

# **Metaphysics and God**

Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump

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# 1 God and Other Uncreated Things

*Peter van Inwagen*

Is there anything (other than himself) that God has not created? In some sense, obviously, every Christian philosopher—every Christian—must answer No, for the Nicene Creed says that God has created all the *visibilia* and all the *invisibilia*.<sup>1</sup> But must a Christian take this creedal statement to mean that God has created *everything*, everything *tout court*, everything *simpliciter*, everything *full stop*, everything *period*? Or is it permissible for the Christian to regard the range of the quantifier ‘everything’ in the sentence ‘God has created everything’ as restricted to a certain class of objects—which is certainly a feature of many “everyday” sentences in which that quantifier occurs, sentences like ‘I’ve tried everything, and I still can’t persuade Winifred to apologize to Harold?’ (“Really? Have you tried pelting her with bananas? Have you tried taking her on a holiday tour of the Pleiades?”)

It is by no means *prima facie* absurd to suppose that this might be so. The well-known dispute about whether God can *do* everything may serve as an analogy. Jesus says, “With God all things are possible.”<sup>2</sup> Could Descartes have used this *logion* as a proof text?—to provide biblical, and indeed Dominical, warrant for his thesis that God can create two mountains that touch at their bases and, nevertheless, surround no valley?<sup>3</sup> Descartes might have thought so (as far as I know, he never mentions the Bible in connection with his views on the creation of the eternal truths), but Aquinas would deny it. I don’t know whether Thomas ever discusses Matt. 19:26,<sup>4</sup> but here’s what *I* (who have a view of God’s power that is much closer to his than to Descartes’s) would say about that verse: The range of ‘all things’ is tacitly restricted to “things” that could possibly be of practical interest to human beings, and of interest particularly in the matter of their salvation; mountains that are removed and cast into the sea perhaps fall within this category, but mountains that are adjacent but have no valley between them certainly do not. (I mean this to be a point about that particular verse; I don’t mean to suggest that the scope of God’s power is limited to matters that pertain to practical human interests. I mean that those things are the things that were Jesus’ topic when he spoke those words, and that nothing that does not pertain to that topic can be a counterexample to the thesis that those words expressed in the context in which they were spoken.)

This example, the example provided by the biblical statement ‘With God all things are possible’, shows that it is at least not beyond dispute that in the creedal statement ‘God is the creator of all things’, ‘all things’ must be understood as an unrestricted quantifier. But if there are things that are, so to speak, not covered by the phrase ‘creator of all things’, what things might they be?

One obvious answer to this question is not really germane to my concerns in this paper, but I will deal with it for the sake of completeness.

There are nouns (‘suffering’, ‘sin’, and ‘death’) that in some sense have referents but which are such that Christians would say that God had not made those referents. (For everything that proceeds from God’s creative power is, as we learn from Genesis 1, good—intrinsically good. And suffering, sin, and death are certainly not intrinsically good things.) St Augustine solved the problem raised by such nouns by saying that their referents are not real things, not substances, but mere defects in substances. To bring about a defect in a substance is not, properly speaking, to create, and the “existence” of defects may therefore be ascribed to the acts of creatures. If Moses’ first attempt at smashing the Tables of the Law resulted only in a crack in one of them, Moses did not thereby add something, a crack, to God’s creation.

This is certainly at least a plausible way of dealing with the problem. I myself would advocate a more radical form of Augustine’s thesis. I would say that phrases that purport to denote defects in things—‘the suffering of the innocent’, ‘the crack in the Liberty Bell’—do not really denote anything, not even some such ontologically substandard or second-tier item as a “defect.” To say this is to say that nothing that is to be met with in the world is a defect; it implies nothing about whether the things that *are* to be met with in the world are defective. In particular, it does not imply that the innocent do not suffer or that the Liberty Bell is not cracked. (My position on the ontology of suffering is therefore not to be confused with Mrs. Eddy’s. In her view, someone who thinks he is seeing people suffer is in every case like someone who is looking at a sound bell and thinks he is seeing a cracked bell because of an optical illusion, and not like someone who is looking at a cracked bell and affirms the metaphysical thesis that no part or component or constituent of the bell is a crack. I have to make this point very carefully, since one meaning of the sentence ‘Suffering does not exist’ is ‘No one suffers’, and this is indeed the only meaning this sentence could have outside metaphysics. So please don’t tell anyone that I believe that suffering does not exist. Telling them that would be like telling them that I have never stopped beating my wife: what you tell them would be true but a slander nonetheless. Falsity isn’t the only thing one can object to in a statement.) I think that my more radical version of the Augustinian ontology of sin and death and suffering is preferable to Augustine’s own ontology of these things (or non-things) because his ontology faces an objection that mine does not face. The objection is this: “All right, sin and

death and suffering aren't substances but only defects in substances. Still, they're *there*. If there are defects, they're among the items to be found in the world. So either God has made them or there's something to be found in the world that God has not made." But if a philosopher's position implies, as my position does, that the nouns 'sin' and 'death' and 'suffering' have no referents, then this objection does not apply to it.

If defects or deficiencies or absences are not the putative counterexamples to the thesis that God has made everything that I propose to discuss, what putative counterexamples to this thesis *do* I propose to discuss? You have probably guessed. I mean to discuss what Quine has called "abstract objects"—properties or attributes, numbers, propositions, fill out the list as you will. I will not attempt to give a definition of 'abstract object'. I have had something to say about how this phrase should be defined in an essay called "A Theory of Properties," and I refer anyone who is interested in what I have to say about that problem to that essay. In the present essay, I will assume simply that we all have a grasp of the concept of an abstract object that will suffice for a consideration of the theological questions that abstract objects raise.

Why are abstract objects "putative counterexamples" to the thesis that God has created everything? Why would anyone suppose that, granting for the moment that there are abstract objects, God has not created them—or at any rate, has not created *some* of them.

One relevant consideration is this: many philosophers believe that at least some abstract objects exist necessarily. Pure sets, for example, purely general propositions, purely qualitative attributes, and numbers.<sup>5</sup> Suppose this common belief is true. Suppose that at least some abstract objects exist necessarily. Does its truth entail that God has not created such abstract objects as exist of necessity? To ask this, I suppose, is to ask whether God can create something that exists necessarily. Or put the question this way: Does '*x* exists necessarily' entail '*x* is uncreated'? Anyone who said that this entailment held would be contradicted by Richard Swinburne, if by no one else. For Swinburne holds that the Son and the Holy Spirit are necessarily existent beings who were created (not, of course, at some point in time) by the Father. Revealed theology aside, one might point out, simply as a matter of abstract logic, that if A exists necessarily, and if it is a necessary truth that if A exists, then A creates B, it follows that B exists necessarily.<sup>6</sup> I am myself inclined to think that '*x* exists necessarily' does entail '*x* is uncreated', but I will not use this thesis as a premise because it is controversial and I know of no very interesting argument for it.

There is a second line of reasoning that might be used to defend the proposition that abstract objects (if such there be) are uncreated. It is this. Creation is, in the broadest sense of the word, a *causal* relation, and abstract objects cannot enter into causal relations. Therefore, abstract objects are uncreated. The second premise of the argument, at least, has been disputed, but I want to point to another sort of problem the argument faces. According

to some metaphysicians, there are contingently existent abstract objects, and at least some of them are contingently existent precisely because they depend for their existence on contingently existent concrete (nonabstract) objects. Consider, for example, the proposition that Alvin Plantinga is an able philosopher. (Suppose for the moment that there are propositions—and that there is such a proposition as that one.) Some theorists of the abstract say that Plantinga is in some sense a component or constituent of this proposition (along with the attribute “being an able philosopher,” and perhaps even some other items, such as a “predicative tie” whose business it is to unite the man and the attribute into the whole that is the proposition). And they maintain that Plantinga is an *essential* constituent of this proposition, a thesis that obviously entails that the proposition cannot exist if Plantinga doesn’t. And they seem to believe (though they may not say this explicitly) that if Plantinga does exist, the proposition exists. (I suppose the argument would be that the predicated attribute—and the “tie,” if that’s involved—are necessarily existent, and that it’s a necessary truth that a proposition exists if all its constituents exist.) But God created Plantinga. And, of course, before he created Plantinga, he knew that when he created Plantinga that act of creation would be sufficient for the existence of a proposition whose subject was Plantinga and whose predicate was the attribute “being an able philosopher.” (Sufficient for its existence, but not, of course, sufficient for its truth.) It therefore seems at least plausible to say that, in creating Plantinga, God created the proposition that Plantinga is an able philosopher. And if that is true, then at least one of the following two theses must be false:

The proposition that Plantinga is an able philosopher cannot enter into causal relations.

For all  $x$  and all  $y$ , if  $x$  creates  $y$ , at least one causal relation holds between  $x$  and  $y$ .

(And it seems clear enough that any proposition is an abstract object, even if it has a concrete object as a constituent.)

Now I do not myself believe that the proposition that Plantinga is an able philosopher—I do believe that there is such a proposition—is a contingent thing. At any rate, I find the thesis that it is a contingent thing a very counterintuitive thesis. It seems to me that if Plantinga had not existed, his existence would nevertheless have been possible. (To deny this would be to deny that the accessibility relation is symmetrical, and the symmetry of the accessibility relation is a good candidate for a Truth of Reason.) I would suppose, moreover, that if it is true in any possible world that Plantinga might have existed, the proposition that Plantinga exists must exist in that world—for it must be possibly true in that world and a proposition can’t be possibly true if it doesn’t exist. And I would suppose that if the proposition that Plantinga exists exists in a world, so does the proposition that

Plantinga is an able philosopher. This argument, however, presupposes a controversial thesis of modal metaphysics, the thesis called Serious Actualism—that an object cannot have a property in a world if it, the object, does not exist in that world. Since Serious Actualism is indeed controversial, I will not appeal to this argument. And I will make no use of its conclusion, which—generalized—is that propositions like the proposition that Plantinga is an able philosopher (if no others, propositions expressed by sentences that contain proper names of concrete objects) exist necessarily.

I will say this. *Some* propositions do not depend for their existence on the existence of contingent things. And those propositions, at least, exist necessarily. I think that *no* proposition depends for its existence on the existence of any contingent thing and that *all* propositions exist necessarily, but it will suffice for my purposes to say that some propositions exist necessarily. “Purely qualitative” propositions, as some philosophers call them, certainly have this feature—propositions like the proposition that some things are material (or are yellow or are warm blooded). And I would say the same thing about numbers, “purely qualitative” attributes, and pure sets (always assuming that there are such things as numbers, purely qualitative attributes, and pure sets).

Let us call such abstract objects as these “free”—free, that is, of ontological involvement with particular concrete objects. I would suppose that if an abstract object is free in this sense, it could exist even if there were no concrete objects at all (if that is a possible state of affairs). For—I would suppose—the only thing that could prevent an abstract object that exists in one possible world from existing in another would be its involving some concrete object that fails to exist in the latter world.

Suppose there are free abstract objects. What would follow? These things, I say. Even if there are possible worlds in which nothing concrete exists—most theists who understand the metaphysical issues the question of the existence of “empty worlds” raises would of course deny their existence—I contend that the proposition that some things are yellow and the attribute “material” and the number 510 exist in those worlds. (In such worlds, of course, the proposition is false, the attribute is uninstantiated, and the number numbers only other abstract objects.) And in no world, I contend, do free abstract objects (if such there are) enter into causal relations.

Now I will affirm something I believe. It will not be my purpose to try to convince you that belief of mine is true. My purpose is rather to defend the proposition that my belief is consistent with the credal statement that God has created everything. The belief, as you will no doubt have guessed, is that there are free abstract objects. I will say again something I have said several times in different ways: In my view, all abstract objects are free. I think that the proposition that Plantinga is an able philosopher (exists and) is free. I think that the attribute “being identical with Saul Kripke” (exists and) is free. I think that numbers and functions and vectors and tensors (exist and) are free. It is certainly true that if there are sets that

have concrete members (or even sets to which some concrete object bears the *ancestral* of the membership relation), then those sets are not free. But I'm inclined to think that there are no sets: I incline toward something like a "no class" elimination of set-theoretical predicates from ontologically serious discourse. But my conviction that all abstract objects are free (a non-vacuous truth, I say) will not figure in my argument. I appeal only to my conviction that there are free abstract objects.

If there are, as I suppose, free abstract objects, then they must be uncreated—since (I affirm this thesis as well) creation is a causal relation and free abstract objects cannot enter into causal relations.

A theist might dispute my thesis that there are uncreated abstract objects, and the argument I have given for this thesis, in either of two ways:

I agree that if there were free abstract objects they would be uncreated. But, since God has created everything, this simply shows that there are no free abstract objects. And there are no free abstract objects for a very simple reason: there are no abstract objects at all. In a word, theists—or at any rate theists who take the Nicene Creed seriously—should be *nominalists*.

I agree that if there were free abstract objects they would be uncreated. But, since God has created everything, this simply shows that there are no free abstract objects. There are abstract objects, all right (in my view, nominalism is not an option), but none of them is free. In a word, theists—or at any rate theists who take the Nicene Creed seriously—should be *Aristotelians*. To use a pair of medieval Latin tags, although theists may (and should) affirm the existence of *universalia in rebus*, they must deny the existence of *universalia ante res*.

I will not discuss the first option. I refer the interested reader to my essay "A Theory of Properties" for an account of my reasons for supposing that "nominalism is not an option." (They may well be defective, but, if they are, that would hardly be an argument for summarizing them here.)

Let us turn, then, to the matter of *universalia in rebus*. (Or, since I am not assuming that the only abstract objects are universals, perhaps I should say *abstracta in rebus*.) What does it mean to say that universals or other abstract objects exist "in" things (that is, in concrete things or in individuals or in particulars)?

We should note first that the idea of an abstract object's existing in a concrete object is not the same as an idea we have already met, the idea of an abstract object's being a constituent of a concrete object. An example should make this clear. Some philosophers think that there is such a property or attribute as "being a descendant of David." Suppose these philosophers are right. Some of them (not all) believe that this attribute has King David as a constituent, and is thus not what we have called a "free" attribute. I have used



the phrase ‘free of ontological involvement’ in this connection: the attribute “being a descendant of David” is, at least in the minds of some philosophers, not free of ontological involvement with concrete objects because David is a constituent of this attribute. But no one, these philosophers included, thinks that David has or exemplifies or instantiates or possesses “being a descendant of David.” And, therefore, although “being a descendant of David” may exist in, say, Solomon or St Joseph, it does not exist in David. And, although it involves David, it does not involve Solomon or Joseph. Therefore, the concept of an attribute’s existing in a concrete individual is not the same concept as the concept of an attribute’s having a concrete individual as a constituent. (In this argument, I have assumed that an attribute can exist in a concrete individual only if that individual has that attribute. I will later examine a conception of “existing in” that does not depend on this assumption—that attributes and other abstract objects exist in the mind of God.)

That is a point about what “existing in” is not. What can we say about what it *is*? I have to confess that I do not understand this idea, and I am not one of those philosophers—there are such philosophers—who are good at explaining ideas that they themselves do not profess to understand. But it seems to be clear that whatever existing in may be, the thesis that attributes exist (only) in the concrete objects that instantiate them implies the thesis that there are no uninstantiated properties. It follows that if there are uninstantiated properties, then this thesis is false if it is meaningful at all. The thesis can therefore be refuted—assuming that it is meaningful, assuming that there *is* such a thesis as it—by producing even one convincing example of an uninstantiated property.

From my point of view, this is not hard to do. From my point of view, a property is very like a proposition. Both propositions and properties, I say, are things that can be *said*—that is, asserted. Propositions and properties are *assertibles*. Propositions are saturated assertibles: they can be said or asserted full stop, period, without qualification. That the earth goes round the sun is something that one can say. Properties are unsaturated assertibles: they can be said or asserted, but only *of* something. For example, one of the things one can say of the earth is that it goes round the sun, and one can say it, that very same thing, of Mars and Venus as well. (If Professor X says that Mars goes round the sun and Professor Y says that Venus goes round the sun, there is something that both of them said of something—and not of the *same* “something.” If someone said to you, “Say of Jupiter what Professor X said of Mars and Professor Y said of Venus,” you would know exactly what to say in response to this imperative.) “That it goes round the sun” is, moreover, a thing that can be said *truly* of a few things like Mars and Venus and the Earth and Jupiter, but only *falsely* of Arc-turus and the number 510 and most other things. A property *of* something *x*, a property that *x* *has* or *instantiates* or *exemplifies*, I say, is simply an unsaturated assertible that can be said *truly* of *x*. An uninstantiated or unexemplified property, therefore, is a thing that can be said of things but

cannot be said truly of anything. And obviously there are such assertibles if there are any unsaturated assertibles at all. One of the things you can say about something, for example, is that it is a woman who was the president of the United States in the twentieth century. (If there is such a thing to be said about something as that it is a woman who was the prime minister of the United Kingdom in the twentieth century, how could there not be such a thing to say about something as that it is a woman who was the president of the United States in the twentieth century?) But this thing, although it can be said of things, can't be said *truly* of anything. It is therefore an uninstantiated property, and its existence refutes the thesis that properties can exist only in the things that have them.

What I have said, of course, presupposes my own account of properties. But I know of no other account of properties that (a) is equally explicit as to the nature of properties, (b) is intelligible, and (c) has the consequence that properties exist only in the things that have them. (I do not count nominalism as a theory of properties. By a theory of properties, I mean a theory that affirms the existence of properties and attempts to give some account of their nature—that attempts to specify some of the salient and philosophically important *properties* of properties.)

Still, it would be nice (from my point of view) to have an argument against the Aristotelian view of properties that did not presuppose the account of properties that I favor. I will present an argument that presupposes neither my theory of properties nor any other particular theory of properties. And here is the argument.

Properties and other abstract objects themselves have properties, and many of the properties of abstract objects could not be properties of concrete objects. The number 510 has such properties as being an even number and having irrational square roots, for example, and the property ductility has the property of being instantiated and the property of entailing the property solidity. It cannot be true of *these* properties—being an even number and being instantiated, and so on—that they exist only in the concrete objects that have them, for they are not had by concrete objects at all. And it would seem—this seems evident to me, at any rate—that “being an even number” is a property in the same sense of ‘property’ as the sense in which “being white” is a property. And it would seem that 510 *has* the property “being even” in the same sense of ‘has’ as the sense in which the Taj Mahal *has* the property “being white.” *Some* properties, therefore, do not exist only in the concrete objects that have them. And if some properties can do this thing, why should we not say that all of them can? If this question does not constitute a refutation of the thesis that *some* properties can exist only in concrete things (*sc.* the things that have them), it at any rate constitutes a significant challenge to the intuition on which allegiance to that thesis rests, namely that it is *impossible* for a property to exist otherwise than “in” the concrete objects that have it. One could certainly respond to the question by insisting that, although such properties as logical inconsistency

and divisibility by 3, properties that are not properties of concrete things, can exist independently of concrete things, properties of concrete things, whiteness and solidity and the like, can exist only in the concrete things that instantiate them. But one would at least have to concede that this was because whiteness and solidity were properties of a certain sort, and not because they were properties *simpliciter*. A further conceptual burden is laid on the backs of those who say that properties of concrete objects can exist only in the concrete objects that have them by the observation that there are properties that are properties of both concrete and abstract objects (if abstract objects there are): self-identity, for example, or not being a prime number.

If properties (and no doubt other abstract objects as well) do not exist in things, if the Platonic, as opposed to the Aristotelian, view of properties is correct, then one cannot say that God creates properties *by* creating concrete things. (And even if the Aristotelians are right about whiteness and solidity, there is still the case of properties of abstract things. Those obviously do not exist in the concrete things that have them, since, as we have observed, concrete things do *not* have them. It therefore cannot be that God has created “divisibility by 3” by creating concrete objects.) If properties existed only in the concrete things that had them, it is easy to see how God would go about creating properties: he would simply create concrete objects, and the creation of properties would be part and parcel of his creation of concrete objects. If, however, properties exist *ante res*, it is very hard indeed to see what the “creation” of properties could consist in.

How might defenders of the position that (given that there are such things as abstract objects) God is the creator of abstract objects reply to this argument? They could, of course, simply insist that—however hard it may be to see what the creation of *ante res* universals might consist in—God nevertheless *does* perform this act of creation. And there is no way to refute this position. There is, however, a more interesting kind of reply. I have in mind the reply provided by the thesis that *ante res* universals and all other abstract objects are thoughts in the mind of God.

It does seem that one is in some sense the creator of one’s own thoughts. One creates them—it seems—by thinking them. Suppose, for example, that I think a thought whose appropriate verbal expression would be “Ah, here’s Jane coming round the corner now.” Don’t I bring that thought into existence by thinking it?

This proposal faces one serious problem that I shall not make too much of. The problem is this: if one supposes that the number 510 or the property whiteness or the relation “to the north of” are thoughts in the mind of God, it is not easy to say *what* thoughts they might be. The proposal is rather easier to apply in the case of propositions—or *true* propositions, at any rate. That is, it is easier to apply it in the case of abstract objects that have truth-values than it is in other cases. This is because the most straightforward notion of “a thought” is this: a thought is a “thinking *that*,” an

episode in which a thinker asserts *in foro interno* that something is the case. A moment ago, I identified a thought I might have had by reference to some words I might have used to express it: ‘a thought whose appropriate verbal expression would be “Ah, here’s Jane coming round the corner now.”’ And it would seem, when we think of “thoughts” we think of mental episodes whose appropriate mode of expression in language is the declarative sentence.

If a proponent of the view that abstract objects are thoughts in the mind of God is asked to say what thought in the mind of God the proposition that the Earth goes round the sun is, it will not be hard for him to provide an answer that is at least plausible: it is that thought of God’s whose appropriate verbal expression would be (or one appropriate verbal expression of which would be), “The Earth goes round the sun.” I confess I am not clear what thought in anyone’s mind, God’s or anyone else’s, could possibly be identified with a number or a quality or a relation. (Could we say that “to the north of” is the thought God has when he thinks of that relation? Well, first, it’s not clear that there is any such thought if there is no object that is the relation “to the north of” and which, in some sense, exists independently of the thought—as its *object*. Secondly, in my case at least, I doubt whether there is any such thought as *the* thought I think when I think of “to the north of”: there is the thought whose appropriate verbal expression is “The relation ‘to the north of’ is transitive”; there is the thought whose appropriate verbal expression is “The relation ‘to the north of’ is asymmetrical” . . . And it’s not clear to me that even God can think of that relation otherwise than by thinking something *about* it.)

It is, in fact, hard to see what thought in God’s mind could possibly be identified with any *false* proposition. We cannot, for example, identify the proposition that the sun goes round the Earth with that thought in God’s mind whose appropriate verbal expression would be, “The sun goes round the Earth”—for the plain reason that there *is* no thought in God’s mind that can be so expressed.

The easiest case for the proposal to treat is the case of true propositions. (This fact has a parallel in the Aristotelian theory of universals. If the Aristotelian theory is to be extended to abstract objects other than universals—other than properties or attributes—well, it’s not clear how to do so. As the thesis “Abstract objects are thoughts in God’s mind” is most easily understood if the abstract objects in question are propositions, so the thesis “Abstract objects exist in the concrete objects that instantiate them” is most easily understood if the abstract objects in question are properties—since it’s not easy to see what it would be for something to “instantiate” a number or a proposition. The parallel is not exact, however, for, as the Aristotelians themselves concede, their theory implies that there are no uninstantiated properties; but I wonder whether the proponents of the former theory would be willing to say that their theory had the parallel implication: that there are no false propositions.)

Let us look at the easiest case, the proposal that *true propositions* are thoughts in the mind of God. If that proposal turns out to be “workable,” perhaps we shall be able somehow to extend it in such a way that it applies to other abstract objects. If it turns out to be unworkable even in the easiest case, there will be no point in trying to extend it to the more difficult cases.

Let us ask this: What is a “thought” in the appropriate sense? Or, if you like, What meaning should the count-noun ‘thought’ have when we use it to state the thesis that true propositions are thoughts in the mind of God? Let’s start with the thoughts of human beings. Consider my hypothetical thought about Jane. Let us suppose that I did think a thought of that description. I have a friend whose name is Jane, and this morning I saw her (or someone I took to be her) coming round a corner, and I thought a thought—or had a thought; I’ll not get into the matter of “cognate accusatives”—whose appropriate verbal expression would have been, “Ah, here’s Jane coming round the corner now.” What, exactly, *was* this item that I’m calling a “thought”?

This is a question we cannot avoid, not if we are being serious about metaphysics, and I doubt whether one can address the question of God’s relation to abstract objects if one is not being serious about metaphysics. If we are going to identify true propositions with certain thoughts—thoughts in the mind of God, to be sure, but at the moment we are simply asking what a thought, anyone’s thought, is—we must suppose that thoughts are objects of some sort. I use ‘object’ in its most general, or “logical,” sense: an object is anything that can be the value of a variable, anything that can be referred to by the use of a pronoun. This is a very undemanding sense to give to the word ‘object’, I concede, but the thesis that thoughts are objects in even this undemanding sense has enough content to impose a certain discipline on the thinking about thoughts of those who accept it. Even in this undemanding sense of ‘object’, every object must, for every property, have either that property or its complement, and every object must be a member of some logical or metaphysical category. (One could deny this only if one were willing to say that the idea of a logical or metaphysical category was meaningless: once you grant that the idea of a category makes sense, you have to be willing to place every object in your domain of quantification—in your ontology—into at least one of them.)

What logical category do thoughts (in the sense of ‘thought’ that figures in “True propositions are thoughts in the mind of God”) belong to? It seems to me that the only appropriate category is *event*: a thought, in the sense of the act, is a mental event of some kind. And, if one distinguishes between event-types and event-tokens, one must suppose that thoughts are event-tokens—for if our argument appeals to the premise that thinkers bring mental events into existence by thinking or the premise that the existence of mental events depends on the act of thinking, these premises will be plausible only if by ‘mental event’ we mean ‘mental event-*token*’.

The thesis that true propositions are thoughts—mental event-tokens—in the mind of God is most easily understood on the assumption that God, although everlasting, is not extra-temporal. (If God is outside time, as Boethius, Augustine, and Aquinas and many other philosophers and theologians have supposed, and if thoughts are events, then God can have “thoughts” only in some analogical sense.) Let us assume, then, that God is in time. We assume this only to make things as easy as possible for the theory that true propositions are thoughts in the mind of God.

If we suppose that thoughts are event-tokens, we must ask what event-tokens are—ontologically speaking. According to Kim’s account, and I have no better account to offer, event-tokens are property-exemplifications, or, better—better because some philosophers have used the phrase ‘property exemplification’ for another purpose—“episodes of property exemplification.” (That is the simplest case; more generally, events are episodes of relation exemplification, but I’ll consider only the simplest case.) Suppose, for example, that I became hungry at noon, that at noon I came to have or exemplify the property “being hungry.” (I’m using the word ‘noon’ as a name for a particular moment of time in the world’s history, and not as a word for something that recurs every day or occurs in different moments in different time zones.) It follows—according to Kim’s theory, as I understand it—that the proposition that I became hungry at noon implies the existence of at least four objects. In addition to me and the property hunger and the time noon, it implies the existence a fourth item, an event-token or concrete event, that might be called ‘my becoming hungry at noon’ or ‘my acquisition of the property hunger at noon’.

I have to say that that seems to me to be an ontologically profligate thesis. Why should one suppose that, simply because I come to exemplify a certain property at a certain time, there is something “there” in addition to me and the property and the time? Those three objects seem to me to be the only objects that need figure in an adequate description of, as we say, what happened. There are, I would say, no events. That is to say, all statements that appear to involve quantification over events can be paraphrased as statements that involve quantification over objects, properties, and times—and the paraphrase leaves nothing out. We can, I say, in every case in which an object acquires a property describe “what happened” without supposing that there are objects that have the property of happening.

I would point out that this position avoids difficult questions about the counterfactual individuation of events. Kim has said things that imply, or appear to imply, that the event that is in the actual world denoted by ‘the death of Caesar’ occurs in every possible world in which Caesar dies at the particular moment at which he in fact died—including those worlds in which he dies of heart failure or because Cleopatra has poisoned him. But those of us who like Kripke’s essentiality-of-origins thesis will feel a strong inclination to say that the event we in fact call ‘Caesar’s death’ can occur only in worlds in which Caesar is stabbed on the floor of the Roman

Senate by certain conspirators. If, however, we suppose there are no events, we avoid the problem of individuating them, and it's always nice to avoid knotty philosophical problems. Nevertheless, I do not recommend the theory—if I may dignify a mere negative statement with the title “theory”—that there are no events because accepting that theory will enable one to avoid the knotty philosophical problem of the individuation of events. I recommend it because it seems evident to me, on inspection of the idea of an object's gaining a property, that when an object gains a property at a certain time, there's just nothing “there” besides those three things: the object, the property, and the time.

I would say, therefore, that there are no thoughts. There are thinkers, yes. There are mental properties, yes. Some mental properties are of a kind of which the following property is representative: “noticing that one's friend Jane is just now coming round the corner.” One does momentarily acquire such properties, yes. There was (in the story I told) a moment at which I acquired (and then briefly exemplified) the property “noticing that one's friend Jane is just now coming round the corner”—yes. But there was nothing *else* there (or, rather, there would have to have been lots of other things there, but no other things figured in my story). There was nothing that answered to the description ‘the event that consisted in my acquiring then briefly exemplifying the property “noticing that one's friend Jane is just now coming round the corner.”’

The property “noticing that one's friend Jane is just now coming round the corner” is a mental property, if you like. It is a mental property in the sense that it entails the properties “has a mental life” and “thinks.” But it is not an inhabitant of the world of concrete things. It is an *ante res* universal, and it would have existed—I say—even if Jane and I had never existed, even if God had not created anything, even if (if this were possible) there had been no concrete existents at all. And it is a universal, a sharable property. It is a property you might exemplify too if Jane were a friend of yours as well as a friend of mine.

If, as I suppose, there are no events, and if thoughts in someone's mind, if they existed, would be events, then, obviously, nothing is a thought in God's mind. But let us suppose that I am wrong and that events exist. Let us suppose that, for any object  $x$ , any property  $F$ , and any moment of time  $t$ , the proposition that  $x$  has  $F$  at  $t$  entails the existence of an event, to wit,  $x$ 's having  $F$  at  $t$ . And let us suppose that when  $x$  is a thinker and  $F$  is a mental property of the right sort, this event is a thought in the mind of  $x$ . And let us suppose that God (who, remember, we are supposing is a temporal being) has at various times certain mental properties of the right sort, and that there are, therefore, such things as thoughts in the mind of God.

If the proposition that the Earth goes round the sun is one of these items, one of God's thoughts, which one is it? Let us, to avoid having to deal with some purely technical problems (problems that a satisfactory account of true propositions as thoughts in the mind of God would eventually have to

solve), suppose that the past and the future are infinite and that the Earth has always been going round the sun and always will be. And let us suppose that the proposition we are considering is the proposition that Earth has always been going round the sun and always will be—world without end. What thought in the mind of God is *that* proposition? It would, I suppose, be the event that consists in, for every time, God's then thinking that the Earth is going round the sun—or perhaps the event that consists in, for every time, God's then thinking that the Earth always has been going round the sun and always will be. This event—on either reading—consists in God's always having a certain mental property: “thinks that the Earth is now going round the sun” or “thinks that the Earth always has been going round the sun and always will be.” (If properties are, as I suppose, unsaturated assertibles, the former will be what one says of something when one says that it is now thinking that the Earth is going round the sun—and similarly for the latter.)

It is not clear to me that this maneuver accomplishes anything. If there are thoughts (in the sense we have given to the word), they are events, and events involve abstract objects, if indeed they are not themselves abstract objects. If there is such a thing as the event that consists in  $x$ 's having the property  $F$  at the moment of time  $t$ , that event has a certain abstract object, the property  $F$ , as a constituent. I admit that I'd be hard put to it to provide a satisfactory definition of ‘involves’ or ‘constituent’—but then I'm not the one who thinks that there are events. If you think that there is such an object as my having the property hunger at noon (or my acquiring hunger at noon, having it throughout the period noon through 1:00 p.m., and then ceasing to have it), I don't see how you're going to avoid saying that hunger is in some sense a constituent of that event. And hunger is a property, an abstract object. And the same goes for mental properties: “fearing that one has a fatal illness” is no less an abstract object than hunger is. But if events, and therefore thoughts, and therefore thoughts in the mind of God, have abstract objects as constituents, what does one accomplish by saying, “True propositions are thoughts in the mind of God; God is the creator of his thoughts; therefore, God the creator of true propositions”? If thoughts have constituents, and if God is the creator of his thoughts, then, surely, God must be the creator of all the constituents of his thoughts? Therefore, the thesis that God creates at least one sort of abstract object, true propositions, depends on the thesis that he creates another sort of abstract object, properties. If we know that God can create properties, why do we need some special theory that explains how he creates true propositions. Why not simply say that he creates propositions using whatever means he employs to create properties—*mutatis mutandis*—and that some of the propositions he creates turn out to be true?

Might we avoid all these problems if we said that a true proposition was not a *thought* in the mind of God but rather one of God's *beliefs*? I don't see that that would accomplish anything, for it seems to be a perfectly trivial assertion, something that would be readily accepted by those who say that God does not create abstract objects. *Of course* the class of true



propositions and the class of God's beliefs are identical, for a belief—yours, mine, God's, anyone's—simply is a proposition, and for any proposition, God accepts that proposition if and only if it's true. What could a belief be if it were not a proposition? Beliefs have truth values, don't they? And most of my beliefs, perhaps all of them, could be someone else's beliefs, too, so they're obviously a kind of universal, and are therefore abstract objects of some sort. What are one's beliefs if not the propositions one accepts? If you know of any other candidate for the office "belief" than "proposition," I should be interested to learn what it might be

Or might true propositions—and false propositions and all other abstract objects—be *ideas* in the mind of God? Again, I don't see what an idea could be if it were not some sort of abstract object. You have the idea of an even number and I have the idea of an even number and God has it too. And how can more than one person have a certain idea if that idea is not a universal of some sort—an abstract object. I can see no way to understand 'idea' that has the following consequence: the phrase 'my idea of an even number' and the phrase 'God's idea of an even number' both have referents and the referents they have are different. (I don't think I'm blaspheming if I contend that some of the ideas in God's mind are also ideas in mine. Some ideas are so simple that even I can have them, and if I can have an idea, then, of course, God can, and will, have that idea too; and it seems obvious enough that the idea of an even number is one of those ideas that is so simple that even I can have it. After all, I do have it.) And if ideas in the mind of God are abstract objects, then we cannot prove that God is the creator of abstract objects by any such argument as:

Abstract objects are ideas in the mind of God  
God is the creator of the ideas in his own mind  
*Hence*, God is the creator of abstract objects.

The argument is valid; perhaps it is even sound. But it is useless as a tool of persuasion, for no one who accepted its first premise would accept its second premise unless he already accepted its conclusion, unless he had accepted its conclusion prior to his consideration of the argument. And that is certainly my case. Since I believe that ideas in the mind of God are abstract objects, I will of course accept the first premise. But when I come to the second premise, my response will be, "No, I don't accept that. I think it's false because, in my view, no one, not even God, could be the creator of an abstract object." I admit that there is a certain *fausse naïveté* in this response to the argument. No doubt anyone who offered an argument framed in the words I have imagined would have meant something by these words that could be stated more adequately as follows:

*So-called* abstract objects are really certain particulars, ideas in the mind of God; that is to say, the role in our discourse that many think is played by *ante res* universals and such is really played by particulars existing

in the mind of God; these are *perfect exemplars*, à la Plato. Thus, if one says that the leaf is green, one is really saying that the leaf resembles God's idea of a green thing—a particular existing in God's mind.

God is the creator of the particulars that exist in his mind (just as we human beings are the creators of the mental particulars that exist in our minds).

*Hence*, God is the creator of the things that really play the role in our discourse that some suppose (wrongly) is played by abstract objects.

Now I reject the theory that this argument appeals to—divine-exemplar nominalism, one might call it. I don't think it can do justice to the data of the problem of universals. But this is not the place to enter into a dispute about the problem of universals. It will suffice for my purposes to point out that it is a form of nominalism, and I of course concede that if any form of nominalism is correct, the question whether God is the creator of abstract objects does not arise.

In the end, I see no way in which abstract objects of any sort can be identified with God's thoughts or beliefs or ideas—no way, at least, that can lend any sense to the idea that God creates abstract objects. God's thoughts may be (or involve) abstract objects, just as yours and mine may. God's beliefs may be abstract objects, just as yours and mine may. God's ideas may be abstract objects, just as yours and mine may. But if God's thoughts or beliefs or ideas are abstract objects, he does not create any of these items by thinking—any more than, if your and my thoughts and beliefs and ideas are abstract objects, you and I create any of these items by thinking. If your and my thoughts and beliefs and ideas are abstract objects, then, when you and I think certain thoughts we thereby bring it about that we stand in certain relations to various abstract objects. If, for example, I am engaged in a certain line of thought and, as a result of this process, come to the conclusion that Plantinga is an able philosopher, I have thereby put myself into a certain relation to the abstract object called 'the proposition that Plantinga is an able philosopher' (the relation called 'accepting'). The proposition that Plantinga is an able philosopher, as a result of my thinking, acquires the relational property "being accepted by van Inwagen," but its intrinsic properties or nature and its existence are wholly indifferent to the fact that it has acquired that relational property. And it's the same with God, really. Since Plantinga is indeed an able philosopher, the proposition that Plantinga is an able philosopher has the relational property "being accepted by God," but that relational property has no more to do with its nature and its existence than the relational property "being accepted by van Inwagen" does.

In the end, I can find no sense in the idea that God creates free abstract objects, no sense in the idea that the existence of free abstract objects in some way depends on the activities of God. (Recall that, although I believe that *all* abstract objects are free, that is not a position that I am concerned to defend in this chapter.) And that is because the existence of free abstract objects depends on nothing. Their existence has nothing to do with causation. One can no

more cause a purely qualitative property or proposition to exist than one can extract a cube root with a forceps. Causation is simply *irrelevant* to the being (and the intrinsic properties) of abstract objects. And, if abstract objects and their intrinsic features cannot be effects, neither can they be causes. An abstract object can be neither of the terms in any causal relation.<sup>7</sup>

I am happy to admit that I am uneasy about believing in the existence of “causally irrelevant” objects. The fact that abstract objects, if they exist, can be neither causes nor effects is one of the many features of abstract objects that make nominalism so attractive. I should very much like to be a nominalist, but I don’t see how to be one—since (having been exposed to *Philosophical Investigations* at an impressionable age) I think that most of the things we human beings believe must be true, *and* (having come in more mature years to accept Quine’s theses on ontological commitment, and having come to believe that many of the things we all believe involve ineliminable quantification over abstract objects) I think that a very significant proportion of the things we believe entail the existence of abstract objects.

Since I accept both the existence of abstract objects and the propositions contained in the Nicene Creed, I must regard the phrase ‘creator of all things visible and invisible’ as containing a tacitly restricted quantifier. And the tacit restriction on the quantifier ‘all things’, I say, is this: its domain is restricted to objects that can enter into causal relations. In my view, therefore, in reciting the opening lines of the Nicene Creed, I commit myself only to the proposition that God is the creator of all things (besides himself) that can in some sense be either causes or effects. Obviously, *visibilia* must enter into causal relations, since seeing is a causal relation. The *invisibilia*, I maintain, are things that do not and cannot enter into the causal relation “seeing,” but do enter into various other causal relations. (Angels are the only *invisibilia* that come readily to mind.)

Creation is, everyone will agree, a causal relation. Theists will say more: that creation is, in a very important sense, *the* causal relation, the causal relation that is the *fons et origo* of all the others. If there are objects to which the concept of causation has no application—in the way in which the concept “pulling out of something by using a physical tool” has no application to the process of extracting a cube root—the existence of such objects is irrelevant to the Christian doctrine of creation. And *whether* there are objects to which the concept of causation has no application is a question that theology should regard as no business of hers, a question that she may in good conscience leave to her handmaiden, philosophy.

## NOTES

1. In the sequel, when I speak of God’s creating everything, I mean God himself to be excluded from the range of this generalization—as does the Nicene Creed, for obviously God is, strictly speaking, an *invisibile*.
2. Matthew 19:26: *Theo pantá dunatá esti*. Quite possibly, the intended meaning of this verse is not ‘Nothing is impossible for God’ but rather, ‘With

God's help, nothing is impossible for human beings'. If the text has the latter meaning, this will not affect the point I make in the text about restricted quantification—for one can still ask, "Does the text imply that, with God's help, it's possible for a human being to draw a round square?"

3. Assuming that Descartes did actually mean to affirm that thesis. See Peter van Inwagen (2006), 157, n. 6.
4. In the discussion of omnipotence in *Summa theologiae* (I.25.3), the biblical verse Aquinas discusses is Luke 1:37, which is usually translated in some such way as "For with God, nothing is impossible." But a more literal translation would be, "For with God, every word (*rima*) is possible." I take 'every word' to mean 'anything you might choose to ask him for' or, perhaps, 'everything he might choose to decree'. Aquinas comes down heavily on 'word': "Whatever implies a contradiction cannot be a 'word', because no intellect can possibly conceive such a thing." It seems probable that he would say something similar about the Matthean text: that 'all things' (*pantá, omnia*) should be understood as meaning 'every word' (*pan rima, omne verbum*).
5. Frege supposed that numbers were what would today be called "impure sets." It follows—it is at least a plausible thesis that it follows—from his ontology of number that the number four would not have existed if James I (who presumably might not have existed) had not existed. The argument in virtue of which this thesis is plausible is this. The number four numbers, among other things, the Stuart kings of England. It is the set of all four-membered sets, and it numbers the Stuart kings by having the set of Stuart kings—James I, Charles I, Charles II, James II—among its members. But the members of a set are essential to a set and thus that particular four-membered set would not have existed if James I had not existed, and the set that is in fact the set of all four-membered sets would not have existed either. I take it that this very consideration shows that Frege cannot have been right about what object the number four was. For if he was right, the proposition that four is an even number would not have been a necessary truth, and it *is* a necessary truth. (We must, however, grant Frege this much: if his ontology of number is right, the *sentence* 'Four is an even number' expresses, with respect to each possible world, a contingent proposition that is true in that particular world.)
6. I am assuming that if a thing has been created, that thing exists. Neo-Meinongians who believe both that Dickens created Mr. Pickwick, and that Mr. Pickwick does not exist, will of course dispute this assumption. I hope they will forgive me for assuming without argument that they are wrong. One can't address every relevant issue in a paper if that paper is to be of manageable length.
7. I do not deny that abstract objects may figure in causal explanations: I do not deny that when we say things of the form 'so-and-so because such-and-such', the explanans will often be a proposition that demonstrably entails the existence of certain abstract objects. But to say that is not to say that abstract objects can enter into causal relations.