


ORIGINAL ARTICLE

In defence of God making stuff up: a reply to Ward

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Abstract

Thomas Ward explicates and defends a version of divine exemplarism called Containment Exemplarism to make good on the claim that God is a ‘totally original artist’. According to Containment Exemplarism, (i) God *ex nihilo* creates according to divine ideas, (ii) divine ideas are about an aspect or part of God, and (iii) God has the ideas he has by knowing himself. Containment Exemplarism, we are told, secures the rationality and creativity of the divine creative act. I argue, first, that Ward’s God is not a totally original artist since, on Containment Exemplarism, God does not act creatively in creating. Theistic Activism, the view that God makes up the ideas he has, can secure the creativity of the divine creative act. I argue, second, that Ward’s argument against the rationality of God making stuff up fails. Thus, there is one version of divine exemplarism that satisfies key desiderata for divine creation.

Keywords: Divine ideas; divine exemplarism; Containment Exemplarism; Theistic Activism; creativity; rationality; artist; creation

According to traditional Christian theology, God is the creator of all reality that is distinct from God. The divine creative act of bringing the world into being is sovereign and free, rational, creative, and good. Divine exemplarism represents an historically prominent theory for explaining *how* God creates in this way. In *Divine Ideas*, Thomas M. Ward explicates and defends a particular version of divine exemplarism rooted in Dun Scotus’s thinking called Containment Exemplarism as the rationally preferred theistic account of divine creative activity (Ward (2020)). According to Containment Exemplarism, (i) God *ex nihilo* creates according to divine ideas, (ii) divine ideas are about an aspect or part of God, and (iii) God has the ideas he has by knowing himself (i.e. in virtue of God’s perfect self-knowledge).

A key motive for Containment Exemplarism has to do with the dialectic related to the Source Question (SQ): where does God get his ideas? Ward considers five possible answers to SQ, ruling out all but the last one: (1) from nowhere, it is a brute fact that God has the ideas he has, (2) by looking outside himself to a realm of co-eternal abstract objects or Forms, (3) by making them up, (4) by knowing himself as imitable, and (5) by knowing himself (period). Possible answer (1) is rejected on theoretical grounds: all things being equal, explanations are better than non-explanations. Since there is at least one possible answer to SQ – namely, (5) – that is plausible and really does explain, then that view should be preferred over the inexplicable option. Possible answer (2) violates God’s sovereignty and freedom since God is not responsible, on this view, for the intelligible realm

and God's creative activity only extends to the material realm. Possible answer (3) renders God's creative activity either irrational or explanatorily vacuous. Possible answer (4) is unworkable because there is no plausible way to explain how creatures are imperfect imitations of God, especially given a strong version of divine simplicity. This leaves option (5) as the only viable contender as an answer to SQ: God gets his ideas by knowing himself.

In this article, I argue that option (3), the idea that God makes things up, is a better answer to SQ than option (5). I do not argue that it is the best answer of all possible answers (1)–(5), but if Ward is correct that (5) is better than (1), (2), and (4) and I'm correct that (3) is better than (5), then we have at least good *prima facie* reasons for thinking (3) is an all-things-considered best explanation to SQ. Still, my claim is more modest in this article: there are good reasons to think that the activist answer to SQ as summarized in (3) is better than the Containment Exemplarist answer to SQ. There are good reasons to think God makes up the ideas that he has, or at least some of them. I'll proceed as follows. First, I show that on Containment Exemplarism, God is not genuinely creative, God is not a 'totally original artist' (Ward (2020), 1). Since the divine act of creation is traditionally thought to be a creative act of God, and since Containment Exemplarism rules out genuine creativity, it follows that Containment Exemplarism is inconsistent with the traditional understanding of divine creation. This result warrants a reconsideration of possible answers (1)–(4) to the Source Question. Next, I show that Ward's argument against possible answer (3) to SQ is unsuccessful. The upshot is that there is at least one version of abstract object realism that satisfies the key desiderata for divine creative activity.

Containment Exemplarism and the creativity argument

According to Ward, in creating the world, God is *like* an artist. Like the human artist, God has something in mind prior to creating. But divine creation is also unlike human artistry in that God does not depend on any external conceptual or material medium for creating. 'God is the only totally original artist' (Ward (2020), 1). There is much to like about this set-up. The artist-artefact analogy is an attractive way for theists to understand God's relationship to the natural world, capturing the idea that God creates novel things of value with intention and purpose (Page (2022), 121). The idea that God is totally original is attractive too: God is supreme, creating out of nothing without depending on anything distinct from himself. While the initial set up is attractive, the devil is – as always seems to be the case – in the details.

I now argue that Ward's God does not qualify as a totally original *artist*. While the idea of an 'artist' is left unanalysed, intuitively, an artist is an exemplar of creativity. Artist manifest *person-creativity*, and artisanship involves *process-creativity* and *product-creativity*.¹ Human artists exhibit, to varying degrees, these three types of creativity. God, as the totally original artist, we might suppose, supremely exhibits these three kinds of creativity. The divine act of creating, on Containment Exemplarism, is free, sovereign, and rational. I deny however, that it is creative since Ward's God lacks *process-creativity*. God does not provide any creative contribution in bringing about the universe. But then, Ward's God is not a totally original artist. The *creativity argument* runs as follows:

- (1) God is a totally original artist. (Premise)
- (2) If God is a totally original artist, then God creates good things freely, sovereignly, rationally, and creatively. (Premise)
- (3) If Containment Exemplarism is true, then it is not the case that God creates creatively. (Premise)
- (4) Therefore, if Containment Exemplarism is true, then it is not the case that God is a totally original artist. (From (2) and (3))

- (5) Therefore, it is not the case that Containment Exemplarism is true. (From (1) and (4) by *modus tollens*)

Since we are assuming the truth of (1), the key premises in need of explication and defence are (2) and (3). Let's begin with premise (2).

Explication and defence of premise (2)

As the totally original – that is, underived and sovereign – being, it follows that God's creative activity will be sovereign and free. In creating, God neither depends on anything that is not God or some aspect or part of God nor is constrained by anything that is not God or some aspect or part of God. As an artist – an exemplar of creativity – any *act* of creation will exhibit *process-creativity*. Thus, God's creative activity is aptly described as 'creative'. At this point, it will be helpful to define further the notion of creativity behind the artist-artefact analogy. There is widespread consensus that the standard definition of creativity involves both novelty and value.² With respect to novelty, what does it mean to say of some product or process that it is 'original' or 'new' or 'novel'?

Consider the case of Elisha Gray and Alexander Graham Bell.³ Both independently developed the idea of a telephone. While Bell was the first to patent his idea of the telephone by a matter of hours, it is likely that Gray was the first to come up with the idea. Which inventor should be described as creative? The first to come up with the idea (Gray) or the first to patent the idea (Bell)? And since they both came up with the idea on their own, isn't it appropriate to describe both as creative? In her work on creativity, Margaret Boden makes a helpful distinction to elucidate the idea of novelty in play in instances of creativity. She distinguishes between *psychological creativity* (or P-creativity) and *historical creativity* (or H-creativity).

P-creativity involves coming up with a surprising, valuable idea that's new to the person who comes up with it. It doesn't matter how many people have had that idea before. But if a new idea is H-creative, that means that (so far as we know) no one else has had it before: it has arisen for the first time in human history. (Boden (2004), 2)

Thus, Gray exhibits both H-creativity and P-creativity whereas Bell exhibited P-creativity (assuming Gray was actually the first to come up with the idea of the telephone). As the totally original artist, God will exhibit H-creativity: for anything that God creates, it has never before arisen in *cosmic*, let alone *human*, history. But as the telephone case shows, an agent can have P-creativity without H-creativity, but not vice versa: if Gray has H-creativity, he must have P-creativity too. As Kind summarizes, and this is important for what follows, 'If something is genuinely new to the world, then it must also have been genuinely new to the mind who created it. P-creativity is the more fundamental notion of the two' (Kind (2022), 24). God's creation of the universe involves H-creativity because it involves P-creativity. Thus, God's creative activity includes intellectual creativity, or creative thinking. Thus, a totally original artist creates the universe freely, sovereignly, and creatively.

What about rationality? Will God's creative act be rational too? There is a tradition, going back to at least Plato (the Plato of the *Phaedrus*), that views creation as a fundamentally irrational act.⁴ The basic idea is nicely encapsulated by Schopenhauer in his claim that genius is 'closely akin to madness' (Schopenhauer (1969), 190).⁵ A less influential tradition that also finds its roots in Plato (the Plato of the *Timaeus*) sees creation as fundamentally a rational act. Christian theology has overwhelmingly sided with the

rationalist: given God's perfect rationality, God's creative activity is rational. God is 'appropriately sensitive' to reasons (Gaut (2012), 261). He knows what he is doing and why he does it. There are good reasons, stemming primarily from considerations related to omniscience and perfect rationality, for thinking that God's creative activity is rational. God's acting irrationally in creating would be inconsistent with God's nature.

Given the doctrines of divine aseity, sovereignty, perfect goodness, and perfect rationality as well as an endorsement of the artist-artefact analogy, we find, then, good reasons to think premise (2), now explained, is more plausible than its denial.

I end this section by noting that Ward accepts premise (2), along with this traditional understanding of divine creative activity. As already noted, according to Ward, God is the sole ultimate reality. God does not depend on anything for his existence and nature and everything that is not God depends on God for its existence and nature.

God creates the world *ex nihilo* – that is, from no material thing which exists prior to God's creation of the world. Thus, God depends on no material medium . . . Moreover, God himself is sufficiently rich in intelligible content that God gets his very idea of the world he intends to create from no other source but himself. Thus, God depends on no intelligible medium: he does not look abroad, to other worlds or realms or gods, to discover what sort of things he might make. If this is right, then God indeed is totally, doubly, original: he is the one origin of the material of the world along with the intelligible structure which a material world can exemplify. (Ward (2020), 8)

Thus, God is a totally original artist because God depends on nothing to create. He is the source of creative inspiration and the source of all distinct reality. We can see Ward's commitment to the goodness of any world created by God, along with the rationality, freedom, and creativity of the creative act in the following passages:

There are no such things as bad worlds . . . if you think, as you should, that it is not logically possible that there should be a world which is not created by God, then there is no such thing at all, anywhere, not in God or God's thoughts or the abstract realm, as such a miserable world. God does not so much even think such a world, for there is nothing to think about . . . So God's real options for worlds he might make are all good, because they are all worlds which, if they should exist, would be made by a God who is infinitely good. (*ibid.*, 56)

And

God's creativity is logically prior to his creating, and his creativity means – if we mean anything at all when we say that God is a person who created the world – that he knows what he is doing when he creates. God has options, and therefore, his creation is not the product of Unconditioned Willing. It is instead the product of a willing which is conditioned by what God himself is. God contains all the genuinely possible worlds, and these are his options. He gives in creation only of what he already is. But what he is is so bountiful that he can create the unfathomable stars and the people who can contemplate them, and leaves infinitude in reserve. (*ibid.*)

We see in these beautifully written passages the elegance and explanatory power of Ward's Containment Exemplarism. God is the sole ultimate reality and the supreme goodness. In creating the universe, God freely gifts being to finite creatures who resemble an aspect or part of God and are thus good. Ward accepts premise (2). His project is not

revisionary. He is seeking to uphold a traditional and well-motivated account of divine creation.

Explication and defence of premise (3)

The key premise in need of explication and defence, then, is (3). My central claim is that Containment Exemplarism is inconsistent with the idea of God creating creatively. To see why this is the case, I first explore a prominent account of divine creating dubbed the ‘World Actualization Model’ or WAM, by Meghan Page (Page (2022), 120–121).⁶ I then explain why Page thinks that on WAM God provides no creative contribution to creating. Finally, I explore Ward’s preferred picture of creation, what I’ll call the ‘Divine Aspectual Model’ or DAM, and show that God provides no creative contribution on Ward’s model either.

The world actualization model (WAM) and creativity

According to WAM, divine creative activity is a complex activity consisting of a deliberate stage and an actualization stage. In the deliberative stage, God considers all possible worlds and selects one on the basis of some good-making feature(s). In the actualization stage, God freely actualizes the chosen possible world, resulting in the creation of the universe. According to WAM, a possible world is a maximal state of affairs or maximal ways things could go. These possible worlds necessarily exist as uncreated and co-eternal abstract objects with God.⁷ Since God does not create possible worlds and since the actual world is a possible world, God doesn’t create the actual world either. Rather, God *actualizes* the actual world and in actualizing the actual world, creates the heavens and the earth and all that is within them. God, on this picture, creates contingent concrete reality. But importantly, God is not creatively responsible for the various plans or possible worlds, including the possible world God actualizes in creating.

In her essay ‘Creativity and Creation’, Meghan Page asks, ‘If God creates by instantiating a pre-existing state of affairs, does God exemplify creativity?’ (Page (2022), 127). Page argues that WAM is in tension with divine creativity. Recall that P-creativity entails that if something is genuinely new to the world – and isn’t anything created originally by God genuinely new to the world? – then that thing must have been genuinely new to the mind that created it. Herein lies the problem. For on WAM, none of the possible worlds are genuinely new to God’s mind. For any possible worlds there are, God eternally knows them, given divine omniscience.

In seeking a possible divine creative contribution on WAM, Page canvasses Margaret Boden’s three types of creative processes: combinational creativity, exploratory creativity, and transformational creativity.⁸ According to combinatorial creativity, ‘an artist combines images or models from different conceptual spaces in a novel way, “making unfamiliar combinations of familiar ideas”’ (*ibid.*, 123). But, Page argues, the God of WAM does not make any creative contribution to creation through combination since God merely selects from pre-existing and complete possible states of affairs (*ibid.*, 127). The second kind of creative process, exploratory creativity, ‘involves working inside a particular conceptual space and exploring all of the possibilities within it’ (*ibid.*, 123). Exploratory creativity is displayed when an artist uncovers some part of possibility space that was previously hidden. But in the divine case, there are no hidden possibility spaces. God knows, and knows exhaustively and perfectly, all possibilities (*ibid.*, 127). Thus, the God of WAM does not make any creative contribution to creation through exploratory creativity. Finally, there is transformative creativity where the artist ‘creates possibilities which did not previously exist’ (*ibid.*, 124). But again this option is not open to the God of WAM

since all possible possibilities are already ‘before’ God in the deliberative stage. God is not responsible for the plans of creation, they ‘just are’ (*ibid.*, 127).

I think that Page successfully identifies a problem for WAM. The God of WAM does not creatively create.

The divine aspectual model (DAM) and creativity

Ward’s picture of divine creation shares some common features with WAM. According to the Divine Aspectual Model (DAM), and like WAM, there is a deliberation stage to divine creative activity. God surveys all the possible worlds and freely chooses a world to create. But we need to tread carefully here. ‘Possible worlds’ are not maximal states of affairs. Rather, a possible world is understood, according to DAM, as a ‘really big possible creature – that is, a thing God could make’ (Ward (2020), 57). The actual world, on this view is ‘all God has made: a total creaturely story’ and a ‘merely possible world is a different total creaturely story God could have told’ (*ibid.*, 58). God does not exist ‘in’ a possible world since a possible world is a thing God could have made and God can’t make himself. To sum up thus far, at the deliberative stage there is God and various total creaturely stories, various ‘really big possible creatures’ or conjunctions of individual token possible creatures, that God can make if he so chooses.

But what about the second stage of divine creative activity? Recall that the God of WAM *actualizes* a possible world and *creates* a universe. Given the conceptual machinery employed by Ward, it is better to say that on Containment Exemplarism, the God of DAM *duplicates* or *model-copies* a possible creature or world and *creates* a universe or total creaturely story. ‘If God duplicates himself perfectly in thought, he incompletely replicates himself in creatures’ (*ibid.*, 44). The universe God brings into being is a participated creature. Finite substances – creatures – exactly resemble a divine idea that exactly resembles an aspect or part of God.

The problem is that duplication, like actualization, is not sufficient for genuine creativity and creation. Ward seems to think that H-creativity is sufficient for creativity *simpliciter*. But as discussed earlier, it is not the case that H-creativity is sufficient for creativity *simpliciter*. Rather, H-creativity presupposed P-creativity. But Ward’s God lacks P-creativity since ‘God duplicates himself perfectly in thought’ and duplication is not creation. The symmetric resemblance relations between divine aspects, divine ideas, and creatures ensures that there is no genuine creativity involved in God’s bringing about the universe. Nothing novel comes into being. Creatures are copies of copies, paler images or imitations of God’s perfectly duplicated thoughts of himself.

At best, the notion of duplication captures a kind of production akin to model-copying or model-making. The distinction between making and creating is a familiar one within the art community. While the distinction is fairly intuitive, Page provides the following example to illustrate: ‘While a novice sculptor aims to imitate the forms and authorities in her field, the master sculptor develops her own unique style and artistry. Creative artistry requires originality’ (Page (2022), 120). As Page’s example shows, the relevant originality in view in creative artistry is P-creativity, not H-creativity.

Recall the Source Question (SQ). Where does God get his ideas? According to Containment Exemplarism, God gets his ideas from his knowledge of self. The possible creatures that serve as exemplars in creating are ‘in’ God, and eternally so. ‘God contains all the genuinely possible worlds, and these are his options’ (Ward (2020), 56). Recall Boden’s three kinds of creative thinking: combinatorial, exploratory, and transformational. Ward’s God exhibits none of these kinds of creative thought processes in divine creation.⁹ Given God’s perfect self-knowledge he knows – eternally and perfectly – all the ‘really big possible creatures’ he could make. So again, like WAM, the God of DAM

does not creatively contribute to what possibilities there are; they ‘just are’ because God ‘just is’. For Ward’s God, there is nothing that is genuinely new to God’s mind in creating the universe. God does not exhibit *process-creativity*. Ward’s God does not create creatively.

What of Ward’s claim, quoted earlier, that ‘God’s creativity is logically prior to his creating, and his creativity means – if it means anything at all when we say that God is a person who created the world – that he knows what he is doing when he creates’ (*ibid.*, 43–44)? Ward is correct that God’s creativity is logically prior to his creating, but he is wrong to locate the meaning of creativity in the fact that God knows what he is doing when he creates. The standard definition of creativity includes novelty and value. As I briefly noted above, and will discuss in more detail below, it is not obvious that creativity includes rationality. The rationalist model is one model of creativity, but it is not the only one, nor the most prominent. Still, I’m happy to side with Ward in thinking that God’s creativity is rational as long as room is left for genuine spontaneity, playfulness, and exuberance in creating such that God exhibits process-creativity. Without any creative contribution to the plan (or possible story or possible creature or possible world), God cannot *creatively* create.

Searching for gaps

Perhaps it could be argued that there is a significant gap on the duplication model, but not the actualization model, for God to exercise genuine creativity in creating. Consider the following transcription intuition:¹⁰

(TI) Intuitively, creativity is involved when an artist transcribes something from one context to another. In the process of moving from idea to reality, or from one material context to another (e.g. transcribing a painting into a song or vice versa), an artist puts something of herself, her own artistic style, into her work. This ‘gap’ between idea and reality, one context and another, provides space for the artist to exercise genuine creativity.

Recall the general distinction between those who make and those who create. What TI tells us is that a creative contribution occurs within the transition between one context (e.g. the ideational realm) and another context (e.g. the material realm) when the person imposes some of her own style, flair, and originality on the work in question.¹¹ We see something like TI at work in the argument against WAM. On the actualization model there is no gap between idea and material context since worlds just are maximally complete sets of states of affairs. There is no room for God to express flair or originality in actualizing a world. Actualizing is just the bringing about of a previously existing and fully determinate blueprint without any deviation from plan.

On DAM, however, perhaps there is a relevant gap between idea and product for God to exercise creativity in creating. Suppose that possible creatures are indeterminate. Distinguish, as Ward does, between creaturely kinds and creaturely attributes (Ward (2020), 47). Perhaps, possible creatures are indeterminate because God only has creaturely kinds in mind when deliberating over possible creatures. Creaturely attributes come later, in the act of creating. Consider Rory the lion. Rory has a determinate height, weight, and hair colour. If we go for individual essences, Rory has one of those too. And Rory’s lion nature, of course, exactly resembles God’s leonine aspect. So, if we distinguish between a general concept of a possible lion and actual individual lions, it could be argued that on DAM, God’s ‘creative magic’ is located at the transition from indeterminate possible creature to determinate actual creature.

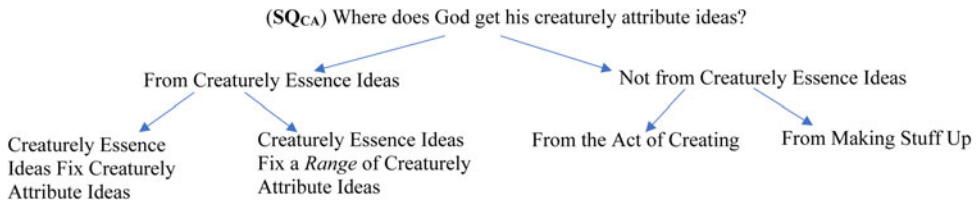


Figure 1. Source Question, Creaturely Attributes.

Unfortunately, this move is not available to Ward. The problem is that no matter how the details go, God fails to be a totally original artist. Consider a more fine-grained version of the Source Question:

(SQ_{CA}) Where does God get his creaturely attribute ideas?

There are two options to consider (see Figure 1). Either God gets his creaturely attribute ideas from creaturely essence ideas or he does not. The first disjunct offers an attractive option since God already has ideas of creaturely essences in virtue of God's perfect self-knowledge. What does it mean to say that creaturely attribute ideas come from creaturely essence ideas? There are two options. One option is to argue that creaturely essence ideas *fix* all creaturely attribute ideas. The suggestion is that creaturely essence ideas entail the set of specific creaturely attributes had by instances of that creaturely kind. Just as the concept of being a lion includes the concepts, *inter alia*, of being a mammal and being alive, the leonine essence idea, we might say, entails the full set of leonine attributes, including those of *being a mammal* and *being alive*. However, given God's perfect rationality, in knowing a creaturely essence idea (e.g. in knowing the leonine aspect of himself that exactly resembles being a lion) he would also know any attributes entailed by that creaturely essence. But then it is not the case that possible creatures are determinate types with indeterminate creaturely attributes. This first option is incoherent.

The second option is to argue that creaturely essence ideas fix a *range* of creaturely attributes that a creature can instantiate. Given omniscience, in knowing creaturely essence ideas God would also know the range of creaturely attributes that an individual could instantiate. The problem is that in knowing the range of creaturely attributes that a creature can instantiate, God fails to create creatively. Consider an analogy. If I'm cooking ham casserole and the recipe gives me the choices (and only the choices) of using either whole wheat or white fibre pasta and either cheddar or Parmesan or Swiss cheese, my choices hardly amount to the imparting of something of me or my creativity into the casserole. In the same way, if in creating Rory the lion, God's choices in creating consist of selecting from a pre-set range of possible qualitative features such as weights, sizes, and hair colours, there isn't any room, or so it seems, left for God to exhibit flair, spontaneity, originality, or creativity. Moreover, even if we allow that there is *some* creative contribution (an allowance I deny), it hardly amounts to the kind of creativity appropriate to the supreme and totally original artist.

Consider now the second disjunct: God does not get his creaturely attribute ideas from creaturely essence ideas. There are two options to consider here as well. One line of thought is to argue that God creates blindly. God gets his creaturely attribute ideas from creating creaturely attributes. On this option, it is a surprise to God what creaturely attributes result from various instantiations of creaturely essences. The other idea is to say that prior to creating creatures, God makes up the creaturely attributes that will attach to various creaturely essences. It should be obvious that neither option is open

to Ward, given his rationality condition. God must know what he is doing when he creates. And God doesn't make things up.

There is no workable gap then, between a creaturely essence idea and creaturely *qualitative* attributes for Ward's God to creatively contribute in creating. There is one final possibility to consider. Suppose on DAM there are no pre-creative singular concepts. It could then be argued that the divine ideas contained in God and employed as exemplars in creating are complex general concepts of creatures, concepts that contain general creaturely essence and qualitative attribute concepts but no identity concept. In creating, God wills to instance his purely general concept of a lion, and as a result he winds up with Rory the lion. Once created, God has, in addition to the complex general concept of a lion, the singular concept of Rory the lion. This picture looks promising for it could be argued that God's creative contribution takes place in the transcription between a complex general concept of a possible creature and a created individual. God imparts something of himself in gifting creatures with *individual essences*, and those essences include distinct ways of being *this* lion and *that* lion.

Unfortunately for Containment Exemplarism, generalism about possible creatures will not work. Consider another more fine-grained version of the Source Question:

(SQ_{IE}) Where does God get his individual creaturely essence ideas?

In this case, it is not plausible to endorse the view that creaturely essence ideas fix or entail in some way either individual creaturely essences or ranges of individual creaturely essences. The first option would render each creaturely essence idea an *individual* creaturely essence idea, in which case there are, contrary to the supposition, pre-creative singular concepts. The second option is implausible since there is no workable way or algorithm, as far as I can tell, to generate a range of identity attributes from a creaturely essence idea.

The only plausible answers to (SQ_{IE}) that are consistent with the thesis that all creaturely natures depend on God in some way, as far as I can tell, are that God gets his ideas of individual essences either in the act of creating or by making them up. Neither option is open to Ward, however. If, on the one hand, God gets his singular concepts by creating individuals, then God's creative activity is not fully intentional (Leftow (2012), 332). In creating a lion, God did not *intend* to create Rory since there are no pre-creative singular ideas of Rory. But then, God's creative activity on DAM is (at least) in tension with the traditional theistic conviction that God intended to create specific individuals and not just types of individuals. Insofar as Ward's project is not revisionary, this option is not an attractive one for Containment Exemplarism. But, even if we drop the intentionality worry, a problem remains: God doesn't fully know what he is doing in creating on this option, and so again, he fails to create rationally.¹² If, on the other hand, God makes up individual creaturely essence ideas, then creation is not rational, given Ward's rationality condition.

The upshot of this discussion is that there is no workable way to make the suggestion that God creates according to determinate creaturely types with either indeterminate creaturely attributes or no individual creaturely essence. I conclude then that it is better for Ward to endorse the view, as I suspect he does, that possible creatures are fully specified, determinate individuals. But then there is no room on the duplication model, at least as Ward has set things up, for God to cook 'off book', as it were, in creating individual creatures. The exemplars by which God creates are fully specified individual concepts of possible creatures. I'll say more about this costly feature of Containment Exemplarism in the next section. For now, it is enough to note that Ward's God is prohibited from making *any* ideas up when creating, given the rationality condition, and this includes the

possibility of God making up fully determinate ideas of creatures from indeterminate possible creatures. But then there is no significant difference between WAM and DAM when it comes to creating. According to both models, in creating, God is either actualizing determinate states of affairs or replicating determinate divine ideas. There is no discernible gap for God to exercise creativity. Ward's God, like the God of WAM, does not create. He only makes.

I conclude that premise (3) is more reasonable than its denial and the Creativity Argument sound: Ward's God is not a totally original artist.

Theistic Activism and the rationality argument

I defend a version of Christian Platonism called Modified Theistic Activism (MTA).¹³ Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel are leading defenders of a version of Christian Platonism called Theistic Activism (TA). Morris and Menzel identify all abstract objects, including properties and relations, with constituents in the divine mind. My MTA is a *modified* Theistic Activism; I do not identify all abstracta with constituents of the divine mind. MTA and TA do share the conviction, however, that everything distinct from God is created by God. According to MTA, abstract objects exist. Some abstract objects exist as constituents of the divine substance. God has properties and stands in various relations to his ideas and thoughts. Regarding God's essential properties, they exist as uncreated constituents of the divine substance. Other properties, those that are not part of or essential to God, exist in a distinct realm – call it Plato's Heaven, call it the abstract realm, or whatever. The created properties and relations reside in this realm. So, regarding properties and relations, some exist as uncreated constituents within God and the rest exist distinct from and created by God. According to MTA, concepts are identified with divine ideas and propositions with divine thoughts. Thinking is a productive activity and so, in thinking, God is the creator of concepts (i.e. divine ideas) and propositions (i.e. divine thoughts). This view regarding concepts and propositions is endorsed by Alvin Plantinga, Thomas Morris, and Christopher Menzel.¹⁴ In sum: there are abstract objects in God and some in a distinct realm. Regarding those abstract objects that are proper parts or constituents of the divine substance, some exist as uncreated constituents (i.e. God's essential properties) and others as created constituents either via an act of the divine will (in the case of God's non-essential properties) or via an act of divine thinking. Those abstract objects that exist distinct from God are created by God via an act of the divine will.

Ward thinks that the idea of created abstract objects is problematic (Ward (2020), 16–17). We can begin to see the problem by asking, what is God thinking about logically prior to creating creatures? The answer, according to MTA, is those created abstract objects that serve as exemplars in divine creation of finite substances. But, Ward presses, 'what about this proto-creation? Did God know what he was doing when he made these abstract objects?' (*ibid.*, 17). On the one hand, if we say no, then God's creation of these abstract objects is irrational. The problem with this horn of the dilemma is that traditional theists maintain that divine creative activity is rational, and as I noted in the prior section, I accept that God's creative activity is rational. Moreover, if God can irrationally proto-create, then there is no principled reason for thinking God can't irrationally create. Better, on this view, to cut out the middle man. On the other hand, if we say yes, that God knew what he was doing when he made abstract objects, then God must have already had something in mind when he created the abstract objects that function as divine exemplars. But where did God get *those* ideas, the ideas he already had in mind when he created the abstract objects that function as exemplars? It seems, according to Ward, that we must postulate a proto-creation in order to secure the rationality of God's proto-creation. The problem is that this results in an infinite

regress of proto-creations: God must proto-create in order to rationally create, but proto-proto create in order to rationally proto-create, but proto-proto-proto create in order to rationally proto-proto create, and so on. The defender of created abstract objects is forced to admit that God's creation is either irrational or explanatorily vacuous. Better, according to Ward, to drop the whole idea of created abstract objects in the first place. God does not make up the ideas God has; possible answer (3) to SQ is not viable given the rationality constraint on divine creative activity. But then it seems that MTA's God is not a totally original artist either, since it succumbs to a *rationality argument* as follows:

- (1) God is a totally original artist. (Premise)
- (2) If God is a totally original artist, then God creates good things freely, sovereignly, rationally, and creatively. (Premise)
- (3*) If MTA is true, then it is not the case that God creates rationally. (Premise)
- (4*) Therefore, if MTA is true, then it is not the case that God is a totally original artist. (From (2) and (3*))
- (5*) Therefore, it is not the case that MTA is true. (From (1) and (4*) by *modus tollens*)

In reply, I now argue that premise (3*) is false and thus the rationality argument (against MTA) fails. It is possible to provide an account of God making stuff up that avoids both horns of Ward's dilemma: God's proto-creation is neither irrational nor explanatorily vacuous. God's creative activity, all things considered, is rational. Ward distinguishes two logical moments in God's creative activity for the activist. First, there is God's *proto-creation* of the divine ideas that serve as possible creatures in creating. Second, there is God's *creation* of finite substances modelled on these divine ideas or possible creatures. For the activist, in dreaming up *possibilia*, God did *not* 'already have something in mind, logically prior to his proto-creation' (*ibid.*). I deny, importantly, that this absence of divine ideas as exemplars for proto-creation renders the first logical moment of divine creative activity irrational. God knows what he is doing in proto-creating without having 'something in mind' as exemplars for proto-creating.

There are two possibilities to consider. Either 'having something in mind' is a requirement of rationality or it is not. Suppose it is. It doesn't follow that God's proto-creation of divine ideas is irrational for it could be that proto-creation is neither rational nor irrational, rather it is a non-rational or a-rational act of God. As Berys Gaut notes, for an act to be judged as rational or irrational, it must be subject to rational assessment. But spontaneous acts are not subject to rational assessment. Therefore, spontaneous acts are neither rational nor irrational, but non-rational (Gaut (2012), 261). Since, as I've characterized it, proto-creation is a spontaneous act of God, then, on the assumption that 'having something in mind' is a requirement of rationality, proto-creation is non-rational, not irrational. Consider *the argument from analogy*. It is commonly thought, following Kant, that human artistic creativity is free, playful, spontaneous, and original.¹⁵ Human artistic creativity is 'logically [opposite] acts of imitation' (Stokes (2016), 248). Moreover, artists recognize a place in aesthetic creation for creating without any prior vision of the thing to be created.¹⁶ By analogy, it could be argued, God's artistic creativity is *like* the human case, but supremely so: utterly free, playful, spontaneous, and original.¹⁷ Importantly, however, in thinking up possible creatures, God neither violates the necessities of logic nor his perfectly rational (and good) nature. There is nothing irrational, as far as I can tell, about proto-creation. Moreover, to be a genuine creation and not a mere imitation, proto-creation seems to require playfulness, spontaneity, and freedom. Thus, it is reasonable to think that proto-creation, as the primordial first *logical* moment of divine creation, is a basic non-rational yet supremely creative act of God, even as divine creative activity is all things considered a rational act.

But why think ‘having something in mind’ is required for rational proto-creating? Ward offers no argument for this claim. I offer three arguments for denying it. First, there is *the argument from competing intuitions*. We have two competing claims to consider. According to Ward, rationality requires ‘having something in mind’. Applied to the question of proto-creating, we can specify this requirement as follows:

(RR) Rationality requires having something in mind in proto-creating.

The result of our prior section established the following claim with respect to creativity with respect to all-things-considered divine creative activity:

(CR) Creativity requires making stuff up in proto-creating.

Since I take it as obvious that God has created, and since Christian theology (and sound philosophy) upholds the creativity and rationality of the divine creative act, one of either (RR) or (CR) needs to go. Which one? Why not (RR)? Note that, for the activist, God’s action in proto-creating is no less reason-guided than his action in creating. In creating, God creates for reasons (either self-glorification, to communicate his goodness and love, or whatever).¹⁸ In proto-creating, God’s action is reason-guided too: he proto-creates in order to spontaneously, playfully, and creatively dream up possible creatures to create. Proto-creation, like creation, is reason-guided, even if God doesn’t have anything in mind in proto-creating. We arrive, in the end, I believe, at duelling intuitions. The Wardian thinks (RR) is most intuitively plausible whereas the activist thinks (CR) is more intuitively plausible. To self-report, it is not obvious to me that God must ‘have something in mind’ for rational proto-creation. I think (CR) more plausible than (RR).

Second, consider the *argument from perfect-being considerations*. It is better to create without any pre-existing matter than to create with some pre-existing matter. Thus, given perfect-being considerations, God creates *ex nihilo*. It could be argued, to continue, that it is better to create the intelligible realm out of nothing than modelled out of some pre-existing (divine) matter. Thus, by parity of reasoning, a perfect being creates the intelligible realm, along with the material realm, *ex nihilo*. But then, again, it is not obvious that God must ‘have something in mind’ in order to rationally proto-create. Both Ward and I think that God is totally original (Ward (2020), 7). On MTA, God is the totally original *creative*. Ward’s God, as argued above, is not supremely creative, rather, God is the totally original *model-copier*. MTA’s God is more perfect than Ward’s God.

Finally, *the argument from cost-benefit analysis*. MTA enjoys many of the benefits that Ward’s mature theory, Containment Exemplarism, does without some of the high costs. I’ll focus on one cost in particular, related to his account of creaturely resemblance to God. According to Ward, a lion resembles God because ‘there is a leonine aspect of God . . . God is the lion. And because God is the Lion, the lion resembles God’ (*ibid.*, 47). Of course, God is much more than that: He is the Octopus, the Platypus, and generalizing, for any finite substance *x*, God is *x*. The problem is with Ward’s appeal to ‘discrete aspects’ or ‘features’ in God. I have no idea what an aspect or feature is. What *kind* of thing is an aspect? Ward writes,

Containment Exemplarism is an alternative to abstract objects, and this is why it is good to use concrete terms to describe the archetypal realities God contains . . . It is fine to say that God contains archetypal *humanity*. What this amounts to is that God contains the archetypal human. As far as the theory is concerned, it is even fine to say that God *is* human, just as it is fine to say that God *is* the Human. The important thing to remember is that insofar as God is human, God is *archetypically* human –

there is no property or nature or universal or Form which is God's humanity, the property by which God is human. (*ibid.*, 42)

What this passage makes clear is that none of the usual kinds of objects – property, state of affair, fact, and the like – seem to be the right sort of thing to locate ‘aspect’ categorically. The best way to go, it seems to me, is to assign aspects a distinct category and then stipulate, for any possible (finite) substance kind, SK_x , and every possible member of every possible (finite) substantial kind, $a, b, c, \dots n \in SK_x$, there is an aspect of God such that ‘God is SK_x ’ and ‘God is the $a, b, c, \dots n$ of SK_x ’. What are aspects? They are the archetypes for creaturely resemblances. Why does God contain an infinite multiplicity of aspects for every possible being? He just does. That is what God is (*ibid.*, 38). End of story. On MTA, we might ask: why did God think up the possible creatures he did? He just did. We could add, he just *rationally* did. Why does God contain an infinite multiplicity of divine ideas for every possible being? He just does. That is what God does. End of story. Brutality for brutality, neither view is worse than the other.¹⁹ However, on MTA, we have a straightforward and intelligible account of resemblance without appeal to a *sui generis* and opaque ontological category of aspects. MTA is more ontologically parsimonious than Containment Exemplarism, containing one less *kind* of thing on its ontological registry and thus less costly with respect to at least one theoretical virtue.

I conclude that premise (3*) of the *rationality argument* is false. God is a totally original artist, and for that reason God makes up some of his divine ideas, namely, those that serve as exemplars for his good, free, sovereign, rational, and creative creation.

A potential problem

Finally, in her discussion of divine creativity, Page raises a worry about theistic activism. It is worth considering whether her objection to theistic activism can be avoided by the modified activist version I endorse. In creating the conceptual realm, Page notes that the activist God is genuinely creative (Page (2022), 136). The problem, however, according to Page, is that the resultant activist picture of divine creation is inconsistent with the idea that God creates *this* world, with all the specific features it contains, for a purpose.

Why think, on the activist picture, that God creates without a purpose? Page writes, ‘Although God generates and combines concepts, these processes occur independently of the *intentions* typically associated with creating’ (*ibid.*, 136). The activist ‘fails to posit any reasons why God engages in this activity [of combining properties to generate possibility space]’ and it is for this reason that God creates, or better proto-creates, without purpose (*ibid.*, 138). One possible reply, Page notes, is for the activist to argue that God proto-creates modal space for the purpose of selecting and actualizing a good world. But then, God selects a good world because of its aggregate good-making features and not because God prefers a world with all of the specific features it has since ‘some parts of creation reveal God’s preferences, and other parts of the world are only here as a consequence of consistency’ (*ibid.*, 139).

While space prohibits a full-scale reply, I do not think Page’s worries related to theistic activism transfer to my preferred modified theistic activism. The first thing to note is that MTA is neutral regarding the ontology behind possible-world talk. To self-report, while I think reality is irreducibly modal, I’m unsure whether possible worlds exist. MTA is consistent with grounding modal facts in (abstract) possible worlds as well as property-based theories of modality that eschew possible worlds altogether.²⁰ If the activist denies the existence of possible worlds – and why not? – it seems to me that Page’s worry dissolves.

But even if the activist is committed to an ontology of possible worlds, now understood as maximal states of affairs, second, it does not follow that God creates them without

intentionality. Following Leftow, as I've argued elsewhere, possibility is fixed by God, not independently of God.²¹ On the partial-deity theory I endorse, some modal truths are grounded in God and others – facts about creaturely essences – are grounded in God's (proto-) creative thinking. On this picture, God spontaneously and intentionally dreams up all possible creatures, including possible worlds (if there are any) all at once and then deliberates over these possible worlds (again, if there are any) in order to select one in creating.

Does this picture make possible creatures, or possible worlds, arbitrary and gappy? No. In proto-creating, God has freely dreamed up cats but not shmats. Shmats then, are not even possible since God has no concept of shmats. Importantly, then, there is no gap, a gap between God's cat-concept and (say) his dog-concept that ought to be filled by a shmat-concept. There are no possible shmats since, taking omniscience as fixed, if there were possible shmats, God would have a concept of shmats.²² When it comes to possible worlds, I claim that any possible worlds created by a perfectly good, rational, and powerful God would be a comprehensive and orderly whole directed towards an end. All that is needed is an explication of the principle or principles God utilized in dreaming up the possible creatures that figure in possible worlds. Historically prominent proposals for generating the modal framework of reality that I find attractive include versions of the Plenitude, Continuum, and Gradation principles.²³ Thus, it is not the case that the activist, or the modified activist, is committed to the claim that possible worlds exist independently of God's intentions. On MTA, possible creatures, and possible worlds (again, if they exist) are created, ordered, and selected intentionally by God. All reality, including (secular) modal reality, reveal God's intentions and preferences.

In conclusion, it seems to me that Ward's idea of a totally original artist can now be fully appreciated. If God, as MTA holds, is truly a totally original artist, then there are no *purely* secular truths. All reality, including the actual world we inhabit, is 'inescapably divine' (Ward (2020), 62). For Ward, 'everything in the world resembles the divine archetype' (*ibid.*). I've argued that this claim is false. But it is close to the truth. On MTA, the picture is amended thus: everything in the world resembles some divine idea, and creaturely divine ideas represent all the ways God could manifest his sovereignty, freedom, creativity, and goodness. And thus, with Ward, 'The world is God's *artwork* and it is inescapably representational *artwork*' (*ibid.*; emphasis added).

Notes

1. For a helpful discussion of these three kinds of creativity, see Kind (2022), 20–22.
2. While novelty and value are (almost always) involved in creativity, it is often suggested that something else is required too. This 'something else' is referred to as 'flair' and usually involves surprisingness and intentional agency. See Kind (2022), 19, 27–32; Gaut (2010), 1039.
3. This case is discussed by Kind (2022), 22–24.
4. See Gaut (2012), 259–260.
5. Cited in Gaut (2012), 259.
6. For a detailed survey of WAM with respect to God's choice in creating, see Kraay (2008), 854–872.
7. Or alternatively: possible worlds are necessary, uncreated, co-eternal with God divine ideas that are either abstract or concrete.
8. See Boden (2004), 3–6; Page (2022), 121–124, 127–128.
9. Ward does consider the possibility of God creativity combining possible creatures into new possible creatures. The example he considers is combining God's idea of a human and God's idea of a horse to produce a divine idea of a centaur. Ward thinks this suggestion is worth considering, but sets it aside since it is not clear to him how to make such combinatorial creativity work in God's case. I too think it is an idea worth considering for it might be a way to save Containment Exemplarism. See Ward (2020), 43–44.
10. This idea is suggested by an anonymous referee.
11. As Page notes, we see this kind of creative contribution quite often in the mortal realm since 'the creation of artifacts is never as simple as having a rigorous idea and physically actualizing it' (Page (2022), 129). In the

human case, there are always adjustments and choices made along the way and those adjustments, given TI, are genuine creative contributions.

12. Moreover, if intentional agency is necessary for creativity, then Ward's God also fails to exercise creativity in creating on this option.

13. I defend MTA, along with Richard Brian Davis, in Gould and Davis (2014), 51–64, 75–79. The paragraph in the text is from Gould (2022), 4. See my contribution to that volume for my latest defence of MTA.

14. See Plantinga (1992); Morris and Menzel (1986).

15. For a nice summary of Kant's view on the imagination, see Stokes (2016), 248–250.

16. See, for example, Richard Wollheim's discussion of how one learns what one is drawing only when the drawing is done (Wollheim (1974), 3–30; cited in Scarry (1999), 116–117).

17. For two Christian philosophers who think divine creativity must be playful and spontaneous in this way to count as genuine creative activity who also think such acts are compatible with perfect rationality, see McCann (2012), 155–175 and Leftow (2012), 272–298.

18. For a discussion of God's reasons for creating, see Wessling (2020), 76–113.

19. The delightful phrase 'Brutality for brutality' is from Leftow (2012), 279.

20. For an excellent discussion of property-based versions of modality, see Jacobs (2010), 227–248.

21. See Gould (2014), 283–296.

22. The shmats idea is from Leftow, I believe. For details on the idea expressed in this sentence, see Leftow (2012), 283.

23. For a sweeping study of how the *Principle of Plenitude*, as well as its corollaries, the *Continuum Principle* and the *Gradation Principle*, have influenced theorizing in the West, see Lovejoy (1936).

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