

WHY THE PERFECT BEING THEOLOGIAN CANNOT ENDORSE THE PRINCIPLE OF ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES

SAMUEL DIRECTOR
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, BOULDER

Abstract. I argue that perfect being theologians cannot endorse the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (AP). On perfect being theology, God is essentially morally perfect, meaning that He always acts in a morally perfect manner. I argue that it is possible that God is faced with a situation in which there is only one morally perfect action, which He must do. If this is true, then God acts without alternative possibilities in this situation. Yet, unless one says that this choice is not free, one must say that God has acted freely without alternative possibilities.¹

WHY THE PERFECT BEING THEOLOGIAN CANNOT ENDORSE THE PRINCIPLE OF ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES

In this paper, I develop a counter-example to the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (AP). In section I, I will define AP; in section II, I will argue for my counter-example to AP; and, in section III, I will address objections. An important clarification must be noted before going any further: my paper does offer what I believe is a counter-example to AP, but this counter-example, if successful, is only threatening to the perfect being theologian. As the name suggests, perfect being theology holds that God is an “absolutely perfect” being.² I argue that, if the theist affirms perfect being theology, then she is faced

1 I would like to thank Josh Orozco, Nate King, Keith Wyma, Chris Heathwood, and the anonymous reviewers at *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* for their helpful comments throughout the writing and revising of this paper. Additionally, I would like to thank Emily Erickson for her continuing support.

2 Mark O. Webb, “Perfect Being Theology”, in *A companion to philosophy of religion*, ed. Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper and Philip L. Quinn, 2nd ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 227.

with a counter-example to AP, meaning that she cannot rationally believe in the truth of AP while maintaining her commitment to perfect being theology.³ Given this, non-theists and theists who do not endorse perfect being theology will not find my argument threatening to their belief in the truth of AP.

I: AP Defined:

AP defines freedom as the following:

“a person [S] does an action A of his own free will only if [S] could have done otherwise.”⁴

AP specifies a necessary, not a sufficient, condition of freedom. Thus, according to AP, all situations in which S does A and lacks alternative possibilities are situations in which S is not free. Given this, if I can provide a single example in which an agent acts freely with respect to A yet lacks alternative possibilities, then I will show AP to be false, because then it would be clear that AP is not necessary for freedom.⁵

3 Wes Morrision has made a similar argument about the connection between God's necessary moral perfection and His omnipotence. Morrision ultimately argues that “there is no possible combination of attributes that includes both omnipotence and necessary moral perfection” (Wes Morrision, “Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are They Compatible?”, *Religious Studies* 37, no. 2 (2001): 158. Thus, he concludes that the perfect-being theologian must either (1) endorse necessary moral perfection and reject omnipotence or (2) reject necessary moral perfection and endorse omnipotence (158). Morrision's argument is similar to mine, in that we both argue that there is an incompatibility between two central features of perfect-being theology. However, my argument is importantly different from Morrision's, in that (1) Morrision and I argue for incompatibilities between different features of perfect-being theology, and (2) while Morrision argues that this incompatibility means that we should reject one of the two features of perfect-being theology, I argue that the incompatibility means that we should *re-interpret, not reject*, divine freedom so that it is compatible with God's moral perfection.

4 David P. Hunt, “The Simple-Foreknowledge View”, in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (InterVarsity Press, 2009), 86.

5 I use ‘AP’ rather than ‘PAP’ to refer to the Principle of Alternative Possibilities. Although some philosophers use PAP in place of AP, many take PAP to be a claim about moral responsibility and have seen AP as a nearly identical claim about freedom. For a discussion of the differences between these principles, see Kevin Timpe, *Free will: Sourcehood and its alternatives*, Continuum studies in philosophy (Continuum, 2008), 21–22 and Robert Kane, “The Contours of Contemporary Free Will Debates”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane, 2.th ed., Oxford handbooks in philosophy (Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 17.

II: AN ARGUMENT FOR A COUNTER-EXAMPLE TO AP

To begin, I will outline my argument in premise-conclusion form, after which point I will explain the justification of each premise.

- (1): God is essentially morally perfect.
- (2): if God is essentially morally perfect, then He must always act in a morally perfect manner in all situations.
- (3): thus, He must always act in a morally perfect manner in all situations [(2), (1)].
- (4): if it is logically possible that there exists a situation (Y) in which there is a singular, morally perfect action (X), then if God is in situation Y, He necessarily must do action X.
- (5): it is logically possible that there exists a situation (Y) in which there is a singular, morally perfect action (X).
- (6): if God is in situation Y, He necessarily must do action X [(4), (5)].
- (7): if God must necessarily do action X in situation Y, then God does not have alternative possibilities in situation Y.⁶
- (8): God does not have alternative possibilities in situation Y [(7), (6)].
- (9): if God freely does action X while in situation Y (despite having no alternative possibilities), then alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom.
- (10): God freely does action X while in situation Y (despite having no alternative possibilities).
- (11): thus, alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom [(9), (10)].
- (12): if alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom, then AP is false.
- (13): thus, AP is false [(12), (11)].

⁶ To clarify, (7) and (8) state that God does not have alternative possibilities in situation Y *with respect to X* specifically.

To begin, I will justify (1): God is essentially morally perfect. As stated, my argument is directed exclusively at perfect being theologians; as such, I will assume the truth of perfect being theology for the sake of my argument. Perfect being theology holds that God is an “absolutely perfect” being.⁷ For the most part, Christians and Western Theists alike endorse this view. As Mark Webb states, the belief that God is an absolutely perfect being “is agreed on by most Jews, Christians, and Muslims”, and it has been endorsed by philosophers ranging from Anselm to Plantinga.⁸ Thus, within the western philosophical tradition, it is uncontroversial to claim that God is an absolutely perfect being.

Perfect being theology entails that God is essentially morally perfect. If God is an absolutely perfect being, then it follows that He is a morally perfect being. As Laura Garcia states, “perfect goodness [i.e. moral perfection] is one of those attributes included in the conception of God as the greatest conceivable being.”⁹ The claim that God’s absolute perfection entails His moral perfection is uncontroversial. As an absolutely perfect being, He possesses all perfections. Being moral is clearly a perfection; thus, it follows that, if God is absolutely perfect, then He possesses the property of moral perfection. But, perfect being theology makes a stronger claim than this; it holds that God is *essentially* morally perfect. In short, the perfect being theologian claims that God has the essential property of moral perfection. Briefly, a property P “is an essential property of an object O just in case it is necessary that O has P if O exists.”¹⁰ In other words, if P is an essential property of O, then in all possible worlds in which O exists, O will have P. Thus, to say that God is essentially morally perfect is to claim that, in all possible worlds in which He exists, He has the property of moral perfection. Again, this is agreed on by perfect being theologians. As Garcia notes, the proponents of perfect being theology hold that moral perfection is an essential property of God.¹¹ Edward Wierenga confirms this when he claims that “theists agree that... God is essentially good.”¹² After all, if God is an absolutely perfect

7 Webb, “Perfect Being Theology”, 227.

8 Ibid.

9 Laura L. Garcia, “Moral Perfection”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 217.

10 Teresa Robertson and Philip Atkins, “Essential vs. Accidental Properties”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2016.

11 Garcia, “Moral Perfection”, 217.

12 Edward R. Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An inquiry into divine attributes* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1989), 203.

being, then He will be the most perfect being possible. Clearly, God is more perfect if He possesses the property of moral goodness essentially rather than accidentally. Thus, perfect being theology entails that God is essentially morally perfect. So, (1) is justified.¹³

Next, I will justify (2): if God is essentially morally perfect, then He must always act in a morally perfect manner in all situations. If object O possesses property P essentially, then it is necessary that O has P in all possible worlds in which O exists. So, an essentially morally perfect being possesses the property of moral perfection in all possible worlds in which this being exists. God is necessarily existent, meaning that He exists in all possible worlds. So, God possesses the property of moral perfection in all possible worlds. Being morally perfect (i.e. instantiating the property of moral perfection) involves acting in a morally perfect manner.¹⁴ Since God is morally perfect in all possible worlds and at all times within those worlds, and since being morally perfect entails acting in a morally perfect manner, it follows that God always acts in a morally perfect manner. So, (2) is justified. Now, (3) (thus, He must always act in a morally perfect manner in all situations) follows from (2) and (1).

But, at this juncture, an objector might claim that God can be morally perfect while not always acting in a morally perfect manner. This is false. If God is essentially morally perfect, then, in all possible worlds and at all times within those worlds, He will instantiate the property of moral perfection. Since instantiating this property entails acting in a morally perfect manner, and since He always has this property in all possible worlds, it follows that in all possible worlds and at all times within these worlds, He acts in a morally perfect manner. If He always acts in a morally perfect manner in all possible worlds, it follows that there is no possible world in which He does not act in a morally perfect manner. If this is true, then it is logically impossible for Him to not act in a morally perfect manner.¹⁵ Thus, if He is essentially morally

13 Also, it is important to note that perfect-being theology claims that God “exists necessarily” Garcia, “Moral Perfection”, 217, meaning that He exists in all possible worlds. Thus, if God is morally perfect in all possible worlds in which He exists, and if He exists in all possible worlds, it follows that He is morally perfect in all possible worlds.

14 To clarify, when I say that exemplifying the property of moral perfection means acting in a morally perfect manner, this includes inaction. Even though, grammatically speaking, inaction is different from action, both can be morally evaluated as actions. So, divine inaction could be a morally perfect action in a given situation.

15 If there is no possible world in which X is true, then X is logically impossible.

perfect, He necessarily acts in a morally perfect manner, and He cannot act in a not morally perfect manner. In short, if there is one possible world in which He is not acting in a morally perfect manner, then He does not possess the property of essential moral perfection. Since He does possess this essential property, it follows that there is not a single instance in which He is not acting in a morally perfect manner. This is agreed upon by perfect being theologians. As Garcia states, “according to perfect being theology, God necessarily acts in accordance with moral principles”,¹⁶ meaning that it is impossible for Him to not act in accordance with moral principles. Or, as Wierenga says, because “God is essentially good” it follows that “it is not possible that he not be good.”¹⁷ Finally, William Rowe and Frances Howard-Snyder hold that “God cannot become less than absolutely perfect.”¹⁸ So, God’s essential moral perfection entails that He cannot ever act in a manner that is not morally perfect.¹⁹

16 Ibid., 225.

17 Wierenga, *The Nature of God*, 203.

18 William Rowe and Frances Howard-Snyder, “Divine Freedom”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2008.

19 One might object that this account of moral perfection generates a problem for God’s omnipotence (see Morrision, “Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are They Compatible?”, 143–44 for an articulation of this objection). After all, it seems like doing something evil is logically possible, and God’s omnipotence entails that he should be able to do all things that are logically possible. Thus, on a very intuitive definition of omnipotence, God should be able to do evil; hence, my account, which entails that He cannot do evil, is false. This objection is beyond the scope of this paper, but I will briefly respond to it. Although Morrision does not endorse this view, he describes a Thomistic account of the relationship between omnipotence and moral perfection that supports my view; on this Thomistic view, “omnipotence requires the maximum possible amount of active power — not maximum liability to error. In a well-known passage in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas argues that God cannot sin precisely because He is omnipotent. ‘To sin is to fall short of a perfect action; hence to be able to sin is to be able to fall short in action, which is repugnant to omnipotence. Therefore it is that God cannot sin, because of His omnipotence.’ [*Summa Theologiae*, I. 25. 3.] On Aquinas’s view, the ‘ability to fall short’ is not a genuine power. So far from being required for omnipotence, it is ‘repugnant’ to it. Now since choosing evil is a way of ‘falling short’ of what (at the deepest level) one is trying for, it follows that the inability to choose evil is not a weakness, but a strength. Since it provides security against failure, this unique inability entails more power, not less” (157). If this Thomistic view is unsatisfactory, I later argue that it is logically impossible, given His essential moral perfection, for God to do anything evil; if this is true, then there would be no inconsistency between omnipotence and moral perfection, because omnipotence never requires God to do anything that is logically impossible.

In total, God's essential moral perfection entails that He always does a morally perfect action. Yet, the question remains as to the nature of the morally perfect action. Presumably, if God is morally perfect, He must be perfect according to some theory of morality, namely whichever theory of morality is true. So, there is a debate about whether God is a Kantian, Utilitarian, Virtue Theorist, etc.²⁰ This debate will not matter for the purposes of this paper. Whichever theory of morality is true, God will act in a morally perfect manner according to this theory. So, God will always act in a morally perfect manner, but the specifics of this action will change based on which ethical theory turns out to be true. But, whether God is the perfect agent of Kantianism or virtue ethics, on either theory, He will act in a morally perfect manner.

Next, I will justify (4): if it is logically possible that there exists a situation (Y) in which there is a singular, morally perfect action (X), then if God is in situation Y, He necessarily must do action X. In short, if God is in a situation in which there is only one morally perfect action, He must do it. As I argued above, if He is essentially morally perfect, then it is logically impossible for Him to act in a manner that is not morally perfect, meaning that He will always do a morally perfect action. If a given situation contains only one morally perfect action, then God, as a being that only does morally perfect actions, will necessarily do this action. Swinburne confirms this when he says, "if there is a best action, [God] will do it."²¹ Many philosophers question the existence of this kind of situation, but most agree that, if a situation with only one morally perfect action existed, then God must do this action when in this situation.

Now, I will justify (5): it is logically possible that there exists a situation (Y) in which there is a singular, morally perfect action (X). In situation Y, a finite number of actions are available to God. Of these possible actions, only one is morally perfect. The remaining possible actions are all either morally neutral or evil. In situation Y, God is confronted with a finite number of possible actions, of which only one qualifies as being morally perfect while the others are either neutral or evil. Situation Y is logically possible. There is no contradiction or violation of a logical law contained within situation Y, meaning that it is logically possible. After all, there are no logical laws that

20 See Garcia, "Moral Perfection", 221–35.

21 Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Clarendon Press, 1994), 135.

govern whether or not a situation can contain a certain number of morally perfect actions. For the purpose of my argument, situation Y needs only to be logically possible.

One might object that it is not as simple as just stipulating that such a situation exists. But, for the purposes of my argument, such a situation need not exist; situation Y only needs to be logically possible. Since God is a being who is capable of doing all logically possible actions, then all logically possible situations are relevant to assessing the nature of God's freedom. But, one might object that, if God never finds Himself in such a situation, then its logical possibility is irrelevant to the nature of God's freedom, because He will have never been in such a situation and will never have made a decision in it. However, it is not necessary that God actually is in situation Y. We can perform a counterfactual analysis like this: if God were in situation Y, then He would be required to do X. So, even if He is not, in fact, in situation Y, the counterfactual claim can still be true and is still relevant to His general freedom. Furthermore, AP stipulates a necessary condition which must obtain in all situations in which an agent acts freely. As such, if there is a logically possible situation in which an agent would act freely without alternative possibilities, then AP is false. It doesn't matter if the situation in question doesn't actually exist. And, to reiterate, my argument only requires a logically possible situation. AP purports to be a necessary condition of freedom in all logically possible situations. So, if there is one logically possible situation in which AP is false, then AP is false, since it won't hold in all cases, making it no longer a necessary condition of freedom.

From this, (6) follows: if God is in situation Y, He necessarily must do action X [(4), (5)]. Again, given His moral perfection, if there is a singular, morally perfect action, He must necessarily do this action; and, situation Y contains only one morally perfect action, meaning that God must necessarily do this action.

Now, (7): if God must necessarily do action X in situation Y, then God does not have alternative possibilities in situation Y. In justification of (7), I offer this argument:

- A: if God must necessarily do action X in situation Y, then He could not have done otherwise in situation Y.

B: if He could not have done otherwise in situation Y, then He does not have alternative possibilities in situation Y.

C: thus, if He necessarily must do action X in situation Y, then He does not have alternative possibilities in situation Y.

(6) shows that, in situation Y, God necessarily must do action X. So, from (6) and (7), (8) follows: God does not have alternative possibilities in situation Y [(7), (6)].

Next, I will justify (9): if God freely does action X while in situation Y (despite having no alternative possibilities), then alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom. Simply put, if God lacks alternative possibilities in situation Y, and if He still acts freely in this situation, then it follows that He can act freely without having alternative possibilities. If He acts freely without alternative possibilities, then alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom. Again, it does not matter if God is actually in situation Y; so long as Y is logically possible, then it is relevant to God's freedom.

Now, (10): God freely does action X while in situation Y (despite having no alternative possibilities). In this paper, I have assumed the truth of perfect being theology, because my intended audience accepts this view. A central claim of perfect being theology is that God *always* acts freely. Indeed, in a list of five central elements of Western Theism, William Mann includes the belief that "God is perfectly free."²² Garcia further confirms this when she says that "the claim that God acts freely...holds a central place in theologies which accept an Anselmian understanding of God as the greatest conceivable being."²³ Swinburne echoes this when he says that "God is perfectly free."²⁴ Essentially, perfect being theologians are deeply committed to the belief that God always acts freely. So, if God acts freely in all situations, then it follows that He must act freely in situation Y, despite not having alternative possibilities.²⁵ Thus,

22 William E. Mann, "Divine Sovereignty and Aseity", in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William J. Wainwright (Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 36.

23 Laura L. Garcia, "Divine Freedom and Creation", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 42, no. 167 (1992): 191.

24 Swinburne, *The Christian God*, 128.

25 It might seem as if I have gone from saying that God always acts freely to saying that He acts freely in all situations. But, there are situations in which it would be logically impossible for Him to be free. So, the following seems more correct: since God always acts freely, then in all situations in which it is logically possible for Him to act freely, He will act freely.

(10) is justified. Now, (11) (thus, alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom) follows from (9) and (10). In short, God lacks alternative possibilities in situation Y, but He still acts freely in this situation, meaning that alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom.

Finally, (12): if alternative possibilities are not necessary for freedom, then AP is false. AP states that person S does action A freely only if she “could have done otherwise.”²⁶ On AP, having alternative possibilities is necessary for freedom. So, if having alternative possibilities is not necessary for freedom, then AP is false. From this, (13) follows: thus, AP is false [(12), (11)].

III. OBJECTIONS:

To review, I have argued that there is a logically possible situation (Y), in which there is only one morally perfect action (X). Given the nature of God’s essential moral perfection, He necessarily does action X in situation Y, meaning that He acts without alternative possibilities. However, His action is still free, indicating that AP is false.

I see one main option for the objector: she can argue that, in situation Y, God does have alternative possibilities. If this is true, then it follows that His decision will involve the ability to do otherwise, and situation Y will not constitute a counter-example to AP. In support of her claim that God has alternative possibilities in situation Y, the objector can argue that (1) the other possible actions in situation Y might be legitimate alternative possibilities, (2) inaction is an alternative possibility, (3) possible conjunctions of action X with the morally neutral actions in situation Y create alternative possibilities, and (4) the category of morally indifferent actions offers God an alternative possibility in situation Y. I will respond to each.

After responding to each of these objections, I will address a final objection, which holds that my argument rests on a flawed understanding of God’s moral perfection.

III. 1:

First, the objector can claim that, in situation Y, both action X (a morally perfect action) and all of the remaining possible actions available in situation

²⁶ Hunt, “The Simple-Foreknowledge View”, 86.

Y are legitimate alternative possibilities for God. Recall that all of the other possible actions in situation Y are either morally neutral or evil and that X is the only morally perfect action in the situation. I have argued that, given God's essentially perfect nature, the morally neutral or evil actions are not legitimate alternative possibilities for Him. But, the objector might question this. She might argue that, although He is morally perfect, God could choose to do something that is not morally perfect. Of course, God never in fact chooses to do something that is not morally perfect, but it might be true that He still could choose to do something that is not morally perfect.²⁷ Stephen Davis has argued that "if God were unable to do evil then he would not be free."²⁸ So, if God can do what is evil/not morally perfect (even if He never actually chooses to do so), then the remaining possible actions in situation Y are legitimate alternative possibilities for God. Thus, in situation Y, although God will do action X, He could have done any of the other possible actions, meaning that He does have alternative possibilities in situation Y.²⁹

As I understand it, this objection has two parts: (1) the objector argues that, even if God necessarily acts in a morally perfect manner, it does not follow that He lacks the ability to act in a less than perfect manner. In other words, God always does act perfectly, but He retains the ability to act wrongly, even though He never uses this ability. Essentially, just because God always does act perfectly, it does not follow that He must do so. Then, in part (2) the objector argues that this never-actualized/never-used ability gives God alternative possibilities. In other words, if God has the ability to do something less than perfect, even if He never uses this ability, He still has alternative possibilities in the situation that I have imagined, which means that my objection to AP fails. I address parts (1) and (2) of this objection in order.

In response to (1), I argue that, if God is essentially morally perfect, then He lacks the ability to act in a less than morally perfect manner. It is not that God has the ability to do evil but never uses this ability; rather, I argue that He lacks the ability to do anything that is less than morally perfect. If God is

27 As Morrision, "Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are They Compatible?", 152 notes, for the Anselmian, "God may have powers that He does not choose to exercise in any possible world".

28 Wierenga, *The Nature of God*, 212.

29 I am thankful to the anonymous reviewers at *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* for raising this objection with force.

essentially morally perfect, then He always acts in a morally perfect manner. For an object *O* to possess a property *P* essentially is for *O* to instantiate *P* in all worlds in which *O* exists. By the definition of necessary existence, a being that exists necessarily exists in all possible worlds. Thus, from the definitions of essential properties and necessary existence, it follows that, if God is necessarily existent and essentially morally perfect (which the perfect-being theologian believes), then God instantiates the property of moral perfection in all possible worlds. If God always instantiates the property of moral perfection, then this means that He always act in a morally perfect manner. In other words, in all possible worlds, God acts morally perfectly, meaning that there is no possible world in which He does not act in a morally perfect manner. Now, we are in a position to see why it follows from God's essential moral perfection that He must act in a morally perfect manner. I take the following as an uncontroversial principle in modal metaphysics: a state of affairs, *A*, is logically possible IFF there is a logically possible world in which *A* obtains. If there were no logically possible worlds in which *A* obtains, then the claim 'A is logically possible' would have no truth-makers. Or, to put the point differently, take the sentence 'it is logically possible that *X* can do *P*;' by the same principle, this sentence is true IFF there is a possible world in which *X* exists and does *P*. Given all of this, the state of affairs in which God does something less than morally perfect is logically possible IFF there is a possible world in which God does something less than morally perfect; and, the sentence 'it is logically possible that God can do something less than morally perfect' is true IFF there is a possible world in which God exists and does something less than morally perfect.³⁰ However, because God is essentially morally perfect, there is no possible world in which He acts in a less than morally perfect manner. As I have argued, this is what it means to be essentially morally perfect. Given this, we can see that there is an incompatibility between God's essential moral

30 Morrision agrees with this analysis; as he says, "if a person *P* possesses this two-way power [i.e. freedom] with regard to an act *A* at a time *t*, then as things are at *t*, it must be possible for *P* to exercise this power by doing, or by refraining from doing, *A* at *t*. If this is right, then it follows that one necessary condition of *P*'s having the power to do *A* at *t* is that it is possible that *P* does *A* at *t*. In the language of possible worlds, there must be at least one possible world in which *P* does *A* at *t*" Morrision, "Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are They Compatible?," 144. Thus, on Morrision's view, if God has the power to do evil, then there must be at least one possible world in which He does an evil act.

perfection and His ability to choose to do evil (or something that is less than morally perfect). If He is essentially morally perfect, then He cannot choose to do something that is morally imperfect; and, if He can choose to do something that is morally imperfect, then He is not essentially morally perfect. Again, if God could choose to do something that is morally imperfect, there would have to be a possible world in which He does choose something morally imperfect; but, if He is essentially morally perfect, then there is no such world. Thus, it is logically impossible for God to act in a less than morally perfect manner. Again, for a state of affairs, A, to be logically possible, there must be a possible world in which A obtains. And, if God is essentially morally perfect, there are no possible worlds in which He does not act morally perfectly. Thus, the state of affairs in which He does not act morally perfectly is logically impossible.

In part (2) of this objection, the objector argues that, because God can choose to do something morally imperfect, He has alternative possibilities, even if He never uses them. However, if (as I argued above) it is logically impossible for God to do something morally imperfect, then morally imperfect actions fail to provide Him with genuine alternative possibilities. The following seems like an intuitive principle for identifying which actions do not qualify as alternative possibilities for action: if action X is logically impossible for agent S, then X is not a legitimate alternative possibility for S. For example, I cannot make 2 and 2 equal 5; thus, it is clear that this action is not a legitimate alternative possibility for me. After all, it seems false to say that actions which are logically impossible (i.e. actions which an agent cannot do in any possible world) could qualify as legitimate alternative possibilities for an agent. Because acting in a non-morally perfect manner is logically impossible for God, it does not constitute a genuine alternative possibility for Him.³¹

31 I am assuming that God's omnipotence does not allow Him to do logically impossible actions. Furthermore, my argument relies on an account of omnipotence very similar to that defended by Wieranga, which holds that an omnipotent being cannot do anything that is incompatible with its essential properties. As Wieranga, *The Nature of God* puts it, "an omnipotent being need not be able to do anything incompatible with its having the essential properties it has" (16-17). Or, as Morrison summarizes Wieranga's view, "if x's nature or essence includes moral perfection, then it is not possible at any time that x actualizes any evil state of affairs unless it has a morally sufficient reason for doing so...so, where x=God, the fact that x cannot actualize E [a state of affairs that is inconsistent with God's moral perfection] does not count against the claim that x is omnipotent" (147). Morrison finds this account of omnipotence to

But, to make sure that I have been charitable to the objector, I will consider a further objection. The objector might respond that, if God has the ability to do something that is less than morally perfect, then there does not need to be a possible world in which He does something that is not morally perfect. Rather, the objector might claim that God still has the ability to do something morally imperfect, even if He never uses this ability in any logically possible world. To put the point more abstractly, God has the ability to do X, even if He never does X in any logically possible worlds.

I have several responses to this objection. First, I argue that it rests on an implausible principle about modality. Take the sentence ‘it is logically possible that X can do P’. On the view just described, this claim can be true even if there is no logically possible world in which X exists and does P. This prompts the question: if this sentence can be true even if there is no logically possible world in which it obtains, then what makes it true? Clearly, this sentence is not analytically true. Thus, something beyond the meanings of the terms must make it true. Upon reflection, I cannot conceive of what can make a non-analytic modal claim true other than a possible world in which the content of the statement obtains. If propositions are true in virtue of referring to something, then this proposition must refer to something that makes it true. Other than a possible world in which this statement’s content obtains, I cannot conceive of something else to which it might refer. Thus, if one is to claim that a non-analytic modal statement can be true without referring to a possible world in which its content obtains, then one must hold that non-analytic modal statements can be true without referring to anything and without having any truth-makers. This position, I argue, is implausible. Thus, this objection rests on an implausible principle about modality.

Second, I respond to this objection by noting that the conception of modality used in my argument is highly intuitive; my claim is only that the sen-

be unsatisfactory (see 146-148). It is beyond the scope of this paper to launch a defense of this view of omnipotence; as such, I must take it as given that this is a plausible notion of omnipotence. After all, this account of omnipotence holds that God cannot act in ways that conflict with His essential properties, which seems to be another way of saying that God cannot do what is logically impossible. As I have argued, if God possesses a property P essentially, then He has P in all possible worlds, which means that it is logically impossible for Him to not possess P. Thus, to say that God cannot do anything which conflicts with His essential properties is simply to say that He cannot do anything logically impossible, because it would be logically impossible for Him to not instantiate His essential properties.

tence, 'it is logically possible for God to do something that is morally imperfect' is true IFF there is a possible world in which God does something that is morally imperfect. Furthermore, I note that it is not the goal my paper to settle a highly technical debate in modal metaphysics. I am willing to grant that my argument only succeeds if my view about modality is true. But, to launch a full defense of this conception of modality would require more space than this paper has, and it would distract from the overall goal of my argument.

III. 2:

Second, the objector might claim that inaction (i.e. doing neither action X nor any other action in situation Y) constitutes an alternative possibility in situation Y. Essentially, the objector argues that, in situation Y, God can choose to do none of the possible actions, and this inaction constitutes a legitimate alternative possibility. This means that God's decision to do X is one made in the presence of alternative possibilities.

This objection fails to understand that inaction can be morally evaluated. I consider inaction to be a kind of action, in that we evaluate it as being moral or immoral. For example, we would say that choosing not to save a drowning child who could easily have been saved is a not a morally perfect action. So, inaction can be evaluated as an action. In a given situation, inaction, since it can be morally evaluated, will either be morally perfect or not morally perfect. Depending on the context of the situation, inaction will vary in its moral status. In the case of not saving a drowning child, inaction is clearly not a morally perfect action. But, there can easily be cases in which inaction is a morally perfect action. In situation Y, the moral status of inaction will depend on the specific context of situation Y, which I have intentionally not stipulated. But, if inaction turns out to be the one morally perfect action in situation Y, then it fails to be a legitimate alternative possibility for God, because it just is the very action to which the objector wants to add an alternative possibility. And, if inaction turns out to be either morally neutral or evil in situation Y, then it is already accounted for as an action that fails to be morally perfect, which, as I argued above, cannot count as a legitimate alternative possibility for God. Thus, inaction fails to solve the problem.

III. 3:

Third, the objector can argue that, even though God necessarily does action X in situation Y, He still has alternative possibilities, in that He can choose to conjunct any of the additional morally neutral actions in situation Y onto His decision to do action X. For example, suppose that, of the finite number of possible actions in situation Y, ten of them are morally neutral. Let's refer to these actions with the first ten letters of the alphabet. God can choose to do action X combined with any of these ten different actions. He can choose to action X while simultaneously doing action A. Or, he can choose to do X while simultaneously doing action B. And so on. Each of these different conjunctions of actions can count as legitimate alternative possibilities for God. After all, He is still doing the one morally perfect action, but He is just adding different morally neutral actions to it.

Although this objection is the most worrisome of the lot, there is a simple solution. It can just be added into situation Y that all of the possible actions are logically incompatible with each other. In other words, all of the possible actions in situation Y are such that, if God does any one of them, it is logically impossible for Him to do any of the others. If this is the case, then God choosing to do action X entails that He can't do the other actions and vice versa. This move may seem ad hoc, but it is not. As I stated earlier, situation Y need only be logically possible. And, the stipulation that all of the possible actions in situation Y are logically mutually exclusive doesn't make situation Y logically impossible. Furthermore, it is not at all strange to say that situations involving moral decision making involve mutually exclusive actions. For example, if I decide to save the life of a drowning child, this is logically incompatible with my possible decision to not save the child.

But, if this response is unsatisfactory, we can always alter situation Y so that the only other possible actions apart from the singular morally perfect action are all evil actions. If we made this alteration to situation Y, then God could not conjunct the remaining possible actions with action X, because all of the remaining possible actions would be evil actions, which He cannot do. Again, this may seem like an ad hoc stipulation. But, this stipulation does not render situation Y logically impossible, and the logical possibility of situation Y is all that is needed for my argument.

III. 4:

Finally, in support of her claim that God has alternative possibilities in situation Y, the objector can argue that the morally neutral actions in situation Y constitute legitimate alternative possibilities for God. Doing a morally neutral action seemingly has no bearing on God's moral perfection. For example, suppose that God could put one more rock on a distant planet whose orbital behaviors will have no effect on humans. God's decision between putting no additional rocks on this planet and putting one additional rock on this planet seems to have no bearing on His moral perfection. This is the case, because both of these actions are morally neutral. So, argues the objector, the morally neutral possible actions in situation Y constitute legitimate alternative possibilities for God.

I will grant that, in a situation in which only morally neutral options are available to God, such as the one just described, then it is not in conflict with His moral perfection for Him to do a morally neutral action. But, suppose that we add a morally perfect action into the above planet situation; and, further suppose that all of the actions in this situation are mutually exclusive. In this case, it seems that God cannot do the morally neutral action. In other words, in a situation in which God has to choose, due to the mutual exclusivity of the options, between doing a morally perfect action or a morally neutral action, He must do the morally perfect action. Doing a morally neutral action to the exclusion of a morally perfect action seems to conflict with God's moral perfection. This means that the morally neutral actions in situation Y fail to constitute genuine alternative possibilities.

Again, if this response is unsatisfactory, the morally neutral actions can, as was just described in the response to the above objection, be removed from situation Y so that it only contains evil actions and one morally perfect action.

III. 5:

Finally, one might object that the notion of moral perfection that I have used in this paper is fundamentally flawed. The objector might argue that I have been unclear about whether moral perfection requires (1) that God always does the *maximally* perfect action in a given situation or (2) that God always does an action that is morally perfect but not necessarily the maximally perfect action. It seems clear that there is a gradient of moral perfection. By this, I mean that, of the set of morally perfect actions, some will be better than oth-

ers. The first view above holds that, if faced with multiple morally perfect actions in a given situation, God must do the action is that is most perfect. The second view claims that, in such a situation, so long as His action is within the category of 'morally perfect,' God is free to choose between the different morally perfect options and need not pick the maximally perfect action. Although this is an important distinction, it has no bearing on my argument. The situation that I have presented (situation Y) is one in which there is only one morally perfect action. The difference between the two views above only arises in situations in which there are multiple morally perfect actions available to God. Since situation Y does not involve multiple morally perfect actions from which God must choose, there is no need for me to assume either view 1 or 2 about moral perfection. Both views would surely say that, if faced with a situation in which there is only one morally perfect action, God must do this action. The debate between these views only arises when the situation in question contains multiple morally perfect actions. Thus, this objection does not actually address the argument made in my paper.

IV. CONCLUSION:

In sum, I argue that there is a logically possible situation in which God lacks alternative possibilities but in which He still acts freely. As I have stated previously, this argument will only be threatening to those who endorse both AP and perfect being theology. I believe that I have shown that there is a fundamental tension between perfect being theology and AP, such that one cannot rationally believe in the truth of both. Thus, as long as the perfect being theologian wants to maintain her commitment to perfect being theology, then she cannot believe in the truth of AP. Of course, it is possible for a perfect being theologian to be so strongly committed to AP that she takes my argument as sufficient reason to abandon perfect being theology, and this would be a consistent view to endorse. But, those perfect being theologians who are more committed to perfect being theology than they are to AP must accept that there is a logically possible situation in which God acts freely and yet lacks alternative possibilities. From this, it follows that the perfect being theologian must believe that AP is false.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Garcia, Laura L. "Divine Freedom and Creation." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 42, no. 167 (1992): 191–213. doi:10.2307/2220215.
- . "Moral Perfection." In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*. Edited by Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, 217–40. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Hunt, David P. "The Simple-Foreknowledge View." In *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*. Edited by James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, 65–103. Spectrum Multiview Book Series. Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2009.
- Kane, Robert. "The Contours of Contemporary Free Will Debates." In *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*. Edited by Robert Kane. 2.th ed., 3–44. Oxford handbooks in philosophy. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011.
- Mann, William E. "Divine Sovereignty and Aseity." In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*. Edited by William J. Wainwright, 35–59. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Morrison, Wes. "Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are They Compatible?" *Religious Studies* 37, no. 2 (2001): 143–60. doi:10.1017/S003441250100556X.
- Robertson, Teresa, and Philip Atkins. "Essential vs. Accidental Properties." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. Summer 2016. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016.
- Rowe, William, and Frances Howard-Snyder. "Divine Freedom." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. Fall 2008. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2008.
- Swinburne, Richard. *The Christian God*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.
- Timpe, Kevin. *Free will: Sourcehood and its alternatives*. Continuum studies in philosophy. London, New York: Continuum, 2008.
- Webb, Mark Owen. "Perfect Being Theology." In *A companion to philosophy of religion*. Edited by Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper and Philip L. Quinn. 2nd ed., 227–224. Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Wierenga, Edward R. *The Nature of God: An inquiry into divine attributes*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.