

Dependence, Transcendence, and Creaturely Freedom: On the Incompatibility of Three Theistic Doctrines

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Mind 130:520 (2021), 1099-1127

1 Three Doctrines

1.1 TWO CORE DOCTRINES

Central to the theistic worldview are two doctrines about the relationship between God and the universe: the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of transcendence.¹

The doctrine of creation, roughly put, says that God *brought about*, or *made*, or *is responsible for the existence of*, the universe. This doctrine comes in at least two versions, however, distinguished by how these verbs are understood. According to one version, God's creation of the universe was a case of *causation*. The idea is that God, or some divine state, caused the universe to come into existence in much the same way that a fall causes a bruise.² The *effect* of creation was of course different from the effect of a fall, both in kind (it was a coming-into-existence, rather than a mere modification) and in magnitude (it was the whole universe, rather than just a bruise). But it was causation all the same.

According to the second version of the doctrine, God's creation of the universe is an instance of a deeper and more intimate relation than mere causation. Thus, it is sometimes said that God *is the ground of all that exists*, or *that on which the universe existentially depends*, or *that which sits atop the great chain of being*.³ The idea is that the universe depends for its existence on God in the same way that, say, your singleton set depends for its existence on you, or a wrinkle in the carpet depends for its existence on the carpet.⁴ You don't *cause* your singleton to come into existence, and the carpet doesn't *cause* the wrinkle to come into existence; rather you and the carpet stand in a more deeply explanatory relation to your singleton and the wrinkle, respectively. So too for God and the universe, according to this second version, which we shall call 'the doctrine of deep dependence'.⁵

¹By 'the universe' I just mean 'all the concrete things other than God'. (And by 'a concrete thing' I just mean 'a thing having causal powers'.) It is thus, speaking strictly, a plural referring term. I make no assumption that there is some single object of which all the concreta other than God are parts. When I use singular pronouns or verbs with regard to the universe, that is simply so it sounds idiomatic.

²There is still room for substantial variation within the causal version, surrounding the questions of how *often* God creates the universe—ranging from just once to all the time—and what *else* God caused/causes to be true about the universe beyond its mere existence.

³These bits of ideology ('ground', 'existential dependence', 'hierarchy of being', etc.) are quite fashionable these days—see *inter alia* Fine [1995], Fine [2012], Schaffer [2009], Schaffer [2010], Rosen [2010], Audi [2012a], Audi [2012b], and Bennett [2017]—but religious philosophers, poets, and thinkers have been using them for quite some time, even in periods when they were quite unfashionable.

(Note: I don't mean to suggest that all the formulations in the text come to exactly the same thing; see Barnes [2018] for a penetrating discussion of some possible deep distinctions between *dependence* and the other notions. But for our purposes we can ignore the distinctions between them.)

⁴I should note that here and throughout when I say 'depends' I mean '*entirely* depends'.

⁵The doctrine in one form or another is a staple of Neoplatonist thought. But one can find it

The second doctrine, the doctrine of transcendence, roughly put, says that God is *separate and apart from* the universe, that He is *wholly* distinct from it. Since things can be separate and apart in many different ways—correlating with the ways in which things can be conjoined and together—this doctrine as well comes in several versions. A robust version says that God is separate and apart from the universe in a *number* of ways, specifically in respect of mereology, modes, and mentality. That is, it says that (a) God and the universe share no *parts* or *constituents* in common, and (b) no portion of the universe is a *mode* or *modification* of God (and likewise that God is not a mode or modification of any portion of the universe), and (c) no portion of the universe is an *idea* or *story* or *volition* in the mind of God (and likewise that God is not an idea or story or volition in the mind of some portion of the universe). Call this version of the doctrine of transcendence, ‘the doctrine of true transcendence’.

1.2 INTERLUDE: A TENSION SET ASIDE

There is some tension—a *prima facie* incompatibility—between the doctrines of deep dependence and true transcendence, because all of the intuitive examples of existential dependence seem to involve things that are *not* wholly distinct. Thus, the example I gave of a thing and its singleton set arguably involves one thing that is a constituent of the other (at least in some sense of ‘constituent’), and the example I gave of a carpet and a wrinkle arguably involves one thing that is a modification of the other.⁶ The conjunction of the doctrine of deep dependence and the doctrine of true transcendence implies that a thing can existentially depend on something from which it’s entirely separate and apart, an implication that is perhaps somewhat puzzling.

A number of classical and medieval religious philosophers were alive to this tension. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-395), John Scotus Eriugena (c. 815-877), and Hasdai Crescas (c. 1340-1410), for example, all strove to maintain both the “emanationism” of Plotinus and the traditional doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. They struggled to do so, however, because the former seemed to commit them to the doctrine of deep dependence, while the latter seemed to commit them to the claim that the universe is in no way made out of God or from God—and thus that the universe is separate and apart from God—per the doctrine of true transcendence.⁷ Some attempted to resolve the tension by re-interpreting the doctrine of creation

in lots of places. For a recent example, see [Pearce \[2017\]](#), who argues that if the cosmological argument from contingency succeeds, it establishes that God is the ‘foundational ground’ of History (the total sequence of events in the universe), where that is explicitly contrasted with His being the *cause* of History.

⁶Note as well that the ‘models’ that [Pearce \[2017\]](#) suggests for what he calls ‘foundational grounding’ (i.e., ways the doctrine of deep dependence could be true) involve violations of the doctrine of true transcendence.

⁷See [Wolfson \[1953\]](#) and [Wolfson \[1970\]](#).

ex nihilo, so that it means that the universe *is* made out of God, who is identical with Nothing, a mysterious and wholly negative being.⁸ Others attempted to resolve the tension by re-interpreting the “emanationism” of Plotinus so that it means nothing more than the traditional doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*!⁹ But whatever the merits of such re-interpretations, they left the tension between deep dependence and true transcendence unresolved.

Indeed, Spinoza seems to have been convinced that the tension was unresolvable, i.e. that the doctrines of deep dependence and true transcendence are in fact incompatible.¹⁰ (Of course, Spinoza jettisoned the latter in favor of the former.) Spinoza’s demonstration of the incompatibility goes by way of an intermediate step. First, Spinoza in effect argues (E1p2 and E1p5) that the doctrine of true transcendence, according to which God is separate and apart from the universe—and hence is not a mode or affection of God, but is rather a distinct substance—implies an even stronger sort of transcendence, according to which God also *shares nothing in common* with the universe. Second, Spinoza argues (E1p3) that, “If things have nothing in common with one another, one of them cannot be the cause of the other.”¹¹ Thus, true transcendence rules out deep dependence; indeed, it appears to rule out creation, period, assuming that ‘cause’ in E1p3 refers to every sort of cause.¹²

Whether or not the intermediate step is necessary, I do think that there is a tension here—that there is at least a *prima facie* incompatibility between them. But I set it aside for present purposes. In putting forward my central thesis and argument, I will assume that there is in fact no incompatibility between the doctrines of deep dependence and true transcendence, all by themselves.¹³

⁸See Wolfson [1970] on Gregory and Eriugena. See also Wolfson [1948] for a more general discussion of this re-interpretation of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.

⁹See Wolfson [1953] on Crescas.

¹⁰*Ethics* 1p1-15. See Wolfson [1934, pp. 79–95] for an excellent distillation of this line of argument and an explanation of how it draws on a parallel line of argument in medieval discussions of the unity of God. I am indebted to a referee for this journal for calling my attention to it.

¹¹Translation taken from Curley [1985].

¹²As Morrison [2015] carefully documents, that is indeed the dominant interpretation. He suggests an alternative interpretation of axiom E1a4—which would result in an analogous interpretation of E1p3—that restricts it to *immanent causation*, as opposed to *transient causation*—where the difference between the two types of causation is understood in terms of whether the causation is accompanied by *inherence*, which is in turn understood in terms of *ontological dependence*. Thus, on Morrison’s suggested interpretation, Spinoza’s conclusion is that the doctrine of true transcendence is incompatible with the the doctrine of deep dependence, while on the standard interpretation his conclusion is that the doctrine of true transcendence is incompatible with the the doctrine of creation, period.

¹³The tension will resurface briefly in §4, where I consider various responses to my argument.

1.3 A THIRD DOCTRINE

There is an incompatibility, I will argue, once a third doctrine is added to the mix. The third doctrine, the doctrine of creaturely freedom, is not directly about the relationship between God and the universe. It's about the universe itself. And although not as central to the theistic worldview, it is nonetheless endorsed by a good number of theistic philosophers, qua theistic philosophers.¹⁴ Roughly put, it says that at least some portion of the universe—usually it is said that some *human* portion of the universe—at least at some time, acts freely. (Terminological note: to avoid using certain awkward-sounding phrases—like, ‘a portion of the universe ate breakfast’—I will henceforth use ‘creature’ in place of ‘portion of the universe’, but the intended meaning is the same: ‘a concrete thing other than God’. No substantive commitment to the doctrine of creation is assumed in my using that term, although given that doctrine it is of course a perfectly natural term to use.) Since ‘acting freely’ can be understood in different ways, this doctrine also comes in several versions. Some versions understand free action in such a way that it is consistent with an inability to do anything other than what one in fact did. Other versions understand free action in such a way that it requires the ability to do something other than what one in fact did. Thus, the ‘doctrine of *robust* creaturely freedom’—the one that, I shall argue, makes for incompatibility—says that at least some creature, at least at some time, performs some act such that he could have done other than what he in fact did. Or, as we might say, some creature has *power* over the fact that he acted as he did.

2 Adherents

Now we have all the relevant doctrines on the table: the doctrine of deep dependence, the doctrine of true transcendence, and the doctrine of robust creaturely freedom. I contend that we can't consistently hold on to all of them. This should come as a surprise, at least to those philosophers who *have* held all of them. It's true that none of the three doctrines commands universal assent, even among theistic philosophers; a fortiori for their conjunction. But their conjunction *does* have its adherents, and those adherents are no lightweights.

Maimonides (1138-1204), for example, seems to have adhered to all three of them. Thus, he begins his legal masterpiece, the *Mishneh Torah* (“Foundations of the Law,” 1:i-iii), with the following declaration¹⁵:

(1) The basic principle of all basic principles and the pillar of all sci-

¹⁴On the relationship between the doctrine of creaturely freedom—and the doctrine of robust creaturely freedom, in particular—and theism, see the recent collection, [Timpe and Speak \[2016\]](#).

¹⁵Translation is taken from [Twersky \[1972\]](#), but I have corrected the translation of (2) to “if it were supposed that...” to match the translation of (3), in order to better reflect the Hebrew original.

ences is to realise that there is a First Being who brought every existing thing into being. All existing things, whether celestial, terrestrial, or belonging to an intermediate class, *exist only through His true existence* (emphasis mine).

(2) If it were supposed that He did not exist, it would follow that nothing else could possibly exist.

(3) If, however, it were supposed that all other beings were non-existent, He alone would still exist

While Maimonides doesn't come right out and assert the doctrine of deep dependence, two points strongly suggest it. First, the phrase 'exist only through His true existence', a highly unusual phrase even in the original Hebrew, suggests a dependence relation much stronger and more intimate than mere causation. Second, (2) is not just making a straightforward claim of *modal* dependence—that it's not possible for something to exist and the First Being not to exist. For as Maimonides' assertions in (3) and elsewhere (e.g., *Guide for the Perplexed* II:1) make clear, he thought it *impossible* for the First Being not to exist, from which the modal claim trivially follows. But (2) is clearly not meant to be either trivial or no stronger than the claim that its antecedent is impossible. He has simpler ways to say that the antecedent is impossible and better things to do than state trivialities. Rather, it is plausibly making a claim along the following, suppositional lines: let's suppose, *per impossibile*, that the First Being does not exist; then we can rightly conclude that nothing whatsoever exists. But what licenses this inference? Not the claim of modal dependence, which says nothing stronger than that the supposition is impossible. Not the claim that the First Being caused the universe to come into existence, for that wouldn't in fact license the inference. I cannot rightly conclude that there's no toothpaste from the supposition that Harry doesn't exist, even if Harry made the toothpaste. Presumably, what licenses the inference is that everything *depends* for its existence—'depends' in a non-modal, non-causal sense—on the First Being in such a deep way that it has counterpossible suppositional implications. (Compare: let's suppose, *per impossibile*, that the number 7 doesn't exist; then we can rightly conclude that the number 7's singleton set doesn't exist. What licenses this inference is that the singleton depends—'depends' in a non-modal, non-causal sense—on the number.) But that's just the sort of dependence relation that the doctrine of deep dependence says there is between God and the universe.¹⁶

As to the doctrine of true transcendence: Maimonides advocated the doctrine as fiercely as anyone. Thus, in his *Guide for the Perplexed* I:52, he tells us:

¹⁶See also *Guide for the Perplexed* II:11-12 in which Maimonides repeatedly likens God and His creative activity to an 'overflowing spring of water', a common Neoplatonist metaphor for the emanation of the universe from God.

There is, in truth, no relation in any respect between Him and any of His creatures...If, however, two things fall under two different genera, there is no relation between them in any respect whatever...How then could there subsist a relation between Him, may He be exalted, and any of the things created by Him, given the immense difference between them with regard to the true reality of their existence, than which there is no greater difference? (Pines [1963, p. 118])

I take it this rules out God and the universe being conjoined and together in respect of mereology, modes, or mentality: they share no parts or *constituents*, neither is a *mode* or *modification* of the other, and neither is an *idea* or *story* or *volition* in the mind of the other.¹⁷

Finally, Maimonides pretty clearly endorses the doctrine of robust creaturely freedom. Thus, later on in the first book of the *Mishneh Torah*, at the heart of his “Laws of Repentance” (5:i-ii), he writes:

(1) Free will is bestowed on every human being. If one desires to turn toward the good way and be righteous, he has the power to do so. If one wishes to turn towards the evil way and be wicked, he is at liberty to do so...

(2) ...Every human being may become righteous like Moses our Teacher, or wicked like Jeroboam; wise or foolish, merciful or cruel, niggardly or generous, and so with all other qualities.

If it is up to a human being—*every* human being no less—whether to be as righteous as Moses or as wicked as Jeroboam, then he must have the power to do that which he in fact does not do, for no one does both of those things.¹⁸

¹⁷Of course, his rather radical statement appears also to rule out the universe’s *dependence* on God, which contradicts the doctrine of deep dependence that we’ve seen Maimonides endorses. But in any case Maimonides must have in mind a restricted sense of ‘relation’, since given a more liberal sense—one according to which there is a relation, **being immensely different with regard to the true reality of their existence**—Maimonides would be contradicting himself *in this very passage*, implying as he would be that God and the universe stand in the relation, **being immensely different with regard to the true reality of their existence**, while also asserting that they stand in no relation at all. I don’t know what restriction in particular Maimonides has in mind, but I strongly suspect his claim is restricted to those relations which are such that necessarily if some *x*s stand in that relation then there is some intrinsic property that each of the *x*s instantiates—*some* way in which they are *alike*. That is why he takes the lack of any relation between God and the universe to follow from his well-known view that God is wholly different from creatures, that they share no positive intrinsic feature in common. (This latter sort of transcendence is the one that Spinoza derived from the doctrine of true transcendence (see discussion in §1.2). Maimonides runs the derivation in the other, more straightforward, direction.) The relation of existential dependence, I take it, fails to entail any such likeness, while being conjoined in respect of mereology, modes, or mentality, does indeed entail some such likeness—or so, at any rate, Maimonides thought.

¹⁸See also *Shemonah Perakim* 8. For a defense of the attribution of this view to Maimonides, see Gellman [1989], Stern [1997], and Ivry [2016]. For some dissent, see nt. 41.

So my argument has at least Maimonides as a target. A case can be made that it has other heavyweight philosophers as targets as well.¹⁹ But I shall not dwell any longer on the issue of who in fact adhered to all three doctrines, and move instead to my argument that no one can consistently do so.

3 The Argument

The argument, in a nutshell, is fairly straightforward. The doctrine of deep dependence very plausibly implies that any fact about the universe *either* (a) is identical with, or (b) holds wholly in virtue of, some fact about God.²⁰ But the doctrine of true transcendence implies that no fact about God is *identical* with any fact about the universe. So the two doctrines together imply that any fact about the universe holds wholly in virtue of some fact that *isn't* about the universe. Moreover, the doctrine of deep dependence very plausibly implies that no fact about God holds even partly in virtue of any fact about the universe. So the two doctrines together imply that any fact about the universe holds wholly in virtue of

¹⁹Aquinas appears to hold all three views. Thus, the Scholastic distinction that Aquinas accepts (*ST* I:19:5; I:19:8; I:22:3) between primary causality (the sort of causality that relates God to the universe) and secondary causality (the run-of-the-mill sort of causality that obtains between created things), seems to imply that God is responsible for the existence of the universe in a way that differs from run-of-the-mill. A very natural understanding of this other way is that of grounding, or deep dependence.

In his comments on free will he says, “But man acts from judgment...But because this judgment, in the case of some particular act, is not from a natural instinct, but from some act of comparison in the reason, therefore he acts from free judgment and *retains the power of being inclined to various things*. For reason in contingent matters may follow opposite courses.” (*ST* I:83, emphasis mine) This seems to imply the doctrine of robust creaturely freedom.

And while I am unaware of any passage in which Aquinas follows Maimonides in ruling out *tout court* any genuine relation between God and the universe, nevertheless in his discussion of omnipresence (*ST* I:8) he *seems* to deny that they are related in respect of mereology or modes—see, however, nt. 50—and there appears to be no basis for suggesting that he thinks that they are related a la Idealism.

Thanks to Sara Aronowitz, Robert Koons, Arash Naraghi, and Sajjad Rizvi for helpful discussion of who else might serve as a target of my argument.

²⁰Two clarifications: First, I use ‘fact about God’ as shorthand for ‘fact about God’s intrinsic properties’ and ‘fact about the universe’ as shorthand for ‘fact about non-divine concreta’, which is itself shorthand for ‘fact about the intrinsic properties of non-divine concreta or the intrinsic relations in which they stand’. More generally, I use ‘fact about X’ as shorthand for ‘fact about X’s intrinsic properties’ and ‘fact about the Fs’ as shorthand for ‘fact about the intrinsic properties of the Fs or the intrinsic relations in which the Fs stand’.

Second, I assume throughout an “abundant conception” of facts, such that for any set of facts, there is the fact that is *conjunction* of all of the facts in that set, i.e. the fact that each of the facts in the set obtains. This saves me from having to always write ‘holds in virtue of some fact or facts...’. But that assumption is merely to simplify things, and is at nearly every stage undoubtedly dispensable. For the one stage at which it is not obviously dispensable, see nt. 38.

some fact that (i) isn't itself about the universe, and (ii) doesn't in turn hold even partly in virtue of any fact about the universe.

So now consider some arbitrary act performed by some creature: say, Maimonides' eating breakfast on July 3, 1160. The fact that Maimonides ate breakfast on July 3, 1160 is a fact about the universe. So there is some fact D (for 'divine'), wholly in virtue of which that fact about Maimonides holds, which (i) isn't itself about the universe, and (ii) doesn't hold even partly in virtue of any fact about the universe. But then it's very hard to see how Maimonides could have any power over D—that is, how Maimonides could possibly have done anything such that if he had done that thing, D would not have been a fact. D is not a fact about Maimonides or what Maimonides did, since then it would be a fact about the universe; and it's not a fact that holds even partly in virtue of any fact about Maimonides or what Maimonides did, since then it would be a fact that holds partly in virtue of some fact about the universe. So very plausibly Maimonides is powerless over D. But since the fact that Maimonides ate breakfast on July 3, 1160 holds wholly in virtue of D, and Maimonides is powerless over D, Maimonides is powerless over the fact that he ate breakfast on July 3, 1160. But that was an arbitrary creaturely act, so this shows that no creature ever has any power over any of his acts. The falsity of the doctrine of robust creaturely freedom follows.

Let's lay out the argument's premises more explicitly and more generally:

1. If the doctrine of deep dependence is true, then:
 - (a) any fact about the universe either is identical with, or holds wholly in virtue of, some fact about God, and
 - (b) no fact about God holds even partly in virtue of any fact about the universe
2. If the doctrine of true transcendence is true, then no fact about the universe is identical with any fact about God

So,

- (C1) If the doctrines of deep dependence and true transcendence are true, then any fact about the universe holds wholly in virtue of some fact that (i) isn't itself about the universe, and (ii) doesn't in turn hold even partly in virtue of any fact about the universe

But,

3. No creature has any power over any fact that (i) isn't itself about the universe, and (ii) doesn't hold even partly in virtue of any fact about the universe

And,

4. If S is powerless over some fact A, and some fact B obtains wholly in virtue of fact A, then S is powerless over fact B as well

So,

- (C2) If the doctrines of deep dependence and true transcendence are true, then no creature has any power over any fact about the universe

But, clearly enough,

5. If no creature has any power over any fact about the universe, then the doctrine of robust creaturely freedom is false.

So,

- (C) If the doctrines of deep dependence and true transcendence are true, then the doctrine of robust creaturely freedom is false

Since the argument's five premises are all necessarily true if true at all, the argument shows that the three doctrines are incompatible: there's no way for the doctrines all to be true.²¹

3.1 PREMISE 1

The first premise puts forward a certain consequence of the doctrine of deep dependence. The premise would be almost completely trivial if the doctrine of deep dependence were formulated to begin with as a claim of both existential dependence and qualitative dependence: as saying that the universe depends for its existence *and* nature on God's existence and nature.²² But it wasn't. The doctrine of deep dependence speaks just of existential dependence. Nonetheless, the claim is plausible enough.

²¹It probably goes without saying that the structure of my argument owes much to van Inwagen's [1983] well-known Consequence Argument. But the substance of my argument and its conclusion differs from that of van Inwagen's. I make a number of assumptions that van Inwagen doesn't make: about the facts over which creatures are powerless, about how powerlessness is transmitted ("vertically"), and of course about the consequences of the doctrines of deep dependence and true transcendence (doctrines that do not figure in van Inwagen's argument). Likewise, van Inwagen makes a number of assumptions that I don't make about the facts over which we're powerless. Consequently, my conclusion does not obviously imply van Inwagen's, nor does van Inwagen's conclusion obviously imply mine. (Thanks to Silvia Jonas for making clear the need for these remarks.)

²²It still wouldn't be *completely* trivial since the anti-symmetry of grounding (dependence, the in virtue of relation, etc.) is not *trivial*, even if it's very plausible. See nt. 27.

Look to the paradigm examples for guidance. Very plausibly, any fact about your singleton (about its intrinsic features) either is identical with, or holds wholly in virtue of, some fact about you; and no fact about you (about your intrinsic features) holds even partly in virtue of any fact about your singleton. Similarly, any fact about the wrinkle (about its intrinsic features) either is identical with, or holds wholly in virtue of, some fact about the carpet; and no fact about the carpet (about its intrinsic features) holds even partly in virtue of any fact about the wrinkle.²³ This is presumably no coincidence. It is because they are cases of existential dependence that these further explanatory relations hold.

One might object that I have cherry picked the cases to my advantage. Some have suggested, e.g., that every human person existentially depends on some human organism, but that some facts about the person do not obtain wholly in virtue of any fact (no matter how comprehensive) about the organism.²⁴ We might think in addition that some such fact is not *identical* with any fact about the human organism either. So, one might say, here we have a case in which one thing existentially depends on another but some fact about the first thing is neither identical with nor holds wholly in virtue of any fact about the second thing.

I find this suggestion about human persons and human organisms rather implausible.²⁵ But wherever the chips fall on that, there is a more specific reason to think that at least in *our* case, of God and the universe, an asymmetric qualitative dependence follows from the doctrine of deep dependence. Let us say that,

‘*x* is basic’ =_{df} *x* is concrete and there is nothing concrete *y* such that *x* existentially depends on *y*.²⁶

Then given certain plausible assumptions, it follows from the doctrine of deep de-

²³I reiterate here (see nt. 20) the restriction to a thing’s intrinsic features so that the reader is not misled by apparent counterexamples. For example, the fact about the wrinkle that it falls under a sortal that is picked out in English by a term beginning with the letter ‘w’ neither is identical with nor holds wholly in virtue of a fact about the carpet; but that fact about the wrinkle is not a fact about its intrinsic properties.

²⁴See Pearce [2017].

²⁵Note: rejecting this suggestion about human persons and human organisms obviously doesn’t require rejecting the view (see *inter alia* Baker [2000] and Shoemaker [2008]) that every human person is constituted by a human organism; nor does it require rejecting the view that every human person is both constituted by and existentially depends on a human organism; nor does it require rejecting the view that every human person is both constituted by and existentially depends on a human organism, and that while the person and the organism share all their ‘organismic properties’, they still differ in their ‘personal properties’; and nor does it require rejecting the view that every human person is constituted by a human organism, but that the existence and nature of the organism doesn’t entail the existence or nature of the human person. (This last rejection is not required whether or not Grounding Necessitarianism (§3.4) is true; for if it’s true, then we don’t have a case of existential dependence, and if it’s a false, then the failure of entailment is consistent with qualitative dependence as well.)

²⁶See Schaffer [2010]. The sense of ‘dependence’ at play is, of course, supposed to be the one at play in the doctrine of deep dependence.

pendence that God is the one and only basic thing. No creature is basic if the doctrine of deep dependence is true, because every creature existentially depends on God (and God is concrete). And God is basic if the doctrine of divine dependence is true, since every concrete thing is either God or a creature, and the relation of existential dependence is antisymmetric.²⁷ Since every concrete thing is either God or a creature, God is the one and only basic thing. But it's quite plausible to think that *every* fact is either identical with, or holds wholly in virtue of, some fact or facts about the basic things. And it's also quite plausible to think that no fact about the basic things holds even partly in virtue of any fact about the non-basic things. But then the first premise follows straightaway. In effect, I am claiming that even if there can be violations of a *local* tie between existential dependence and qualitative dependence, there cannot be violations of a *global* tie between existential dependence and qualitative dependence.

3.2 PREMISE 2

The second premise puts forward a certain consequence of the doctrine of true transcendence. It connects *objectual* distinctness with *factual* distinctness: it says the former is sufficient for the latter. Well, it says that in the specific case of God and the universe, but the reason to believe it is a more general claim that objectual distinctness suffices for factual distinctness. We can put the more general claim this way:

OBJECTUAL TO FACTUAL: For any *x*s and any *y*, if the *x*s and *y* are separate and apart in respect of mereology, modes, and mentality—if they share no parts or constituents in common, none of the *x*s is a mode or modification of *y* (nor vice versa), and none of the *x*s is an idea or story or volition in the mind of *y* (nor vice versa)—then no fact about *y* is identical with any fact about the *x*s

OBJECTUAL TO FACTUAL gives us a sufficient condition for the distinctness of facts; or, equivalently, a necessary condition for the identity of facts: if two facts are to be identical, then they can't be facts about the intrinsic character of things that are entirely separate and apart. The principle obviously doesn't purport to give us a sufficient condition for the identity of facts. (The necessary condition is pretty ill-suited to serve itself as a sufficient condition.) I have no idea whether there *are* any finitely stateable conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for the identity of facts (in general), and so I certainly won't try to supply them. But OBJECTUAL TO FACTUAL seems pretty anodyne and unobjectionable. It's extremely difficult to see how any fact about *y*'s intrinsic properties could be *the very same*

²⁷Or so it seems. See Barnes [2018] for some dissent. If need be, I could retreat to an argument for the incompatibility of *four* theistic doctrines, the fourth being the view widely held by theists that God does not existentially depend on anything at all, let alone on the universe He created.

fact as a fact about the intrinsic properties of the *x*s and/or the intrinsic relations in which they stand, unless the *x*s and *y* are in “intimate metaphysical contact” (a term I will leave undefined, but I hope still understood). But it’s also extremely difficult to see what *other* sort of relation—other than overlap, modification, or ideation—might bring the *x*s into “intimate metaphysical contact” with *y*. So it’s extremely difficult to see how OBJECTUAL TO FACTUAL could be false. And the consequent of the second premise is just an instance of OBJECTUAL TO FACTUAL is its antecedent is true.

3.3 PREMISE 3

The third premise states a condition that is necessary for some creature to have power over a fact: the condition is that the fact needs to either *be* about the universe or *hold at least partly in virtue of* some fact about the universe.

I don’t know how to argue for this premise. But that’s because I don’t know how to argue for *any* claim of powerlessness except by inferring it from some other claim of powerlessness—by some “transmission of powerlessness principle”—and I don’t know what claim of powerlessness I can infer this premise from.

But that hardly makes this premise unique, and hardly means that I can’t know it. Compare: I might argue, with many incompatibilists, that if determinism is true, then we are powerless over every fact, by inferring that claim of powerlessness via a “transmission of powerlessness principle” from the twin facts that we are powerless over the laws of nature and that we are powerless over the past. But how do I argue for the claim that we are powerless over the laws of nature, say? I don’t, and I can’t. But that hardly means that I can’t know that we are so powerless. It just seems extremely obvious that we don’t possess such supernatural powers.²⁸ By the same token, it just seems extremely obvious that neither I nor any other creature possesses what would be an evidently supernatural power over a fact that neither is about the universe nor holds even partly in virtue of any fact about the universe.²⁹

3.4 PREMISE 4

The fourth premise is one of those “transmission of powerlessness principles” to which I referred in my discussion of the previous premise. It says that powerlessness is transmitted by (full) grounding.

A fairly straightforward way to argue for the principle is via a *modal link*:

²⁸Although given certain views about what laws of nature are—in particular, any Humean view—this is less obvious than it otherwise would be. See Beebe [2003]. I take that as a problem for Humeanism, however, rather than as a reason to think we have such supernatural powers.

²⁹What about angels, if such there be? I’d be content restricting this premise and hence my conclusion to human creatures, but I don’t think it’s that much more plausible to think that angels have such supernatural powers than to think that humans do.

1. **Grounding Necessitarianism:** If B is fully grounded in A, then A entails B (i.e. necessarily, if A obtains then B obtains)
2. **Transmission of Powerlessness By Entailment:** If S is powerless over A, and A entails B, then S is powerless over B

So,

3. **Transmission of Powerlessness By Grounding:** If S is powerless over A, and B is fully grounded in A, then S is powerless over B

The Transmission of Powerlessness By Entailment is uncontroversial, and, even more importantly, it's obviously true;³⁰ and Grounding Necessitarianism is very plausible.³¹ Nonetheless, the latter is somewhat controversial, and not quite as obviously true.³² As some have argued, there might be conditions that are no part of the full grounds for a fact, but whose obtaining or non-obtaining nevertheless can *matter* for whether, given the presence of those full grounds, that fact obtains: the conditions might be enablers or disablers (Cohen [forthcoming]), blockers or masks (Leuenberger [2014]).

I do not wish to wade into this debate here, so I offer two alternatives, both of which involve a modest departure from the original argument, and neither of which assumes Grounding Necessitarianism.³³

³⁰See Finch and Warfield [1998]. For why it's obviously true: the logic of counterfactuals licenses the inference $p \Box \rightarrow q, \Box(q \rightarrow r) \vdash p \Box \rightarrow r$. So if there is something X that S can do such that if S were to do X then B wouldn't obtain, and necessarily, if B fails to obtain then A fails to obtain (equivalent to: A entails B), then if S were to do X (which is something S can do), then A would fail to obtain.

³¹See Trogdon [2013].

³²See, *inter alia*, Leuenberger [2014] and Skiles [2015].

³³Why not leave the overall argument intact and just argue for (4) via an *explanatory* link, rather than a *modal* one? That is, why not argue as follows:

1. **Grounding-Explanation Link:** If B is fully grounded in A, then A's obtaining completely metaphysically explains B's obtaining
 2. **Transmission of Powerlessness By Explanation:** If S is powerless over A and A's obtaining completely metaphysically explains B's obtaining, then S is powerless over B
- So,
3. **Transmission of Powerlessness By Grounding:** If S is powerless over A and B is fully grounded in A, then S is powerless over B

The reason I don't argue that way is that I don't think it makes much progress at all over the simpler modal-link argument. Suppose that Grounding Necessitarianism is false, and there are conditions that are no part of the full grounds for a fact, but whose obtaining or non-obtaining nevertheless matters for whether that fact obtains given the presence of those full grounds. Either those conditions are part of a full metaphysical explanation of the grounded fact, or they are not. If they are, then a gap opens up between grounding and metaphysical explanation—analogueous to the gap some have alleged between causation and causal explanation (Beebe [2004])—and we ought

The first alternative in a nutshell: instead of assuming that grounding *always* comes along with entailment, we can build in to the first premise the narrower assumption that it does so in *our* case of God and the universe, and justify that in much the same way that we justified the original version of the first premise. That is, we can replace the first premise with the following:

- 1*. If the doctrine of deep dependence is true, then:
- (a) any fact about the universe is *entailed by* some fact about God (i.e., necessarily, if the latter obtains then it obtains), and
 - (b) no fact about God holds even partly in virtue of any fact about the universe

From (1*), together with (2), we can conclude:

- (C1*) If the doctrines of deep dependence and true transcendence are true, then any fact about the universe is *entailed by* some fact that (i) isn't itself about the universe, and (ii) doesn't hold even partly in virtue of any fact about the universe

Then we can just replace (4) with the uncontentious Transmission of Powerlessness by Entailment, and all will go on as before.

The justification of (1*) is along much the same lines as that of (1). Again, look to the paradigm examples for guidance. Any fact about your singleton is entailed by some fact about you; and no fact about you—no fact about how you are intrinsically—holds even partly in virtue of any fact about your singleton. Similarly, any fact about the wrinkle is entailed by some fact about the carpet; and no fact about the carpet—no fact about how the carpet is intrinsically—holds even partly in virtue of any fact about the wrinkle. This is presumably no coincidence. It is because they are cases of existential dependence that these further modal and explanatory relations hold.

One might again object, as was objected in §3.1, that I have cherry picked the cases to my advantage. Some have suggested, e.g., that every human person existentially depends on some human organism, but that some facts about the person are not entailed by any fact (no matter how comprehensive) about the organism.³⁴ So, one might say, here we have a case in which one thing existentially depends on another but some fact about the first thing is not entailed by any fact about the second thing.

to deny Grounding-Explanation Link. If they aren't, then a gap opens up between metaphysical explanation and entailment; and then we might reasonably deny Transmission of Powerlessness By Explanation, since S can have power over B by having power over one of the conditions that serves as an enabler, or a disabler, or a blocker, or whatnot.

³⁴Pearce [2017].

I likewise find *this* suggestion about human persons and human organisms rather implausible.³⁵ But wherever the chips fall on that, there is a more specific reason to think that at least in *our* case of God and the universe, an entailment follows from the doctrine of deep dependence. For as we already noted, it follows from the doctrine of deep dependence that God is the one and only *basic* thing. And it's *extremely* plausible to think that *every* fact is entailed by some fact or facts about the basic things: the distribution of all properties and relations *globally* supervenes on the intrinsic properties and intrinsic relations of the basic things.³⁶

In effect, I am claiming that even if there can be violations of a *local* tie between existential dependence and qualitative entailment, there cannot be violations of a *global* tie between existential dependence and qualitative entailment.

But some might disagree even with this: perhaps, they suggest, the world can exhibit what we might call “vertical randomness”.³⁷ That is, perhaps the character of the ground-floor concrete objects—their intrinsic properties and the intrinsic relations in which they stand—leaves open to chance, *objective* chance, how the non-ground-floor things will be.

Given how I understand ‘intrinsic property’ and ‘intrinsic relation’, I frankly find this suggestion unintelligible. I’d happily settle for a conditional claim: *if* there is no possibility of vertical randomness, then our three doctrines are incompatible. But even granting the possibility of vertical randomness—along with the denial of Grounding Necessitarianism—I think we ought to conclude that the three doctrines are incompatible.

For there is a second alternative. In a nutshell: we can leave the first three premises just as they are, and still get by with a weaker version of the fourth premise, one which says, very roughly, that *global* powerlessness is transmitted by grounding. More precisely, the premise we could substitute for (4) is as follows:

4*. If:

- (a) every fact about the Fs holds wholly in virtue of some fact that: (i) isn’t itself about the Fs and (ii) doesn’t in turn hold even partly in virtue of

³⁵All but the last rejection mentioned in nt. 25 are still available options.

³⁶See Skiles [2015, §5.2] where he points out that the denial of Grounding Necessitarianism is consistent with the eminently plausible global supervenience principle to which I’ve appealed.

Since I am appealing to global supervenience, what I technically mean is ‘that every fact is entailed by some fact or facts about the basic things, *together with the fact that those are all the basic things*’. Accounting for this technicality would require a slight reformulation of the second and third premises, but not one that matters for their plausibility, so I ignore it.

Note also that the global supervenience principle I stated is much stronger than I need. As it stands, it is likely false if possibly, there is no basic thing—for then any two worlds that have no basic things but which disagree on *something or other* will falsify the claim of global supervenience. But all I really need is the claim that any two worlds, *in which there are basic things*, that agree on the distribution of intrinsic properties and relations over the basic things agree on the distribution of all properties and relations.

³⁷If I understand Pearce [2017] correctly, this is his view.

any fact about the Fs; and

- (b) S is powerless over every fact that: (i) isn't itself about the Fs and (ii) doesn't hold even partly in virtue of any fact about the Fs

Then,

- (c) S is powerless over every fact about the Fs

With (4*) substituted for (4) we can still validly infer (C2)—the relevant instance of (4*) is obtained by replacing 'the Fs' with 'the universe'—and then (C) as well.

Why accept (4*)? It may be hard to see why, since the principle is somewhat complicated. But it's a corollary of a simpler principle:

4**. If:

- (a) every fact about the Fs holds wholly in virtue of some fact that isn't itself about the Fs; and
- (b) S is powerless over every fact that isn't itself about the Fs

Then,

- (c) S is powerless over every fact about the Fs

The reason to believe (4**) is that if (a) and (b) are true, then there's just no way for S to get a *foothold*: he won't have power over a given fact about the Fs by way of having power over some enabler or blocker or whatnot, because he won't have power over the enabler or blocker *either*.

More pedantically: suppose every fact about the Fs holds wholly in virtue of some fact that isn't itself about the Fs, that S is powerless over every fact that isn't itself about the Fs, and that nonetheless S has power over some fact about the Fs. But if there is some fact about the Fs over which S has power, then there is some fact C that is a *conjunction* of all the facts about the Fs over which S has power.³⁸ Since each conjunct is a fact about the Fs, the conjunction is also a fact about the Fs. But then per the supposition, there is some fact A that isn't itself about the Fs in virtue of which C obtains; and per the supposition, S has no power over A. But then S has power over C only if there is some condition E (enabler, disabler, blocker, etc.) over which S has power that *isn't* one of the conjuncts of C. Per the supposition E is a fact about the Fs. But since C was a conjunction of *all* the facts

³⁸As I noted in nt. 20, I assume throughout an "abundant conception" of facts, such that for any set of facts, there is the fact that is conjunction of all of the facts in that set. That assumption is undoubtedly dispensable at nearly every stage of the argument, since it is uncontroversial that grounding can take a plurality of facts on the grounding side of the relation, and the needed modifications to (1a) and (4) don't affect their plausibility. Even at this stage the assumption can be dispensed with so long as grounding can take a plurality on the *grounded side* of the relation as well. See [Dasgupta \[2014\]](#) for discussion of that issue.

about the Fs over which S has power, E is one of the conjuncts of C. Contradiction. So, reductio of the supposition that S has power over some fact about the Fs.

When I say that (4*) is a corollary of (4**) I don't mean that the former follows as a matter of logic from the latter. It doesn't, of course. (Condition (b) of the antecedent of (4*) is logically weaker than condition (b) of the antecedent of (4**).) What I mean is that it's very hard to resist (4*) once you've granted (4**).

In effect, (4**) asks to consider a partition of all the facts into two categories, the F-facts and the non-F-facts, such that S is powerless over facts in the second category, and facts belonging to the first category hold wholly in virtue of facts belonging to the second category. It then says that given such a partition, S has no power over facts in the first category either (and hence S has no power over any facts).

Let us grant that. Now, in effect, (4*) asks to extend that judgment to a very similar partition: a partition of all the facts into three categories, the F-facts, the non-F-facts that *don't* hold (even partly) in virtue of the F-facts, and the non-F-facts that *do* hold (at least partly) in virtue of the F-facts, such that S is powerless over facts in the second category, and facts belonging to the first category hold wholly in virtue of facts belonging to the second category. It then says that given such a partition, S has no power over facts in the first category either. The reason is that *salvation cannot come from the third category*: the facts in that category come on the scene too late (in the order of explanation) to salvage S's power over facts in the first category. S has to have power over facts in the first category before (in the order of explanation) S can have power over facts in the third category; and (4**) says that he doesn't.

Thus completes my tripartite defense of the fourth premise, or of something near enough.

3.5 PREMISE 5

Sometimes a premise is so clearly true as to need no defense. This is such a premise.³⁹

4 Whither?

If my argument succeeds, then the doctrines of deep dependence, true transcendence, and robust creaturely freedom, are incompatible. Consider someone,

³⁹That's not to say that no philosopher could be crazy enough to deny it. One could suggest, for example, that facts about creaturely actions are not facts about the universe, where, recall, 'facts about the universe' is just shorthand for 'facts about the intrinsic properties of non-divine concreta or the intrinsic relations in which they stand'. Perhaps, goes the suggestion, non-divine concreta instantiate no intrinsic properties and stand in no intrinsic relations, and so there *are* no facts about the universe. Crazy, for sure, but logically possible.

such as Maimonides, who is inclined toward accepting or has already accepted all three. Which should he drop?⁴⁰

I imagine many will say: drop the third.⁴¹ The doctrine of robust creaturely freedom encounters other serious difficulties—some having nothing to do with theism, some having something to do with theism, and some having everything to do with theism—and this just gives us one more theistic reason to reject it.

But one should proceed with caution here. As we noted at the beginning, there is in any case a tension between the doctrines of deep dependence and true transcendence. If that tension is real enough—if they are, in fact, incompatible—then, of course, jettisoning the third doctrine won't allow you to avoid incompatibility. To do that, one of the first two doctrines must be jettisoned. But then there's no point in trying to solve *our* problem by dropping the doctrine of robust creaturely freedom.

I imagine many would say that if we're going to drop one of the other two doctrines, the one to drop is the doctrine of deep dependence.⁴² And this for three reasons. First, there's the *idleness* motivation: it's not obvious what the doctrine of deep dependence "gives us," what religious role it plays, that cannot be played

⁴⁰In light of [Lebens \[2015\]](#), one might suggest that although the argument succeeds, we don't need to *drop* any of the doctrines—we just need to *relativize* appropriately. Lebens ingeniously develops Hasidic idealism—the view that we are characters in a divine dream—in such a way that much of what we take to be true is true-relative-to-the-divine-dream, not true simpliciter. Thus, we might hold on to the doctrine of robust creaturely freedom, but only as true-relative-to-the-divine-dream, not as true simpliciter, while hold on to the other two doctrines as true simpliciter, but not true-relative-to-the-divine-dream. I don't pursue this route here, not because I don't think it's worth pursuing, but because a proper evaluation of it would take us too far afield.

⁴¹A number of interpreters of Maimonides have suggested that Maimonides did exactly that; or, more precisely, that he never really accepted the doctrine in the first place. See [Pines \[1960\]](#) and [Sokol \[1998\]](#). (Some lump [Altmann \[1974\]](#) in with these interpreters, and with good reason; but as [Gellman \[1989\]](#) correctly notes, the view that Altmann explicitly attributes to Maimonides is that theological determinism is true, not that the doctrine of robust creaturely freedom is false.) Pines thinks that according to Maimonides's secret view humans are not free at all, while Sokol thinks that according to Maimonides's secret view humans are free but nonetheless cannot do other than what they in fact do.

But the passage in the *Guide for the Perplexed* on which their interpretation is based (II:48) implies at *most* that determinism is true. (Whether it implies even that is the subject of dispute between [Pines \[1960\]](#) and [Sokol \[1998\]](#) on the one hand, and [Gellman \[1989\]](#), [Stern \[1997\]](#), and [Ivry \[2016\]](#) on the other hand.) But of course one can't simply take for *granted* that this entails the denial of creaturely freedom, or even the denial of robust creaturely freedom—the latter entailment would be news to David Lewis [1981]—*a fortiori* for the claim that Maimonides *recognized* such an entailment. One needs to *argue* for these further claims, a point of which many participants in the interpretive discussion seem to be scarcely aware.

⁴²As a referee pointed out, Maimonides himself (*GP* III:23) asserts that the entire point of the biblical book of Job was to teach the lesson that we human beings are unable to understand *how exactly* the universe depends on God, even if we can know *that* it does. But, as I understand Maimonides, our ignorance does not extend to the doctrine of deep dependence—*that* is something that we know. And so, as the referee also pointed out, far from providing a response to the problem, Maimonides is just restating it (or at least part of it).

by the causal version of the doctrine of creation. Second, there's the *idolatry* motivation: dropping the doctrine of true transcendence seems theologically risky and borderline idolatrous. Third, there's the *obscurity* motivation: dropping the doctrine of true transcendence helps avoid incompatibility only if it allows for some fact about the occurrence of some creaturely action to be the same as some fact about God; but we have no positive sketch of how that is supposed to go.⁴³

As to the *idleness* motivation: obvious or not, it seems that the doctrine of deep dependence *does* play a religious role that cannot be played by the causal version of the doctrine of creation. A central religious impulse is the mystical one—the longing for and perception of a deep underlying unity lying behind the wildly heterogeneous and rapidly changing plurality in which we find ourselves. The Hebrew prophet, Zechariah, expressed this longing plainly and powerfully when he hoped for the day that “The Lord will be King over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be One and His Name will be One.” (14:9) The early twentieth century Jewish mystic and legal decisor, Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), emphasizes its religious centrality:

Greater than this is the mystical quest, which by its nature penetrates to the depths of all thought, all feelings, all tendencies, all aspirations, and all worlds, from beginning to end. It recognizes the inner unity of all existence, the physical and the spiritual, the great and the small, and for this reason there is, from its perspective, no bigness or smallness. Everything is important, and everything is of marked value. There is no lost gesture, there is no vain imagining...Therefore, the mystical dimension is the soul of religion, the soul of the Torah.⁴⁴

True, even the causal version of the doctrine of creation gives us *some* sort of unity, since everything (concrete) ultimately owes its existence to the causal activity of a single being; but not more than we get from a thoroughly naturalistic Big Bang cosmology that likewise claims that everything (concrete) ultimately owes its existence to a single event; and that's evidently not enough to satisfy the central religious impulse. It seems that nothing short of *monism*—understood as the claim that there is exactly one basic thing—is enough to satisfy that impulse.⁴⁵ And while the doctrine of deep dependence entails monism, the causal version of the doctrine of creation does not.

In any case, it's not clear what the force of the idleness motivation is supposed to be. Whether or not the doctrine of deep dependence “gives us” anything we

⁴³Of course, this would not be the only theological commitment afflicted by obscurity. Various doctrines, coming from various religious traditions, have been held to be both obscure and true: incarnation, in the Christian tradition, chosenness, in the Jewish tradition, etc. But one might still think it better not to be more obscure than necessary.

⁴⁴*Orot Hakodesh*, Kook [1978, p. 194]. For discussion see Lamm [1961].

⁴⁵See Schaffer [2010]. According to Schaffer's version of monism, the sole basic thing is *the whole cosmos*, while according to the doctrine of deep dependence, the sole basic thing is God.

couldn't otherwise get, it will be difficult for a theist to *deny* it, at least if she grants its intelligibility. That is, if she thinks good sense can be made of talk of 'grounding' and 'existential dependence' and suchlike, then a theist would be hard pressed to deny that the universe existentially depends on God. For if the statement, 'the universe existentially depends on God' makes sense, then denying it is tantamount to claiming that some creature *is existentially independent of* God, and presumably *existentially independent of everything else*: it is tantamount to claiming that some creature is a piece of *reality's basic furniture*, on par at least in this regard with God. But that's a very hard pill for a theist to swallow.

As to the *idolatry* motivation: true, if one drops the doctrine of true transcendence and instead identifies God with each creature, or with the whole universe, or with some object that has the whole universe as a part, or with some object that is constituted by the whole universe, then that may well be risky (or worse) and borderline idolatrous (or well beyond the border).⁴⁶ But there are other alternatives that are safe and comfortably non-idolatrous. There is the *idealist* alternative, according to which the universe is an idea or story or volition in the mind of God. This secures intimate metaphysical contact without, it would seem, any real risk of deifying any creature.⁴⁷ There is also the *inverted panentheism* alternative, according to which God is (literally) part of every creature, but no creature is part of (or constitutes) God.⁴⁸ This too secures intimate metaphysical contact—indeed, universal mereological overlap between God and every creature—without, it would seem, any real risk of deifying any creature. Being part of God (a feature panentheism attributes to the universe) makes its bearer divine, for its bearer plays a role in *making God up*; having God as a part (a feature inverted panentheism attributes to the universe), on the other hand, is absolutely wonderful, but doesn't obviously make its bearer divine in any objectionable sense.

As to the *obscurity* motivation: admittedly, the details have been and will remain somewhat sketchy. Whether incompatibility can be avoided by dropping the doctrine of true transcendence—and dropping it in such a way that doesn't run afoul of the idolatry problem—will depend in part of what sort of intimate metaphysical contact is adopted in its stead, and in part on the identity conditions for facts, an issue on which I already professed ignorance.

A number of Absolute Idealists, such as T.H. Green (1836-1882) and Josiah Royce (1855-1916), seem to think that the incompatibility cannot be avoided merely

⁴⁶The 'whole universe' is to be understood here as the mereological sum of the portions of the universe.

⁴⁷For recent defenses of idealism (Berkeleyan or Hasidic), see Adams [2007], Lebens [2015], Lebens [2017], Goldschmidt and Pearce [2017], Segal and Goldschmidt [2017], Goldschmidt and Lebens [forthcoming]. For discussion of its relation to panentheism and other theologically "risky" views, see Lebens [2015, p. 190-1].

⁴⁸See Hudson [2006], Hudson [2009], and Segal [2014]. Inverted panentheism is, I think, the view that's expressed by several passages in the great work of Kabbalah, *The Zohar*, as well as by a number of passages in the *Tanya*, the seminal work of *Hadad* Hasidism.

by dropping the doctrine of true transcendence; or, at the very least, that there is an incompatibility between the doctrine of robust creaturely freedom, the doctrine of deep dependence, and *their own* Absolute Idealist version of intimate metaphysical contact. For they effectively give up on the first doctrine because of their adherence to the other two.⁴⁹

But Mary Calkins (1863-1930), an unjustly neglected Absolute Idealist, puts forward a solution to the tension between the doctrine of deep dependence and the doctrine of robust creaturely freedom that relies essentially on the intimate metaphysical contact between the Absolute and finite selves:

The finite self, it will be reasserted, does form an identical part of the absolute self...More than this: the absolute self, in willing the finite self as he actually is, wills precisely this rebellious volition...and the Absolute's will differs from the human self's will merely, but significantly, by transcending it. The distinction may once more be compared to that between the circle and the sector. The circle unquestionably possesses all the qualities of a sector—excepting that of not-being-a-complete-circle. Such a difference, inherent in the very natures of 'part' and 'whole,' certainly cannot invalidate their qualitative identity. Absolute will differs from human will not in what it lacks but in what it adds. (Calkins [1936, pp. 478–79])

In effect, Mary Calkins can do other than what she in fact does—and other than what the Absolute *would have wanted her to do* but for some larger purpose that He has—despite Mary's deep existential dependence on the Absolute, because Mary's willing to do what Mary in fact does *just is* the Absolute's willing that Mary do what Mary in fact does. The Absolute wills much that Mary does not—a fact that Calkins takes to mitigate the Absolute's authorship of sin—but Mary's act of willing anything whatsoever is nonetheless identical with some act of willing on the part of the Absolute.⁵⁰

⁴⁹See [McDaniel \[2018\]](#) for discussion.

⁵⁰[McDaniel \[2018\]](#) seems to interpret Calkins's conclusion differently. Nonetheless, I am deeply indebted to McDaniel, whose penetrating discussion both made me aware of Calkins's work and inspired the central argument of this paper.

After writing this paper I was made aware of an article by Robert Koons [2002], in which he pursues a closely related route out of a related incompatibility. (In place of the doctrine of deep dependence he has a Thomistic account of providence, and the argument for incompatibility is different. And his route out of the incompatibility is to identify creaturely actions with divine willings—rather than to identify creaturely willings with divine willings—and he of course does not take on board the whole of Absolute Idealism. But the similarity is manifest. Indeed, Robert Koons has suggested (in personal correspondence) that Aquinas's talk (*ST* I:44:1) of creaturely "participation" in God bespeaks, if not genuine mereological overlap, something near enough as to constitute a rejection of the doctrine of true transcendence—a rejection that allows him to identify facts about free creaturely action with facts about divine willings.) The reader would very profitably consult Koons's article.

Thus, if one rejects the doctrine of true transcendence in as radical a fashion as an Absolute Idealist, it is perhaps easy to see how one can identify a fact about the occurrence of some creaturely action with some fact about God (the Absolute). But I suspect that for most theists, a rejection as radical as that indeed flirts too closely with idolatry. And if one rejects the doctrine of true transcendence in the more moderate fashion of a Berkeleyan or Hasidic idealist, or an inverted panentheist, then it is somewhat harder to see how one can identify a fact about the occurrence of some creaturely action with some fact about God. I leave that as a challenge to those who wish to take this route out of the incompatibility. In any case, my central aim is not to plump for some particular response to the incompatibility, but to make clear that an incompatibility it is.⁵¹

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⁵¹This paper was written for the ‘Models of Providence: An Abrahamic Inquiry’ project (John Templeton Foundation, grant #60004), and I appreciate their support. Thanks to Sara Aronowitz, Nathan Aviezer, Kelly Clark, Tyron Goldschmidt, Aaron Griffith, Silvia Jonas, Robert Koons, Jeffrey Koperski, Arash Naraghi, Josef Stern, Dar Triffon-Reshef, and two anonymous referees, for extremely helpful feedback.

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