

BOOK SYMPOSIUM

PRÉCIS OF

GOD AND NECESSITY

by

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The Western monotheisms teach that everything but God traces back in some way to God. Necessary truth and modal truth more generally raise a question for this: if there are entities whose existing or nature help make it true (say) that $2+2=4$ or that $\text{water} = \text{H}_2\text{O}$, do even these trace back to God? In its medieval and rationalist heyday, theistic metaphysics mostly answered 'yes'. If everything traces back to God somehow, modal truth does. The dominant sort of theory – 'deity' theories – traced modal truth somehow to God's very nature, e.g. the content of the property <deity> or ideas He 'naturally' has.

I too ground logical, mathematical and some normative truths in God's nature. But when it comes to modal truth about the non-divine, 'secular' modal truth, I argue against deity theories and offer an alternative. The argument is partly from the alternative's relative advantages, and partly that deity theories yields incongruities. Consider, for instance, the claim that

(1) (it is untrue that $\text{water} = \text{H}_2\text{O}$) \rightarrow God does not exist.

This is true simply because it has an impossible antecedent. It is true trivially, due to the semantics of conditionals, but only trivially. We are sure of this because the semantics suffices to explain its truth and its antecedent appears irrelevant to its consequent. (If water goes down, why should it take God with it?) But suppose that a deity theory is true. Then if God exists, His nature provides a truthmaker for <water = H_2O >.

So on a deity theory, if it is not true that water = H₂O, it must be that God does not exist. A truth-to-truthmaker connection provides a hidden link between (1)'s antecedent and consequent. (1) reflects a fact about the divine nature. So (1)'s truth is overdetermined. It is true for substantive as well as trivial reasons and (unintuitively) its antecedent *is* relevant to its consequent. All this is a strike against deity theories.

If God's nature in no way makes it the case that water = H₂O or that there is such a stuff-kind as <H₂O>, then a theist modal metaphysics must hold that God's creative thought is the ultimate root of secular modal truth. God has by nature only general creature-directed powers: e.g. to creatively think up creatures, make decisions concerning them, create and sustain them. God's nature does not explain that there is such a kind as <dog>. Nothing required Him to think up <dog>. Rather, coming up with it was sheer creativity. God simply dreamed up dogs, considered them, decided that they were good enough to permit to exist, and by so doing gave Himself a specific power to create dogs which had not been His by nature. All this takes place at once: no sooner does He think up dogs than He considers, decides, etc. God's thinking is so thoroughly the sole reason there is such a kind as <dog> that had God not thought up <dog>, it would not have been so much as impossible that dogs exist. There would have been no facts about dogs at all, not even that God had not thought them up, and so no modal facts about dogs. For if this were not so, <dog> would have some purchase in reality God's thought had not given it.

Nor does what God has *de facto* thought up exhaust His creativity. His creativity is not of a sort to be fully expressed by an array of possible creatures, creature-kinds, etc. So why isn't there such a further kind as <zog>? Not because He exhausted Himself before getting to it, and not because God's nature ruled it out. God's nature has no content about specific creaturely kinds at all. The only reason there isn't such a kind is that God *de facto* didn't think it up. In particular, God's nature did not explain His not thinking this up. It did not prevent His doing so. So – I say – it was in God to think up things He has not, then permit them to be possible. As He did not do so, it follows that it was in Him to make something possible which is not in fact possible, and so to bring about something which is in fact impossible. If we do not say something like this, His nature will wind up limiting or determining the contents of His thinking and permitting, and so we will have a deity theory after all.

As I see it, God thinks up creaturely attributes, and so if they have definitional essences, He thinks up their definitions. That is why they have the content they do: God accounts for definitional essential truths. God stipulates transworld identities, somewhat as authors stipulate trans-story identity for their characters, and that is the root of creatures' individual essences. God's powers to will to make His contribution to (what we speak of as) a worlds' actuality take over the role of possible worlds in modal semantics. On my account, the logic of absolute modality is S5, and I show that one can give it a Kripke-style semantics. Divine necessity falls out of all this, though not in the most obvious way.

If all this works out, it completes my case against deity theories: we can avoid the incongruities they generate at acceptable cost. Theistic Platonism is now popular in some quarters. If my theory works out, it undercuts theistic Platonism as deity theories did historically: God can take over the roles for which theist Platonists posit abstract entities. If theism alone can do these jobs, the Platonism in theistic Platonism is otiose. The like turns out true for theistic possibilism. So if my theory works, it becomes the best theistic competitor against other realist approaches to modality.

I think my view wins against realist theories that base the modal on creaturely powers rather than those of omnipotence. For it takes omnipotence to get the extension of the possible right. Creaturely powers aren't capable of everything we think should come out possible. Omnipotence is guaranteed to be. I argue for my view against Platonic theories of worlds, non-world Platonist modal ontologies and both Meinong's and Lewis' possibilism on grounds of economy: God does on the cheap what these other views do more expensively. All this provides one component of an argument for God's existence, for an entity can earn its place in the philosopher's toolbox by what we can do with it.