Religious Studies (2021) **57**, 10–29 © Cambridge University Press 2019
doi:10.1017/S0034412518000859

Shoring up divine simplicity against modal collapse: a powers account

JOSEPH E. LENOW

Department of Theology, Creighton University, Omaha, NE 68102, USA
e-mail: josephlenow@creighton.edu

Abstract: **This article defends a broadly Thomist understanding of the doctrine of divine simplicity from the objection that such a position inevitably leads to a modal collapse. To do so, it draws upon Barbara Vetter's recent dispositionalist account of modality, in which irreducibly modal multi-track powers are the truthmakers of modal claims. Conceiving of God's power on the analogy of these dispositional properties enables us to hold that the divine life is itself the truthmaker of modal truths, without requiring a real distinction between what is necessary and contingent in God that would compromise divine simplicity.**

The threat of modal collapse

It would seem to be a theoretical virtue of one's doctrine of God that it should not compromise one's ability to reason about the world. An increasingly popular argument claims that the doctrine of divine simplicity does precisely that; specifically, that the doctrine of divine simplicity occasions a modal collapse in which all appearances of possibility and contingency in the world are unmasked as illusions, thus making everything absolutely necessary. In a modal collapse, this is the only possible world, all true propositions are necessarily true, and things could not possibly have been any way other than they actually are.[1]

An argument to this effect is frequently raised by philosophers of religion against the doctrine of divine simplicity. Both Thomas V. Morris and Gary Rosenkrantz find that Thomas Mann's account of God's simplicity leads to what Morris diagnoses as a 'modal uniformity' in the divine life, undermining the possibility of any contingency in the created order.[2] Paul Copan and William Lane Craig similarly argue that 'divine simplicity leads to an extreme fatalism, according to which everything that happens does so with logical necessity'.[3] Steven J. Duby notes that those more sympathetic to divine simplicity are aware of the challenge as

well, canvassing how Brian Leftow, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, William F. Valicella, Katherin A. Rogers, and Timothy O'Connor have each attempted to reconcile divine simplicity and creaturely freedom. Duby concludes, however, that '[a]ll of the aforementioned attempts to align God's simplicity or freedom end up weakening one or the other'.[4]

Most recently, R. T. Mullins has extensively pursued this line of argument, first in his essay 'Simply Impossible: A Case Against Divine Simplicity'', and further in *The End of the Timeless God*.[5] Mullins's critique, what I will call the 'modal collapse argument', has gained significant traction in just a few short years.[6] He offers the following concise presentation of the argument that divine simplicity leads to modal collapse:

> On divine simplicity God's essence is identical to His existence. Also, God's one simple act is identical to His essence/existence. God's action of creation is identical to this one simple act, and so identical to God's essence/existence. God exists of absolute necessity. So His act of creation is of absolute necessity since it is identical to His essence/existence. (Mullins (2016), 138)

In this argument, Mullins begins from three premises widely held by defenders of divine simplicity: there is no composition in God; all of God's attributes are identical to God; and God necessarily exists. If there is no composition in God, then the act by which God creates the world cannot be a constituent part of God's act, but must be identical to it, for the divine act must be simple. But there can also be no real distinction in God between this act and God's being – both are identical to the one simple God. God's act of creation must therefore be identical to God. At this point, Mullins's argument depends upon a plausible but unstated premise:

(1) If necessarily God exists, and God is identical to God's existence, then all that is identical to God is necessary.

This premise is the hinge connecting the necessity of God's existence to the divine act by which God brings the world into being. If we accept it, then Mullins's argument seems to follow through: the one simple divine act is necessary, so the act of creation identical to it is necessary.[7]

Several pages later (*ibid.*, 139–140), Mullins offers another argument, beginning from the Thomist affirmation that God is pure act without any potency. If, Mullins reasons, it is possible for God to do something that God does not do, then there is some unactualized potency in God to perform that action.[8] To restate this premise:

(2) If it is possible for God to do something that God does not do, God has a potency to do it.

But if there is no potency in the divine life, then it is not possible for God to do anything that God does not do; and so, necessarily, God does all that it is possible for God to do.

It is worth noting that neither of these arguments, in itself, has yet proved a full modal collapse: perhaps God's act of creation is necessary, but does not

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

necessitate everything that happens within the world. A full collapse depends upon two other affirmations of God widely held by defenders of divine simplicity: God's immutability and omniscience. The former is derivable from divine simplicity: if God possibly changes, then God possesses a potency for that change; but if there is no potency in God, then God cannot possibly change and is immutable.[9]

If God is omniscient as well, then God must immutably know the whole course of created history with full determinacy. Any indeterminacy in God's knowledge – say, indeterminacy about which course of action a created agent will pursue – would result in change in God's knowledge of the world as God learns which course of action the agent *does* pursue. So then, as God wills the creation of a world, God must will that world in full knowledge of its determinate particulars, its whole course from beginning to end. If the creation of that world is necessary to God (the conclusion of Mullins's first argument), then it is not possible that any of its determinate particulars should fail to exist, and so all the determinate particulars of that world exist necessarily. If God does all that it is possible for God to do (the conclusion of Mullins's second argument), then the only world that God can possibly create is the actual one. There is nothing that is possible, but not actual; all that is, is necessarily. We have a full modal collapse.

Mullins identifies three negative results of a modal collapse:

> First, contingency and freedom completely vanish. Everything becomes necessary, so there is no such thing as free will. Second, it denies that God is free over creation. He cannot exist without it. He must create it. Third, any concept of divine grace is gutted of the very meaning of grace. Grace is supposed to be a free gift from God that He did not have to give. On a modal collapse, there is no such thing as grace because everything must happen as it does in fact happen. There are no other possibilities. (*ibid.*, 138)

These are dire theological consequences. If the proponent of divine simplicity is to find a compelling response to Mullins's objections, it must be an account in which a simple God is consistent with the attribution of contingency and possibility to the world.

In this article, I respond to Mullins's argument by rejecting premises (1) and (2). Though God exists necessarily, God does not will all that God wills necessarily; furthermore, there are things that God can possibly do but does not do, but there is no unactualized potency in God. To motivate the rejection of (1) and (2), I offer a dispositionalist account of modal grounding, according to which the simple life of God can serve as the truthmaker both of the necessity of God's existence and the possibility of God's creating otherwise. While I draw especially on the dispositionalist account of modal grounding recently offered by Barbara Vetter,[10] the position for which I argue is a broadly Thomist one, committed to the claims that God's essence is identical to God's existence, that God's being is identical to God's act, and, in particular, that God's life should be described as *actus purus* lacking any unactualized potency.[11]

My argument proceeds in several steps. First, I will contextualize the turn to dispositionalist accounts of modal grounding within the broader landscape of modal

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

metaphysics, and consider how a Thomist might truly predicate a dispositional property of God. Second, I call attention to some features of Barbara Vetter's dispositionalist account of modal grounding that make it particularly well-suited to one who wishes to ground the truth of modal claims in the simple life of God. Third, I discuss how a broadly Thomist adaptation of Vetter's dispositionalist account of modality answers the modal collapse argument. Finally, I respond to some objections that might be raised against the position I have outlined.

Thomism and dispositionalism about modal truths

In recent years, a number of philosophers – among them Alexander Bird, Jonathan Jacobs, C. B. Martin, George Molnar, and Stephen Mumford[12] – have turned to powers or dispositional properties to ground the truth of modal claims, rather than appealing to possible worlds to do this work. If modality can be accounted for satisfactorily in terms of dispositional properties or some feature of their analyses, we will no longer require quantification over possible worlds in our definitions of possibility and necessity, and so are free either to relegate them to the role of mere heuristics for metaphysical speculation, or to dispense with them entirely. In general, this dispositionalist turn has been motivated by an Aristotelian rejection of Humean supervenience, and a desire 'to identify, within the actual world, the grounds, source or truthmaker of modal truths' – locating the grounds of modal truths within objects themselves, rather than in sets of propositions.[13]

From the standpoint of philosophy of religion, dispositionalism about modal claims may be attractive because it accords well with many classical claims of Christian theology, particularly as represented in the Thomist intellectual tradition. Timothy Pawl, for instance, argues that 'the Thomist can take powers to be the truthmakers for possibility claims without violence to Aquinas' metaphysics' (Pawl (2008), 178). The powers of created existents are capable of accounting for the truth of many modal claims – for instance, the claim that it is possible that Smith will walk his dog. Yet there are also modal claims the truth or falsity of which it is difficult to account for by appeal to any creaturely powers; paradigmatically, the modal claim that there might have been no contingent beings at all.

For the truth of such claims, Thomas can point to God's power as a truthmaker. As Brian Leftow has neatly summarized Aquinas's position,

> God perfectly understands His power. Powers are powers to do a range of actions. If one perfectly understands a power, one perfectly understands all that it is a power to do. One also has a perfect grasp of each individual action in its range. Anything less would not constitute *perfectly* understanding the power; a fuller understanding would be possible. So in perfectly grasping His power, God perfectly understands every action it is in His power to do . . . According to Thomas, God can bring about every state of affairs such that His bringing it about entails no contradiction. So every such state of affairs 'exists in God's power.' God knows these states of affairs 'as possible to His power': He knows them as states He *can* produce, and whatever He can produce *ipso facto* is possible. (Leftow (2005a), 171–172)[14]

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

For Thomas, then, it is God's power that '*makes true* claims about possibility and necessity . . . serv[ing] as their ontological ground or ultimate metaphysical explanation' (Brower (2005), 201).[15]

Which truths does God's power make true? This is a contentious issue. Leftow holds that, for Aquinas, God's power makes true all modal truths, including the truths of necessity; Pawl denies that truths of necessity have truthmakers, but are true because their complement lacks a truthmaker; Frost holds that created essences themselves ground the propositional truths of necessity about them.[16] Rather than wading into the thorny questions of interpreting Thomas's texts, I will simply note here that what matter most in resisting the modal collapse argument are the modal truths of possibility. If we can establish that a simple God can ground the truths of created contingency, we will have resisted a modal collapse; I will therefore leave the questions of whether there are truthmakers for necessary truths and what they might be to the side. Henceforth, when I speak of God's power as a truthmaker for modal claims, I have in mind truths of possibility.

When I ascribe a power to some created entity, I am predicating a dispositional property of it. Predicating such a property of a simple God presents two challenges to any account of modal grounding that identifies God's power as the truthmaker for modal truths of possibility. The first concerns whether dispositional property-talk can be used of a simple God at all; the second concerns whether predicating a dispositional property-term of a simple God rules out predicating other property-terms (for instance, goodness and will) of God.[17]

The first challenge, then, asks how a dispositional property might truly be predicated of God. According to divine simplicity, God cannot possess any properties that are really distinct from the simplicity of the divine life. But if God cannot possess a power as a property, it seems that predicating power of God requires affirming that God just is a dispositional property; and holding that God is an abstract object is difficult to reconcile with the personal God encountered in Scripture. To respond to this challenge, we require an account of how we may truly predicate property-terms of God, what Thomists generally describe as 'analogical' predication.[18]

On Thomas's understanding, each property predicated of the created order is 'an *accidens* inseparable from its subject because caused by the specific principles of its subject' (Dewan (1989), 142 n. 1).[19] That is to say, each property-term in our understanding and application of it to the created world is an '*inherent* (a "property") rather than a *subsistent* or concrete thing' (*ibid.*, 144). This limitation is built into our understanding of what it is for something to be a property: it does not subsist of itself, but exists either as an abstract object, or concretely as a quality of some other subject.

Accordingly, for the Thomist, it is inappropriate to predicate a property (as such) of God. As Lawrence Dewan writes, when we say that God is good or wise '*what the word signifies* is truly verified (that is, is to be found) in the very being or substance of God (though in a more perfect mode), whereas *the way the word says it* is

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

inapplicable – insofar as it . . . indicates inherence rather than subsistence' (*ibid.*, 144). Some likeness between God and created things, what Thomas calls the thing signified (*res significata*) by our property-word, is affirmed of our predications of God, and this likeness of God to the created order teaches us what the divine nature is like. But the mode of signification (*modus significandi*), the way that we generally use this property-word to refer to an accident that inheres in a substance, is denied.[20] And so, '[t]o say "God is good" means that "what we call 'good' in creatures is to be found existing by priority in God, though in a more eminent degree" ' (*ibid.*, 145).[21] Predications of God are thus said to be 'analogical', in that the likeness between created properties and the simple life of God allows us to predicate these properties of God truly, but their manner of existing in God (as a limitless perfection, identical to the simple life of God) is only analogous to their manner of existing in creatures (as limited inherents).

What we predicate of creation with property-terms like 'good' and 'wise' is also truly predicated of God, not because goodness or wisdom exist in God in the same inherently limited way that they exist in the created order, but because God is the perfection and source of created goodness and wisdom. Similarly, when I ascribe a dispositional property or 'power' to God, I do not mean that the divine nature just is such a property as we customarily encounter it; I mean that the powers we customarily encounter exhibit a likeness to God. God is truly powerful, but God's power is unrestricted even by the need to inhere in something as the subject of that power. God is power (and goodness, and so on for all the divine attributes) subsisting of itself, and so we are free to use both concrete ('God is powerful') and abstract ('God is power itself') terms of God without surrendering God's personal existence.[22]

The second challenge concerns the predication of diverse property-terms to a simple God. My response to the modal collapse argument will require predicating not only power of God, but goodness and will as well. Without being able to affirm all three of these predications to be true of God's simple life, my alternative account of modal grounding will fail. Yet, on the understanding of analogical predication that I have provided, it seems that we *can* truly ascribe the diverse attributes of power, goodness, and will to God without undermining divine simplicity. As Leftow writes, for the Thomist,

> Omniscience is or supervenes on that state which is God's knowing what He does. Omnipotence is or supervenes on that state which is God's having the abilities He has. The terms 'omniscience' and 'omnipotence' of course carry distinct senses, but what reason is there to find it odd that God satisfies them in virtue of the same inner state? Is this any more surprising than that some substance satisfies 'water' (taken as having a sense involving directly perceptible attributes) and 'H_2O' in virtue of the same inner constitution? (Leftow (1990), 598 n. 27)

When we attribute omniscience and omnipotence to God, we are not saying that these terms as we understand them are identical to one another, but rather that whatever is true of God in these predications, when stripped of the limitation

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

inherent in our property-talk and understanding of these properties in predicating them, is one in the simple life of God. As predicated of creatures, attributes like power and goodness seem (and indeed are) irreducibly diverse, yet in God, all these attributes refer to the same 'inner constitution', the simple life of God. If it is difficult for us to see how these diverse attributes might be one in God, this shouldn't overly trouble the Thomist, for Thomists have generally held that the divine essence is incomprehensible.[23]

In sum: while God is not, strictly speaking, a dispositional property, we can learn something of what the divine life is like through reflection on them; for power, understood as the dispositional property we routinely predicate of creatures stripped of the inherent limitation in the manner we predicate them, is truly ascribable to God.[24] Henceforth, when I speak of power as 'analogically predicated' of God, or when I speak of God's power as being 'on analogy to' the dispositional properties possessed by creatures, I will be assuming this account of the difference between predications made of God and predications made of creatures.[25]

Vetter's dispositions and God's power

Not all understandings of dispositional properties are equally well suited to be ascribed to a simple God. On what Barbara Vetter has called 'the standard conception of dispositions', for instance, '[a] disposition is individuated by the pair of its stimulus condition and its manifestation', and '[its] modal nature is, in some way or other, linked to or best characterized (to a first approximation) by a counterfactual conditional "If x were S, x would M" ' (Vetter (2015), 34).[26] While the 'standard conception' comes in various reductive, non-reductive, and realist flavours, what these approaches have in common is a shared sense that counterfactual conditionals are indispensable in accounting for how a disposition may serve as a truthmaker for modal claims. Consequently, on the standard conception, a disposition is best understood as 'a disposition to M when S' (*ibid.*, 34).

Most dispositions, whether encountered at the level of everyday experience or of physical law, seem to require more than one counterfactual conditional to be individuated properly: they are 'multi-track' dispositions, rather than 'single-track'.[27] A single-track disposition is individuated by a conditional of the sort, 'If this vase were to be struck, it would break', while a multi-track disposition employs many counterfactual conditionals: the vase's fragility is such that it may break if it is struck with a hammer, but not if it is struck with a wiffle-ball bat. But how should we relate these single- and multi-track dispositions to one another – which is more fundamental? 'Given the standard conception of dispositions', Vetter writes, 'there is considerable pressure to favour the single-track, specific dispositions. If the nature of fragility is best or adequately characterized by conditionals, then it will be infinitely complex, for it requires an infinity of conditionals' (*ibid.*, 55).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This presents a problem for the defender of divine simplicity. If the standard conception of dispositions is correct, and if we are seeking to understand God's power on the analogy of creaturely powers, God's power is either single-track (in which case what God actually does is the only thing God can do), or multi-track. If God's power is multi-track, then the standard conception leads us to view God's power as composed of an infinite number of single-track dispositions, and so divine simplicity is violated.

Vetter argues, however, that many of the dispositions with which we are familiar (for instance, electric charge) are impossible to account for if one presumes that single-track dispositions are more fundamental than multi-track dispositions.[28] She thus takes the crucial step of claiming that multi-track dispositions are '*more* fundamental' than single-track dispositions.[29] In contrast to the standard conception, she offers what she calls the 'possibility conception' of dispositions:

> 1. A disposition is individuated by its manifestation alone: it is a disposition to M, full stop.
> 2. Its modal nature is that of possibility, linked to or best characterized (to a first approximation) by '*x* can M'. (*ibid.*, 65)

On Vetter's account, if a ballplayer has a dispositional property to catch baseballs, one and the same property is the truthmaker for all the modal truths about ways that that player can catch a baseball. Furthermore, this disposition is not complex. The disposition to catch baseballs is not composed of the disposition to catch baseballs approaching at 45°, and 47°, and so on – it is a disposition to catch baseballs, full stop. While the disposition to catch baseballs is not itself fundamental (Vetter calls it an 'iterated potentiality', a dispositional property able to be acquired based on other dispositions one possesses), even at the fundamental level, dispositional properties are multi-track.

Vetter's approach requires no necessary appeal to counterfactual conditionals to account for the modal truthmaking features of this property. The dispositional property itself is understood to be modal, and is of itself fully sufficient to make true the truths of possibility. Though counterfactual conditionals might, in practice, be employed in describing what a subject has a disposition to do, possibility is rooted in the dispositional property itself. Vetter is thus able to define possibility in terms of dispositional properties (she prefers to call them 'potentialities') quite simply:

> POSSIBILITY*: It is possible that $p = d_f$ Something has, had, or will have a potentiality for it to be the case that *p*. (*ibid.*, 199)[30]

In a final theoretical advantage of Vetter's account for the defence of divine simplicity, we are able to do away with the stimulus condition, individuating dispositional properties solely by their manifestations. It is worth noting that individuation in this way does not require that the dispositional property should

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ever actually *be* manifested – the baseball player is still able to catch a baseball, even if she never tries to catch one. We could thus restate Vetter's first feature of the 'possibility conception' of dispositional properties in more classically Thomist language by saying that they are individuated by their 'end', the manifestation towards which such properties intrinsically tend.

Drawing, then, on the technical categories of dispositional properties that Vetter works out, we may say that the simple life of God is analogous to (i) a power to will God's own infinite goodness. This divine power may be described as (ii) intrinsic, (iii) maximal, (iv) first-order, and (v) multi-track. Within the created order, God's power is most like created powers that are intrinsic, maximal, first-order, and multi-track, and Vetter's account enables us to identify these particular features of created powers as likenesses of the simple life of God. Yet power is predicated of God analogically, absent the limitation of being predicated as the property of a subject, and so even in God's likeness to creaturely powers there is an even greater unlikeness.[31] In the interest of clarity, let me consider each descriptor of this claim in turn.

First, this power is the power to will God's own infinite goodness – this is its manifestation or end. The 'modal nature' of this power is that God can will God's own infinite goodness, and the simple life of God makes true modal claims of contingency because this power is truly attributable to God. We should note that, on a Thomistic outlook, God's infinite goodness is God, just as God's power is. There is thus no composition entailed by this willing: God's power is perhaps best understood as God's volitional power to be God, who is the source and standard of all created goods. Neither is there any necessary composition between God's goodness and God's willing, for as we saw above in our discussion of analogical predication, the same underlying state of God's simple life can account for the truth of predicating both goodness and will to God. The relevant power is God's power to be God, and thus to be the perfection of all goodness.

Second, this divine power is intrinsic, an attribute of the divine life itself (where an attribute is understood to be analogically related to the life of God in the manner I have described above). The divine power depends upon no external circumstances, and is not possessed jointly. God's willing of God's own infinite goodness is not conditioned or dependent upon any other entity, and is manifested solely by God's act.

Third, the divine power is maximal: God cannot fail to manifest this power. As Vetter argues, many dispositional properties are intensive, ordered by degrees: a thing can be more or less fragile, and something is maximally breakable if it is not possible for it not to break – it will break under any circumstances. That God's power is maximal is ensured on the Thomist account by the affirmation of the divine life as pure act. If there is no potency in God, then God cannot fail to will any less than the full extent of this infinite good.

Fourth, this divine power is a power *simpliciter* – that is, a first-order power, rather than a power to acquire some other power (an 'iterated' potentiality, in Vetter's use). There would be two problems with holding that God's power to create (for instance) is an iterated power of God's disposition to will God's own infinite goodness. First, acquiring such a power would require change in God, which would require some potency in God that is subsequently actualized. Second, God's possession of an iterated power alongside the first-order power to will God's goodness would require composition in God. Any power that is attributed to God should thus be included within the first-order power analogically predicated of the simplicity of the divine life.

Fifth and finally, this power should be understood as a multi-track power. God's power is individuated by the one manifestation of perfectly willing the good, but this power is multi-track, realizable in many different ways. In creating the actual world, God realizes one 'track' along which God is capable of fully enacting the willing of the divine life. To use the Thomist lexicon, there is no potency that remains unactualized in this power being manifested by one particular track. A baseball player has the power to catch a fly ball, and may catch it in any number of different ways; but in catching it in one particular way, the power is fully realized in act. Similarly, Thomas understands God's willing of the created order as ordered to the end of God's own goodness; the same end might have been willed through the creation of some other world, or through no world at all. As Thomas writes at *Summa Theologiae* 1.19.2, God 'wills both Himself to be, and other things to be; but Himself as the end, and other things as ordained to that end; inasmuch as it befits the divine goodness that other things should be partakers therein'.[32] It is necessary that God wills this end, but not absolutely necessary to the divine life that it should be willed in this particular way, inclusive of the created order.[33]

In explicating these claims, defenders of divine simplicity typically emphasize that God's life is itself full and infinite goodness, lacking nothing. Robert Sokolowski for instance writes: 'God is to be so understood, and the world or creatures are to be so understood, that nothing greater, *maius*, is achieved if the world or creatures are added to God' (Sokolowski (1995), 8). Consequently, had God willed to exist without creation, God would not have willed a lesser goodness than God has willed in creating the world – the same power would have been realized.[34] Similarly, had God willed the creation of a different world, God would not have willed a lesser (or greater) goodness than God has willed in creating this one.[35] Each of these acts of willing would have produced different effects, to be sure, but in each case, the power manifested is the same: the power to will God's infinite goodness as ultimate end. The range of possible worlds is limited only by the necessity of being compatible with the divine life itself and the attributes ascribed to it. For instance, God's goodness itself presumably renders worlds where the righteous are unjustly subject to unending torture impossible as a 'track' for realizing the divine power to will the good perfectly.[36]

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

We must offer some further qualifications if we wish to attribute this dispositional property analogously to God. Most obviously, if we wish to maintain the Thomist affirmation that the divine life should be described as pure act, it is important to avoid conceiving of this property at any point in the divine life as a power yet to be realized, and so indeterminate in the particular track by which God wills the good that is the divine life. There is no point at which God decides to create the world, thus selecting the track that includes the creation of the actual world instead of the other possible worlds which might also have served the end of God's willing the divine goodness. We must rather understand the creation of this particular world as included within the divine will from all eternity: in the very timelessness of God's life, this is the track by which God wills God's own goodness. Were this not the case, the divine life would be composed of act and still-indeterminate potency. Rather than conceiving of God's power as a dispositional property that may yet be realized along multiple tracks, it is important to understand it as a multi-track property that is already fully realized in its determinate content from all eternity.

Responding to the modal collapse argument

With this understanding of God's power in mind, how might we respond to the modal collapse argument?

Most importantly, this dispositional account of God's power allows us to reject the inference at (1) of the modal collapse argument above: God exists necessarily, but this does not entail that God's actual will and act (most importantly, God's creative will and act) are necessary. While God necessarily wills God's own goodness (because it is a *maximal* dispositional property that is analogically predicated of God), God's power is intrinsically such that God can do many other things that God does not do. Not creating would be perfectly consistent with the willing of the divine good, as would be creating a world very different than the actual world. All these modal claims of possibility are made true by what God's power is actually like in the simplicity of the divine life. Just as the baseball player's one power to catch baseballs makes true all the different ways that she can catch a baseball, and as the vase's fragility makes true all the modal truths about its shattering, so also the one dispositional property analogically predicated of God makes true modal claims about the contingency of the created order and other ways that the world might have been. Nothing is required for these to be true but the actual power of God, analogically ascribed to the simplicity of the divine life. Accordingly, although God exists necessarily and wills the divine good necessarily, it is inappropriate to conclude that all that God does bears this same modal status. There are many things that God can do (things compatible with willing the divine good) that God does not do, and because the divine power is itself a truthmaker for modal claims, these are metaphysical possibilities. No distinction or composition in the divine life is

required to secure this result, for it is the one power of God that grounds these modal truths.

In light of this argument, we should also reject the premise at (2): the claim that it is possible for God to do something that God does not do, does not entail that there is potency in God. On the account that I have given, there is no potency in God: from all eternity, God's power to will the divine good is eternally actualized – God wills the infinite good of the divine life along one track in fully determinate fashion. When a ballplayer catches a baseball, her disposition to catch baseballs is fully actualized along one track. There is no further work that she needs to do to actualize this dispositional property – she has caught the baseball as fully as it can be caught, and thus actualized this disposition as fully as it can be actualized. Certainly, it remains possible for her to catch baseballs in other, golden glove-winning ways, but the disposition itself is individuated as a disposition to catch baseballs, and she has done that. These other tracks of ball-catching are not more fundamental than this disposition, such that one track might be actualized while the others remain only in potency; the disposition itself has been actualized and manifested. On the analogy of these creaturely dispositional properties, the divine life is from all eternity the pure actuality of one track of God's power – willing the divine good, and the course of created history as ordered to this good. God's power is intrinsically such that other tracks are possible, but this is made true by what God is actually like, the divine power predicated analogically of the simplicity of God's life. Thus we have other possibilities, without any potency in God.

Modal collapse is thus averted. God eternally wills to create, and this will is identical to the simplicity of God's life; but God does not necessarily will to create, for the power of God grounds the possibility that God might have created another world, or might not have created at all. God does not do all that it is possible for God to do, but this requires ascribing no potency to God. What comes to be does not come to be necessarily, and God's gift of grace is not compulsory, because other ways of willing are perfectly compatible with the way the divine nature actually is, and the way the divine nature actually is perfectly suffices to ground a well-formed modal discourse including truths of both necessity and possibility. We may affirm divine simplicity, and nevertheless reason about how God might have created the world otherwise.

Objections

Responding to three potential objections will render the lines of my account more precisely.

First: my account affirms that God's will to create – and in fact, God's will to bring the actual world into being in its complete course, with full determinacy – is included in God's life from all eternity. This will, and this act, are each analogically ascribed to God and identified with the simplicity of the divine life. Isn't this

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

precisely the modal collapse we were trying to avoid? The objection hinges on the intuition that the eternally determinate actuality of God's willing precludes the possibility that God might have willed otherwise. If there is no potency in God, there is no possibility of God doing otherwise than God does, and so there are no other possible ways the world could be.

On Vetter's account of modal grounding, however, there is no incompatibility between the actuality of a state of affairs and the dispositional property that makes possible that state of affairs. Quite the contrary, one of Vetter's central modal axioms is what she calls ACTUALITY:

> ACTUALITY: Potentiality is implied by actuality:
>
> Anything which is Φ must also have a potentiality to be Φ. (Vetter (2015), 182)

The actuality of the ballplayer's having caught a baseball entails that she possesses a dispositional property (here again, Vetter prefers the language of 'potentiality' rather than 'power') to catch baseballs. That dispositional property not only grounds the ballplayer's possibility of catching the baseball in the manner that she does, but numerically the same dispositional property grounds her possibility of catching baseballs in every manner of which she is capable. If actuality and power are not mutually exclusive attributes when encountered as accidental properties in the created order, why should we think that the actuality of God's willing and God's power preclude one another when analogically predicated of the divine life? As in the case of the ballplayer, the actuality of God's willing the divine good entails that God has the power to will the divine good, and so we also attribute this power to the divine life. It is God's power – the multi-track dispositional property analogically predicated of God – that grounds the modal truths of possibility, and so there is no modal collapse. The actuality of God's willing does not preclude God's having this power. It is true that we require some account of how these diverse predications of will and power can both refer to the simple life of God, rather than to two different properties, but I have argued above that we possess such an account. If we are able to predicate both the actuality of willing the divine good and the power to will the divine good analogically to God, then we are able to ground all the truths of what it is possible for God to do: creating other worlds, refraining from creating at all, and so on.

A second objection is raised by Mullins against the traditional Thomist attempt to distinguish between the absolute necessity with which God wills the divine life, and the conditional necessity with which God brings the world into being. Mullins writes,

> [i]f God's act of creation is of conditional necessity, His act is not identical to His essence. This is so because conditional necessity is not identical to absolute necessity. So if the Thomist makes this move, she will be abandoning divine simplicity because she will be forced to say that God's act is not identical to God's essence. (Mullins (2016), 138)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The worry is that, if God's essence is willed with absolute necessity, but the creation of the world is willed with only conditional necessity, then either there is a real distinction in God between essence and existence; or God has God's essence only by conditional necessity; or God's act (and more particularly the creation of the world) is absolutely necessary.[37] Yet according to the account I have offered, we require no distinction within the divine will between what God wills with conditional necessity and absolute necessity. Neither must we appeal to any moment or state in the divine life prior to God's willing what God actually wills. God simply wills what God wills from all eternity, and God's power is intrinsically such that it makes true many modal truths of possibility. God's willing of the divine good is necessary to God because the divine power is such that its full actuality along any determinate track entails willing the divine goodness, and creation is contingent because that same divine power does not entail willing the existence of any creature, but this depends on no real distinction within that power itself.

Yet this raises a third objection: doesn't the positing of many tracks along which the divine power might be actualized introduce complexity in God? Leftow has raised this objection in the course of considering whether the Thomist might distinguish between God's will and God's manner of willing:

> mustn't there be some real distinction in God between the willing and the manner, and how is this compatible with divine simplicity? There either is or is not something in which it consists for the willing to be in the one manner or the other. If there is, it seems that that something must be there contingently, and so we introduce internal complexity in a simple God. If there is not . . . we seem to solve the problem by magic. (Leftow (2009), 36)

According to the account I have offered, however, there is no distinction between a necessary and a contingent component of God's willing. God's power is, necessarily, what it is, and is *itself* such that it grounds non-actual possibilities without any internal complexity. As in Vetter's account of creaturely dispositional properties, God's power is fundamental: the possibly actualizable tracks along which this power may be manifested are themselves based upon God's power, on analogy to the irreducible modality of Vetter's dispositional properties. As with Vetterian potentialities, we can distinguish between the property itself and the property as realized along a particular track, but it is the very same property under discussion in either case. Theologically, we might say God's will is fully determinate, eternally including the will to create the actual world and all the particulars of the course of that world. God's power to will the divine good is fully in act, and so God does in fact will the divine good along some particular track. Yet the divine power is intrinsically such that it might conceivably have been actualized in many different ways without difference in the power itself. It is, importantly, this intrinsic modal feature of what the divine dispositional property is *actually* like, rather than a possibility that God might have willed otherwise, that grounds the modal order of creation. Here again, the relevant distinction is between God's will and God's power.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

If, then, the diverse attributes of power and will can be analogically ascribed to the simplicity of the divine life, God's power succeeds in grounding modal truths of possibility without ascribing any potency or other real distinction to God. As Vetter's ACTUALITY shows, the actuality of some creature's being Φ does not preclude, but rather entails, a subject's possessing a dispositional property to be Φ. There is accordingly no reason that these attributions should be mutually exclusive when predicated analogically of the divine life.

Conclusion

Does this account provide a sufficient account of metaphysical possibility and divine freedom? One's answer to this question will largely depend upon one's theological proclivities. It does not render creation absolutely necessary to God, as the divine power also grounds the possibility of other courses of created history. It follows the traditional Thomist rejection of any indeterminacy in the divine will, without portraying God's will as constrained by necessity.[38]

Yet it is worth acknowledging that my account has little place for the sort of deliberative freedom that many (including some within a broadly Thomist outlook) have wanted to ascribe to God; but I join philosophers like Lynne Rudder Baker and theologian Jesse Couenhoven in holding that it is undesirable to attribute such freedom to the Christian, and to God.[39] Nevertheless, for some, holding that the divine will is fully determinate from all eternity may come uncomfortably close to holding that the act of creation is essential to God.

This would, however, be an improper conclusion. Worries that the eternal actuality of the divine being might improperly constrain God's will, or attempts to base the divine being on an eternal divine decision, both threaten to push beyond the proper limits of human intellect, attempting to peer into the incomprehensible mystery of the divine life in which the being and act of God are one.[40] For the proponent of divine simplicity, the being of God is not more basic than the will or act of God – all these attributes analogically refer to the simple life of God. It would be a mistake, then, to imagine that what God wills is determined by what God's being is like; the latter is no more basic or fundamental than the former. It would be just as (in)appropriate to imagine God's will and act as 'constitutive' of God's being.[41] In sum, we have no account to give of why this or any world is what God wills to create – or, in the modal terms I have preferred here, why the particular track of willing God's perfect goodness that includes the creation of the world is realized over against all the other possible tracks. The simple life of God remains mysterious to us.

Having avoided the threat of modal collapse, we may nevertheless say that God 'creates us out of the superabundance of perfection that characterizes his infinite being', and may on surer modal ground '[attribute] to God something both like and unlike what we call free choice' (White (2016), 744). The divine nature imposes no constraint upon what God wills in the created order, and so what

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

God wills, God wills freely. Yet from all eternity the creation is included within the divine willing that is the simple life of God. There are still, no doubt, questions that remain about how we come to know of this simple life of God, how divine freedom is related to creaturely freedom, and indeed around the coherence of the doctrine of divine simplicity itself, but there is no modal collapse.[42]

References

Adams, Marilyn McCord (1999) *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

Adams, Marilyn McCord (2006) *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Baker, Lynne Rudder (2003) 'Why Christians should not be libertarians: an Augustinian challenge', *Faith and Philosophy*, **20**, 460–478.

Bird, Alexander (2007) *Nature's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Brower, Jeffrey E. (2005) 'Aquinas's metaphysics of modality: a reply to Leftow', *The Modern Schoolman*, **82**, 201–212.

Brower, Jeffrey E. (2008) 'Making sense of divine simplicity', *Faith and Philosophy*, **25,** 3–30.

Burrell, David B. (1973) *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

Burrell, David B. (1986) *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press).

Burrell, David B. (2008) *Aquinas: God and Action* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press).

Cameron, Ross P. (2010) 'The grounds of necessity', *Philosophy Compass*, **5**, 348–358.

Copan, Paul, & William Lane Craig (2004) *Creation out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic).

Couenhoven, Jesse (2012) 'The necessities of perfect freedom', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, **14,** 396–419.

Denzinger, Heinrich (2012) *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 43rd edn, Robert Fastiggi & Anne Englund Nash (eds) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press).

Dewan, Lawrence (1989) 'Saint Thomas, Alvin Plantinga, and the divine simplicity', *The Modern Schoolman*, **66**, 141–151.

Dolezal, James E. (2011) *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Eugene OR: Pickwick Publications).

Duby, Steven J. (2016) *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark).

Frost, Gloria Ruth (2009) 'Thomas Aquinas on necessary truths about contingent beings' (Unpublished PhD Dissertation: University of Notre Dame).

Frost, Gloria Ruth (2014) 'Aquinas and Scotus on the source of contingency', *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, **2**, 46–66.

Hinlicky, Paul R. (2016) *Divine Simplicity: Christ the Crisis of Metaphysics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic).

Jacobs, Jonathan D. (2010) 'A powers theory of modality: or, how I learned to stop worrying and reject possible worlds', *Philosophical Studies*, **151**, 227–248.

Jubien, Michael (2007) 'Analyzing Modality', *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, **3**, 99–139.

Kraay, Klaas J. (2008) 'Creation, actualization, and God's choice among possible worlds', *Philosophy Compass*, **3**, 854–872.

Kraay, Klaas J. (2011) 'Theism and modal collapse', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, **48**, 361–372.

Leftow, Brian (1990) 'Is God an abstract object?', *Noûs*, **24**, 581–598.

Leftow, Brian (2005a) 'Aquinas on God and modal truth', *The Modern Schoolman*, **82**, 171–200.

Leftow, Brian (2005b) 'Power, possibilia, and non-contradiction', *The Modern Schoolman*, **82**, 231–243.

Leftow, Brian (2006) 'Divine simplicity', *Faith and Philosophy*, **26**, 365–380.

Leftow, Brian (2009) 'Aquinas, divine simplicity, and divine freedom', in Kevin Timpe (ed.) *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump* (New York: Routledge), 21–38.

Levering, Matthew (2011) 'Christ, the Trinity, and predestination: McCormack and Aquinas', in Michael Dempsey (ed.) *Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 244–273.

Martin, C. B. (1994) 'Dispositions and conditionals', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, **44**, 1–8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

McCall, Thomas H. (2014) 'Trinity doctrine, plain and simple', in Oliver D. Crisp & Fred Sanders (eds) *Advancing Trinitarian Theology: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 42–59.
McCormack, Bruce L. (2013) 'Processions and missions: a point of convergence between Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth', in Bruce L. McCormack & Thomas Joseph White (eds) *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: An Unofficial Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 99–126.
McInerny, Ralph M. (1996) *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press).
McNall, Joshua (2015) *A Free Corrector: Colin Gunton and the Legacy of Augustine* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press).
Molnar, George (2003) *Powers: A Study in Metaphysics*, Stephen Mumford (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
Morris, Thomas V. (1985) 'On God and Mann: a view of divine simplicity', *Religious Studies*, **21**, 299–318.
Mullins, R. T. (2013) 'Simply impossible: a case against divine simplicity', *Journal of Reformed Theology*, **7**, 181–203.
Mullins, R. T. (2016) *The End of the Timeless God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
Mumford, Stephen (2005) 'Kinds, essences, powers', *Ratio*, **18**, 420–436.
Ortlund, Gavin (2014) 'Divine simplicity in historical perspective: resourcing a contemporary discussion', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, **16**, 436–453.
Pawl, Timothy J. (2008) 'A Thomistic account of truthmakers for modal truths' (Unpublished PhD Dissertation: Saint Louis University).
Plantinga, Alvin (1980) *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press).
Radde-Gallwitz, Andrew (2009) *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
Rogers, Katherin A. (2000) *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).
Rosenkrantz, Gary (1985) 'Necessity, contingency, and Mann', *Faith and Philosophy*, **2**, 457–463.
Sider, Theodore (2011) *Writing the Book of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
Smith, Barry D. (2014) *The Oneness and Simplicity of God* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers).
Sokolowski, Robert (1995) *The God of Faith and Reason* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press).
Spencer, Mark K. (2017) 'The flexibility of divine simplicity: Aquinas, Scotus, Palamas', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, **57**, 123–139.
Stump, Eleonore (2003) *Aquinas* (Abingdon: Routledge).
Stump, Eleonore (2016) 'Simplicity and Aquinas's quantum metaphysics', in Gerhard Krieger (ed.) *Die Metaphysik des Aristoteles im Mittelalter: Rezeption und Transformation: Akten der 14. Tagung der Karl und Gertrud Abel-Stiftung vom 4.-6. Oktob* (Berlin: De Gruyter), 191–210.
te Velde, Rudi (2006) *Aquinas on God: The 'Divine Science' of the* Summa Theologiae (Farnham: Ashgate).
Thomas, Aquinas (2008) *The Summa Theologiae of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Latin-English Edition* I, Fathers of the English Dominican Province (trs) (Scotts Valley CA: NovAntiqua).
Tomaszewski, Christopher M. P. (2018) 'Collapsing the modal collapse argument: on an invalid argument against divine simplicity', *Analysis*, doi.org/10.1093/analys/any052
Torrance, Alan (2013) 'Reclaiming the continuing priesthood of Christ: implications and challenges', in Oliver D. Crisp & Fred Sanders (eds) *Christology, Ancient and Modern: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 184–204.
Vetter, Barbara (2011) 'Recent work: modality without possible worlds', *Analysis*, **71**, 742–754.
Vetter, Barbara (2013) 'Multi-track dispositions', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, **63**, 330–352.
Vetter, Barbara (2015) *Potentiality: From Dispositions to Modality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
White, Thomas Joseph (2016) 'Nicene orthodoxy and trinitarian simplicity', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, **90**, 727–750.
Williamson, Timothy (1998) 'Bare possibilia', *Erkenntnis*, **48**, 257–273.
Wilson, Jessica (2012) 'Fundamental determinables', *Philosopher's Imprint*, **12**, 1–17.

Notes

1. Use of the phrase 'modal collapse' to describe the consequences of the doctrine of divine simplicity comes from Mullins (2013). Mullins himself draws the phrase from Kraay (2008) and (2011), though Kraay considers modal collapse in the context of God's freedom or constraint to create a best possible world.

2. See Morris (1985), especially 307 on the impossibility of creaturely contingency, and Rosenkrantz (1985).
3. Copan & Craig (2004), 179.
4. Duby (2016), 193–195.
5. Mullins (2013) and (2016).
6. Alan Torrance writes that 'Mullins shows how divine simplicity and the attendant view that God is pure act lead to modal collapse . . . a position that is clearly odious to Christian theology' at Torrance (2013), 200–201; while Thomas McCall calls Mullins's argument an 'extremely important charge' and a 'very serious objection' at McCall (2014), 53–54. Since the 2013 publication of Mullins's article, his claim that divine simplicity leads to modal collapse has been cited also as evidence against divine simplicity at Smith (2014), 71 n. 55; Ortlund (2014), 436–453; McNall (2015), 65 n. 57; and Hinlicky (2016), 23.
7. Christopher Tomaszewski has recently presented a forceful case for the invalidity of premise (1), arguing that Mullins's argument depends on a fallacious modal substitution; see Tomaszewski (2018). Even if we assume, contrary to Tomaszewski, that Mullins's argument is valid, we can still show that it is unsound due to this premise, (1), being false.
8. So Mullins, (2016), 140:

> Anything that God might possibly be able to create or bring about, God must create or bring about. Otherwise, God has unactualized potential. This entails that there is only one way that the world can be – God actualizing all possible states of affairs. In other words, there is only one possible world.

9. See also Rogers (2000), 46–50.
10. Vetter (2015).
11. St Thomas makes these claims in *Summa Theologiae* 1.2-3. A fine introduction to Thomas's understanding of divine simplicity may be found at te Velde (2006), 78–85; for a more extensive discussion, see Burrell (2008), 13–30. Thomism is not the only avenue of response to the modal collapse argument. One might, for instance, develop an account of divine simplicity that rejects the claim that God is identical to God's attributes, as did Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa; see Radde-Gallwitz (2009), especially pages 143–169 and 175–218. Gavin Ortlund has traced the development of this understanding of divine simplicity in St John of Damascus at Ortlund (2014), 440–441. Recently, Mark Spencer has employed this strain of Cappadocian thought, mediated through the Palamite essence/energy distinction, to modify the Thomist account of divine simplicity in response to the challenge of reconciling divine simplicity and divine freedom; see Spencer (2017), particularly pages 136–139. In addition, one might opt for one or another species of 'modal deflationism', according to which our modal attributions of necessity and possibility do not map anything at the fundamental level. On deflationist accounts of modality, see Cameron (2010); for an especially careful example of one such account, see Sider (2011).
12. See Martin (1994), Molnar (2003), Mumford (2005), Bird (2007), Jacobs (2010).
13. Vetter (2011), 742. At Vetter (2015), 6, she also notes the criticisms of possible worlds accounts of modality offered by Williamson (1998) and Jubien (2007) as motivating factors for the turn to dispositionalism about modal claims.
14. See also Jeffrey Brower's response at Brower (2005), and Leftow's rejoinder Leftow (2005b).
15. It is worth noting Leftow's own objections to his reconstruction of Thomas's truthmaker theory, what Brower calls the 'power-reduction problem' (the problem of how modal facts may reduce to an ostensibly non-modal fact, God's life), and the 'one–many problem' (the question of how the simple life of God can make true many diverse modal facts). I agree with Brower's rejoinder: 'If Aquinas can show definitively *that* God must be the explanation for all the powers he has and for all modal truths there are, then he will have accomplished all he needs to accomplish, even if he can't show *how* this is the case'; Brower (2005), 209. Leftow's worry that the doctrine of divine simplicity and its attendant rejection of any distinct aspects in God's life renders us incapable of describing precisely 'how one unstructured, undifferentiated reality makes true all modal truths, however varied their content' (Leftow (2005a), 185) seems mitigated by a properly Thomist apophatic reserve. We should not be surprised that we cannot describe how the one divine life itself is the source in which the varied things of the created order exist through participation, because that divine life is essentially incomprehensible.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

16. See Leftow (2005a), 183 and (2005b); Pawl (2008), 198–213; and Frost (2009), 145–158. Frost goes so far as to say that 'Aquinas's texts leave no doubt that he did not hold the view that Leftow ascribes to him' (Frost (2009), 149).
17. These are, of course, versions of the objections to divine simplicity that Alvin Plantinga raises at Plantinga (1980), 46–61.
18. On Thomas's understanding of analogy, see especially Burrell (2008), 63–77 and te Velde (2006), 95–121, as well as Burrell (1973), McInerny (1996), and Stump (2003), 92–130.
19. Dewan is discussing here Aquinas's *In Posteriorum analyticorum Aristotelis* 1.14.
20. *Summa Theologiae* 1.13.3.
21. Citing *Summa Theologiae* 1.13.2. See Leftow (2006), 368–371 for an account of the divine attributes as predicable of God in virtue of God's being the 'standard' of attribution of these predicates to the created order.
22. This feature of analogical predication helps answer Alvin Plantinga's worries that the doctrine of divine simplicity might require holding that God is an abstract object; see also James Dolezal's response at Dolezal (2011), 145–147. Leftow also notes that the suggestion that God has some abstract-object features would help explain why God is a concrete object that seems to evidence some attributes otherwise true of abstracta – for instance, necessary existence; see Leftow (1990), 593–594.
23. For other defences of the predication of diverse attributes to a simple God, see Leftow (2006); Brower (2008); and Duby (2016), 186–193. Describing the divine essence as incomprehensible raises many questions about how we come to know it; see Burrell (1986) for one Thomist account attempting to answer them.
24. One might object that dispositional property-talk, as a disposition to do some thing or some range of things, inherently requires limitation, and so is unfit to be applied to God in a way that talk of goodness is not. As we will see, however, the disposition I will ascribe to God is the disposition to will God's own infinite goodness, and so any other end of God's willing could only be a privation or diminishment of this act of willing, in that it would be directed to a lesser good or to the *nihil* itself.
25. An anonymous reviewer wonders whether truths of possibility might be grounded not in God's power (as the Thomist tradition holds), but rather in matter (as is characteristic of more classical Neo-Platonism). This position would actually end up quite close to Vetter's, who grounds possibility not in God, but in the potentialities of what exists at the origin of the universe (Vetter (2015), 290–291). Such an approach would not, as far as I can see, answer the modal collapse argument: if possibility is grounded wholly in creation, divine simplicity still seems to require attributing necessity to God's act of creation, falling afoul of affirmations of God's freedom in creating. See also Mullins's discussion of John Philoponus at Mullins (2016), 138–139.
26. In speaking of the 'standard conception of dispositions', Vetter has in mind accounts like those of Martin (1994), Mumford (2005), Bird (2007), and Jacobs (2010); see Vetter (2015), ch. 2.
27. In addition to the discussions of multi-track properties in Vetter (2015), see Vetter (2013).
28. See Vetter (2015), 56–59.
29. Vetter notes this as her principal point of departure from Wilson (2012) at Vetter (2015), 57 n. 13.
30. I cite POSSIBILITY* over POSSIBILITY, as the former makes clear that POSSIBILITY is to be read as untensed.
31. So the Fourth Lateran Council's (1215) famous formulation: 'between Creator and creature no similitude can be expressed without implying a greater dissimilitude' (Denzinger (2012), 806).
32. Thomas Aquinas (2008), 242. See also the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 74–76.
33. *Summa Theologiae* 1.19.3; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 80–83.
34. Frost (2014), 52.
35. *Ibid.*, 53.
36. An anonymous reviewer raises the question of how we know that the actual world is in fact compatible with God's goodness. Given the immense suffering we encounter in the world, my suspicion is that we believe this now only by faith, and hope to know it eschatologically. Adams (1999) and (2006) continue to be indispensable in setting out clearly both the problem and a richly Christological description of how God might overcome horrendous evils.
37. This way of framing the issue is indebted to Brian Leftow's critique of Thomist accounts of conditional necessity at Leftow (2009), 23–29.
38. See *Summa Theologiae* 1.19.8 and Frost's discussion at Frost (2014), 48.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412518000859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

39. Baker (2003) and Couenhoven (2012).
40. Eleonore Stump has offered a suggestive understanding of divine freedom based on this insight at Stump (2016).
41. See Levering (2011) and McCormack (2013).
42. Many thanks to Paul Griffiths, Paul Nedelisky, participants in a session of the Society of Christian Philosophers–Pacific, members of the University of Virginia Metaphysics Writing Workshop, and three anonymous reviewers for comments on various drafts of this article.