contexts into which one cannot always substitute necessarily coextensive terms *salva veritate*.

¹¹For some discussions of hyperintensional approaches, see Jago (2014), Vander Laan (2004), and Nolan (1997).

¹²See, e.g., Fine (2001) and Dasgupta (2014).

partially) on x 's surroundings iff either the presence or the absence of something or some things that have no part in common with x partially grounds the fact that x is F." (763)¹³

With this in mind, consider again absolute EN-independence. Is it the case that the presence or absence of some thing or some things distinct from the purported bearer of this property (at least partially) explains the fact that the bearer possesses this property? We take it that it does. *What it is* to be independent in that sense is just lacking dependence relations to things distinct from yourself. Absolute EN-independence is thus an extrinsic property (since possession of it is at least partly an outward looking matter), and we take it to be a purely extrinsic one at that. Why so? Being the sole object—unlike, e.g., being loved by someone—counts as a pure extrinsic property, for possession of the former, unlike the latter (given the possibility of self-love), is always a matter of how things distinct from the individual in question stand. In the same way, being absolutely EN-independent is necessarily at least partly a matter of how things distinct from the purported bearer of this property are.¹⁴

Why, though, take it that aseity consists in a lack of dependence relations and not vice versa? Couldn't a defender of the absolute EN-independence view maintain instead that a thing lacks dependencies *because* it possesses aseity?¹⁵ This line of questioning would, however, misconstrue what is meant by "consists in" here. According to the absolute EN-independence view, God's aseity *just is* his not being dependent on anything else for his existence and nature. There aren't two separate facts here—the fact of God's aseity and the fact of God lacking dependencies—and some kind of explanatory relation between them. Rather, there is one fact: God's aseity—and a proposed explanation of what it consists in (i.e., his lacking dependencies). Consider for comparison the fact of the number 7 being prime. If we say 7's being prime consists in its having no factors other than 1 and itself, then we are not attributing two features to this number and saying that one explains the other. Rather, we are rather merely clarifying what it is for 7 to have the property of being prime. There is, of course, no barrier to someone proffering an alternative account of aseity which takes there to be two facts here and some explanatory relation between them. However, such an account would then either need to go on to outline an alternative explanation of what God's aseity *consists in* or else take aseity itself to be unanalyzable.¹⁶

Given these observations, it seems we also have sufficient reason to accept P3: properties possessed in an extrinsic manner are possessed in a dependent manner—they depend at least partly on the way in which things distinct from their bearer are (or aren't).

The only other possible point of controversy, then, is P5—that a perfect being possesses aseity by nature. What problems might arise from denying this claim? One is that doing so obviously flies in the face of a long tradition of authors (discussed in Craig [2016, 1–12]) who clearly take aseity to be part of God's nature. However, since our own preferred solution (outlined in section 6 below) also departs from the tradition in some significant respects, it would be disingenuous for us to place too much weight on this consideration. A more substantial worry is that it renders what is traditionally considered something of a cornerstone of the doctrine of divine perfection a merely accidental property.

¹³The clause that the absence of some thing(s) featuring in the grounds of some x 's being F will also suffice for x 's being extrinsically F is needed since properties such as *being the sole object* are clearly extrinsic.

¹⁴Importantly, we do *not* mean by "pure extrinsic property" a property the possession of which is *only* a matter of how things distinct from its bearer are. Given this, our argument is not dependent on our earlier decision to take "distinct" to mean "not identical with" rather than "nonoverlapping" since even if we used this alternative and more restrictive notion of distinctness, absolute EN-independence still turns out to be a pure extrinsic property. If we say that an absolute EN-independent being is one who depends for its existence and nature on no nonoverlapping object, then possession of this property will still *depend* on its relation to various nonoverlapping objects are (i.e., it will depend on its not being dependent on these objects for its existence and nature).

¹⁵We thank an anonymous reviewer for this journal for raising this consideration.

¹⁶Our subsequent discussions of aseity will focus on alternative analyses of the property since we take the claim that aseity is primitive and unanalyzable to be something of a last resort.

It is important to stress, though, that the worry here isn't that this response renders God's aseity contingent. Such a view would, of course, be problematic (indeed, we think that, given an absolute EN-independence account of aseity, it is very likely inconsistent). However, it's not clear whether someone who denies that aseity is a part of God's nature must therefore conclude that God possesses it contingently. There are, after all, various neo-Aristotelian accounts of essence which allow that a property (such as *being such that* $6 \times 6 = 36$) might be possessed necessarily by some being without being part of that being's nature (see, e.g., Fine 1994). On these accounts, it may well be necessarily the case that God possesses aseity even though aseity is not strictly speaking a part of his nature.

Rather, the worry is that regarding aseity as accidental prevents it from playing a role in explaining various other perfections which are (almost) uncontroversially taken to be a part of the divine nature. Yet, as we explore further in the next section, this purported explanatory power has provided a major motivation for positing God's aseity in the first place. Regardless of what account of essence one prefers, it seems clear that the explanation for why some being possesses an essential property cannot lie in one of that being's nonessential properties.¹⁷ Of course, our opponent could respond to this worry by also denying that the other relevant perfections are parts of God's nature, but that would (as we discuss further in section 6) leave us with such an impoverished account of the divine nature that it is liable to empty the N part of absolute EN-independence of most of its content.

Let's summarize. We argued in section 3 that God's aseity cannot be understood by means of the crude and sweeping claims that no truth about God depends on anything besides himself, or that no property (in an abundant sense) God possesses depends on anything besides himself. Any successful account of aseity must place some restriction on the types of property God possesses independently. In this section, we further argued that this restriction cannot be made by limiting aseity's scope to God's existence and nature. There seems, then, to be good reason to seek out a new understanding of aseity, but what will such an account require? Certainly, it must say something about the ways in which God is supposed to be independent (and what from), and it must do so whilst avoiding the argument presented above. In addition, it would be highly desirable if such an account were able to accommodate (some of) the motivations for taking God to exist *a se* which we surveyed in section 2. Further, as we noted above, there are other difficulties facing standard accounts of aseity which are entirely independent of the argument we presented at the start of this section. A final desideratum for a new account, then, is that it be immune to these traditional challenges.

5. Difficulties for aseity

In this section, we explore some of the other potential difficulties facing the standard notion of aseity. We saw above that aseity has sometimes been motivated by the thought that it underpins numerous other divine attributes. Yet, its tendency to do so has sometimes proven to be a double-edged sword since aseity can also be used to motivate more controversial putative divine attributes, attributes which are apt to yield paradoxical results. In addition, there are some metaphysical perplexities more directly connected to the aseity doctrine itself. Let's begin by considering worries of the first, less direct kind.

Most premodern philosophers and theologians maintained that God does not exhibit any kind of metaphysical complexity and is not in any way a composite—call this the doctrine of divine simplicity, or “DDS.” DDS was standardly taken to entail that God has no parts (spatial, temporal,

¹⁷There may be an exception here for cases where the relevant properties are determinants of a determinable. For example, it would make sense to claim that a being is essentially extended and also has the property of being extended in the actual world @ in virtue of *accidentally* having the particular extension it happens to have in @. However, exceptions of this kind will be of no help to those looking to reject P5.

metaphysical, or otherwise) and that he is not distinct from his existence, essence, or attributes. Aseity is often taken to be the key motivation here. Anselm (1998, 30), for example, claims that a “composite requires for its existence, its components and owes its being what it is to them. It is what it is through them. They, however, are not what they are through it.” And Aquinas ([1273] 2006, 33) maintains that God cannot be a composite since “every composite is posterior to its component parts and is dependent on them.” Arguments of this kind have also arisen in the contemporary literature. William E. Mann (1983, 268), for example, claims that DDS “is motivated by the consideration that God is a perfect being, and that qua perfect being, he must be independent from all other things for his being the being he is.” The common thought here is that if God did have proper parts then, *contra* the aseity doctrine, God would depend upon these parts for his existence. Further, some worry that if the relation between God and his divine attributes was *not* identity, God would be dependent upon entities distinct from himself for his being the kind of being that he is. This is, for example, Anselm’s (1998, 98) motivation for maintaining that “Life and wisdom and the other [attributes], then are not parts of You, but all are one and each one of them is wholly what You are and what all the others are.”

For a long time, these contentions were (as the quotes above illustrate) a key part of theistic orthodoxy. However, DDS has subsequently come under much philosophical scrutiny. C. B. Martin famously called the doctrine “hogwash” (1976, 40), and it doesn’t take too much reflection to see why DDS engenders suspicion. For example, if God is identical to each of his properties, then it seemingly follows that God himself is a property.¹⁸ Yet, properties are exemplifiable while persons (even divine persons) aren’t. Similarly, properties cannot think, act, nor care; persons can. Further, it’s somewhat mysterious, to say the least, how, e.g., God’s goodness could be one and the same thing as his knowledge, and how both could be identical to his existence.

These worries have led some, such as Quentin Smith, to maintain that these mysteries can’t be resolved because the claims they involve are “plainly self-contradictory” (1988, 424). And views of this kind are hardly confined to atheists such as Smith. Plantinga (1980, 61), for example, claims that DDS flouts “intuitions much firmer than those that support it.” Others disagree, though, and there have been some recent attempts to make sense of DDS. Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey Brower (2006) offer a “truthmaker view” according to which many different predicates may truly apply to God, but the truthmaker for any true predicative statement involving God is always (and only) God himself. Similarly, Katherin Rogers (1996) proposes that DDS is best made sense of by maintaining that all there is to God’s nature is one single, pure act. And yet others have tried to deny the putative link between aseity and DDS. Thomas Morris (1988), for example, argues at length that there isn’t “any convincing reason to think that aseity entails ... the doctrine of divine simplicity” (172–73). And Gregory Fowler (2015) employs a version of priority monism (as defended by Schaffer [2010]) to replace DDS with a “doctrine of divine priority,” according to which, although God has proper parts, these are metaphysically dependent on him, not vice versa. Such a view can, Fowler contends, respect the aseity thesis whilst avoiding the numerous metaphysical difficulties simplicity entails.

Given this, it would be premature to conclude either that DDS is hopeless or that it’s straightforwardly entailed by aseity (as traditionally conceived). Still, the proposed methods of either redeeming DDS or else severing its connection with aseity each employ substantial philosophical theses that are no less controversial than the metaphysical oddities they seek to explain. Attempts to sever the connection between the two typically rely on a rejection of the widespread intuition that a whole *must* be dependent on its parts, often supplementing this with a commitment to some particular account of the metaphysics of dependency (or some other contested notion). While attempts to redeem DDS tend to introduce various puzzling notions—God himself serving as the truthmaker for all claims about God, God’s being a single pure act, etc.—which are, at the very least,

¹⁸For discussion of this argument, and a sustained attempt to resist its conclusion see Leftow (1990).

in need of significant further explication and defense.¹⁹ It would certainly be desirable, then, to have a plausible account of aseity which didn't entail any commitment to simplicity, nor introduce complex and controversial metaphysical machinery in order to avoid such a commitment.

Further, DDS isn't the only potentially problematic consequence of aseity as standardly understood. Indeed, as Leftow (2014, section 3) points out, DDS provides "one of the deepest reasons for divine immutability's broad historical appeal." For it's often assumed that change in an object must involve that object gaining or losing a part (whether that be a physical part such as the leg of a chair, or a metaphysical part such as the chair's property of redness). As such, there is some motivation for someone who accepts the entailments between aseity and DDS to make the further move to a very strong form of divine immutability according to which God is not only unchanging with respect to his character and essential nature, but also undergoes no changes whatsoever in his (intrinsic) properties. Nor is this the only way in which aseity might be taken to entail this strong form of immutability. Brown (1991, 285) suggests that God's immutability means "that God is neither subject to, nor capable of, change ... since God is immune to external influences, and without internal needs, of the sorts that might give rise to such change." That is, that God is immutable because his *a se* nature renders him impassable to external influence as well as entailing that he is lacking in nothing (and so not subject to any internal motivation to change).²⁰ Yet, adherence to this strong form of immutability famously brings its own range of difficulties. For one, there are notable worries concerning a completely changeless God's ability to come to know temporally indexed facts about the world, such as that, e.g., Mike is procrastinating *now* (Stump and Kretzmann 1981).²¹

Similarly, one motivation for insisting that God is timeless is that this is the only way to preserve God's aseity. As Paul Helm notes:

What helps to form the thought that God is timeless (and spaceless) is the idea, surely a basic intuition of "Abrahamic" theism, that God has fullness or *self-sufficiency* or perfection ... He exists as a complete, entire unity, together. His existence is not spread out in time or in space, as the existence of material objects is, but his existence is all at once ... If God is in time ... it follows that he has earlier and later phases. (2014, section 3)

If God is temporal, Helm maintains, then God depends on time in order to exist. Additionally, if the perdurantist view of persistence is correct, then a sempiternal God persists through time by being partly located at each moment of time, seemingly implying that he is dependent upon these parts for his existence. And, once again, claims concerning divine timelessness have been at the root of a number of famous worries concerning the compossibility of divine attributes. First, there are worries, paralleling those discussed above, about a timeless God's ability to possess knowledge concerning facts obtaining at some times and not at others. Further, there are (as discussed in, e.g., Mullins [2016, 156–94]) difficulties concerning the compossibility of divine timelessness and some prominent doctrines found within particular theistic religions, such as the Christian doctrine of the incarnation (and, more generally, about a timeless God's ability to interact with a temporal world).

Again, we do not mean to suggest that there's anything genuinely problematic about divine immutability or timelessness. Indeed, numerous capable philosophers, such as Helm (1988),

¹⁹For an overview of these debates, see Vallicella (2006).

²⁰Brown himself (1991) only takes the first part of this claim (God's immunity to external change) to be guaranteed by aseity. However, we think it's plausible to make the further claim that aseity (at least as traditionally understood) is incompatible with God's encountering any lack or privation which would motivate internal change.

²¹Relatedly, Brown (1991) presents an argument for the incompatibility of an *a se* God's being omniscient and immutable with human free will. Grant (2012) discusses three models of God's knowledge of contingent truths which attempt to avoid the result that God undergoes intrinsic change by possessing knowledge of contingent facts.

Padgett (1989), and Mann (1983), have provided sustained arguments in favor of accepting them as genuine divine attributes. Rather, we are merely highlighting some consequences of the unrestricted understanding of aseity that some prominent philosophers have taken to be problematic.

Other worries for aseity arise rather more directly. One standard difficulty concerns its apparent incompatibility with Platonism as traditionally conceived. Some argue that God's possession of goodness, omniscience, and so on cannot be understood in terms of God's instantiating Platonic universals since this would make God dependent on the relevant universals (i) for having those features, and (ii) for existing at all (since omniscience, goodness, and so on are typically taken to be properties God could not exist without instantiating).²² This tension with the aseity doctrine has been the locus of a great deal of discussion in recent years, but there is no clear consensus as to how best to respond to it.²³ However, one obvious move for a theistic philosopher who finds Platonism independently plausible would be to take this tension as a reason to reject aseity as standardly understood.

Again, we're not suggesting that such considerations present a conclusive argument for the claim that theists should adapt (let alone abandon) the doctrine of divine aseity, and a range of other responses are available. Indeed, one may, like Craig (2012, 47), take theists to be committed to some form of nominalism since "Platonism ... so fundamentally compromises divine aseity."²⁴ One might also, as Morris and Menzel (1986) do, accept the existence of abstract objects but deny that these are independent of God, or follow Welty (2014) in taking such worries as providing additional motivation for adopting some kind of "divine Platonism" (whereby universals and the like are somehow parts of God's nature). Finally, one may follow Shalkowski (2014) in regarding any apparent conflict between aseity and Platonism as either illusory or trivial.

As a final point for consideration, take the relationship God has to morality, and to the role standard views of aseity have played in generating the famous "Euthyphro dilemma." According to classical theism, God commands certain moral imperatives, but there is a question concerning whether these imperatives are morally good *because* they're God's commands or commanded by God because they accord with some independent moral standard. On the face of it, the first answer seems problematic because it seems to make moral goodness objectionably arbitrary (since there appears to be no reason, beyond divine fiat, why God issued the particular commands he did). There have, of course, been various attempts (see, e.g., Adams [1979] and Joyce [2002]) to make embracing this horn of the dilemma more palatable but our interest is, rather, in the second horn since it presents an apparent conflict with divine aseity.

If the concern with accepting the second horn was merely that what God commands depends on something else—such as the nature of the independent moral facts—then this need not be especially troubling for those who restrict aseity only to God's existence and nature. It would not, after all, seem unreasonable to suggest that what God commands (and, indeed, *that* God commands at all) is not part of his nature. However, there is a deeper worry here when it comes to God's own goodness since, as Michael Murray and Michael Rea (2008, 247) highlight, it would seem that if "God depends for his goodness on the extent to which he conforms to an independent moral standard" then "God is not absolutely independent."

Having presented some arguments against standard accounts divine aseity, we'll now move on to consider the prospects for developing a new account of aseity which avoids these difficulties (while also respecting at least some of the standard motivations for taking God to exist *a se* which we surveyed in section 2).

²²For arguments to this effect see, e.g., Craig (2012; 2014; 2016) and Plantinga (1980).

²³See Gould (2014) and Craig (2016) for two book-length treatments of the subject.

²⁴Though Craig (2016, 7–8) dislikes the label "nominalism" since he believes that it is likely to engender confusion.

6. Toward a better understanding

We argued in section 4 that aseity should not, on pain of contradiction, be characterized in terms of absolute EN-independence. As such, the theist must either reject the notion of aseity altogether or else develop a more successful characterization of what it is for a being to exist *a se*. In this section, we consider the prospects for the second approach. We argue that, contrary to what is frequently presupposed, it is not obviously incompatible with God's perfection that he features as a dependent in *some* dependency relation(s) even with regards to his existence and nature. Hence, there is strong motivation to pursue an account of aseity which abandons appeals to absolute EN-independence in favor of the claim that God is free from *certain kinds* of EN-dependence relations. (In what follows, we will, for brevity's sake, drop the "EN" qualification but the claims we make below are intended to apply only to God's [in]dependence with respect to his existence and nature.)

To construct a more restricted account of aseity, we would need to limit the kinds of independencies God has to a certain subset of relations, or to limit the range of entities God is independent from, or both. An obvious minimal revision here would be to claim that since our argument in section 4 hinges on the idea that the absolute EN-independence notion of aseity poses a problem for itself, God's aseity should be taken to be the sole exception to the claim that no aspect of God's nature is dependent on anything else. That is, we could concede that the property of aseity itself, while part of God's nature, need not be possessed independently.²⁵ The trouble is, however, that there doesn't seem to be any obvious motivation (besides sidestepping our argument from section 4) for adopting such a proposal, and without one, this line of response is objectionably ad hoc. What is needed is a restricted account which provides an independent, principled reason for allowing some dependence relations whilst prohibiting others. Further, we might hope that such a restricted account would address (some of) the classical difficulties for aseity which we surveyed in the previous section.

Before considering how to do so, though, it's important to highlight that this type of strategy—restricting the scope of a proposed divine property in the face of certain paradoxes—is commonplace with respect to other divine attributes. Consider, for example, omnipotence. Historically, philosophers and theologians (with some possible exceptions such as Descartes [2003, 100]) have tended to reject the position that God has the power to do anything *simpliciter*.²⁶ And contemporary definitions of omnipotence (such as those of Flint and Freddoso [1983], Griffin [1976, 251–74], Hoffman and Rosenkrantz [2002], Weilenberg [2000], and Wierenga [1983]) routinely involve restricting the scope of God's power in some relevant way. Indeed, recent discussions surrounding omnipotence tend to focus only on *how* to restrict its scope, not on *whether* such restrictions are necessary. The reason for this is that an *unrestricted* view—one whereby omnipotence is "absolute"—encounters a variety of well-known problems: concerning, for example, God's inability to sin, to make a four-sided triangle, to destroy himself, and (to quote *The Simpsons*) to microwave a burrito so hot that even he couldn't eat it.

Omniscience provides another good example. It has, for example, been proposed that the knowledge of a perfect being must be limited to propositional knowledge, given some well-known worries with supposing that such a being also has (complete) knowledge-how or experiential knowledge (such as knowing what it's like to fail).²⁷ And even within the realm of propositional knowledge, there is reason to doubt whether omniscience can be defined in terms of knowing the set of *all* true propositions since there appear to be good arguments to show that there could *be no* set of such truths (Grim 1991). Additionally, some have maintained that God cannot be expected to know certain truths since these are in principle unknowable: truths concerning, for example, the future actions of free beings (Hoffman and Rosenkrantz 2002; Hasker 1989), and the precise extension of

²⁵We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

²⁶For the controversy over Descartes's view on this matter see, e.g., Funkenstein (1975) and Bennett (1994).

²⁷For a discussion of, and response to, some of these concerns see Nagasawa (2008).

certain vague terms (Sorensen 2001, 61). All these claims are, of course, controversial—both in terms of taking there to be truths about these matters and taking these truths to be unknowable—but the point remains that it is not uncommon to find such restriction mooted within the literature.

Nor are these merely isolated examples: proposals for restricting the scope of various divine attributes are widespread and have already been advanced concerning attributes which are often closely linked to aseity. For example, numerous philosophers (including van Inwagen [2009], and Shalkowski [2014]) have argued (again, controversially) that we should restrict the scope of divine sovereignty to exclude abstracta and other objects which are incapable of entering into causal relations. It's surprising, then, that analogous moves haven't typically been made in the face of the difficulties which arise from taking God to be absolutely independent. Proposals for limiting the scope of aseity have occasionally been put forward (by, for example, Grant [2012, 267] and Pruss [2008]), but such proposals are very much the exception rather than the rule and (as we will discuss below) are rather underdeveloped. However, we have argued that considering God to possess his existence and nature independently without qualification is at least as problematic as supposing that, for example, God can do anything without restriction. We propose, then, that the theist would be better placed appealing to a restricted view of aseity—one according to which *some* kinds of dependence are compatible with maximal perfection.

Merely proposing such a restricted view is not, however, particularly informative, since there are numerous ways such a position could be spelled out. The difficulty which arises then is in determining *which* kinds of dependency relation a maximally perfect being might legitimately instantiate. Some kinds of dependency—such as being causally dependent on another being for his existence—seem straightforwardly inadmissible. By contrast, others—such as being dependent on some contingent state of affairs' unfolding in order to know about it, depending on independent moral standards for the rightness of your decrees, and depending on the existence of a property for your instantiating it—do not strike us as being so straightforwardly problematic. Indeed, once we abandon the idea that being the dependent in *any* kind of dependency relation is *eo ipso* an imperfection, such dependencies seem especially benign. Further, we have seen that those theists who accept the conclusion of our argument in section 4 (that no perfect being possesses absolute EN-independence) have very good reason to reject the claim that any kind of dependency must be an imperfection. Of course, one *could* regard various arguments against absolute aseity as attempts to prove that the existence of any perfect being is an impossibility, but we see no reason to do so.

It is certainly true that various key figures in the tradition have regarded being dependent as an imperfection but these figures also tended to agree that it was an imperfection to be ignorant or impotent. They did not, however, take this as demonstrating that God was capable of doing, or of knowing, any arbitrarily named thing. Given this, combined with the claim that it is impossible for *any* being to be the dependent in no dependency relations whatsoever, there is no more reason to regard being dependent in some sense as incompatible with God's absolute perfection than there is to regard being unable to do what is logically impossible, or to know what is in principle unknowable as incompatible with this status.

Those sympathetic to the claim that some, but not all, kinds of dependence are incompatible with maximum perfection will, however, now be faced with the daunting task of establishing some principled theoretical basis for dividing up the different kinds of dependency relation into these two camps. While the majority of those discussing aseity have, as noted, been content with a straightforwardly absolute characterization of aseity, a small number of recent authors have attempted a more significant qualification. Grant (2012, 267) and Alexander Pruss (2008), for example, each say that God's aseity requires him to not depend upon anything else for what he is intrinsically. Such a view would certainly enable them to avoid the problem with the absolute EN-independence which we discussed in section 4. They need only accept that aseity is indeed a pure *extrinsic* property, and then the claim that God's aseity depends on something distinct from himself would no longer stand as a counterexample to their characterization.

Yet, things are not all smooth sailing. First, more needs to be said about what precisely “intrinsic” amounts to here. It is, as noted in section 4, accepted as a platitude that intrinsic properties “depend only on that [which possesses them]; whereas the extrinsic properties of something may depend, wholly or partly, on something else” (Lewis 1983, 197). If, then, this is all that is meant by “intrinsic,” then Pruss and Grant’s suggestion appears to be in danger of reducing the aseity doctrine to a mere truism: God doesn’t depend on anything else for the properties he has independently of anything else. This will certainly be the case, but it does nothing to differentiate God from his creation. Of course, these authors almost certainly intended to assert something more than this truism here, but without further detail, it’s hard to see what advancement can be made with this offering. Second, we again run into difficulties trying to combine the view that aseity is a pure extrinsic property with the kinds of motivation discussed in section 2. It would, for example, seem very problematic to still maintain that the various divine attributes which depend on aseity are themselves intrinsic. If possessing eternity, say, depends on possessing aseity and possessing aseity depends on something external to God, then being eternal must itself depend on something external to God. On the other hand, if we also regard all of these other divine attributes as extrinsic, then (even bracketing any general doctrinal concerns about such a view) merely guaranteeing that God is independent when it comes to his *intrinsic* properties would seem to leave us with a rather impoverished notion of divine aseity.

Fortunately, other restricted accounts are available and there are a number of *prima facie* plausible methods for delineating precisely which dependency relations God can (and cannot) enter into. Unfortunately, and again paralleling discussion of other divine attributes, such suggestions quickly encounter difficulties.²⁸ A first proposal would be to maintain that God is independent in every way in which it is metaphysically possible *for him*—i.e., *for a being like God*—to be. This would mean that God would not be expected to be independent without restriction in order to exhibit aseity since such a thing is metaphysically impossible, thus avoiding the paradoxical results of section 4. However, this account fails to establish a principled distinction between the kind of independence possessed by God and that possessed by his creatures. After all, it’s metaphysically impossible given the truth of classical theism *for beings like us* to exist without being causally dependent upon God for our existence. Hence, this condition is all too easy to meet.²⁹

We might suggest instead, then, that aseity amounts to being independent in every way in which it’s *metaphysically possible* for *any* being to be. However, it seems impossible for God (or any being, for that matter) to possess such a property. There are, after all, many ways to be independent which cannot possibly apply to God. Take, for example, the property of *being identical to Mike*. There’s a sense in which Mike possesses this property independently: after all, provided Mike exists, not even God could prevent Mike from instantiating it. However, *independently being identical to Mike* is not an independency God could possibly instantiate since he is unable to instantiate the property *being identical to Mike* in any way (dependently or otherwise).

A final proposed amendment is to relax our account of “distinctness” so as to allow that God can be dependent on something with which he is not numerically identical provided that it isn’t distinct from him in some other sense (for example, provided that he overlaps with it). This would straightforwardly allow God to be dependent on his proper parts for his existence and so undermine the most prominent reason for denying that God possesses such parts, but the consequences of the view may not end here. It may, for example, allow that God could depend on the existence of an *Fness* property numerically distinct from himself for his being *F* (where *F* is some property which is part of the divine nature) *provided* that we construe that property as being a metaphysical part of

²⁸For comparison, see, e.g., La Croix (1977).

²⁹Worries of this kind are, of course, parallel to those which the famous “Mr. McEar” case (introduced by Plantinga [1967, 170] and christened by La Croix [1977, 183]) pose for equivalent accounts of omnipotence. Mr. McEar is an individual imagined to be such that he is by his very nature only able to perform one action: scratch his ear. If an omnipotent being is thought to be one who can do anything its nature allows, then, counterintuitively, McEar would be omnipotent.

God. In combination such views would, if they could be made metaphysically palatable, avoid commitment to DDS while circumventing some longstanding worries about the relationship between God and his properties.³⁰ Regardless, though, such a view also encounters significant difficulties. First, it would not in itself avoid our primary objection to absolute EN-independence.³¹ As such, it would need to be supplemented by further restrictions. More worryingly, it would also be compatible with the claim that God himself is part of some larger entity on which he depends for his existence or nature—a view which would, of course, be unacceptable to anyone trying to defend a remotely orthodox version of perfect being theology.

What do such difficulties tell us about the prospects for offering a restricted account of aseity? One possibility is that any such account would be as problematic as the absolute EN-independence view we rejected above. However, this would be premature. Recall, again, the comparison with other divine attributes. It is (almost) universally agreed that no being could be omnipotent in an absolute or unrestricted sense, but the prospects for a successful restricted account of omnipotence are far less clear. Rather, there are, as we have already discussed above, numerous attempts to explicate a coherent version of restricted omnipotence which avoids the pitfalls encountered by the most rudimentary explications of that property. By contrast, most extant discussions of aseity take it for granted that it's an all or nothing matter. That is, they assume that we must either accept the absolute EN-independence of God, or else give up on aseity altogether. The prospects for a middle ground have—our brief survey above notwithstanding—barely been touched on. Given this, we believe that it would be a serious breach of intellectual humility to claim anything definitive about the prospects for such accounts at this stage.

It's also worth considering the possibility of a different kind of “middle ground” position. Returning to the debate concerning omnipotence, there are those (such as Geach [1973]) who remain unconvinced by all efforts to retain such properties, arguing that even restricted accounts of omnipotence should be discarded and replaced with some alternative notion (such as what Geach [1973, 7] terms “almightiness”). Further, skepticism regarding God's possession of, even restricted versions of, the traditional divine attributes isn't confined to omnipotence. In his discussion of the divine attributes, Nicholas Everitt (2010) asks: “[a worship-worthy] god needs to be powerful—but why omnipotent? Perhaps knowledgeable—but why omniscient? Perhaps good—but why perfectly so? Perhaps long-lasting—but why eternal? It is not as if there is any overwhelming Biblical warrant for the traditional attributions.” Everitt goes on to lament that despite the solutions they might offer, philosophers of religion have tended to shy away from exploring such options. Similarly, Yujin Nagasawa (2017, 92) suggests that the “claim that the perfect being thesis entails the omni God thesis seems [...] ungrounded.” That is, that there is no clear reason to suppose that an Anselmian perfect being must have properties such as omniscience, omnipotence, and so forth.³² Rather, he proposes that the Anselmian theist accepts the “Maximal God thesis” according to which “God is the being that has the maximal consistent set of knowledge, power and benevolence” (92).

Returning to the case of God's independence, it is possible that someone might wish to avoid any appeal to aseity (absolute or otherwise) by taking up a version of Everitt's suggestion which replaces the claim that God is *a se* with the claim that he merely possesses a peculiarly high degree of independence (being uncreated, incapable of being destroyed, of having his plans thwarted, and so forth). Similarly, we could add the property of independence to the list of properties in Nagasawa's “Maximal God thesis.” Whether accounts of this kind, or a restricted view of aseity, for that matter, can ultimately be rendered plausible and consistent with (some of) the motivations we outlined in section 2 remains to be seen. However, we hope to have shown that there are significant motivations

³⁰For an excellent in-depth discussion of competing views of metaphysical parts and related issues, see Pasnau (2011).

³¹For reasons outlined in note 14 above.

³²Of course, any Anselmian theist who denies that God possesses such properties would also have to deny that any other (possible) being does so.

to search for a midpoint between absolute EN-independence on the one hand, and a complete rejection of God's independence on the other.

7. Where to now?

Unsurprisingly then, given the longstanding difficulties which have beset efforts to define other divine attributes, we are not able to offer a complete account of aseity here. Even in the absence of such an account, though, we have made several important advances in our understanding of this neglected attribute. First, we have shown that extant characterizations are untenable. Second, we have suggested some useful avenues along which future endeavors to define (or reject) aseity should proceed. Thirdly, and most importantly, we have demonstrated that the nature of aseity is in dire need of further study. As we noted at the beginning of this paper, it is often presupposed that aseity can be defined relatively easily by reference to a few simple platitudes. We have shown, however, that this is not the case, and—given the central role which aseity plays in classical theism—it therefore becomes a pressing matter for the theist to either seek out a more adequate definition of aseity, or else to demonstrate that, *contra* the various arguments we discussed in section 4, it is not an indispensable aspect of perfect being theology after all. We commend both these projects as avenues for future research.

Acknowledgments. We would like to thank Dani Adams, Michael Bench-Capon, Emily Paul, and several anonymous reviewers from this journal for their extremely useful comments.

Sarah Adams received her PhD from the university of Leeds in 2015. She now works in publishing, but also peruses philosophy on the side as an independent academic. Her research interests mainly lie within the fields of metaphysics and philosophy of religion.

Jon Robson got his PhD from the university of Leeds in 2009. He is now an assistant professor in the philosophy department at the University of Nottingham. His main research interests are in aesthetics, epistemology, and the philosophy of religion.

References

- Adams, R. M. 1979. "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 7: 66–79.
- Adams, S. 2015. "A New Paradox of Omnipotence." *Philosophia* 43: 759–85.
- Anselm. 1998. *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, edited by B. Davies and G. R. Evans. UK: Oxford University Press.
- Aquinas, T. (1264) 2014. *The Summa Contra Gentiles, the Fathers of the English Dominican Province* (tr. 1924), London: Aeterna Press.
- Aquinas, T. (1273) 2006. *Summa Theologica, the Fathers of the English Dominican Province* (tr. 1912), North Carolina: Hays Barton Press.
- Beilby, J. 2004. "Divine Aseity, Divine Freedom: A Conceptual Problem for Edwardsian-Calvinism." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47: 647–58.
- Bennett, J. 1994. "Descartes's Theory of Modality." *The Philosophical Review* 103: 639–67.
- Bergmann, M., and J. Brower. 2006. "A Theistic Argument against Platonism (and in Support of Truthmakers and Divine Simplicity)." In *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* Vol. 2, edited by J. Kvanvig, 357–86. UK: Oxford University Press.
- Brower, J. E. 2009. "Simplicity and Aseity." In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, edited by T. P. Flint and M. C. Rea, 105–28. UK: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, R. F. 1991. "Divine Omniscience, Immutability, Aseity and Human Free Will." *Religious Studies* 27: 285–95.
- Clark, M. J., and D. Liggins. 2012. "Recent Work on Grounding." *Analysis* 72: 812–23.
- Clarke, S. (1705) 1998. *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings*, edited by E. Vailati. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Craig, W. L. 2012. "Nominalism and Divine Aseity." In *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* Vol. 4, edited by J. Kvanvig, 43–64. UK: Oxford University Press.
- Craig, W. L. 2014. "Anti-Platonism." In *Beyond the Control of God: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, edited by P. M. Gould, 113–26. London: Bloomsbury.
- Craig, W. L. 2016. *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism*. UK: Oxford University Press.
- Dasgupta, S. 2014. "On the Plurality of Founds." *Philosophers' Imprint* 14: 1–28.
- Descartes, R. 2003. *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings*. Translated by D. M. Clarke. London: Penguin Books.

- Everitt, N. 2010. "The Divine Attributes." *Philosophy Compass* 5: 78–90.
- Fine, K. 1994. "Essence and Modality." *Philosophical Perspectives* 8: 1–6.
- Fine, K. 2001. "The Question of Realism." *Philosophers' Imprint* 1: 1–30.
- Flint, T., and A. Freddoso. 1983. "Maximal Power." In *The Existence and Nature of God*, edited by A. Freddoso, 81–113. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Fowler, G. 2015. "Simplicity or Priority?" In *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* Vol. 6, edited by J. Kvanvig, 114–138. UK: Oxford University Press.
- Freedman, D. N. 1960. "The Name of the God of Moses." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79: 151–56.
- Funkenstein, A. 1975. "Descartes, Eternal Truths, and the Divine Omnipotence." *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 6: 185–99.
- Geach, P. T. 1973. "Omnipotence." *Philosophy* 48: 7–20.
- Grim, P. 1991. *The Incomplete Universe*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Gould, P. M. 2014. "Introduction to the Problem of God and Abstract Objects." In *Beyond the Control of God: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, edited by P. M. Gould, 1–20. London: Bloomsbury.
- Grant, W. M. 2012. "Divine Simplicity, Contingent Truths, and Extrinsic Models of Divine Knowing." *Faith and Philosophy* 29: 254–74.
- Grant, W. M. 2015. "Aseity." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by E. Craig (online version), <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/aseity/v-1>.
- Griffin, D. R. 1976. *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Hasker, W. 1989. *God, Time, and Knowledge*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Helm, P. 1988. *Eternal God*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Helm, P. 2014. "Eternity." The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, edited by E. Zalta, <https://stanford.library.sydney.edu.au/archives/sum2010/entries/eternity>.
- Hoffman, J., and G. S. Rosenkrantz. 2002. *The Divine Attributes*. London: Blackwell.
- Jago, M. 2014. *The Impossible: An Essay on Hyperintensionality*. UK: Oxford University Press.
- Joyce, R. 2002. "Theistic Ethics and the Euthyphro Dilemma." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 30: 49–75.
- Kim, J. 1982. "Psychophysical Supervenience." *Philosophical Studies* 41: 51–70.
- La Croix, R. R. 1977. "The Impossibility of Defining 'Omnipotence'." *Philosophical Studies* 32: 181–90.
- Langton, R., and D. Lewis. 1998. "Defining 'Intrinsic'." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58: 333–45.
- Leftow, B. 1990. "Is God an Abstract Object?" *Noûs* 24: 581–98.
- Leftow, B. 2003. "On a Principle of Sufficient Reason." *Religious Studies* 39: 269–86.
- Leftow, B. 2014. "Immutability." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by E. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/immutability>.
- Lewis, D. 1983. "Extrinsic Properties." *Philosophical Studies* 44: 197–200.
- Livingstone-Banks, J. 2017. "In Defence of Modal Essentialism." *Inquiry* 60: 816–38.
- Mann, W. E. 1983. "Simplicity and Immutability in God." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23: 267–76.
- Martin, C. B. 1976. "God, the Null Set and Divine Simplicity." In *The Challenge of Religion Today* edited by J. King-Farlow, 138–43. New York: Science History Publications.
- Morris, T. V. 1988. "Dependence and Divine Simplicity." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 23: 161–74.
- Morris, T. V., and C. Menzel. 1986. "Absolute Creation." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23: 353–62.
- Mullins, R. T. 2016. *The End of the Timeless God*, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Murray, M. J., and M. Rea. 2008. *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Nagasawa, Y. 2008. *God and Phenomenal Consciousness: A Novel Approach to Knowledge Arguments*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Nagasawa, Y. 2017. *Maximal God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nolan, D. 1997. "Impossible Worlds: a Modest Approach." *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 38: 535–72.
- Padgett, A. G. 1989. "God and Time: Toward a New Doctrine of Divine Timeless Eternity." *Religious Studies* 25: 209–15.
- Pasnau, R. 2011. *Metaphysical Themes 1274–1671*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Plantinga, A. 1967. *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Plantinga, A. 1980. *Does God Have a Nature?* Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.
- Pratt, D. 1989. "Aseity as Relational Problematic." *Sophia* 28: 13–25.
- Pruss, A. R. 2008. "On Two Problems of Divine Simplicity." In *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* Vol. 1, edited by J. Kvanvig, 157–66. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rogers, K.A. 1996. "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity." *Religious Studies* 32: 165–86.
- Schaffer, J. 2010. "Monism: The Priority of the Whole." *Philosophical Review* 119: 31–79.
- Scotus, D. 1987. *Philosophical Writings: A Selection*, A. Walter (trans.). London: Hackett.
- Scrutton, A. 2013. "Divine Passibility: God and emotion." *Philosophy Compass* 8: 866–74.
- Shalkowski, S. 2014. "God with or without Abstract Objects." In *Beyond the Control of God: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, edited by P. M. Gould, 143–54. London: Bloomsbury.

- Smith, Q. (1988). "An Analysis of Holiness." *Religious Studies* 24: 511–27.
- Sorensen, R. 2001. *Vagueness and Contradiction*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Stump, E. and N. Kretzmann. 1981. "Eternity." *The Journal of Philosophy* 78: 429–58.
- Vallicella, W.F. 2006. "Divine Simplicity." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited E. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/divine-simplicity>.
- Vander Laan, D. 2004. "Counterpossibles and Similarity." In *Lewisian Themes*, edited by F. Jackson and G. Priest, 258–76. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Van Inwagen, P. 2009. "God and Other Uncreated Things." In *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump*, edited by K. Timpe, 3–20. London: Routledge.
- Weilenberg, E.J. 2000. "Omnipotence Again." *Faith and Philosophy* 17: 26–47.
- Welty, G. 2014. "Theistic Conceptual Realism." In *Beyond the Control of God: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, edited by P. M. Gould, 81–96. London: Bloomsbury.
- Wierenga, E. 1983. "Omnipotence Defined." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 43: 363–75.
- Witmer, D.G., Butchard W., and Trogden, K. 2005. "Intrinsicity without Naturalness." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 70: 326–50.