The Logiphro Dilemma:
An Examination of the Relationship between God and Logic

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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2014

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Abstract

In this dissertation I set out to answer the following main question: What is the relationship between God and logic? I argue for an answer to this question by first examining two possible options and then give my own philosophical explanation that I believe overcomes the problems associated with the prior investigated options.

In Chapter 1 I first define and clarify the desiderata of my main question. I understand God to be the divine being of classical theism shared by Jews, Christians and Muslims. I understand logic as primarily about the logical consequence relation. I characterize this relation in terms of necessity and universal applicability (or form), which captures various popular intuitions. Therefore, my main question is refined to: What is the relationship between the God of classical theism and logical consequence?

In Chapter 2 I investigate an ancient question and dilemma presented by Plato in his *Euthyphro* dialogue, known popularly as the Euthyphro Dilemma. I suggest that the structure of this question naturally lends itself to the investigation of my question—what I call the Logiphro Dilemma, or the Logical Euthyphro Dilemma. As the name suggests, this dilemma gives us at least two options for thinking about the relationship between God and logic: (1) logical voluntarism: the view that claims the logical consequence relation is the result of God’s commands or will; and (2) logical non-voluntarism: the view that the logical consequence relation is completely independent of God’s commands.
or will in the sense of being independent of his creating or sustaining power. I then investigate both of these positions each in turn.

In Chapter 3 I investigate logical voluntarism. I clarify what the position amounts to and then investigate a few possible historical proponents to see what might motivate this view. I then investigate various objections to this view, especially focusing on one of these and the negative results for accepting the consequences of this objection. I conclude that logical voluntarism cannot provide an answer to my main question.

In Chapter 4 I investigate logical non-voluntarism. I clarify what the position of logical non-voluntarism amounts to and note its advantages over logical voluntarism. I clarify that it can be construed either platonistically (i.e. explicitly appealing to abstract objects) or nominalistically (i.e. explicitly not appealing to abstract objects). I investigate the platonist version first noting several objections to it from classical theism. I then investigate the nominalist version showing that it is a poor account of logic. I conclude that logical non-voluntarism (both versions) cannot provide an answer to my main question.

In Chapter 5 I give my positive account to explain the relationship between God and logic. I first re-investigate the original Euthyphro Dilemma and find that the literature discussing this dilemma suggests a third alternative. I suggest that an analogous third alternative is available to the Logiphro Dilemma as well. Borrowing from Greg Welty’s account of modality and God, I argue for a model of logical consequence constituted by mental objects within the mind of God. I conclude that this model explains the relationship between God and logic while overcoming the problems associated with both logical voluntarism and logical non-voluntarism.
Dedication

To W. Wiley Richards

My first philosophy professor
Acknowledgments

Thanks of course go to my dissertation committee: Stewart Shapiro, Tamar Rudavsky, and Chris Pincock for all of their advisement, criticisms, and help throughout this dissertation process. I would like to especially thank Stewart Shapiro who patiently guided me throughout my graduate career, particularly when I wanted to quit. Thanks also to all of the professors in the philosophy department of The Ohio State University (both current and now elsewhere) who have helped me at every step. Much thanks to my wife Cynthia—the one person who really knows how difficult this whole process has been for me. Finally, all thanks to Him who undoubtedly has kept me and blessed me (Numbers 6:24-6).
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CHAPTER 1: PROLEGOMENA

My primary question in this work is: What is the relationship between logic and God? In the whole of the following I will investigate and attempt to explain the nature of this relationship. I believe a good explanation of this relationship will be restricted by our understanding of the desiderata of logic and God. Once a clear understanding of these notions is in place, we should then be in a better position to see what sort of explanation of the relationship between these two notions will count as an acceptable or unacceptable explanation. Therefore, in this present chapter I will clarify what I mean when using the terms “logic” and God.”

In §1 I will clarify the desideratum of logic, what I take to be the primary focus of logic. Though I believe I won’t be saying much that is controversial in this section, I’ll argue for a certain way to understand logic’s primary focus. In §2 I will clarify the desideratum of God. Since the divine is usually seen as an epistemologically challenging subject for exploration, I will investigate the two broad theological methodologies that are usually appealed to in making claims about God. I’ll address some challenges with the methodology I will be mainly siding with and then explain the particular way I take myself to be epistemically justified in making claims concerning God. Even though this is strictly a philosophical investigation, I will also identify the notion of the western or Abrahamic religious tradition I’ll be assuming throughout this work. I believe this
chapter will sufficiently define our desiderata of logic and God in order that we may go forward with our investigation as to what sort of relationship exists between the two.

1. Defining Logic

1.1 Logic’s Primary Focus

What do I mean by “logic” when I say I’m interested in the relationship between God and logic? What does “logic” represent here? Generally, logic is taken to be the study of correct reasoning. More particularly, it is often characterized as the study of assessing good arguments from bad arguments in a particular (i.e. logical) way. By “argument” here, we typically do not mean a shouting match but a stretch of indicative discourse where at least one claim is intended to be supported by one or more other claims. The claim that is intended to be supported is often called a “conclusion” while the claim, or claims, intended to do the supporting are often called “premises.” So, the technical term “argument” in logic refers to a collection of claims that includes one or more premises and a single conclusion with this sort of supporting relationship between them. It is usually claimed that logic’s particular means of assessment—that I’ll call its primary focus—is the supporting logical relation between the premises and conclusion. This sort of relationship goes by various names such as deductive (or logical): validity, entailment, or consequence. Thus logic seems to be primarily about the

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1 As with most things in philosophy, the “general” view has its respectable detractors. Gil Harman challenges the straightforward connection between reasoning and logic. See his (1973) and (1986).

2 A couple of caveats to this description: (1) some conclusions need no support from other claims (\(\vdash \phi\)), i.e. the set of premises may be empty; and (2) it is trivially true that a claim can support (imply) itself (\(\phi \vdash \phi\)), at least on most accounts of logic.
business of distinguishing “good” arguments as *deductively valid* from “bad” arguments as *deductively invalid*. In this work I’ll simply call this relationship logical consequence.

In our day, most logicians and philosophers of logic will agree that logic’s primary focus is the notion of logical consequence. However, at one time logical truth was seen as the primary focus of logic.³ Stephen Read briefly comments on why there was this historical shift from logic primarily focusing upon truth to now focusing upon consequence:

> In the early twentieth century a number of authors (perhaps under the influence of the axiomatic method) seem to have concentrated on logical truth as the primary logical notion and logical consequence became an afterthought. This is a grave mistake, completely reversing the real situation.⁴

Read goes on to give two arguments that attempt to show why this was supposedly a “grave mistake.” First, Read claims that holding logical truth as the primary notion and logical consequence as “an afterthought” completely reverses the real situation. How so? Note that a logical truth is usually defined as the conclusion of a valid argument with no premises (i.e. |- Φ). Observe here that logical truth is being defined *in terms of* logical consequence. And, as Read points out, the converse is not possible: logical consequence cannot be defined in terms of logical truth. This being the case, consequence seems like a

³ Some notable examples: Gottlob Frege focused primarily upon logical truth in his (1918-19) essay “Thought”: “Just as ‘beautiful’ points the way for aesthetics and ‘good’ for ethics, so do words like ‘true’ for logic. [. . .] To discover truths is the task of all sciences; it falls to logic to discern the laws of truth” p. 325. W. V. Quine (1986) also focused on logical truth as well: “Logic is, in the jargon of mechanics, the resultant of two components: grammar and truth” p. 60. A more contemporary example, Penelope Maddy’s (2007) centers on logical truths as the central notion in logic. But I find her discussion somewhat ambiguous. She claims to focus upon logical truth but it seems she spends a majority of her logical discussion dealing with logical consequence instead.

⁴ Read (1995), 38.
more foundational notion than truth in logic and so consequence should be recognized as the primary focus of logic.

Second, Read points out that logical truths, when counted among the premises of an argument, are unnecessary; or, put another way, premises that are logical truths may be suppressed. To see this point, take some argument where the conclusion follows validly from a collection of premises and suppose one of those premises is a logical truth. Validity is usually taken to mean that the conclusion follows from its premises alone. For if an argument is valid, then any interpretation that makes the conclusion false must make at least one of the other premises false too. But of course, the premise that is a logical truth cannot be made false. So the validity of this argument will not be affected by omitting the logical truth. Thus, the logical truth is redundant and so can be suppressed.

The conclusion that Read draws from these points, along with the majority of logicians and philosophers of logic today, is that the notion of logical consequence is central, or at least more central, to logic than logical truth. Thus, I will also take the notion of logical consequence as the primary focus of logic as well.

1.2 Defining Logical Consequence

But how exactly should we understand this notion of logical consequence? Well, since it is the primary focus of logic, it would also seem that logical consequence would probably be the primary focus of most any formal logical system. Indeed, this is usually

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5 Obviously formal systems can have other goals, such as relevance or rhetorical power. See Haack (1978), 11-13. Some typical formal systems include Aristotelian logic, classical logic, intuitionistic logic, etc.
the case. In such systems, which are typically about formal languages, consequence is often characterized in one or two closely related ways. Let L stand for any formal system of language, let Γ stand for a set of premise claims and let Φ be a single concluding claim. Thus, the first formal notion of consequence is *syntactic logical consequence* and usually defined as:

\[
<\Gamma, \Phi> \text{ is syntactically valid in } L \text{ just in case } \Phi \text{ is derivable from } \Gamma, \text{ and the axioms of } L, \text{ if any, by the rules of inference of } L.
\]

The second formal notion of consequence is *semantic logical consequence* and defined as:

\[
<\Gamma, \Phi> \text{ is semantically valid in } L \text{ just in case } \Phi \text{ is true in all interpretations in which every member of } \Gamma \text{ is true.}
\]

Given that these are sharply defined notions on a formal language L, relations between them are a purely formal matter and so various formal results can be deduced from them. For instance, systems like L are called *sound* if every syntactically valid argument in L is also a semantically valid argument in L; and L is considered *complete* if every semantically valid argument in L is also a syntactically valid argument in L. So, since logical consequence is usually understood in a formal way, distinguishing valid from invalid arguments is usually done by applying some formal interpretation of consequence within some system L.

It makes sense then why scholars, and philosophers in particular, usually talk and think about logic, in general and logical consequence in particular, in terms of some specific formal system L. However, in pursuing the philosophical question about the

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6 A logical truth is usually taken to be a valid instance of \(<\Gamma, \Phi>\) where \(\Gamma = [\emptyset]\).
relationship between God and logic, I need to be clear that I’m not concerned or interested in the relationship between God and some formal system $L$. (Though I’m sure there are interesting questions there.) Rather, I’m concerned with the relationship between God and that which I believe such formal logical systems are usually attempting to model or capture—again, what I’m calling the primary focus of logic, i.e. the notion of logical consequence. I take it that whatever constitutes logical consequence, is not a formal system but what most formal systems of logic are usually attempting to represent.

But if that’s so, exactly what constitutes logical consequence? What sort of entities makes up this notion? I take this to be a metaphysical question and historically there have been various suggested answers to it. Some candidates for what constitutes logical consequence include mental things (like thoughts, beliefs, etc.), or concrete objects in the world (such as sentence tokens), or abstract objects (propositions, possible worlds, sets, etc.). Since throughout this work I will be attempting to understand what relationship exists between God and logic, this will include attempts at answering what sort of entities constitute logical consequence. In order to not beg any questions at this point we want to remain neutral as to the exact sort of metaphysical nature that constitutes logical consequence. So I’ll leave this unanswered for now.

But, in order to answer this metaphysical question later, I think we first need to understand more clearly what sort of notion of the logical consequence relation we are working with. Again, I see the attraction for philosophers to primarily think of logic in

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7 There is a large body of literature that treats the issue of ontology in logic and many other related areas such as mathematics. A few works that serve as excellent introductions include Read (1995), Shapiro (2000), and (2005).
terms of a formal system. Since, as claimed above, logic is primarily focused upon the
notion of logical consequence, then having a formal conception of logic enables us to
classify a fairly crisp view of consequence; thus giving us a nicely demarcated
referential target for the term “logic.” However, since I’m proposing that we conceive of
logic extra-systematically, i.e. non-formally, and since I’m also, at this point, wanting to
remain neutral as to logic’s exact metaphysical nature, then it seems incumbent upon me
to try to give a clear (as far as possible), non-formal characterization of logical
consequence that I believe most formal systems are attempting to represent. In doing so I
want to give a characterization that endeavors to capture some commonly accepted and
intuitive notions that are often associated with logic. There are several such
classifications one could adopt here. I will mention four basic notions before
suggesting my own characterization of logical consequence and my rationale for adopting
it.

First, the idea that modal concepts like necessity and possibility have something
to do with logic has a long and distinguished history tracing back to Aristotle. Taking
modality into account, logical consequence can be rendered the following way
(remember that Φ is a sentence and Γ a set of sentences):

(M) Φ is a logical consequence of Γ if it is not possible for the members of Γ
to be true and Φ false.

Nowadays it is common to talk of modal notions in terms of possible worlds. So (M) can
be restated in this way:

8 Shapiro (2002) heavily informs this section. As Shapiro argues there, some of the different
notions of logical consequence do not cohere very smoothly with others.
(PW) Φ is a logical consequence of Γ if Φ is true in every possible world in which every member of Γ is true.

With the semantic turn in analytic philosophy it was sometimes claimed that the notion of logical consequence should eschew metaphysically rich notions like modality and be rooted in something more readily accessible, like the meaning or use of language. This suggests a second notion of logical consequence, the semantic notion:

(S) Φ is a logical consequence of Γ if the truth of the members of Γ guarantees the truth of Φ in virtue of the meanings of the terms in those sentences.

However, the notion of meaning has taken its share of criticisms as well. Therefore, a third characterization of logical consequence that leaves out meaning, what might be called a formal characterization, though not to be confused with the earlier notion of “formal” that I’m leaving aside, is the following:

(F) Φ is a logical consequence of Γ if there is no uniform substitution of the non-logical terminology that renders every member of Γ true and Φ false.

But another fairly intuitive conception of logical consequence claims that it has something to do with the idea of rationality. This idea suggests a forth notion of logical consequence:

(R) Φ is a logical consequence of Γ if it is irrational to maintain that every member of Γ is true and that Φ is false. The premises of Γ alone justify the conclusion Φ.

I take all of the above four characterizations to be prima facie intuitive. One could give a plausible case for each that it is a good description of the primary focus of logic.

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9 See Quine (1986), Chapter 1 for a brief but clear discussion of some criticisms of the traditional notion of meaning.
Nevertheless I will suggest and adopt the following extra-systematic characterization of logical consequence:

\[(LC) \quad \Phi \text{ is a logical consequence of } \Gamma, \text{ if at every possible world in which the uniform substitution of the non-logical content in } \Gamma \text{ and } \Phi \text{ renders every member of } \Gamma \text{ true, then it also renders } \Phi \text{ true.}^{10}\]

By submitting this extra-systematic characterization as the way to think of logical consequence, I’m claiming that (LC) best represents the sort of relationship of support between \(<\Gamma, \Phi>\) (i.e. logical consequence) that many formal logical systems are attempting to represent, even if some of these systems might give contrary evaluations of validity than what (LC) would deliver for the exact same sequence of claims. In other words, it could very well be that not every formal system \(L\) will capture (LC) perfectly. But this should come as no surprise given that the same can be said for competing formal systems of each other.

But why am I submitting (LC) as the basic non-formal concept of logical validity? First, it contains the commonly held intuitive notion of necessity. (LC) claims that if \(\Phi\) is a logical consequence of \(\Gamma\), then this shows that the relationship between conclusion and premise(s)—if any—is a necessary one. As mentioned above this has been a long and well-recognized core component of logic. But I believe the notion of necessity is

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\[^{10}\text{I stress here that since the possible worlds talk in (LC) can be interpreted in variously excluded ways, I’m not presupposing any sort of metaphysical position about logical consequence. (LC) can also be stated in the following equivalent way:}\]

\[(LC_1) \quad \Phi \text{ is a logical consequence of } \Gamma, \text{ if there is no possible world at which the uniform substitution of the non-logical content renders every member of } \Gamma \text{ true, it also renders } \Phi \text{ false.}\]
strongly tied to another notion that (LC) also represents. I believe the following quote from philosophers J. C. Beall and Greg Restall is very suggestive here:

The fact that logical consequence is necessary means that logical consequence applies under any conditions whatsoever. If we consider what might happen if A were the case, and we reason from the premise that A, validly to a conclusion B, we ought, by rights, be able to conclude that if A were the case then B would be the case too. The applicability of logic is not a contingent matter; it works come what may, whatever hypotheses we care to entertain.11

If a valid argument is indeed necessarily valid, then it seems that nothing should to be able to change that. The validity of an argument seems to be something that cannot be mucked with because it is not a contingent matter. For it seems obviously true that if a valid logical argument is necessarily valid, then it seems it must hold “come what may.”

But note additionally that Beall and Restall tie the notion of necessity in logical consequence to the notion of universal applicability. This seems to imply that the necessity of logical consequence includes the notion of logical form (i.e. the substitution of non-logical content does not affect deductive validity), which (LC) captures as well.

For if Γ |- Φ is truly a valid argument, it seems it should be valid no matter what non-logical content is represented in Γ and Φ may represent.

I think the notion of universal applicability (and thus logical form) can be well illustrated with what is sometimes called the “locked room metaphor” concerning logic.12 This metaphor claims that we should be able to correctly recognize inferences that are instances of valid logical arguments even if we were locked in a dark windowless room knowing nothing of the outside world. As the metaphor highlights, if it were the case that

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12 See Bencivenga (1999), 6-7.
we were in such a situation, we would then have to evaluate sequences of claims exclusively on the basis of our linguistic competence of logical terms alone. In other words, one need not know anything about the content of the other non-logical terms (i.e. “nothing about the outside world”) in order to determine the validity of an argument. This seems intuitive, for if $P$ then $Q$, and $P$, validly implies $Q$ surely this argument is valid regardless of what is being represented by $P$ and $Q$.

However, appealing to the notion of logical form pushes us to ask how do we know what counts as a logical content and what does not? For if the notion of logical form, as represented by (LC), is to truly characterize the extra-systematic notion of logical consequence, then we must be able to successfully distinguish logical content from non-logical content. Historically there have been many and varied attempts to make the demarcation between the logical and non-logical crisp and clear. Nevertheless, as far as I can tell, there is still very little philosophical consensus about how to make a definitive distinction here.\textsuperscript{13} Interestingly though, such a distinction is still very popular and almost uniformly held to in logical practice among philosophers and logicians. Many thinkers simply adopt the practice of listing commonly accepted logical terms. A typical stipulated list includes truth-functional connectives (“not,” “and,” “or,” “if . . . then”), quantifiers (“some,” “all”), variables and identity. Though I agree with this list as well, I

\textsuperscript{13} See MacFarlane (2009) for an in-depth discussion of the problems that have plagued trying to distinguish logical from non-logical content since the rise of Frege’s first-order logic over traditional Aristotelian logic. MacFarlane puts forward the notion of permutation invariance as the most hopeful way to eventually make this distinction. But it seems to me that his discussion highlights various worries concerning permutation invariance. Thus, in sum, the distinction between logical and non-logical content still seems to be difficult to clearly demarcate.
find this approach a little unsatisfying. Therefore, let me say a little more here to motivate this common move.

How can one be epistemically justified in holding that the terms in some set S (like the list given above) are truly logical terms? It seems to me that this is closely akin to asking how am I epistemically justified in holding that a particular argument X is valid? For if we know that X is a logically valid argument, and validity is a matter of form (in accordance with my characterization (LC)), then we must know what content in the argument is the logical content.

I find Stewart Shapiro’s (1991) explanation of epistemic justification of logic to be helpful here. Shapiro explains that adopting a formal system can become an objective justification for logic if two questions are settled. Familiarity with soundness and completeness proofs should make these questions sound recognizable. First, does every deducible argument in the formal system correspond to a correct inference in the natural language under study? In other words, do the valid arguments in our formal logic match the acceptable inferences that we make in our non-formal, everyday talk? Second, is the system exhaustive in the sense that every correct inference of natural language corresponds to a deducible argument in the formal system? That is, conversely, do the acceptable inferences in our non-formal, everyday talk match to valid arguments in our formal logic? Shapiro notes the rather common sense observation that “we somehow recognize the correctness of at least some inferences in natural language, and that we do in fact recognize the correctness of inferences modeled by deducible arguments.”

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context, Shapiro is explaining how valid logical arguments are usually thought to be *a priori* justified by way of a formal system; yet, as these questions show, he initially appeals to the idea that we must first start with such psychological phenomena as subjective introspection and, perhaps, community beliefs about inferences. Shapiro gives a story of how he thinks this sort of process most likely goes:

At the outset of theory, when considering the ‘data’ with which one is to begin, ‘there is no logic and epistemology independent of psychology’. It is, in effect, a working hypothesis that the inferences and propositions that seem correct are correct. What else is there to go on? The stronger our intersubjective certainty about a given inference, the less likely it is that it will be challenged or revised in the light of theory. In some cases, we simply cannot imagine revision, at least not now. This applies to logic . . . once theory has begun and shows signs of success (whatever that may be), then our intuitions can be modified by its light. That is, theory can guide our dispositions to judge, just as dispositions guide theory. Indeed, at any given time, these ‘intuitions’ are the product of one’s background training, and that is, at least in part, the product of previous intellectual endeavors.\(^\text{15}\)

In that our introspective and commonly held beliefs are providing some initial justification for the validity of logical arguments, Shapiro recognizes that this is a concession, of sorts, to psychologism—an almost universally discredited way of thinking about logic. But Shapiro thinks that psychologism is later expelled in that once we have a “successful” logic in place we can then make a distinction between intersubjective certainty and epistemic justification. That is, we no longer have to rely solely upon our intuitions to epistemically justify our logical inferences once we have a commonly accepted formal system in place that comes in and takes over that epistemic load. Thus,

\[\text{\textsuperscript{14} Shapiro (1991), 33. Shapiro points out though that neither stance could assure us that the system is exhaustive, i.e. that every correct inference of the natural language is modeled in the deductive system.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 34. See Resnik (1985) for a similar and fuller discussion of this sort of approach.}\]
the formal system, i.e. the “successful” logic, eventually acquires a normative status within the community of users who have adopted it. Shapiro notes that though this approach may sound objectionably circular, “we now have the benefit of historical hindsight. The [formal] systems have proved fruitful and they do conform to our current dispositions concerning correct inference.”

In like fashion, it seems to me that we can provide a similar epistemological justification for accepting the typical list of logical terms that we usually do. The usual list, being part of most formal logical systems, is part of that proven track record of being fruitful in our logical practice and it also conforms to our current dispositions concerning what counts as logical terminology. Even though (LC) is strictly an extra-systematic account of logical consequence, the notion of form that is included in this characterization is partially informed by logical practice and familiarity with current formal logical systems. It seems to me that the position I’m advocating here is similar to what MacFarlane calls the Deflater position:

Like the Relativist, the Deflater seeks a moderate middle ground between the Demarcater [one who believes there is a principled distinction between logical and non-logical] and the Debunker [one who denies the Demarcater’s thesis]. The Deflater agrees with the Demarcater that there is a real distinction between logical and nonlogical constants, and between formally and materially valid arguments. She rejects the Relativist's position that logical consequence is a relative notion. But she also rejects the Demarcater's project of finding precise and illuminating necessary and sufficient conditions for logical constancy. “Logical constant”, she holds, is a “family resemblance” term, so we should not expect to uncover a hidden essence that all logical constants share. [. . .] That does not mean that there is no distinction between logical and nonlogical constants, any more than our inability to give a precise definition of “game” means that there is no

16 Shapiro (1991), 34. I think this is a bit overstated given that we have a plethora of voices today espousing various competing logics. But I agree with the general notion: there seems to be an overwhelming consensus on many logical notions, including what terms count as logical.
difference between games and other activities. Nor does it mean that the distinction does not matter. What it means is that we should not expect a principled criterion for logical constancy that explains why logic has a privileged epistemological or semantic status.  

I part ways a bit with the Deflater in that I don’t overtly reject the Demarcater’s project; I’m just not very hopeful that it will ever be successful. And given that we have a commonly accepted list of logical “constants” (i.e. logical terms) already, then, along with the Deflater I don’t see the question of finding a principled distinction as terribly pressing. With this sort of epistemological or Deflater picture in mind, I think we have a fairly intuitive grasp of what terms count as logical, and thus we have some epistemological justification for the notion of logical form represented in (LC)—we can thus recognize logical content.

So I take (LC) to be the best characterization of what logical consequence is. Note that (LC) is a synthesis of the notions of necessity (PW) and formality (F), which implies that I’ve ruled out the notions of meaning (S) and rationality (R). Why rule these out? I excluded any sort of semantic notion of consequence (i.e. (S)) because it includes a notion of linguistic competence that seems contrary to universal applicability that the locked room metaphor suggests. Some form of minimal linguistic competency is obviously needed for identifying the distinction between logical and non-logical content and thus in order to identify the notion of logical form included in (LC); but this sort of linguistic competency is a much shallower notion of “meaning” than the richer semantic content that (S) suggests. My exclusion of (R), which includes the notion of rationality,  

is more nuanced though. I’ve already affirmed that logic should be universally applicable. Similarly, following Shapiro and MacFarlane, I’ve also already affirmed that logic has its place in normatively governing how we should reason and think about things. As Frege famously said, from logic “there follow prescriptions about asserting, thinking, judging, inferring. And we may very well speak of laws of thought . . . .”  

As Joan Weiner explains, Frege thought logic is “meant to offer us tools for evaluating inferences when our aim is to make true judgments. [. . .] What distinguishes these guiding principles from other laws of this sort is that they apply to every domain.” But to say that logical consequence informs our norms of rationality, is not the same as saying that rationality, and its normative force, just is logical consequence. In other words, I believe we should not confuse one of the primary uses of logic with what logic actually is. As Frege also famously said: “an explanation of a mental process that ends in taking something to be true, can never take the place of providing what is taken to be true.” Frege’s latter reference is to logic—the former reference is to how logic is used.

In summary of §1, I have set out to make clear what I mean by the term “logic.” I have claimed that logic is primarily focused upon the notion of logical consequence. I have also claimed that many formal logical systems are attempts to capture or model the non-formal notion of logical consequence. I’m not interested in the relationship between God and some formal system but between God and the extra-systematic notion of logical consequence.

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18 Frege (1918-19), 325.
20 Frege (1918-19), 326.
consequence. I take no stand, at this point, upon the metaphysical nature of whatever constitutes this notion. However, I’ve argued that (LC) best characterizes it. That is, I believe the best and most intuitive way to understand logical consequence, apart from a formal system, is by (LC).

Therefore, by pursuing the question, “What is the relationship between logic and God?” I am more precisely asking, “What is the relationship between what constitutes logical consequence, as characterized by (LC), and God?” Let’s now get clearer on what I mean by the notion of God.

2. Defining God

What do I mean by “God” when I say I’m interested in the relationship between logic and God? In this section of the chapter I will define the sort of divine being I’m referring to when I reference God as well as defining the tradition it is a part of. But before doing so, we must first ask: How do adherents of the notion of God I have in mind arrive at their characterizations of this being? How do they know that this picture accurately describes this God they believe in? These sorts of questions highlight the need to give a theological method—a means of explaining how claims about God are epistemically justified. In the following we will investigate the two broad methodologies that have historically been appealed to as well as challenges to the method I will largely side with. I will then explain my own epistemology for making claims about God in this work. I will conclude this section with a purposely general account of God. However, by the end of this section we should have a fairly clear understanding of what I understand the divine being to be.
2.1 Revealed and Natural Theology

Theology, the study of God, has historically been divided into two broad approaches, or two methods of inquiry, which may be generally referenced as “revealed theology” and “natural theology,” respectively. One traditional slogan that is thought to aptly distinguish these two approaches claims: “It is the difference between God’s movement toward man [revealed theology] and man’s movement toward God [natural theology].”21 As with most distinctions, the one between revealed and natural theology is not always a sharp one. However, let’s try to make the distinction clearer.

*Revealed theology* constitutes claims about God acquired through revealed means. The phrase “revealed means” focuses upon one of the distinctive features of the western religious tradition, sometimes called the Abrahamic tradition: the belief that God can and has manifested himself to human beings in various ways, sometimes called *special* revelation. One of the primary ways it is believed that God has manifested himself is by literally speaking to particular members of humanity throughout history, usually revealing certain indicative (as well as metaphorical) claims about himself or his purposes. Since only a certain limited number of people have received this divine information first-hand, it is usually testified to others by means of some written text, where the grounds for belief in the items of knowledge available to the first recipients are obviously different than those grounds available to the rest of us. Therefore, given the peculiar nature of special revelation, revealed theology usually focuses upon the written testimonial accounts of those who have claimed to be recipients of special revelation

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21 Miller (1972), 12.
firsthand. I will reference any such written testimonial accounts in this work as “Scripture.”

And, if Scripture is truly a record of revelation from God, then such data is obviously a central and primary means by which theists might make claims about God. For if one wants to find out information about some person P, apart from investigating or interviewing P first-hand, then he or she would certainly take written testimony from first-hand witnesses of P to be a most important resource of coming to know and understand P. Of course the different main branches within the western tradition (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) have long debated what counts as authentic Scripture. And even when this is agreed upon, there are also disagreements about what Scripture actually claims or does not claim. Nevertheless such disagreements do not negate the idea that Scripture, whatever counts as such, can operate as a primary testimonial source of information about God.

In contradistinction to revealed theology, natural theology is usually thought to be constituted by knowledge claims about God acquired through commonly and publicly available means of philosophical analysis. Natural theology is especially distinguished from revealed theology by making a conscious effort to not appeal to special revelation.

22 “Scripture” often refers to a type of special or divine revelation. That is, for example, the Bible just is special revelation from God. For my purposes, “Scripture” need only be understood as a human record of divine revelation. I don’t deny that Scripture is divine revelation, but I only need the latter notion for this project. In this work I’m not mainly concerned with who authored Scripture but that it is a reliable testimonial source. See Swinburne (2007), 239ff for a discussion of this subject.

23 I take “Scripture” to be a synonym for “the Bible.” But, as I’ll explain in the last part of this chapter, when I appeal to the notion of Scripture, I only plan on appealing to that which Jews, Christians, and Muslims share (i.e. the so-called Old Testament).

24 Swinburne (2005), 107.
As said, this approach to theology primarily relies upon the traditional tools of philosophical investigation, such as the active employment of observation, reflection, and inference, among others. This is why natural theology is sometimes simply called *philosophical theology*. Examples of natural theology are usually thought to include things such as the traditional arguments for God’s existence, the Anselmian tradition of “perfect-being” theology, et al. Thus, claims and philosophical arguments about God, apart from special revelation, exemplify the method of natural theology.

Since the present work takes itself to be a work of philosophy, I plan on mainly relying upon (to be explained in §2.3 below) the methodology of natural theology. However, natural theology has been challenged in various ways.

### 2.2 Challenges to Natural Theology

There have been proponents of the western or Abrahamic tradition of religion that have seen natural or philosophical theology as problematic and thus claim we should appeal to revealed theology alone in making claims about God. Since the present work is primarily a philosophical one, I want to investigate this allegation that philosophical theology is inadequate compared to revealed theology. As far as I can tell, there are only a few general lines of thought from the traditional western theists that seek to dismiss natural theology in favor of revealed theology.

First, there is the seemingly extreme position that claims that human reason (in general, and the study of philosophy in particular) is not equipped to deal with issues of

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25 For instance, Kenny’s (1979) is a self-avowed piece of natural theology in that he claims he wants to “discuss the concept of God and his attributes in the light of reason without accepting as authoritative any claim to revelation, such as the Christian revelation” (p. 3).
religious faith either by the utter uniqueness of divine matters\textsuperscript{26} or perhaps because humans have damaged rational capacities that disallow them from being able to do so.\textsuperscript{27} For instance, it has been thought that the Apostle Paul held such a view when he warned the Christians in first-century Colossae with the following: “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition . . . and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).\textsuperscript{28} The view that reason, and philosophy in particular, should be held in suspicion in reference to theological claims is usually called \textit{fideism}. Specifically, fideism is the view that theological claims cannot be the result of rational investigation, or, sometimes added, that theological claims are not even subject to rational evaluation. For example, a fideist would most likely claim that his belief that God exists does \textit{not} depend on any reasoning and would most likely see trying to prove God’s existence by argument as a waste of time and effort.

But how does the fideist \textit{know} that God exists? Well, he might appeal to various things such as his own personal experience, intuition, or perhaps Scripture—but any explanation given would be done so with the caveat that such knowledge was \textit{not} the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{26} So, for instance, Gregory of Nazianzus seems to represent something like this sort of view with claims like the following: “To tell of God is not possible . . . , but to know him is even less possible. For language may show the known if not adequately, at least faintly, to a person not totally deaf and dumb of mind. But mentally to grasp so great a matter is utterly beyond real possibility” quoted from Boyer and Hall (2012), 39. Gregory seems to think that God is so utterly different from humans that we cannot think, talk, or reason intelligibly about the divine.

\textsuperscript{27} For example, the protestant Christian tradition of religion often maintains that humans have a general ability to think accurately, but due to their personal sins against God they (at least sometimes) lack the moral ability to do so. The idea is that our sinful inclinations tend to push us away from thinking the way we should about the divine. For, so the reasoning goes, if we thought rightly about God we would all turn to him in repentance; but many obviously do not. For more details see Horton (2011), 431-432.

\textsuperscript{28} I personally do not think that is what the apostle is claiming here; but I won’t take the time to defend that claim. See Moreland and Craig (2003), 18 for a non-fideistic discussion of the meaning of this verse.
\end{footnotesize}
result of philosophical reasoning or argument. If this sort of appeal is seen as the only legitimate way to make theological claims, then natural theology would obviously be a futile and irrelevant path to knowledge of God. As a popular and seemingly fideist slogan goes: Religion is a matter of the heart, not the head!

I also suspect fideistic attitudes against natural theology are sometimes fueled by an overreaction to certain epistemological views, such as those espoused by W. K. Clifford’s classic essay “Ethics of Belief.” Clifford set forth the definitive, modern version of evidentialistic epistemology arguing that it is never morally acceptable to believe anything without sufficient evidence. Unable to provide the sort or amount of evidence for claims about God that epistemologies like Clifford’s demands, perhaps some theists retreated to a fideistic safety to shelter their religious beliefs from such attacks. However, in recent decades this sort of highly demanding epistemology has fallen out of favor due to various inextricable problems associated with it. But I think fideism, or a fideistic attitude, should be rejected as a reason against eschewing natural theology on much simpler grounds. Fideism is simply self-refuting. Take the following, which I believe is a fair representation of the fideistic position towards natural theology:

(*) Any view that aspires to make theological claims the result of using rational (or philosophical) reasoning should be rejected.
(**) Natural theology aspires to make theological claims using rational (or philosophical) reasoning.
(***) So, natural theology must be rejected as a means of making theological claims.

29 One place where this famous essay can be found is in Pojman (2003), 515ff.
30 A good summary of these problems is provided by Peter van Inwagen’s “Quam Dilecta”, pgs. 44-46 in Morris (1994).
But, as I think this argument makes clear, fideists are actually using or relying upon rational (or philosophical) reasoning—even if only implicitly or vaguely—in order to reject rational (or philosophical) reasoning concerning God. Therefore, since fideistic reasoning against rationality in general, and philosophy in particular, is self-refuting (it uses the very means it claims to be rejecting), fideism cannot be appealed to as grounds for dismissing natural theology.

Perhaps a more informed reason for adherents of the western or Abrahamic tradition to dismiss natural theology as a means of making theological claims is the worry that natural theology could possibly be a corrupting influence on their respective religions. More particularly, I think the worry is that the terms and concepts usually associated with natural theology—and so the picture of classical theism delivered by natural theology—may not cohere well with the picture explicitly delivered by revealed theology. Something like this criticism can be seen as early as the late 2nd or early 3rd century AD Christian thinker Tertullian who is supposed to have infamously stated: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” I think this worry is often why many religious thinkers throughout western thought have derogatorily referenced the God presented by natural theology, and by extension classical theism, as the “God of the philosophers.” A sample of how this worry has been fairly constant throughout, for example, the history of Christianity, is recounted by theologian Michael Horton:

The seventeenth-century Genevan theologian Francis Turretin pointed out that the Socians reproached the traditional doctrine of God on the basis that “the whole doctrine is metaphysical” (i.e. philosophical) rather than biblical. Specifically, they charged that God’s simplicity, aseity, immutability, and exhaustive foreknowledge originated in Stoic philosophy—a claim that has been repeated consistently down to our own day. In the same vein, Albrecht Ritschl attempted to eliminate all “metaphysical” ideas from Christian theology. The late
nineteenth-century historical theologian Adolf von Harnack advanced his thesis that nearly everything we regard as Christian “orthodoxy”—“the Catholic element”—is in fact the result of “the acute Hellenization of the church.” As we can see, and as with Tertullian’s comment before, this worry is sometimes worded in terms of “Greek” or “Hellenistic” philosophy. Again, I think the fear is that by “importing” certain terms or concepts—those that do not seem to exist within the resources of special revelation—theology can become corrupted in the sense that theological claims informed by natural theology may not accurately represent the God presented by special revelation. I think this is a perfectly legitimate worry. It makes more sense to give primacy to first hand accounts of P rather than resting primarily upon philosophical claims and formulations concerning P. Secondhand data is obviously epistemologically weaker (i.e. further conditions must be met to say we know it).

However, this does not necessarily imply that this more secondary approach to making claims about P is in no way coherent with the data of first hand accounts of P. Moreover, it seems to me that philosophical claims concerning P should be made in accordance with the first hand accounts of P. In reference to the Hebrew Bible, Horton points out that the story of Scripture gives rise to particular doctrines: “Not only are the people of Israel able to infer certain attributes or characteristics of their God from his mighty acts; God himself interprets these for them. Israel’s lexicon of divine attributes does not come in the form of a systematic theology . . . but in narrative, instruction, liturgy, and law.” As Horton suggests, surely one of the primary motivations for

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32 Ibid., 225.
attributing philosophical terms and concepts of natural theology to God are predominantly based on special revelation (or rather, records of it), even if the vocabulary in which the matter gets discussed, for better or worse, is philosophical (i.e. not originally in Scripture). Therefore, could some sort of synthesis be made between natural and revealed theology?

2.3 Synthesis of Natural and Revealed Theology

Various thinkers within the western tradition of religion have sought to show a compatibility between the picture of theism delivered by natural theology and their religious tradition, which is usually considered rooted in revealed theology. Attempts to show compatibility between natural and revealed theology seem to imply attempting a synthesis between natural and revealed theology. But how might such a synthesis be accomplished? What might it look like?

Philosophers of religion J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig give a very informative suggestion with the following claim: “Since the concept of God is underdetermined by the [i.e. scriptural] data . . . philosophers working within the [western religious] tradition enjoy considerable latitude in formulating a philosophically coherent and [i.e. scripturally] faithful doctrine of God.”

By claiming that the concept of God is “underdetermined by the [i.e. scriptural] data,” I take Moreland and Craig to mean that Scripture sometimes does not address many philosophical issues and questions that may concern us about God (e.g. like the relationship between God and logic). On this point

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33 Moreland and Craig (2003), 501. I’ve replaced “scriptural” for their word “biblical”.

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they are surely correct. For example, given their belief in special revelation, Christians in antiquity wondered how it could be that Jesus of Nazareth was God when the Father in Heaven was obviously God. The Christian concepts of the Trinity (i.e. that God is three in person, but one in essence), and Chalcedonian Christology (i.e. that Christ has a fully divine as well as a fully human nature) are examples of philosophical formulation and extrapolation that the original writers of Scripture seemed to simply assume or cared little about explaining. To say that the concept of God is underdetermined by Scripture, is not so much a criticism of Scripture as a resource for making theological claims as it is a claim that in imparting revelation to the original recorders of these documents God had little interest in answering or clarifying many such philosophical questions and concerns. Nevertheless, scriptural paucity pushes those who are interested in such questions to look elsewhere in their thinking about God. Such efforts would be, I take it, examples of natural theology.

I understand the above suggested synthesis in the following way: taking the testimonial documents of revealed theology to be primary data, natural theology comes along as a means of clarifying such data and extrapolating to more coherent philosophical formulations that is consistent with this data. I think philosopher Ed. Miller explains this sort of dual approach to understanding God quite well:

[The philosopher of religion] ought, as much as possible, to pursue philosophical knowledge concerning the divine since he, being a man, possesses a natural desire and proper inclination to understand what he already accepts on faith. Reason, moreover, is necessary for clarification and explanation of revealed doctrines, the refutation of opposing and erroneous teachings, and for the apologetic purpose of reasoning with those who do not accept the authority of the Scriptures.34

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34 Miller (1972), 123.
Since this synthesis between natural and revealed theology seems like a very reasonable epistemology, or theological method, it thus seems to be a very reasonable way to approach philosophical claims about God. Therefore, throughout this work, in making claims about God I will be appealing to the philosophical methodology of natural theology. Yet, as the above synthesis has suggested, I believe this natural theology approach should respect the general claims of revealed theology, which I will attempt to do as well.

2.4 Classical Theism and the Western Religious Tradition

Now that we have a theological methodology in place, I can now clarify that the notion of God that I will adopt throughout this work is part of a picture that is often called classical theism. Classical theism is a conception of God generally shared by most adherents of the western religious tradition, which includes the main branches of the religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. There are various compatible ways to describe the God of classical theism. For example, here is one brief synopsis:

God is a person: that is, a being with intellect and will. A person has (or can have) knowledge and belief, but also affections, loves, and hates; a person, furthermore, also has or can have intentions, and can act so as to fulfill them. God has all of these qualities and has some (knowledge, power, and love, for example) to the maximal degree. God is thus all-knowing and all-powerful; he is also perfectly good and wholly loving. Still further, he has created the universe and constantly upholds and providentially guides it.

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35 Rather than a singular conception, some have claimed that classical theism should be seen as a family of conceptions. However, I think there is enough of an overriding conception to identify a single notion of God that can be recognizably acknowledged by most adherents of the classical picture. See Peterson, et al (1998), 81, fn. 3.

Another familiar but more technical way to describe the God of classical theism is to broadly distinguish God’s *incommunicable* attributes from his *communicable* attributes. The former attributes are so called in order to delineate those attributes that belong to God uniquely. Consequently, God’s incommunicable attributes are often identified by negation by stating those respects in which God is *not* like us. Thus some of God’s incommunicable attributes include immortality (since we are mortal), invisibility (since we are visible), and immutability (since we are changeable), among others. But the communicable attributes of God are those characteristics which humans share with God, though in a qualitatively much inferior way to God. For example, to say “God is wise” and to say that “Plato is wise” is to identify something similar between God and Plato. Yet, classical theism maintains that God’s wisdom far surpasses that of Plato’s or anyone else’s wisdom. Some of God’s communicable attributes include omniscience (since humans have some knowledge), omnipotence (since humans have some causal power), and omnipresence (since humans are spatio-temporally located), among others.

This classical theistic picture is a fairly common understanding of God in western philosophical thought, including among many atheists and agnostics. For instance, the so-called problem of evil has as its common target the God of classical theism. Indeed, this familiar argument only makes sense as a discussion between theists and atheists and agnostics with this view of God held in common.\(^{37}\) Since this is the generally understood

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\(^{37}\) The problem of evil references the argument that the following three propositions cannot be jointly and simultaneously true:

1. God is all-powerful (i.e. omnipotent);
2. God is all-good (i.e. omnibenevolent);
notion of God, and given the purposes of the present project, I don’t think I need to attempt an exhaustive description here of the being known as God in classical theism. In the following chapters I will often cite various traditional doctrines (teachings that claim what God is like or not like) of classical theism to see whether a particular explanation of the relationship between God and logic can be counted as acceptable. In other words, I take it that particular characteristics and aspects of the God of classical theism must be respected in order for an explanation of the relationship between God and logic to count as a good explanation. But the doctrines I will reference are not controversial, in the sense that it is not in question whether they are a generally recognized part of classical theism.

There is one more matter I need to briefly address before summarizing this section. Throughout my discussion here I’ve been using phrases like “the western religious tradition,” or “the Abrahamic tradition,” which I take to be synonymous. I should be clear on what I mean by these phrases, particularly as they relate to the notion of Scripture. Normally the “Abrahamic tradition” is a rubric that includes the main branches of the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Though there is much disagreement among these branches, there is also quite a bit of overlap—

(3) Evil exists.

Both opponents and proponents of this argument agree that to deny (1) or (2) is equivalent to the claim that “God does not exist”. For if God does exist, as classical theism claims, then (1) and (2) must be true of him.

38 One purpose in calling these “western” is that I’m primarily trying to distinguish the eastern tradition of Christianity as shaped by Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus from the western tradition of Christianity as shaped by Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas. This distinction does not deny that there is much overlap between the eastern and western traditions of Christianity; but given certain differences to be identified later, I want to segregate off the eastern tradition from this rubric of “Abrahamic” or “western” religion.
mainly overlap concerning the picture of God that I’ve presented called classical theism. Since the classical theism I am adopting is a fairly detailed and complex picture of God that has been worked out over the centuries in the western religious tradition by Jewish, Christian and Islamic theologians and philosophers, then everything I will be arguing for in this work—as far as I can tell—should be consistent with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In line with this thought whenever I reference Scripture as data, I will be usually focusing upon the so-called Old Testament books since they are the common property of Jews and Christians and respected among Muslims (since they are often quoted in the Koran). Thus whenever I appeal to the notion of revelation (mainly in Chapter 3) it should allow me to make a case that applies to all three western monotheistic religions.

As a further note, I take the phrase “traditional western theist” to refer to a believer and practitioner of mainline Jewish, Christian or Muslim tradition, such that, if any of the claims or practices of the respective tradition were clearly characterized, then any well-educated person who identifies with that respective branch of this religious tradition would more than likely agree that the claim or practice in question is true or part of that tradition.

Let me reiterate that this present work is strictly not a work of theology. Rather, it is an attempt at being an authentic work of philosophy. As such, in line with the natural theological method, I do not intend to use Scripture as evidence (such as quoting sacred texts for proof of some point). Rather, given the importance of Scripture within the western religious tradition, I will treat Scripture as data that I need to seek to be consistent with. In other words, if my project presented a picture of the relationship between God and logic that could not be made to cohere well with the generally accepted
account of classical theism as proffered by the Scripture of that tradition, then I would take this project to be a failure in finding an adequate explanation of the relationship between God and logic.

In summary of §2 I conclude that “God” references the being presented by the picture of classical theism. I understand this picture as being primarily informed by the Scripture of revealed theology in classical theism and extrapolated and built upon by the resources of natural theology. However, since the present work is a philosophical one, I will primarily be relying upon the methodology of natural theology while still seeking to be consistent with the Scripture, and tradition, of revealed theology. In trying to answer the question, “What is the relationship between God and logic?” I will more precisely be asking, “What is the relationship between the God of classical theism and what constitutes logical consequence?”

3. Summary

I understand logic to be primarily about logical consequence, which I think is best represented by my characterization (LC). Again, I assume that whatever sort of entities constitute logical consequence is what most formal logical systems are attempting to capture or model. But I remain neutral on the metaphysics of logical consequence at this point. I understand God to be the divine being presented by classical theism. The special revelation of revealed theology, presented in Scripture, functions as the “raw data” of theology, while natural or philosophical theology seeks to theorize and extrapolate from this data coherent views concerning God, especially as it relates to concerns not addressed, or not addressed sufficiently, within Scripture. This current work is primarily
a work of natural theology, but will seek to be consistent with the claims of special revelation (i.e. the so-called Old Testament) in the western tradition. In addition, I’m concerned with arguing for a position that coheres with the whole of classical theism, namely, all three main branches of the western Abrahamic tradition. Therefore, I will attempt to argue for my thesis with this broad notion of western religion in mind.

I think this prolegomena is sufficient for understanding the desiderata we must respect when asking the question: “What is the relationship between logic and God?” Throughout this work I will often word the question in this simple way; but it should be understood more precisely as asking, “What is the relationship between what constitutes logical consequence, as characterized by (LC), and the God of classical theism?” Now that we understand our terms and the assumptions involved here, what is the best way to approach this question and conduct our investigation? This is the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 2: THE LOGICAL EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA

Now that we’ve clarified what we mean by the terms “God” and “logic,” we can now focus on the primary question: What relationship exists between God and logic? But how exactly shall we go about investigating and answering this question? In this chapter I will suggest a track of investigation by way of a classic query, and problem, that is found in philosophical antiquity. I believe this ancient question and its ensuing dilemma present a good starting point for approaching how God and morality relate to each other. But, in addition, I believe an investigation of the structure of this classic question, and its dilemma, will suggest an interesting, analogous way to begin thinking about the relationship between God and logic. In §1 I will explore this ancient question and dilemma briefly laying out the problems it presents to any kind of theory that attempts to explain morality in virtue of God’s will or commands. In §2 I will then attempt to motivate an analogous dilemma structure for our investigation concerning God and logic. As I think we’ll see, this approach lays out quite nicely at least two options for thinking about what relationship might exist between God and logic. In §3 I’ll try to deflect the objection that this sort of approach is actually worthless.

1. The Euthyphro Dilemma

Historically, religiously minded ethicists have often sought to ground morality in the being of God, in some way, where God plays some central role in explaining the very
nature of morality. There are various sorts of ethical theories that offer such an account, including theological versions of virtue ethics and natural law approaches. However, another way to explain morality in virtue of God, and one that has also been popular among many theists, is that ethics is grounded in explicit commands of God or grounded in God’s will. Such an ethical theory claims that morally evaluable entities, of whatever kind, have at least some of their moral statuses in virtue of acts of divine command or will. For example, according to such a theory an act of kindness would be morally good if and only if God had in fact commanded or willed humans to act kind. Such an ethical view is standardly known as some sort of divine command theory. However, divine command theories have had a long track record of problems. These problems are usually thought to trace back to what is often called the Euthyphro dilemma. In the following section I want to investigate the original, and updated, Euthyphro dilemma and the problems that it poses for divine command theorists.

1.1 The Original (and Updated) Euthyphro Dilemma

The Euthyphro dilemma finds its origin in an early Socratic dialogue entitled, appropriately enough, *Euthyphro.* Written by his student Plato, it features Socrates questioning the young religious zealot and presumed prophet Euthyphro. The dialogue begins with Socrates and Euthyphro meeting each other on the way to court: Socrates to answer for an indictment of corrupting young men, Euthyphro bringing murder charges

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1 See Wadell (2012) for a helpful and sympathetic introduction to various such approaches.

2 For analysis and commentary on Plato’s original *Euthyphro* see Geach (1966), Sharvy (1972), and Hare (1985). I give here a fairly common interpretation that largely agrees with these commentators.
against his very own father. In light of his supposed prophetic knowledge, Euthyphro makes several confident assertions to Socrates concerning piety. Socrates, seeking to be enlightened in order that he may effectively answer his prosecutors, begins to question Euthyphro on the nature of piety. In response, Euthyphro initially proclaims that “what is dear to the gods is pious, what is not is impious” (7a). But Socrates points out that the gods are not always unified on what is dear to them. One god may favor one thing, another god another thing. But Euthyphro insists, to the contrary, that the gods are together on such matters. He clarifies that “the pious is what all the gods love, and the opposite, what all the gods hate, is the impious” (9e). So, in sum, Euthyphro proclaims that if all the gods support some practice because they love it, then it’s an act of piety; if they all denounce some practice because they hate it, then it’s an act of impiety.

But then Socrates asks the following question, one that has ever since haunted ethicists who desire to make a strong connection between divine will and morality: “Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods?” (10a). This seemingly innocent question presents two options to Euthyphro and divine command theorists. Both options are usually taken to be fraught with difficulties.

However, before going on to these problems, we should note that in our day most philosophers who might be sympathetic to some sort of divine command theory, which this Socratic question challenges, will be monotheists unlike the polytheistic Greeks of antiquity. This being so, we should update the wording of Socrates’ original question a

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3 Euthyphro text quoted from Cooper (1997), translation by G. M. A. Grube.
bit. It is widely agreed that doing so will not blunt any of the force of Socrates’ original challenge. Louise Antony helpfully provides an updated translation: “Translated into contemporary terms, the question Socrates is asking is this: Are morally good actions morally good simply in virtue of God’s favoring them? Or does God favor them because they are—independently of his favoring them—morally good?”¹ I think Antony’s revision is a fair rendering of Socrates’ original question. The plural “gods” is replaced with the monotheists’ “God,” “piety” is taken to mean “goodness” (i.e. moral goodness), and Antony replaces the “loves” of the gods with God’s “favor,” where favor is thought of in terms of God’s commands. An initial objection one might bring against this translation is that piety is not especially connected to morality and so “goodness” is not an acceptable gloss here. This objection claims that someone could be religiously pious (i.e. strictly following religious duties and practices) without being moral.⁵ Nevertheless, I think it’s clear that piety is usually thought to be tightly connected with morality and the context of Plato’s original dialogue seems to assume this connection as well. Also, the rationale for the translation of “loves” to “favor” is built on the idea that if, for example, God commands us to be merciful to one another, then it is reasonably thought that this shows his favor of such actions.

⁴ Antony (2009), 71.

⁵ See Euthyphro (11e)ff. Thanks to Stewart Shapiro for pressing this point.
1.2 Problems for Moral Divine Command Theories

Now that we’ve updated Socrates’ original question to fit our context, let’s now look at the problematic two options that this question implies that the monotheistic divine command theorist must choose from.

The first horn of the Euthyphro dilemma: Morally good actions are morally good simply in virtue of God’s favoring them. This first option suggests that God’s commands or will determine what is morally good, and God’s prohibitions, or negative will, determine what is morally bad. If God commands or wills some action, then it’s morally good in virtue of his commanding or willing it. If God prohibits some action, then it’s morally bad in virtue of his prohibiting it or willing against it. Thus this view claims that what is morally good is the case solely because God has commanded or willed it. Moreover, there is nothing more to say concerning a particular action being morally good other than that God commanded or willed it. To affirm this position is to embrace a voluntarist theory of moral goodness—a straightforward divine command theory.

The second horn of the Euthyphro dilemma: God favors morally good actions because they are, independently of his favoring them, morally good. This second option suggests that God’s commands or will concerning morality are what they are in virtue of God recognizing what is already morally good. On this view the moral goodness of an action is a feature independent of, and antecedent to, God’s commanding or willing it. Thus, when God makes moral commands or morally wills something, it is because such commands are (or his will is) rooted in that which is already and independently morally

\[\text{ voluntarist theory of moral goodness—}a\text{ straightforward divine command theory.}\]

6 By explicitly designating moral goodness, we are claiming that this option is silent as to the determination of other kinds of goodness.
good. This view also usually claims that God, being good himself, only commands or wills what is antecedently good. So God’s moral commands or will are thought to consistently track what is indeed morally good. Call this view a non-voluntarist theory of moral goodness.

Unfortunately, for divine command ethicists, neither the voluntarist nor the non-voluntarist option is considered unproblematic. I’ll not offer an exhaustive list here of all the problems for either of these positions; but let’s briefly look at some of the usual objections that are given to each.

Concerning the voluntarist option, critics have often pointed out that if God’s commands or will are the sole determinants for why particular actions are morally wrong (e.g. rape or genocide), then it seems that the moral status of such actions are entirely a reflection of God’s capricious whim. For if there are no prior or further reasons for why such actions are morally wrong, then they are wrong simply because God said or willed so. Call this the no reasons objection.\(^7\) The objection highlights the unintuitiveness of the voluntarist claim. Even if God prohibits or wills against, say rape and other sexual abuses, surely there are justifying reasons for why such actions are wrong other than simply that God prohibits or wills against them. A related objection notes that a voluntarist theory of moral goodness seems to imply that since moral goodness is purely a matter of God’s commands or will, then God could have counterfactually commanded or willed what we take to be clearly morally abhorrent actions. On this view if God had commanded or willed rape or genocide, then according to this option such actions would

\(^7\) The names of these various objections I give here I take from Bagrett and Walls (2011).
then count as morally good. But this seems obviously and clearly wrong. Call this the 
*abhorrent command objection*. In essence, this objection is pointing out that the 
volutarist option makes morality a completely arbitrary matter, which is, to say the least, 
highly unintuitive. Another related problem for this position is how it affects ascriptions 
of moral goodness to God. For example, when someone references God as morally good 
(or some similar normative notion), then a person tends to think that such an ascription is 
meaningful. But if this ascription is consistent with God being able to command or will 
obviously horrible actions as morally good (i.e. the abhorrent command objection), then 
the attribution of goodness to God appears vacuous. Call this the *vacuity objection*. To 
my knowledge, a voluntarist divine command theory is unable to answer these objections 
and still maintain the voluntarist position. Therefore, the voluntarist option of divine 
command theory seems fairly hopeless.

However, what we’re calling the non-voluntarist position offers little better to the 
divine command theorist. For it presents another problem that, from the divine command 
theorist’s perspective, is equally unattractive. To embrace a non-voluntarist theory of 
moral goodness is to locate the standard of morality in a position independent from God. 
On this option God must consult what the standard of morality normatively dictates 
before commanding or willing it—in a position very similar to us. Thus, for example, 
God prohibits or wills against murder because he has discovered that murder is 
immoral—prior and independently of his commands or will. Though this gets around 
criticisms against the voluntarist, this is a serious problem for divine command theorists 
who identify themselves with the western religious perspective. Why? God is normally 
conceived in this tradition as the only completely self-sufficient and independent entity
that exists. Thus all entities, other than God, depend in some way upon God for their
nature and existence. But the non-voluntarist option of divine command theory makes
the nature and existence of morality completely autonomous from God. In other words,
God is completely superfluous or unimportant to the nature of morality—moral goodness
is what it is completely apart from God. But this is a consequence that few theists in the
western tradition of religion will accept. Thus, the non-voluntarist take on divine
command theory seems also to be an unacceptable option for divine command theorists.

To briefly summarize §1, Socrates’ original (and updated) question to Euthyphro
gives a dilemma that implies that the divine command theorist has only two unfavorable
choices, both of which are taken to have insuperable problems: either God’s relationship
to morality makes morality a completely arbitrary affair (i.e. voluntarism) or God’s
relationship to morality leaves God superfluous to the nature of morality in any essential,
special, or interesting way (i.e. non-voluntarism).

Remember that our main concern here is not to attempt to investigate and
vindicate some ethical theory, but to be introduced to it in order to see if it might give us
any help us in our own investigation. Now that we’ve investigated the original (and
updated) Euthyphro dilemma, let’s now turn to see whether it can help in our own
investigation.

2. Extending the Euthyphro Structure

2.1 Motivating the Euthyphro Approach

Can the original Euthyphro question and dilemma serve as a profitable example or
a suggestive way of how to begin thinking about the relationship between God and logic?
Since I’ve spent several pages investigating the original Euthyphro dilemma, I of course am going to be suggesting that this is indeed the case. But this isn’t an arbitrary proposal on my part, nor will I simply be trying to shoehorn our investigation into this particular mold. Rather, I think there are good reasons to think that a Euthyphro-like structure will be helpful and that it will naturally lend itself to our goal.

One reason to think that a Euthyphro-like structure will be helpful is noticing how often the argument or dialectical structure of the Euthyphro dilemma, or something close to it, comes up in various other philosophical contexts. For example, note the following quote from political philosopher David Estlund:

In Plato’s dialogue *Euthyphro*, the question is raised whether something is pious because it is loved by the gods, or whether the gods love it because it is pious. The “Euthyphro question” has a form that crops up all over philosophy, and democratic theory is no exception. Many people today think that, at least under certain conditions, good political decisions are those that are democratically made. We do not have to accept the old slogan that *vox populi, vox dei* (the voice of the people is the voice of God) to see the parallel to the Euthyphro question: are good (or just, or legitimate) democratic outcomes good because they are democratically chosen, or are democratically chosen because they are good?8

As we see here, Estlund observes that the Euthyphro question (or better, the Euthyphro structure) seems to appear all over philosophy, including democratic theory. But why is the Euthyphro structure supposedly so common throughout philosophy? As I think Estlund’s example shows, a Euthyphro structure seems particularly helpful in highlighting the pros and cons of representing a particular philosophical phenomenon as being constructed (i.e. being the result of human activity in some way) or being non-

constructed (i.e. existing completely apart from any sort of human activity). In this sense, the Euthyphro serves as a very helpful, as well as versatile, philosophical tool.

Let’s look at another example from the world of meta-ethics to further see this point. Consider the position of moral constructivism, which claims that the reality of the moral domain is a constructive function of humans. Russ Shafer-Landau brings up the following criticism against moral constructivists who import certain moral constraints, which are evidently not humanly constructed. He complains:

These constraints are not themselves products of construction, and so there would be moral facts or reasons that obtain independently of constructive functions. This is realism, not constructivism.

If this is sounding a familiar note, it should. The dilemma pressed against the constructivist is a variation of one first found in the *Euthyphro*.\(^9\)

Shafer-Landau is pushing a criticism here against moral constructivists, one that he claims bears strong similarity with the Euthyphro dilemma. Towards such constructivists the implied question, I take it, is something like the following: Are morally good actions morally good simply because humans construct or sanction them to be so? Or do humans sanction actions as moral because they are—indeed of their construction—morally good in some way? Shafer-Landau is claiming that the moral constructivists in question, who seem to hold a voluntarist position of sorts that gives an affirmative answer to the first question, are also inconsistently affiriming a non-voluntarist position implied by the second question. This Euthyphro-like question, or structure, here helps to clarify this critical point.

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\(^9\) Shafer-Landau (2003), 42.
So the above gives us good evidence to see that the structure of the Euthyphro dilemma—its challenging question and attending options—is not only perhaps a common philosophical phenomenon; but also (and perhaps because of it being so) it seems to be an argument structure that is fairly versatile and helpfully highlights certain issues to which it is applied.

However, another reason that I believe should motivate our attempting to use a Euthyphro-like structure is the following. Given that the original Euthyphro was given as a way to think about a certain theistic philosophical position, this suggests that this versatile tool will also more than likely, naturally extend to examining other similarly theistic positions. Indeed, other examples seem to show this is the case. Note the following proposal from philosopher William Mann:

It is useful to consider the [Euthyphro] dilemma in tandem with another theistic conundrum—whether God is the author of necessary truths, or whether they have their modal character independently of him. One might expect that a resolution to that conundrum would shed light on the Euthyphro dilemma.\(^\text{10}\)

Mann is proposing here a Euthyphro-like investigation of the relationship between God and certain modal (i.e. necessary) truths. He speculates that a philosophically adequate resolution to that investigation would perhaps given an equally satisfying outcome, due to its analogous nature, to the original Euthyphro investigation concerning God and morality. I’m not so much concerned here with Mann’s latter claim; but his initial idea is, I think, highly suggestive. In essence, Mann is proposing that a Euthyphro-like structure can be used to investigate another reality—besides just morality—in relation to

\(^{10}\) Mann (1989), 83-4.
God. And it seems to me that this notion can be quite easily extended in thinking about even other realities in relation to God. Originally Socrates applied the Euthyphro structure to God and piety. Later, others naturally extended this by applying it to God and morality. Mann is suggesting we apply it to God and modality. And so I think a Euthyphro-like structure can be easily and naturally extended to God and logic, or more precisely, God and logical consequence.

Therefore, given the helpful versatility and naturalness of extending its application to other questions concerning the divine’s relationship to other realities, I propose we investigate the relationship between God and logic by applying a question and dialectical structure analogous to Socrates’ original dilemma presented against Euthyphro’s view of God and piety.11 As I believe we’ll see, this will give us a good starting place for thinking about our subject. Let’s see how this might go.

2.2 The Logical Euthyphro Dilemma

In order to propose a question analogous to Socrates’ original Euthyphro question, or more particularly our updated question, let’s first imagine that we have an individual who holds a position similar to the religious devotee Euthyphro in Plato’s original dialogue. Let’s call this individual Logiphro (pronounced LAH-ji-fro). We’ll understand Logiphro to be a devoted monotheist who conceives of God broadly in line with the western theistic tradition of classical theism as laid out in Chapter 1. Logiphro thus generally thinks of God as the creator and sustainer of everything, apart from himself.

11 I should give credit where credit is due. Memory fails me, but when I first conceived of doing this project either I had first proposed this idea to Stewart Shapiro and he encouraged me to pursue it or it was originally his idea and I jumped on it.
Thus the nature and existence of anything apart from God must be explicated, ultimately, in relation to God. Does this include items of an apparently more abstract nature? For instance, what about logic? How exactly does Logiphro conceive of the relationship between God and logic? In response to this Socratic question, let’s imagine that Logiphro makes a statement similar to Euthyphro’s original: “If God favors some sequence of claims that we recognize as a logical argument, then it is a valid argument; if God disfavors some sequence of claims that we recognize as a logical argument, then it is an invalid argument.”

As with the earlier Euthyphro position, this latter claim assumes that God only commands or wills that which he favors. Understood in this way Logiphro is claiming that logically evaluable entities (whatever these entities may be) have their validity statuses in virtue of God’s favor (i.e. commands or will). This sounds suitably similar to the original Euthyphro claim: an entity has its particular sort of status in virtue of the divine commands or will.

However, as we saw with the original Euthyphro position, Socrates asked a question that challenged Euthyphro to clarify and explain how piety is related to divine commands or will. In a similar vein, we can imagine a Socrates-like critic asking an analogous sort of question challenging Logiphro. Wording it as closely as possible to the original updated question, our new question to Logiphro would be something like the following: Are logically valid arguments valid simply in virtue of God’s favoring them?

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12 My wording here, as stated in Chapter 1, reflects a neutrality as to the exact metaphysical nature of logic so as not to beg any questions going forward with our investigation.

13 See Chapter 1 for an explication of what counts as an argument, and what constitutes logical validity and invalidity.
Or does God favor them because they are—independently of his favoring them—logically valid?

This analogous Socratic question seems to push Logiphro to face a familiar sort of dilemma for clarifying and explaining his position. The question implies that there are at least two options for understanding Logiphro’s suggested logical theory. We’ll call this the logical Euthyphro dilemma or just the Logiphro dilemma for short.

The first horn of the Logiphro dilemma: Logically valid arguments are valid simply in virtue of God’s favoring (i.e. commanding or willing) them. This option suggests that God’s commands or will determine what counts as valid, and God’s prohibitions or will against determine what is invalid. Thus, concerning any sequence of claims (or in the limiting case where there is only a single concluding claim without premises), God has the ability to make the logical supporting relation between such claims valid or invalid. For example, this option claims that God could command or will it to be the case that modus ponens (i.e., \( p, (p \rightarrow q) \mid\mid q \)), as well as any other generally recognized valid argument,\(^{14}\) be invalid if God were to decide to make it so. Likewise according to this option, affirming the consequent (i.e., \( q, (p \rightarrow q) \mid\mid p \)), as well as any other generally recognized fallacy (i.e. invalid argument), could be made into a logically valid argument if God commanded or willed it to be so. To be clear and emphasize the radical nature of this option, we need to see that this view is claiming in those cases

\(^{14}\) By “generally recognized valid implications” I am neither ignoring the different validity judgments amongst formal logical systems nor pre-judging a case between monistic and pluralistic conceptions of logic. Rather, the simple idea I’m appealing to here is that there are some implications that most logicians (and presumably most people in general) would agree as recognizing as valid. A similar point goes for the phrase “generally recognized fallacy.”
where a concluding claim has no related premise claims, and thus logically true, then God could command or will these logical truths (i.e. \( \vdash \psi \)) to be invalid. Likewise with logical falsehoods—such as logical contradictions—God could command or will such claims to be valid.\(^{15}\) To affirm this option clearly embraces a voluntarist theory of logical validity. Let’s call this initial characterization the position of logical voluntarism.

The second horn of the Logiphro dilemma: God favors (i.e. commands or wills) valid logical arguments because they are—indeed and antecedently of his favoring them—logically valid. This second option suggests that God’s logical commands or will are what they are in virtue of what is already valid or invalid. On this view the validity status of a sequence of claims is a feature independent of, and antecedent to, God’s commanding or willing it. As with the similar moral position, this view suggests that God, being a logical being himself, is only interested in commanding or willing that which is already valid. It seems to me that to affirm this view is to embrace a non-voluntarist theory of validity. So let’s call the initial characterization of this position logical non-voluntarism.

2.3 Initial Problems for the Logiphro Logician

Thus, for anyone, like our imaginary Logiphro, who seeks to explain the relationship between God and logic in terms of God’s commands or will has at least these

\(^{15}\) “God could command or will logical falsehoods to be true” can be delineated in several different ways: (1) Conee (1991) claims it’s not possible that \((p & \neg p)\) and yet God is able to make it the case that \((p & \neg p)\); (2) Curley (1984) holds that it’s not possible that \((p & \neg p)\) and it’s possible that it’s possible that \((p & \neg p)\); and (3) what’s usually called universal possibilism, which simply claims that it’s possible that \((p & \neg p)\). I’ll be interpreting “God can make logical falsehoods true” along the lines of (3). As I’ll explain in Chapter 3, I believe (1) and (2) are representatives of a limited possibilism reading of logical voluntarism while (3) is a universal possibilism reading of logical voluntarism. I’ll argue in Chapter 3 that for logical voluntarism limited possibilism reduces to universal possibilism.
two options to choose from. As our new dilemma puts forward, it seems that Logiphro must endorse either logical voluntarism or logical non-voluntarism. However, just as we saw how the Euthyphro ethicist is faced with difficult problems on either option, it seems to me that in almost the exact same ways the Logiphro logician must also face analogous troublesome problems: he seems forced to hold\(^\text{16}\) that either the validity of logical arguments is completely arbitrary (i.e. logical voluntarism) or hold that the nature and existence of valid logical arguments is superfluous to the existence of God (i.e. logical non-voluntarism). However, I believe the Logiphro logician is in even a worse situation than the Euthyphro ethicist. For along with the objections that are analogous to the moral case, the Logiphro logician has several additional problems that complicate his position even more than the Euthyphro ethicist had to deal with. I’ll lay out these problems in more detail in later chapters. But let me briefly list a few of the problems here to give a flavor of the morass for the one who wants to explain the relationship between God and logic in terms of divine commands or will.

Concerning logical voluntarism, at the very least, it seems quite bizarre to even consider that logical arguments can change their validity status simply in virtue of God’s commands or will. What would it even mean to say, for instance, that the law of non-contradiction is false, or that modus ponens is invalid? Questions of this sort seem to invite only puzzlement. There are a host of worries to bring out here but we can summarize, in brief, that there is a serious doubt as to whether logical voluntarism is a

\(^{16}\) As I’ll argue in Chapter 5, I believe this is a false dilemma. The dilemma assumes that the only thing God can contribute to logical consequence is via his commands or will. I believe this assumption is false.
coherent or even an intelligible position to make out. In addition, there is an even a bigger problem for logical voluntarism given that Logiphro is a member of the western tradition of religion. As laid out in Chapter 1, claims about God in this tradition are usually taken from what are considered to be trustworthy testimonial accounts (i.e. Scripture) whose own origins are supposed to trace back to God’s self-revealing claims about himself. But if logical voluntarism is correct, the view implies that any claim God may have communicated cannot be understood by us in any usually straightforward way. For any kind of communication relies upon certain assumptions about logical inferential connections to other claims—what is included or excluded—at least to some degree. If logical voluntarism is true, then one could never be sure what this divine supra-logical being of logical voluntarism means when he or she communicates anything to humans. And given that many of those who operate in the western religious tradition take Scripture to be the primary evidence for their claims about God, logical voluntarism calls this whole edifice into question. The sort of “possibilities” logical voluntarism avails itself of would make theistic philosophical formulation and theological discussion essentially pointless, for one could not take any claims about God in any usually understood way. In Chapter 3, we’ll address in detail the position of logical voluntarism along with these problems it appears to face.

Concerning logical non-voluntarism, this view presents a problem quite similar to the one we saw for the moral non-voluntarist position earlier. Again, the western religious perspective normally conceives of God as the only completely self-sufficient and independent entity that exists. Thus all entities, other than God, depend in some way upon God for their nature and existence. But adherents of logical non-voluntarism hold
that the nature and existence of logical validity (whatever metaphysically constitutes it) is completely autonomous from God. Thus God is completely unneeded to explain the nature and existence of logic. Since this consequence is unacceptable to theists in this tradition, it seems logical non-voluntarism is an untenable position for such theists to hold. In Chapter 4, we’ll clarify what the position of logical non-voluntarism amounts to along with addressing this problem and whatever other problems it may also face.

But let’s put all of these problems to the side now and note what we’ve accomplished thus far in this chapter. In §1 we investigated Socrates’ original (and updated) Euthyphro dilemma, which included its challenging question and the presented options for the pietist (or ethicist) who wishes to draw a strong connection between God’s commands or will and the nature of piety (or ethics). In §2 we also saw that the dialectical structure of the Euthyphro dilemma seems to arise in various philosophical contexts because, showing it to be a versatile and helpful philosophical tool. Given that the original Euthyphro was presented in the context of challenging a theory that made a strong connection between God and some reality, I suggested that we could naturally extend the Euthyphro dialectical structure—in a roughly analogous way—to serve in our investigation of God and logic. Thus, we suggested a question analogously similar to Socrates’ original question to Euthyphro to our imaginary Logiphro. This question presented a dilemma that implies at least two choices for our imaginary Logiphro: logical voluntarism or logical non-voluntarism. Thus we have two fairly clear delineated options that help us to begin to consider how God and logic might be related.
3. An Objection to Adopting the Euthyphro Structure

However, though I believe the above has shown that the Euthyphro structure gives us a nice starting point for our investigation of the relationship between God and logic, one might think that this suggestion is actually pretty useless. Even assuming that one finds the primary question important or philosophically interesting—How are God and logic related to one another?—I can think of at least one objection that might be put forward to the Euthyphro-like approach that I want to adopt here.

We saw how the original Euthyphro dilemma left us with only two options: moral voluntarism or moral non-voluntarism, both of which seemed plagued with difficulties. And even a cursory knowledge of the philosophical literature seems universally united in claiming that these difficulties cannot be overcome. Thus, the Euthyphro dilemma is taken to be a damning critique of trying to explain morality in terms of God’s commands or will. But, if this is so, why think that an analogous use of this approach has any better chance of showing anything profitable concerning attempts to explain some other reality in terms of God’s commands or will? In other words, if the Euthyphro structure so successfully destroyed Euthyphro’s theory of God and morality, doesn’t it seem fairly probable that it will truncate any sort of similar theory concerning God and logic? Why use a dialectical structure that has shown itself to be more than able to roundly and justifiably discard such a theistic position? To do so seems like entering a race with a horse that has proven to be lame. Surely, if one wants to philosophically investigate the

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17 Just one example, Antony (2009) does little more than assume this is the case.
relationship between God and logic, there must be a better and more defensible method to begin with?

Perhaps there is a better starting point—though I do not know of it. Nevertheless, I believe that the original Euthyphro dilemma may not be as victorious in its critique of divine command theories, or theistic versions of ethics more generally, as it is popularly held to be. For example, there has recently been a strong and healthy flow of philosophical literature attempting to show that the supposed strength of the original Euthyphro dilemma is not as robust as usually thought.\(^\text{18}\) These works have focused upon overcoming the problems that the original (and updated) Euthyphro has foisted upon divine command conceptions of morality as well as addressing problems associated with non-theistic conceptions of morality. With these published works in mind, it seems that the Euthyphro structure may not be in such completely bad shape after all.

But, regardless of any sort of alleged or possible success of such rebuttals, the main point I want to make here is that the unified philosophical response that upholds the Euthyphro critique as thoroughly successful is, at the very least, overstated. And, if such is the case, then it seems that a Euthyphro-like approach still holds out the possibility of serving as a productive starting point for investigating the relationship between God and some other reality like logic. Besides, even if the Logiphro dilemma ends up being successfully damning of any philosophical theory that seeks to establish some close or interesting relationship between God and logic as damning as the original Euthyphro is

\(^{18}\) See Baggett and Walls (2011), Copan (2008), and Milliken (2009). I will address the supposed success of the Euthyphro dilemma against theologically based ethics in more depth in Chapter 5.
conceived to be, it seems to me that this would still be an interesting philosophical upshot to be learned.

Therefore, I believe we have some good reason to believe that a Euthyphro-like approach can serve as an interesting and helpful way of approaching a philosophical investigation of the relationship between God and logic. The Logiphro dilemma has given us two fairly clear and contrasting targets to focus upon. This seems to me, at the very least, to be a good starting point.

4. Summary

We began by looking at Plato’s *Euthyphro* and saw how Socrates’ challenging question to Euthyphro’s divine command theory led to an attending dilemma. Given our imaginary interlocuter Logiphro’s view of God and logic, which is analogously similar to Euthyphro’s original view concerning God and morality, we saw how an analogous challenging question can also be raised that puts forward a similar sort of dilemma. Despite the unpopularity of divine command theories, evidently buttressed by confidence in the success of the Euthyphro dilemma, I argued that this does not serve as a sufficient reason to not adopt a Euthyphro structure in investigating God and logic. Therefore, I believe this chapter has shown that my suggested Euthyphro approach is a very natural and productive way to begin thinking about the relationship between God and logic.

Let’s now turn to the investigation of the two positions that this approach has given us. In the next chapter, Chapter 3, we will investigate the position of logical voluntarism.
CHAPTER 3: LOGICAL VOLUNTARISM

As laid out in the last chapter, opting for logical voluntarism is the view that God’s commands or will determine what arguments are valid. Conversely God’s prohibitions or will against determine what arguments are invalid. Thus, for any sequence of claims that constitutes a logical argument, God has the ability to make its logical connection valid or invalid. To be clear and emphasize the radical nature of this option, we need to see that this view is claiming in those cases where a valid concluding claim has no related premise claims (i.e. traditionally thought of as a logical truth), then God could command or will such a claim to be false, and likewise with a logical falsehood—such as a contradiction—God could command or will it to be true. To affirm this option is to embrace a voluntarist theory of logical validity.

I divide this chapter into two main sections. In §1 I will attempt to explicate and clarify what logical voluntarism amounts to. Given the rather bizarre possibilities the view puts forward, in this section I will also try to figure out what might motivate logical voluntarism, particularly by looking at a few historical figures that have been suspected of holding such a view. Then in §§2.1 and 2.2 I will look at some objections that can be mounted against logical voluntarism. I think the logical voluntarist may be able to answer these objections. Nevertheless, in §2.3 I will deal with what I take to be a huge problem for logical voluntarism from the perspective of the traditional theist in the Abrahamic or western tradition. In §2.4 I will discuss the possibility of the logical
voluntarist who wants to “bite the bullet” of the objection discussed in §2.3. I will argue that the suggested move requires too large of a cost for the one who wants to continue to adhere to traditional western theism.

1. Clarifying Logical Voluntarism and Examining Motivations for the View

1.1 Clarifying Logical Voluntarism

Prima facie, logical voluntarism is a difficult view to make sense of. What does it even mean to say that God could command or will a valid argument to be invalid or an invalid argument to be valid?\(^1\) Moreover, it is very difficult to begin explicating logical voluntarism without begging a whole host of metaphysical questions related to logic. For example, if instances of valid arguments are composed of nothing more than linguistic entities, then it might seem rather trivial to say that God can change the validity of these arguments for surely human beings, to some extent, have control over the linguistic components they use. In other words, if logic is just a matter of language, and humans seem to have some choice about what language means or implies, then it seems obvious that God could have a choice in this matter as well. However, if some sort of platonic entities (e.g. propositions, sets of possible worlds, etc.) constitutes logical arguments, then the logical voluntarist would need to explain what God exactly changes when he changes the validity status of arguments constituted by them. Yet, I believe, we can largely sidestep these metaphysical issues because the logical voluntarist needs to first

\(^1\) In Chapter 1 I demarcated the term “argument” as referring to a stretch of indicative discourse where one or more claims is intended to support another claim. See that chapter for further explanation and caveats.
deal with what I see as objections that are preliminary to any such metaphysical details of his account. But before dealing with these objections, we first need to clarify the picture of logical voluntarism a little more than what we were introduced to in the last chapter.

In order to get clear on what exactly logical voluntarism is claiming, let’s examine just one claim of the logical voluntarist position that God could command or will invalid arguments to be valid. Remember that logical truths are just one subset of valid arguments. Likewise, we think of any logical falsehood as an inconsistent, and thus invalid, argument. Thus, the logical voluntarist seems committed to the following:

\[(LV1): \text{God could command or will logical falsehoods (arguments of the form } (p \& \neg p)\text{) to be true.}\]

How should we understand what (LV1) is claiming? For instance, Earl Conee\(^2\) seems to explicate something like (LV1) as: It is not possible that \((p \& \neg p)\) and yet God is able to make it the case that \((p \& \neg p)\). In a similar fashion E. M. Curley, in explaining his interpretation of Descartes on the subject,\(^3\) defines (LV1) as: It is not possible that \((p \& \neg p)\) and it’s possible that God could make it possible that \((p \& \neg p)\). In addition, (LV1) can be understood in a stronger and more straightforward way as it simply being possible for God to make it the case that \((p \& \neg p)\).\(^4\) If we take logical truths to be one category of necessary truths—and thus logical falsehoods to be necessary falsehoods—I think these different formulations can be assigned to either of two different modal ways of

\(^4\) Though his view has nothing to do with God, Priest (2006) understands “dialetheias” (i.e. true contradictions) in a somewhat similar fashion. That is, that there are true contradictions.
understanding (LV1). I believe Conee and Curley’s different readings of (LV1) are both instances of what is often called *limited possibilism* in that both understand (LV1) as a claim that necessary truths (and necessarily valid arguments) are only contingently necessary for God. In relation to classical theism, limited possibilism is usually explicated in the following way: at the moment of creation—before establishing the necessary truths (including logical truths)—God could have commanded or willed any “truth” (i.e. any claim) to be either a necessary (or contingent) truth or a necessary (or contingent) falsehood. Thus God had the power to determine the modal status, as well as the truth-value, of any claim in the moment of creation. Since we understand logical truths to be one category of valid arguments, this view extends to the claim that God also had the power to command or will the validity status of any argument at the moment of creation as well. However, so the view goes, once God established all of the truths at creation, including the necessary truths and falsehoods (and also the validity statuses of all other arguments) these claims of necessity bind even his omnipotent power—they are now necessary even for God.\(^5\) However, another (and stronger) suggested reading for (LV1) above is oftentimes called *universal possibilism* in that it understands (LV1) to claim that God has the power to command or will the modal status, as well as the truth-value, of any claim at any time as well at the validity status of any argument at any time—including beyond the moment of creation. On this reading of (LV1) there is no claim (and literally no thing) binding upon or an impediment to God’s omnipotent power.

\(^5\) For an example of this view see Clouser (1983).
On the universal possibilism reading, there are neither any necessary truths, nor any
necessary validities, for God.

It appears that the limited possibilism is a more charitable, and more plausible,
reading of logical voluntarism. However, as I’ll explain later in §2.4, I believe the
limited possibilism reading ultimately suffers from what I take to be the same objection
that the universal possibilism reading does. Nevertheless, I’ll assume the weaker limited
possibilism reading of logical voluntarism throughout this chapter: God commanded or
willed the modal status (and thus validity status) of every argument at the moment of
creation.

Now that we have a little clearer picture of logical voluntarism, why would a
traditional western theist hold such a view concerning God and logic?

1.2 Motivations for Logical Voluntarism

In order to understand what might count as an impetus for this view, in this sub-
section I think it will be helpful to look at a few historical figures that have been thought
to be representatives of logical voluntarism, or something akin to it. We’ll briefly look at
each example and then attempt to draw some motivations for logical voluntarism.⁶ In
addition, by the end of §1, I will suggest a different category of additional reasons that
have nothing to do with religious reasons or historical examples that might also motivate
logical voluntarism.

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⁶ Even though we’ve set up the dialectic of this dissertation on what I’ve called the Logiphro
dilemma, no one, as far as I know, has ever been motivated to logical voluntarism, or anything like it,
specifically because of the proposed dilemma.
A possible representative of logical voluntarism was the Italian bishop and prolific writer Peter Damian (AD 1007-1072). His most famous work De divina omnipotentia (On Divine Omnipotence) has been thought to show that Damian denied the universal validity of the law of non-contradiction (LNC). The impetus for this supposed claim seems to have been Damian’s dissatisfaction with a statement made earlier by the Christian Church Father Jerome (AD 347-420) who claimed that even God could not restore virginity to a woman once she had lost it. Damian’s reply to this view can be seen in the following:

Let the quibbling of the impious question be once more put forth; let it also be seen from what root it was produced, for then the stream that ought to be engulfed by the ground lest it should flood and ruin the rich fruits of sound faith may just dry out with its source. For in order to prove that God could not restore a virgin after her lapse, they add, as if it were a consequence: for would even God be able to bring it about that what has been done, has not been done? As if . . . it ever established that a virgin has been spoilt, it could not happen that she would be intact again. This is assuredly true as far as nature is concerned, and the opinion holds. Also, that something has been done and that the very same thing has not been done cannot be the case. These, to be sure, are contraries to each other in such a way that if one of them is, the other cannot be. For of what has been it cannot truly be said that it has not been, and the other way around, of what has not been it is not correctly said that it has been. For contraries cannot coincide in one and the same subject. This impossibility, then, is indeed rightly affirmed if it is attributed to the lack of means of nature, but on no account should it be applied to the divine majesty. For he who has given birth to nature easily removes the necessity of nature when he wills (611D-612B).7

I think Damian’s position is fairly clear in this passage. In direct opposition to Jerome, Damian affirms that God could restore virginity to a woman who had lost it. But what exactly does this affirmation entail? Is Damian affirming that God can perform logically contradictory actions: that some action could be successfully done and yet undone in the

7 From Peter Damian’s De divina omnipotentia, English translation provided by Holopainen (2009).
sense as if the action had never been done? Since the seminal work of German scholar J. A. Endres, it has been fairly common to interpret Damian along the lines of what I’ve been calling logical voluntarism. Endres believed various passages, like the above, showed that Damian denied that any laws (logical as well as physical) could bind God’s omnipotent power, implying that God could perform logically contradictory actions. So if God is able to perform a logically contradictory action, then it seems that he can will that a logical contradiction is true. Thus, Endres’ interpretation of Damian shows him to be in line with logical voluntarism. The following argument I think represents this interpretation of Damian’s divine virginal restoration view:

(1) Damian maintains that God can restore virginity to a woman who has lost it.
(2) But restoration of virginity consists in removing those events in the woman’s past that are incompatible with her being a virgin.
(3) Therefore, Damian has to maintain that God can undo what has been done.
(4) But the undoing of what has been done involves a contradiction.\footnote{One might wonder whether this is really a contradiction if God can destroy past events. It would take me too far afield to address this objection thoroughly. However, even if God could destroy past events, it seems to me that this position might still not rule out logical voluntarism.}
(5) Therefore, Damian has to claim that the LNC is not universally valid (if only for God).

If this interpretation is correct, it seems clear that Damian was clearly an advocate of what we’re calling logical voluntarism.

For many years this had been the primary interpretation of Damian’s view; but recent scholarship has argued that this interpretation is mistaken.\footnote{See Holopainen (2009), Knuuttila (1993), and Resnick (1992).} The main evidence against what I’m calling a logical voluntarist interpretation is that it fits badly with what

\footnote{Endres (1906), (1910). Endres’ scholarship had been the final word on Damian for over a century.}
Damian says elsewhere in his work *On Divine Omnipotence*. The primary evidence relevant here is Damian’s view of divine providence. Following Augustine, Damian holds that God is immutable, both in himself and in relation to his creation. To God there is no past or future; everything is present to him in an eternal now. Therefore, the past cannot be changed (i.e. denial of (2) and (3) above) because past events are immutably present in the divine providential plan that is immutable (607A). Therefore, this seems to show that even though Damian plainly affirmed the possibility of God restoring virginity (i.e. claim (1) above), it does not necessarily imply a logical violation of undoing what has been undone (i.e. claim (2) above). In other words, it seems that Damian believed that God could do the physically impossible—for example, like restoring the hymen to a woman who had lost it—but not the logically impossible, like undoing what has been done. If this understanding of Damian is correct, then it seems that Damian did not believe that affirming claim (1) implies that God could do that which is logically contradictory (i.e. claim (2)).

However, I think there is reason to push back against this newer interpretation of Damian for it’s not clear to me whether restoring a woman’s hymen is equivalent to restoring her virginity. It seems plausible to say that once a woman has had the experience of sexual intercourse with another person, regardless of whether the physical evidence could be undone, that the woman is no longer a virgin. In other words, it seems to me that (1) *does imply* (2). However, rather than entering into an exegetical or historical debate over whether Damian was actually a logical voluntarist, it’s enough for us to note why a logical voluntarist interpretation of Damian is a tempting and understandable reading. Given not only in what Damian claims in the above passage, but
elsewhere Damian admitted that theists should be reticent in being fully forthcoming of an explication of divine power that admitted that God could not do certain things—like commanding or willing a logically contradictory claim to be true. Damian’s fear seems to have been motivated by the possibility that this truth might shake the faith of the common Christian believer. He writes: “For if it should reach the common people that God is asserted to be impotent in some respect (which is a wicked thing to say), the unschooled masses would instantly be confused and the Christian faith would be upset, not without grave danger to souls.”\(^{11}\) As Holopainen explains, Damian’s “delicate task in [On Divine Omnipotence] is to convince his readers of the view that divine omnipotence remains intact even though God cannot undo the done, without ever saying that God cannot undo the done because this is “a wicked thing to say”\(^{12}\). Given this goal, it’s understandable how Peter Damian could be interpreted (even if mistakenly) as a logical voluntarist.

Another possible representative of logical voluntarism is the medieval thinker and theologian William of Ockham (AD 1287-1347). As is well known, Ockham was a prolific writer on various philosophical issues, including those related to theology and logic. Many commentators have noted how the doctrine of divine omnipotence was often a major factor in much of Ockham’s thought.\(^{13}\) Let’s look at a couple of examples that will emphasize this point.

\(^{11}\) Quoted in Holopainen (2009), 19.
\(^{12}\) Ibid.
In reference to the Exodus account of Israel leaving Egypt, Ockham claims that Israel’s despoiling of Egypt (Exodus 12:36) was not a mass occurrence of theft, and thus not to be considered morally objectionable, simply on the grounds that God commanded the Israelites to despoil the Egyptians. In other words, Ockham seems to be claiming that God’s command to do some action X is the very basis of the morality of some action X. Thus, Ockham appears to have been an advocate of moral voluntarism—our straightforward moral divine command theory.

Another example, Ockham’s emphasis upon divine omnipotence can be seen in other areas of his philosophical thought such as in his account of “intuitive knowledge.” For Ockham, intuitive knowledge is the immediate apprehension of a thing as existent—what we might call sense perception or direct empirical input today—which justifies the said cognizer to form statements corresponding to the existence of that thing. For example, if I have intuitive knowledge of an apple, Ockham says this allows me to claim, “This apple is red,” or “This apple is tasty,” or whatever other statements may correctly correspond to that cognition. A striking addition to this account is that Ockham famously maintained that God could cause us to have intuitive knowledge of an object that did not objectively exist. Thus God could cause me to have intuitive knowledge of, say, a book—such that I could read, touch, and even turn the pages of the supposed book—

14 Quoted in King (1999), 239. To quibble, it seems clear to me from the context of Exodus 12:36 that the Israelites asked for the Egyptians’ possession, not that they simply took them.

15 However, there is some question as to whether Ockham was consistently a divine command theorist concerning morality. In other places he seems reluctant to claim that God’s commands are the sole basis for the rightness of an actions. King (1999) highlights this point while McGrade (1999) calls Ockham’s view an “implicit divine command” theory. See Karger (1999) for a detailed account of Ockham’s moral views.
which in fact did not really exist. Ockham denied that God actually did perform such deceptive acts but only that God could perform such actions in virtue of his omnipotent power. Frederick Copleston comments on the emphasis upon God’s omnipotence in Ockham’s epistemological account:

What Ockham has to say on the [above] matter admirably illustrates his tendency, as a thinker with marked theological preoccupations, to break through, as it were, the purely philosophic and natural order and to subordinate it to the divine liberty and omnipotence. It illustrates too, one of his main principles, that when two things are distinct there is no absolutely necessary connection between them. Our act of seeing the stars, considered as an act, is distinct from the stars themselves: it can therefore be separated from them, in the sense that divine omnipotence could annihilate the latter and conserve the former. Ockham’s tendency was always to break through supposedly necessary connections which might seem to limit in some way the divine omnipotence . . .

If Copleston’s assessment of Ockham’s thought is correct, then one might suspect that Ockham was also a logical voluntarist. Since premises and conclusions are distinct, then Ockham would seem to have believed that the necessary connections between premises and conclusions could in no way limit divine omnipotence as well. Nevertheless, despite sounding like a logical voluntarist at times, Ockham seems to have stood firmly against such a view. This comes up in various ways in Ockham’s writings. For example, in the following, Marilyn McCord Adams highlights Ockham’s commitment against logical voluntarism in his philosophical use of contradiction:

Ockham, in effect, takes the Indiscernibility of Identicals—i.e., the principle that for every individual x and y and every property F, if x is identical with y, then x is F if and only if y is F—to be a necessary truth about and our primary criterion of distinction for real things. Thus, he says that contradiction is “the most powerful way” of proving a distinction among real things, and insists that if we allow one and the same real thing to have contradictory properties simultaneously, “every

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method of proving distinction or nonidentity between any entity whatever would perish.” Further, Ockham seems to assume that . . . if \( x \) is really the same as \( y \), \( x \) is necessarily identical with \( y \); and if really distinct, necessarily distinct . . . . Thus, Ockham implies that if \( x \) and \( y \) are really the same, it is not logically possible that \( x \) should exist without \( y \) and vice versa, even by divine power.\(^{17}\)

So even though it seems clear that Ockham was not a logical voluntarist it’s important to note, as with Damian before, that Ockham’s philosophical views were strongly motivated by an attempt to uphold a strong reading of divine omnipotence; that is, Ockham seemed to be reluctant to say anything that might appear to show that God was not omnipotent simpliciter.

Let’s look at one last historical example. It would seem that if anyone deserves the title of logical voluntarist it would be father of modern philosophy René Descartes (AD 1596-1650). Though Descartes never explicitly appeals to or expounds upon logical voluntarism in any of his main works, he seems fairly adamant about this position in several of his letters. In a letter to Marin Mersenne he says:

> The mathematical truths which you call eternal have been laid down by God and depend on him entirely no less than the rest of his creatures. Indeed to say these truths are independent of God is to talk of him as if he were Jupiter or Saturn and to subject him to the Styx and Fates. Please do not hesitate to assert and proclaim everywhere that it is God who has laid down these laws in nature just as a king lays down laws in his kingdom.\(^{18}\)

Notice that Descartes sees mathematical truths (e.g. \( a + b = b + a \), \( a^2 + b^2 = c^2 \), etc.) as “laws in nature” and that he conceives of God’s relation to these laws as akin to a monarch bringing legislation into being. The existence of any legal laws is obviously contingent upon the deciding power of some ruler or ruling body that makes them or

\(^{17}\) Adams (1987), 16-17, (emphasis mine).

\(^{18}\) Descartes (1991), 23.
brings them into being. Likewise, Descartes seems to have believed that mathematical truths are merely laws of this sort, solely legislated by God. Thus the existence of all such truths and laws are completely dependent upon God’s commands—in the sense that they were created and are still enforced by God. In a later letter Descartes adds:

You ask me by what kind of causality God established the eternal truths. I reply: by the same kind of causality as he created all things, that is to say, as their efficient and total cause. For it is certain that he is the author of the essence of created things no less than their existence; and the essence is nothing other than the eternal truths . . . You ask what necessitated God to create these truths; and I reply that he was free to make it not true that all the radii of the circle are equal.\(^\text{19}\)

Though Descartes gives the example of a mathematical truth here, it should be clear that he is calling a logical truth into question as well. For if God could make a circle, all of whose radii are not equal, then it seems we have a contradiction, for a circle just is a figure all of whose radii are equal. Thus Descartes seems to be endorsing logical, as well as mathematical, voluntarism. Elsewhere he is even more explicit on this point:

For my part, I know that my intellect is finite and God’s power is infinite, and so I set no bounds to it; I consider only what I can conceive and what I cannot conceive. . . . And so I boldly assert that God can do everything which I conceive to be possible, but I am not so bold as to deny that he can do whatever conflicts with my understanding—I merely say that it involves a contradiction.\(^\text{20}\)

Thus Descartes’ view of divine omnipotence includes the possibility of God doing everything conceivable and also being able to do anything inconceivable, including performing outright contradictory actions. Since performing such an action implies that God willed a contradiction, it would seem that Descartes was indeed a logical voluntarist.

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\(^{19}\) Descartes (1991), 25-6.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 363.
However, as we’ve seen with our prior historical examples, there are scholars who have argued that Descartes should either not be read as a logical voluntarist, \(^{21}\) or at least not one of the universal possibilism variety. \(^{22}\) As with Damian before, the actual historical verdict need not concern us here. Descartes may have been, or may not have been, a logical voluntarist. But, as with Damian and Ockham before, I am more interested in why Descartes has sometimes been interpreted as a logical voluntarist. And again, as with Damian and Ockham, Descartes seems to have been concerned with interpreting God’s omnipotent power in a very strong way.

I think the above is enough of a historical sketch to clearly suggest what might motivate logical voluntarism. Even though Damian, Ockham, and Descartes may have not been true advocates of logical voluntarism (though this is debatable, especially concerning Damian and Descartes), I think it has been clear from our investigation of them that what mainly motivated their voluntarist-leaning views was a desire to give a strong interpretation of the traditional category of divine omnipotence. I think an argument that characterizes this connection between divine omnipotence and logical voluntarism might go something like the following:

\[
\begin{align*}
(6) & \text{ If the truth-values of individual claims and the validity status of arguments were independent of God’s will or commands, then these things would act as limitations to God’s power.} \\
(7) & \text{ But if these things were independent of God’s will or commands, then God would not be truly omnipotent.} \\
(8) & \text{ But God is omnipotent.}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{21}\) Stencil (2012) specifically argues that Descartes should not be understood as a logical voluntarist of either a limited possibilism or a universal possibilism variety.

\(^{22}\) See Clouser (1983), Janowski (2000), chapter 3. Schrader (1986) argues that Descartes can be given either a limited possibilism or a universal possibilism reading.
Therefore, these things cannot be independent of God’s will or commands. But why give divine omnipotence such a strong interpretation, which then implies construing God’s power along voluntarist lines? I think a couple of things can be suggested here.

One, there seems to be a concern on the part of theistic defenders that anything less than a full voluntarist reading of God’s power would be seen as thinking or conceiving of God as less than the way he should be thought or conceived of. This possibility seems to be unacceptable to some traditional western theists. Recall how Descartes said that to say that something like logical arguments are independent of God’s power is “to talk as if he were Jupiter or Saturn and to subject him to the Styx and Fates.”23 Descartes believed that God could not be subject to anything outside of himself and his power. The implication for Descartes seems to be that to believe so is to demote God to the status of something like the mythic gods of ancient Greece, who, though possessing characteristics and powers beyond that of common mortal human beings, Descartes took such “gods” to be obviously deficient to the omnipotent being of classical theism. For the devoted Abrahamic theist, such a suggested demotion of God’s nature is intolerable and so God must be defended accordingly. For example, in a similar way, if I know my friend is consistently honest and someone claims that she lied, I obviously would want to argue in defense of my friend. Not only because I think it’s true that she is honest, but I desire to defend her out of loyalty and affection.

A second reason for defending such a strong view of divine omnipotence seems to be more related to a concern for those who are less educated in their respective religious communities. Remember that Damian’s reluctance to be fully forthcoming about God’s power being limited was motivated by the fear that “the unschooled masses would instantly be confused and the Christian faith be upset, not without grave danger to souls.”

Damian feared that unless God was unequivocally proclaimed to be omnipotent, with no qualification, then the majority of “unschooled” Christian believers would have their faith in God diminished, frustrated, or perhaps even destroyed. This may seem a deceptive suggestion on the part of Damian, but anyone who has taught an introductory course on a subject, say in a college setting, should be able to relate to this concern. In introductory courses instructors will often say things that are not strictly true. Good pedagogical practitioners know that beginning students need to be given straightforward general claims in order to get an initial and easy grasp of the subject. Such claims can sometimes be over-simplifications that are not strictly true. But to continually correct and qualify the claims of a subject would make it needlessly burdensome to beginning students—death by a thousand qualifications! In an attempt to not confuse non-experts with sufficiently qualified (and thus strictly true) claims, instructors will many times supply more simple (though strictly false) claims concerning the subject. Thus a simple-minded view of divine omnipotence may be an acceptable, and perhaps necessary, starting point for those less educated in the religious community. However, later, more advanced teaching can become more nuanced in its claims.

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24 Again, quoted in Holopainen (2009), 19.
I think these two reasons give some explanation why defending such a strong interpretation of divine omnipotence is so important for thinkers like Damian, Ockham and Descartes, and why they are often read—even if not correctly so—as logical voluntarists. Though I believe these suggested reasons are probably fairly common for motivating a voluntarist picture of God in relation to various domains, there could be reasons to believe that logical arguments may not enjoy the sort of modal and alethic permanence that they (or at least not all) have traditionally thought to have apart from any concern about God or his power. If it’s true that valid logical arguments are not necessary, or that our belief in such may need to be qualified in some way, then this might also give reasons to motivate someone towards a voluntarist picture of God and logic. What might some of these reasons be?

Motivated by the perceived lack of success in answering many of the semantic paradoxes, Graham Priest in particular has put forward the idea that at least some contradictions should be considered dialetheias,\(^2^5\) that is, that there are some true contradictions. Thus Priest is denying that we should hold to the universal validity of the LNC (law of non-contradiction) since he claims there are instances that prove that this law is sometimes false, and thus not necessarily true.

Similarly, the late W. V. Quine also seemed to have been open to revising our understanding of logical possibility, at least in theory. A famous passage from Quine proclaims:

\(^2^5\) To be clear, dialetheias are statements of the form \((p \& \sim p)\) that are true. See Priest, (2006). Priest is agnostic as to whether dialetheias are sentences, propositions, or statements. He claims that his theory is unaffected by the choice of truth-bearer.
Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system. Even a statement very close to the periphery can be held true in the face of recalcitrant experience by pleading hallucination or by amending certain statements of the kind called logical laws. Conversely, by the same token, no statement is immune to revision. Revision even of the logical law of excluded middle has been proposed as a means of simplifying quantum mechanics; and what difference is there between such a shift and shift whereby Kepler superseded Ptolemy, Einstein Newton, or Darwin Aristotle.  

In the above Quine states that none of our beliefs, including our beliefs about logic, are immune to revision. But if that is the case then our beliefs about what counts as valid logical implications are also open to revision, as Quine suggests with the law of excluded middle ($\neg p \lor \neg \neg p$). This would mean that even our belief in the universal validity of the LNC is also open to revision. However, some of Quine’s remarks seem to recommend that we should be reticent to follow through on this idea.  

Note that the two above non-theistically motivated reasons are epistemic in nature. In other words, Priest and Quine are not necessarily claiming that logical validities are changeable (by God or anyone else), but that we may be mistaken in our beliefs about which arguments are valid or invalid. Nevertheless, this point may serve as a motivation for logical voluntarism. For if we mere mortals can modify our beliefs about the validity status of logical arguments (as Quine so claims) or if certain long-held logical arguments do not have the status of validity that we thought them to have (as Priest so claims), then it might not be so crazy to believe that an omnipotent being can change the validity or truth-status of logical arguments (as logical voluntarists so claim).  

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26 From “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” in Quine (1980), 43.

27 Quine, (1980), 80-94. Stewart Shapiro and Jack Arnold argue that despite such reticence, Quine (what they call the radical Quine) seems forced to take dialetheism seriously. See their (2007).
So, summarizing §1, we’ve clarified that logical voluntarism is the view that God determined the modal status, as well as the validity status, of every argument at the point of creation, thus assuming a limited possibilism reading. Moreover, we’ve seen some historical and late examples of theistic as well as non-theistic reasons that suggest how someone might be motivated to the logical voluntarist position.

However, as was introduced in Chapter 2, it should be clear that the highly unintuitive nature of this view encumbers it with a host of protestations. It’s to these that we will now turn our attention.

2. Objections to Logical Voluntarism

Obviously, various objections can be raised against the logical voluntarist view—objections that I believe largely mirror those leveled against the moral voluntarist view. In this section I will examine these objections. As I will explain, I think that the logical voluntarist might be able to answer some of these objections. But I believe there is one objection that the logical voluntarist cannot give a good answer to and still consistently be a theist in the western tradition of religion. I will conclude this chapter by addressing the possibility of a logical voluntarist moving outside of this tradition in §2.4. I will argue that this move comes at too large a cost for the traditional western theist.

In the previous chapter we briefly listed several objections to moral voluntarism. I think it will be helpful here to look at these objections again, in a bit more detail this time, to see how they might be similar to objections against logical voluntarism.28 I will

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28 This section is highly indebted to Baggett and Walls (2011), 129-131.
list the objections against moral voluntarism in what I take to be their order of strength, from weakest to strongest.

One objection we previously listed against moral voluntarism was what we called the *vacuity objection*. This objection can take a couple of different forms. The first form: If God is the source of morality, then saying “God is moral” expresses a trivial truth. It is a mere tautology and not substantively or informatively true. If God merely determines what is morally good, then “God is good,” just means “God is what God determines.”

However, a more interesting version of the vacuity objection takes the following form: If God defines morality, then calling God’s actions right lacks determinate content. When theists claim God is good—that his actions are good and moral ones—they usually take such claims to have determinate content; i.e. they take them to mean something informative. But if God’s commands are the sole basis for the morality of an action, then the truth of “God is good” or “God’s actions are moral” could be consistent with God being, to all appearances, bad. The basic point of the vacuity objection, regardless of its form, is that any theory that results in such obviously vacuous moral language should be considered a failed theory.²⁹

Another objection to moral voluntarism we previously saw, the *no reasons objection*, pointed out that if God’s say-so is the sole reason for the morality of an action,

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²⁹ One can point out that the vacuity objection doesn’t necessarily follow for moral voluntarism. God need not be inconsistent in accordance with every command he might give. For instance, God might command “Always tell the truth” and yet refrain from telling the truth about some things; or he might command “Don’t eat meat and milk together” but of course—assuming God neither eats nor drinks—this is something that he cannot violate. So, I admit, there is some slippage here that the moral voluntarist may squeeze out from under the vacuity objection. Nevertheless, as we’ll see, the logical voluntarist has no such wiggle room. Thanks to Stewart Shapiro for emphasizing this point.
then there seems to be no other reason why, for instance, human slavery is wrong. But surely there are many other reasons, apart from God’s commands, for holding that such a practice is immoral. Just to name a few, human slavery seems to be a violation of basic human rights, it leads to other bad and undesirable consequences, and it seems to violate other ethical principles that we take to be intuitively and clearly correct. This objection further points out that if morality is not based upon reasons, then God’s commands are not based on reasons. And thus our obedience to these commands is nothing more than simple-minded deference to his authority and caprice.

The conclusion of the no reasons objection seems to naturally lead to what I believe is the strongest objection against moral voluntarism, what we called the *abhorrent commands objection*. This latter objection points out that if God’s say-so is the sole reason for the moral goodness of an action, then it seems to follow that God could make any action good simply by his declaring it so. Thus, slavery, genocide, rape, pedophilia, etc. would count as morally permissible actions if God decided that they were so. But surely this is wrong. The abhorrent commands objection contends that we have good reasons to believe that things such as slavery, genocide, and the rest are morally problematic regardless, or in spite of, what God may command. In essence, both the no reasons objection and the abhorrent commands objection point out that moral voluntarism makes morality, in effect, completely arbitrary upon God’s caprice, which seems clearly incorrect. Since these two objections are closely related, they are sometimes together called the *arbitrariness problem* for moral voluntarism.\(^{30}\)
2.1 Vacuity and Arbitrariness for Logical Voluntarism

Now that we’ve reviewed these objections to moral voluntarism in a little more detail, I now want to show how the objections to logical voluntarism can be analogously drawn from the objections to moral voluntarism. In addition, I will show how logical voluntarism suffers from a trouble not shared by moral voluntarism. I’ll draw the analogous objections first in this section, and then in the §§2.2 and 2.3 go on to the other problem that logical voluntarism suffers from.

I’ll start with what I considered the weakest objection for moral voluntarism: the vacuity objection. As I explained for the moral voluntarist, the vacuity objection can take a couple of different forms. Likewise, I think a similar objection can be stated a couple of different ways against the logical voluntarist as well. The first form: If God is the source of validity, then saying “God is logical” expresses a trivial truth. But as with moral voluntarism, I believe the more interesting form of this objection against logical voluntarism can go something like this: If God’s commands or will solely determine what arguments are logically valid, then calling God’s actions logical or rational (i.e. that his actions follow some identifiable set of logical rules) does not have any determinate content for his actions could then be consistent with anything. Suppose we actually had an observable example of God performing what we would normally take to be a

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30 Baggett and Walls (2011) interestingly observe that the arbitrariness problem and the vacuity objection are the “flip side” of one another. They write:

So long as there are no constraints on God’s will, and it’s God’s will that constitutes the standard for morality, then both of these implications follow: morality is whatever God says it is, no matter what, which introduces an arbitrariness problem; and God is good and right no matter what, which empties such terms of the determinate content they’re thought to possess, rendering them vacuous in the sense that they are consistent with anything at all. (p. 242)
fallacious move (e.g., from the assumed truths of $q$ and $(p\rightarrow q)$, God inferred or moved to perform $p$). According to the logical voluntarist, the move in question could still be an example of a valid logical argument if God commanded or willed that argument to be valid. But this means that the truth of “God is rational” or “God is logical” could be consistent with anything, including to all appearances that which is irrational and illogical. Surely logical voluntarism is a failed theory since it claims that there are many possibilities that seem to be only vacuously valid. Therefore, the vacuity objection’s basic point is that the logical voluntarist theory of God and logic should be considered a failed theory since it results in such obviously vacuous language.

I think the vacuity objection is a definite problem for logical voluntarism. But we should note here that this objection does not seem to have the same sort of punch that it delivers with moral voluntarism. It seems that pointing out that “God is good” is a vacuous claim is much more of a problem for the traditional western theist than pointing out that “God is logical” is vacuous. I think this is so because the claim “God is good” is taken to be more central or more important to traditional western theism’s conception of God than the claims that “God is rational” or “God is logical.” I don’t think this is because these latter claims are not held to be true by such theists. Even though God is taken to be unequivocally good by theists, and God’s “rationality” can seem fairly queer at times, I’m sure that many theists are confident that God has a rational and logical basis for all that he does, even when humans can’t understand those reasons and their basis is not so clear. Nevertheless, despite this prima facie lessening, I think this objection is actually stronger against the logical voluntarist than the moral voluntarist. I’ll explain why this is so in §2.3. Therefore, I’ll simply lay it to the side for now.
That brings us to the no reasons objection. I believe that this objection can be posed towards logical voluntarism in the following way. One may object to logical voluntarism in that if God’s commands or will are the sole basis for the validity of any valid argument, then there seems to be no other reason to believe that, say, modus ponens is valid or why the LNC is necessarily true. But surely there are other reasons to believe that such arguments are valid or necessary that have nothing to do with God’s commands or will, and it’s tempting to believe that those reasons should be God’s reasons as well. Obviously there are non-theists who hold to these traditional claims of validity on other grounds that make no such appeals to God’s commands or will, much less his existence. And if there are other reasons for justifying our beliefs about valid arguments, then it seems that God’s commands or will cannot be the sole basis for why we should believe logical arguments have the validity status that they do. Moreover, if God’s commands or will were the sole basis for the validity status of every argument, then it seems to follow that God’s commands or will are not based on reasons either. This is because we take our reasons to be why we think things are true. But, as proposed, God’s commands or will would seem to be rooted in nothing more than his mere whims. As with moral voluntarism, the no reasons objection also seems to naturally lead to what we called the abhorrent commands objection. For if God’s say-so or will is the sole reason for the validity status of any argument, then it follows that God could command or will any argument to be necessary or contingent, true or false, simply by his declaring it so, which may not seem so “abhorrent”—a point that we’ll return to briefly. We stipulated earlier that both of these objections could be grouped together as the arbitrariness problem for moral voluntarism. For it seemed that, at bottom, both of these
objections were pointing out that morality seems to have a permanence or un-arbitrariness that moral voluntarism was denying. But, as we’ll see later, the no reasons objection only serves as one motivation for the arbitrariness problem concerning logical voluntarism.

Returning to the abhorrent commands objection, as we noted with the vacuity objection, this objection does not seem to have the same sting or punch for logical voluntarism as it does for moral voluntarism. For if the validity status of any argument can be changed merely by God’s whim alone, then we only have the “abhorrent” possibility that logic does not have the sort of permanence that it is normally thought to have. These sorts of logical possibilities (e.g. the invalidity of modus ponens, the falsity of the LNC, etc.) may be undesirable or appear bizarre, but they hardly seem to have the intuitive gut-punch of the sorts of ethical possibilities that moral voluntarism suggests (e.g., that rape or genocide could be moral, that telling the truth or being kind could be evil, etc.). Point taken. But what I want to suggest here is that the abhorrent commands objection does carry over against logical voluntarism, but in a modified way. With moral voluntarism we seem to have the possibilities of wrongs that we intuitively think can’t be made right. In a similar way, with logical voluntarism we seem to have the possibilities of a different sort of “wrongs” that we also have a hard time picturing as being made “right” as well. The difference for logical voluntarism is that the possibilities in question seem not wrong in a moral sense, but rather wrong in a logical or rational sense. For we must admit that it is hard to make sense of the claim that modus ponens could be invalid, or the LNC could possibly be false. In other words, the abhorrence being suggested here in the abhorrent commands objection is that of sheer incoherence or unintelligibility. I
take this “abhorrence” to be a primary and highly intuitive objection against logical voluntarism: Logical voluntarism is false because it is incoherent or unintelligible.

In §2.2 I will address these two objections against logical voluntarism. In addition, I will return to the vacuity objection in §2.3 and show why, even though I take it to be the weakest objection for moral voluntarism, I believe this is actually the strongest objection against logical voluntarism.

2.2 The Incoherence and Unintelligibility Objections

We should be clear on what the objections of incoherence or unintelligibility amount to. Even though the word “incoherence” often serves as a synonym for “unintelligible” or “meaningless,” I believe the notion of incoherence is actually distinct from the notion of unintelligibility. Therefore, I think it will serve us to get clear on what incoherence is before framing it as an objection against logical voluntarism.

I think probability theory can help to clarify this objection. In probability theory a set of probability assignments is usually considered incoherent if the set is an example of a Dutch book.31 The metaphor refers to a set of probability assignments such that, if a person were to bet in accordance with those assignments, then he or she would lose no matter what the outcome. Thus, one could say it would be incoherent for a person to bet on such a set of probability assignments. The charge of incoherence here is a judgment upon the act of holding a certain set of beliefs (i.e., a Dutch book) simultaneously. We

31 This is an unfortunate designation used in probability literature. Given what such a book is, my apologies to any Dutch person who might be reading this.
can see an example of how this sort of criticism might arise with the following two claims:\(^\text{32}\)

(10) God transcends human experience.
(11) None of our concepts applies to God.

Assume that a theist affirms both of these claims. An astute critic will point out that if God transcends human experience, then one cannot also claim that none of our concepts applies to God. Why? According to the above argument, it seems that one of our concepts is the following, i.e. “none of our concepts applies to God.” And, laying Kantian worries to one side, we presumably know when our concepts do or don’t apply to something. But, according to the claims above, one concept that seems to apply to God is, namely, none of our concepts apply to God. We seem to have a contradiction. Thus, we derive the verdict that one cannot coherently accept (10) as well as (11) simultaneously. Given these examples, we can say that a set of plausibly observable claims\(^\text{33}\) are incoherent for any agent A if by holding one of the claims in the set (say \(p\)), A should also be committed to denying (or qualifying) at least one other claim in that set (for example \(\neg p\)). This definition assumes that an agent cannot be equally committed to two (or more) contradictory beliefs simultaneously. For if he were made aware of the contrary nature of the two (or more) beliefs in that set—if it was brought to his attention—then he would obviously reject at least one of them; or in the case where he is

\(^{32}\) This example is taken, and modified, from Plantinga (1980), 120.

\(^{33}\) By “set of plausibly observable claims” I mean only those sets of beliefs that are reasonably within an agent’s abilities and limitations to investigate. If this qualification were not included we would have a definition of incoherence that would only apply to an omniscient being.
not sure which to reject, his commitment to both beliefs (or all beliefs in the set) would at least be greatly lessened or qualified.

But how does logical voluntarism count as incoherent according to this definition? To see how this objection goes, I think we can fairly characterize the logical voluntarist position with the following argument:

(LV2):

(12) If God has power over all arguments, then he can command or will any valid argument to be invalid.
(13) God has power over all arguments.
(14) Therefore, God can command or will any valid argument to be invalid.

Now (LV2) is a valid argument. Therefore, given what (LV2) claims, the logical voluntarist should also be committed to the following claim,

(15) God can command or will (LV2) to be invalid,

since (15) is just one instance of the universal claim (14). The logical voluntarist is thus committed to claims (12) through (15). But if (15) were made true by God, then the logical voluntarist should not hold (LV2) as valid since it would then be invalid. But (LV2) just is a summary of the logical voluntarist position. Therefore, it seems the logical voluntarist must deny (15) instead. But in denying (15) the logical voluntarist would then be committed to denying (14), and claim (14) is a central belief for logical voluntarism. Therefore, it seems that logical voluntarism is incoherent since an advocate of this view cannot simultaneously hold both claims (14) and (15) as true, even though both seem to be central to the logical voluntarist position.\textsuperscript{34,35} Call this the incoherence objection.

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Nevertheless, it seems to me that this incoherence objection might not bother the logical voluntarist. For even if logical voluntarism is incoherent, that doesn’t mean, by the logical voluntarist’s own lights, that it is not true. Our definition of incoherence declared that any agent A could not simultaneously hold contradictory beliefs or at least hold them unqualifiedly. But the logical voluntarist might claim that God is not just any agent. If he is omnipotent in the way the logical voluntarist so says, then it is possible that God can change the validity status of arguments, and in limiting cases, the truth-values of logical truths and falsehoods. Therefore, according to the logical voluntarist, God could make it the case that (LV2) remains valid; thus claim (14) would still be true and claim (15) come out true as well, simultaneously!

However, I think many would be tempted to say, along with W. V. Quine, that if the logical voluntarist claims (14) and (15) can be simultaneously true he does not really know what he is saying. For it seems that we simply cannot imagine what it means to say

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34 One might claim that you need not tease out divine omnipotence into the logical voluntarist position in order to attain the status of incoherence since Mackie (1955) simply claims omnipotence itself is incoherent. However, he argues for this by characterizing omnipotence as being unable to give a satisfactory response to (what he calls) the Paradox of Omnipotence: Can God make things that he cannot control?—which I take to be a version of the Euthyphro question and dilemma. Mackie’s characterization of omnipotence is similar to that of logical voluntarism. Therefore, it seems to me, that claiming that omnipotence is an incoherent concept is just a more generalized criticism of the above claim that logical voluntarism is incoherent.

35 A side point: a critic who points out this incoherence could highlight that our descriptions of God’s actions need not deny that God is omnipotent, if such a description is of a “pseudo-task”: that is, a self-contradictory act. Mavrodès (1963) coins this phrase and defends this position. The failure to perform such a task implies no limit upon omnipotence since an incoherent description cannot be the description of a real or possible action. An omnipotent being should not be considered limited because it cannot simultaneously do X and not-X. Frankfurt (1964) points out that this criticism relies upon the principle that an omnipotent being need not be supposed capable of performing tasks whose descriptions are self-contradictory. But this seems like a principle that the logical voluntarist would deny (Frankfurt claims that Descartes would deny it). Therefore, an appeal to pseudo-tasks does not succeed as an objection against logical voluntarism since it is apparently question-begging.

36 Quine (1986), 80.
that “affirming the consequent is valid,” or “modus ponens invalid,” or “the LNC false,” or that “some contradiction is true.” In other words, if the logical voluntarist claims that the incoherence objection as unproblematic, then it appears his view has a further problem in that it seems unintelligible. Call this the unintelligibility objection. For if God’s omnipotence means he can make claims (14) and (15) true simultaneously, it’s not entirely clear what that means. In making this objection against logical voluntarism, we should be clear that we are not including or confusing the notion of contradiction with unintelligibility. Contradictory sentences or descriptions have an intelligible place in our language. If they did not, then commonly held valid logical arguments such as *ex falso quodlibet* (i.e., \((p \& \neg p) \vdash q\)) or *reductio ad absurdum* (i.e., \((p \rightarrow (q \& \neg q)) \vdash \neg p\)) would be unintelligible as well and thus we could not use them in our logical derivations. Rather, the unintelligibility objection being put here to logical voluntarism is a challenge to the validity-status assignments it gives to certain arguments and claims. We understand many fallacious claims. For example, we understand what affirming the consequent is: \((q, (p \rightarrow q) \vdash \neg p)\). But we have no idea how such an argument could be valid. We understand claims of the form \((p \& \neg p)\). We just have no idea how such claims could be true.\(^{37}\) Gijsbert Van Den Brink elaborates well the problem that the unintelligibility objection is highlighting:

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\(^{37}\) One suggestion for intelligibility might be that claiming something is the case means other things cannot be the case. In other words, meaningful statements rules things out. But take the following statement: “Everything is true.” This is a statement ruling nothing out. But even though this statement is presumably false, we understand what the statement is claiming, namely every statement there possibly is, is true. Thus “Everything is true” is meaningful even though it rules nothing out. Therefore, the intuition that meaning must rule out things is not a necessary condition for meaningfulness. See Priest (2006), page 28 for a fuller discussion.
In saying that it is possible for God to make contradictions true, i.e. to do the logically impossible, either we derive the meaning of “possible,” from our standard framework of modal logic, in which case the claim is contradictory, or we equivocate upon the meaning of “possible,” in which case it is unclear what we are saying. In both cases, we would be flouting our ordinary standards of speech and thought if we held that the claim is nonetheless true.\textsuperscript{38}

Nevertheless, the logical voluntarist may point out that our inability to imagine things like contradictory or invalid states of affairs only emphasizes the limitedness of our mental capacities.\textsuperscript{39} It does not show that logical voluntarism is false. In fact, given the sort of motivations we saw with Peter Damian, William of Ockham, and Descartes, the logical voluntarist may claim that this observation only shows just how great and inscrutable God’s omnipotence is, especially in comparison to our own limited abilities. Why believe that only those utterances that are conceivable or meaningful to us are the only ones that are true or capable of being true for God? As much as we may firmly believe this is the case, it seems presumptuous to think that this must be the case. This line of argument actually leads naturally back to the vacuity objection against logical voluntarism. I’ll address that objection in the next section.

But concerning the incoherence and unintelligibility objections, we need to see the force of the sort of responses that I’ve suggested that logical voluntarist can offer us here. For both objections, it should be obvious that appealing to our commonly held views concerning logical validity—whether formal or informal—or appealing to

\textsuperscript{38} Van Den Brink (1993), 188.

\textsuperscript{39} Miller (1957) agrees with this response arguing that Descartes’ strong view of God’s omnipotence undermines our ability to perceive necessary truths, like valid logical arguments. He claims that if God could’ve made necessary truths differently, then we are being misled to believe they are necessary when they are not. Frankfurt (1977) corroborates this interpretation claiming that Descartes held that our inability to conceive of true contradictions is merely a contingent fact about us. But Curley (1984) claims Frankfurt has misinterpreted Descartes. I’ll leave that debate to the Cartesian scholars.
commonly held views concerning truth and meaning, which also rest upon our views of logical validity, cannot refute logical voluntarism since this position questions the very status of such views. And this should be no surprise, for how can one argue for the validity of an argument—like the LNC, or modus ponens—without assuming the validity of that argument? Stating this point more generally: An advocate of some logic \(L_1\) can only argue that some rival logic \(L_2\) is false or invalid while assuming \(L_1\). But of course the adherent of \(L_2\) will not accept arguments on the basis of \(L_1\) since this is the very point of disagreement. Thus \(L_2\) cannot be refuted on the basis of \(L_1\). Obviously, this predicament is completely symmetrical for \(L_2\) also cannot argue that logic \(L_1\) is false or deductively invalid without assuming \(L_2\).\(^{40}\)

This shows that neither the incoherence objection nor the unintelligibility objection can deductively refute logical voluntarism. That is, we cannot give the logical voluntarist a successful valid deductive argument where the conclusion “Logical voluntarism is false” comes out unabashedly sound (the logical voluntarist will agree that the premises are true) and valid (the logical voluntarist will agree that the conclusion is entailed by the premises). Thus it seems that the logical voluntarist has a good case for believing that the validity status and truth status of each and every logical argument is whatever it is because God commands it is to be the case.

\[\text{Priest (2006), 170-1. Given such a debate one could say it’s contingent that there are necessary truths for the logical truths that one believes to be necessary seem dependent upon the contingent choice of one’s logical theory.}\]
2.3 The Vacuity Objection

Given the failure of the incoherence and unintelligibility objections, it seems the logical voluntarist has a secure, even if bizarre, philosophical position. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the western tradition of theism, I believe that logical voluntarism should still be rejected as the way of thinking about the relationship between God and logic. Even though logical voluntarism cannot be given a knockdown argument—it cannot be deductively refuted (see above)—I believe that one can still mount some justification for rejecting it.

One point I think should be noted here is that the logical voluntarist option seems highly incongruous with the commonly held intuition that logical arguments are independent of human language and thought. We usually believe logic is what it is despite how we humans think or how we talk. Logical voluntarism does not violate that intuition directly since it is God, not humanity, which has the ability to change the validity statuses of arguments. Nevertheless, this independence from humans is intuitive in the sense that arguments seem to have a permanence not enjoyed by many other things in our experience. To hold that God could change logic so effortlessly still pushes against this intuition. All philosophers know intuitions can sometimes be massaged away or modified. However, we should never quickly abandon our initial and deeply held inclinations. Claims that fly in the face of such intuitions need convincing argumentation. Though the logical voluntarist seems to have been able to answer our
objections up to this point, I’m not sure that we have any convincing argumentation that
their view is true.\footnote{Against my claim Conee (1991) argues: “It is nonetheless clearly intelligible to claim that
someone has an ability to do something that is not done. This is to claim that someone has of an ability that
is not exercised. It is equally intelligible to claim that someone has an ability to do the impossible” (p.
456). However, it is far from clear to me that this is \textit{equally} intelligible. I don’t see how this is an intuitive
or obvious move and so I believe Conee owes us more of an argument for why we should believe it.}

Which brings us to what I consider to be the most pressing concern for a logical
voluntarist, at least if he wants to remain within the tradition of western theism. Earlier
we placed aside the vacuity objection, where I commented that though it is the weakest
for moral voluntarism, I think that this objection is actually the strongest objection one
can give against logical voluntarism. In the following I’ll explain why I think this is the
case. However, I’ll also investigate what follows for the logical voluntarist who is
willing to try and “bite the bullet” of the vacuity objection.

I had claimed that the more interesting (and thus tougher) version of the vacuity
objection for logical voluntarism was the following: If God’s commands or will solely
determine what arguments are logically valid, then calling God’s actions logical or
rational (i.e. that his actions follow some identifiable set of logical implications) does not
have determinate content for his actions could then be consistent with anything. The
problem for the logical voluntarist is that the belief that God is logical or rational is
consistent with God being, to all appearances, irrational or illogical. As pointed out
before, the vacuity objection’s basic point is that any theory should be considered a failed
theory if it results in such obviously vacuous language. I now want to tease out why this
is actually a substantial problem for the logical voluntarist from within the western
religious perspective, if he wants to remain consistent with that tradition of theism. I will argue here that the vacuity objection, as it applies to logical voluntarism, shows more than just that the domain of logical language would be vacuous, it shows how all language as it applies to God, or revealed by God, comes out vacuous, and thus makes such language malfunction for its usual intended communicative purposes. I will explain why this is so and why it is such a huge problem from the perspective of the Abrahamic tradition.

As we previously specified in Chapter 1, the tradition of theism we are assuming in this work holds that God has revealed himself to human beings throughout history (i.e. revealed theology). Because such encounters with God are believed to have been rare, this tradition has usually focused upon the oral or written testimonial accounts of those who have claimed to encounter God. This is the reason why sacred texts, or Scripture, hold such primacy within this tradition. Scripture is believed to contain, among other things, claims from God communicating true data about God. To name just a very few key claims, Scripture declares the following:

(16) God is good. 42

(17) God only tells the truth. 43

(18) God does not change. 44

42 “For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations,” (Psalm 100:5). “Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever,” (Psalm 106:1). “No one is good except God alone,” (Mark 10:18).

43 “Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,” (Deuteronomy 7:9). “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?” (Numbers 23:19).
These sorts of statements, and others, are the foundation upon which many theists within the western tradition of religion build their religious beliefs upon, and thus from which reasoning concerning God, religion, and moral actions are made by such theists. But the vacuity objection points out that if logical voluntarism is true, then none of the above statements—nor any statements concerning God inferred from the above—can be taken at their usual face value. For logical voluntarism implies that any claim God may have communicated, or is taken to be a true claim about God, cannot be understood by us in any usually straightforward way. For any kind of communication relies upon certain assumptions about inferential connections to other claims—what is included or excluded—at least to some degree.45 Linguistic communication relies upon and assumes certain inferential rules, presumably both conceptual and logical. So when we communicate with others it seems that we need to assume a certain minimal amount of logic—at least rules that operate in the sort of deductive ways logic is usually taken to operate. But if our interlocuter is a being that may not only assume standard logical rules, but has the ability to change such rules, then it does not seem that we could truly

44 “[The earth and the heavens] will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will away, but you are the same, and your years have no end,” (Psalm 102: 25-7). “For I the LORD do not change,” (Malachi 3:6). “So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us,” (Hebrews 6:17-18).

45 Shapiro (2007) brings up a similar problem for dialetheism. In sum, Shapiro argues that there are certain notions and concepts that the dialetheist invokes (informally) that cannot be adequately expressed unless her attendant meta-theory is completely consistent. I’m making a somewhat similar point here: God cannot be understood to be expressing the notions and concepts we think he is expressing unless logical voluntarism is false.
understand what such a being meant when it communicated to us. Let’s tease this out some to see this point.

When God reveals, say, claim (16) as true, on the logical voluntarist picture the following claim could be true as well:

(16a) God is not good.

But (16) and (16a) are obviously contradictory. God cannot be good and not good, at least not at the same time and in the same way. But on the logical voluntarist picture, such claims could be simultaneously true if God commanded or willed them to be so. Due to this possibility, if God revealed (16) as true about himself, it could very well be the case that God was also not not good. In other words the truth of (16) is consistent with God being evil by the logical voluntarist’s lights.

But a traditional western theist, perhaps sympathetic to logical voluntarism, might object that (16a) is not a real possibility because God has revealed not only (16) to be true but he has also revealed that:

(17) God only tells the truth.

Thus, so the argument goes, God cannot reveal (16) as true and make (16a) true as well, for that would contradict the truth of (17). Thus, even according to logical voluntarism, it follows that we can and should understand (16) as we normally would understand such a claim. But hold on, for on the logical voluntarist picture the following could be true as well:

(17a) God sometimes fails to tell the truth.

Again we have contradictory claims: (17) and (17a). Given this possibility on the logical voluntarist picture, one could then not understand (17) as we normally would understand
such a concatenation of words put together: that God only tells the truth without exception. But again, the logical voluntarist may further object that (17a), as well as (16a), cannot be true because God has also revealed the following to be true:

(18) God does not change.

Therefore, if God does not change (i.e. (18) is true), and he reveals himself as being good (i.e. (16) is true), and reveals that he always tells the truth (i.e. (17) is true), then it follows that neither (16a) nor (17a) could ever be true. But unfortunately appealing to (18) does not get logical voluntarism off the vacuity objection’s hook. For if logical voluntarism is true—that God could change the truth status or validity status of any claim—then (18) can be simultaneously true along with

(18a) God sometimes changes.

In fact, (18) could be simultaneously true with

(18b) God always changes (!).

Therefore, claims (16), (17), and even (18)—all statements that western theists claim God has revealed about himself—cannot be understood in the usual way. That is, we cannot justifiably believe that God never changes without exception as (18) would normally be understood; we cannot justifiably believe that God only tells truth as (17) would normally be understood; and we cannot justifiably believe that God is good as (16) would normally be understood. Moreover, we should be able to see how this result generalizes to all claims concerning God (those revealed and those inferred from special revelation) since no claims about God on the logical voluntarist picture could be taken to clearly mean what we would normally take them to mean.
This inability to take God’s own revelatory claims, and other claims about God, in a usually understood way is a serious problem for theists in western tradition since they often hold that the main datum for thinking and theorizing about God is God’s self-revelation. As I’ve argued above, if logical voluntarism is true, then it follows that this datum is a completely unreliable source of information for we cannot justifiably believe that what is being communicated by this datum is what we think is being communicated. The “possibilities” that logical voluntarism avails itself of makes philosophical formulation and theological discussion essentially pointless. If logical voluntarism were adopted, there would need to be a massive overhaul—to say the least—of all of the traditional claims about God in the Abrahamic tradition. For none of those claims could necessarily mean what they’ve been thought to mean. It would be as if humans on earth had been receiving messages from aliens in outer space for years and decades. Imagine that over this time some people (say some academics) thought they had deciphered this seeming alien language—what its grammar and vocabulary consisted in. Based upon this datum, a detailed account of what these aliens were like was developed: their thought and civilization, including their science, economics, philosophy, political thought, sociology, etc. But then imagine that this academic community eventually discovered that these aliens had actually been operating according to a logic that was utterly and completely “alien” from our own understanding of logic. This discovery would bring the whole edifice and discipline of “alien studies” into question. For these scientists could not justifiably believe that all that they had thought they had understood and learned of these beings was what they had thought or was in fact true.46
In sum, the vacuity objection shows that if logical voluntarism were true all language as it applies to God, or even revealed by God, is essentially useless, which calls the primary source of datum (i.e. special revelation) of the western theistic tradition into question. Therefore, the vacuity objection shows that logical voluntarism is an unacceptable picture of the relationship between God and logic for those in the western tradition of theism.

But perhaps I’ve moved too quickly here. Suppose logical voluntarism is true. One might then ask: Why can’t the western theist go on to claim that God simply doesn’t, and furthermore won’t make contradictions true? In the same way that a libertarian about freewill might claim that moral praiseworthiness is dependent upon the ability to do otherwise. Perhaps the praiseworthiness of God—which is tied to his consistency in character and action—is dependent upon his ability to do otherwise (i.e. that he could make contradictions true). What this view is suggesting is that we read logical voluntarism only according to the limited possibilism reading, rejecting the universal possibilism reading as implausible. Though I’ve tried to only assume the limited possibilism reading throughout this chapter, I don’t think this helps the logical voluntarist at all against the vacuity objection.

There’s a couple of different ways to understand the limited possibilism reading. One: God once had the ability to change the truth status and validity status of every claim and argument at any time; but once he decided upon the truth and validity statuses of these claims (presumably at the time of creation), then these statuses remained fixed—

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46 This point is similar to Quine’s notion of “radical translation” illustrated most memorably in his famous “Gavagai” thought experiment. See Quine (1960), chapter 2.
God cannot now change them; he no longer has the ability to do so. Limited possibilism summarized:

(19) God has the ability to determine the truth and validity status of any claim at any time, before creation.

Two: God still has the ability to change the truth status and validity status of every claim at any time; but God never follows through on his power to make such changes. Summarized:

(20) God has the ability to determine the truth and validity status of any claim at any time, but he will never do so.

What’s wrong with this limited possibility suggestion, on either interpretation? Doesn’t it get the logical voluntarist around the vacuity objection? I don’t think so, and for two reasons.

First, I don’t see any merit in the claim that God’s praiseworthiness is dependent upon his ability to do otherwise, at least not in many cases. People are sometimes considered praiseworthy for things that are beyond their control or power. For instance, a person could be praised for his or her natural beauty. The person obviously did not have control over this aspect of himself or herself yet we consider it something worth praising. In the same way, it seems to me that God could still be praiseworthy for something that is beyond his control or power.

Second, the limited possibilism suggestion (on either (19) or (20)) gives away too much for it still delivers the same consequences as an unvarnished universal possibilism reading of logical voluntarism. In other words, universal possibilism is not ruled out by the limited possibilism view. The first suggested way to understand the limited possibilism reading of logical voluntarism was:
(19) God has the ability to determine the truth and validity status of any claim at any time, before creation.

But why couldn’t the following be true as well?

(19a) Before creation, God decreed (19) to be necessarily false.

If (19a) was made true by God before creation, then we could not justifiably believe that (19) was true now. Therefore, this understanding of limited possibilism does not escape the vacuity objection. A similar problem holds for the second way to understand limited possibilism:

(20) God has the ability to determine the truth and validity status of any claim at any time, but he will never do so.

However, if logical voluntarism is true, (20) could be simultaneously true with the following:

(20a) God has the ability to determine the truth and validity status of any claim at any time, and he will do so.

In other words, what (19a) and (20a) are pointing out is that a limited possibilism reading of logical voluntarism in no way helps us to know claims concerning God could be understood as they would normally be understood. On the logical voluntarist picture, we just could not know that predictions about how God would or should act would hold true. As Peter Geach points out, “[W]e cannot say how a supra-logical God would act or how he would communicate anything to us by way of revelation.”

Therefore, since the limited possibilism reading delivers the same consequences of the universal possibilism reading, it doesn’t help in defending logical voluntarism

47 Geach (1973), 11.
against the vacuity objection. Furthermore, since the vacuity objection highlights that the primary source of datum for the traditional theist is called into question, the traditional western theist should reject logical voluntarism. Regardless of how God and logic are actually interrelated, the price of logical voluntarism is too high for the theist of the Abrahamic tradition.

2.4 Biting the Bullet of the Vacuity Objection

I’ve argued that even though logical voluntarism cannot be deductively refuted, the traditional western theist has good reason to reject it in that its acceptance would make worthless the primary source of his information concerning God (i.e. special revelation). All language revealed by God or applied to God would come out vacuously uninformative. But the logical voluntarist might reply in the following way. Perhaps the western tradition of theism should be given up, or modified. Perhaps the conviction that God’s revelation is capable of being understood in any straightforward or regular way by human beings is a mistake or oversimplification. Maybe it is mere hubris to think that we finite mortals can come to even an approximation of understanding what an infinite being may communicate. In essence, this suggestion is claiming that we accept the outcome of the vacuity objection: We cannot straightforwardly understand God’s revelatory claims about himself, nor claims about God inferred from revelation, nor applied to God in any usually understood way of interpreting those same words as used in other contexts. In fact, there is a long tradition of theology that I believe is sympathetic to this response.
The tradition I have in mind here goes back, at least, to the writings of one Dionysius (c. AD 1st century), an early Christian mystic.\footnote{There is some question as to who Dionysius actually was. Depending on the literature you look at, he is either referred to as Dionysius the Aeropagite, or Pseudo-Dionysius. I’ll sidestep that historical question and just refer to him as Dionysius.} In his writings, Dionysius distinguished between two different ways of doing theology: \textit{Kataphatic} or positive theology, which is constituted by affirming claims concerning God; and \textit{apophatic} or negative theology, which is made up of negating claims concerning God. Vladimir Lossky in his theology of the Eastern Christian Church points out that Dionysius claimed:

The first leads us to some knowledge of God, but is an imperfect way. The perfect way, the only way which is fitting in regard to God, who is of His very nature unknowable, is the second—which leads us finally total ignorance. All knowledge has as its object that which is. Now God is beyond all that exists. In order to approach Him it is necessary to deny all that is inferior to Him. It is by \textit{unknowing} (agnosia) that one may know Him who is above every possible object of knowledge. Proceeding by negations one ascends from the inferior degrees of being to the highest, by progressively setting aside all that can be known, in order to draw near to the Unknown in the darkness of absolute ignorance. For even as light, and especially abundance of light, renders darkness invisible; even so the knowledge of created things, and especially excess of knowledge, destroys the ignorance which is the only way by which one can attain to God in Himself.\footnote{Lossky (1957), 25.}

Claiming agreement with Dionysius, Lossky claims that God is unknowable because he is “beyond all that exists.” The idea seems to be that God’s nature is such that we do not have categories of thought (and thus language) that corresponds to what God is like.\footnote{I think some of the reasons for motivating logical voluntarism we saw earlier (§1.2) fit well with this picture. Remember the quote we saw from Descartes earlier:} For my part, I know that my intellect is finite and God’s power is infinite, and so I set no bounds to it; I consider only what I can conceive and what I cannot conceive. . . . And so I boldly assert that God can do everything which I conceive to be possible, but I am not so bold as to deny that he can do whatever conflicts with my understanding—I merely say that it involves a contradiction [Descartes (1991), 363].
Therefore, according to Lossky, the most we can say about God is what he is *not* like. But I think it should immediately strike any clear-headed person that this apophatic approach to theology, as described, is problematic. For is it not to affirm something about God to claim that God is “beyond all that exists”? And even if God is “unknowable,” don’t we know at least know one thing about him then, namely that he is unknowable? This sort of talk seems to put the advocate of apophatic theology in a pretty pickle: affirming contradictory claims. Or perhaps I’m not grasping what the apophatic theologian is up to.

In his book *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (1994), Michael Sells gives perhaps the clearest, and seemingly sympathetic, exposition of what someone like the apophatic theologian is attempting. He calls such attempts examples of the *aporia*, or the unresolvable dilemma of transcendence. He attempts his own explanation of such with the following:

The transcendent is beyond names, ineffable. In order to claim that the transcendent is beyond names, however, I must give it a name, “the transcendent.” Any statement of ineffability, “X is beyond names,” generates the aporia that the subject of the statement must be named (as X) in order for us to affirm that it is beyond names. [. . .] This [sort of] discourse has been called negative theology. Denying what God is like, is affirming what God is; but this in turn must be denied—and this proceeds on to a linguistic regress. The regress is harnessed and becomes the guiding semantic force, the *dynamis*, of a new kind of language. This language is called *apophasis*.51

So Sells explains that apophatic language is more than just giving negating claims of God, but a series of claims that continue to negate. And furthermore, he explains that this

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is not a meaningless double-talk, but an entirely new type of language or discourse. He goes on to clarify what this new language is doing.

Any [example of apophasis] saying (even a negative saying) demands a correcting proposition, an unsaying. But that correcting proposition which unsays the previous proposition is in itself a “saying” that must be “unsaid” in turn. It is the tension between the two propositions that the discourse becomes meaningful. That tension is momentary. It must be continually re-earned by ever new linguistic acts of unsaying.  

I think the idea that Sells is gesturing at is something like the following. Suppose the apophatic theologian claims that “God is not finite.” This implies then God is infinite, right? “No,” claims the apophatic theologian. “God is also not infinite either.” So God is neither finite nor infinite? “Correct,” replies the apophatic theologian, “though this claim must also be further negated.” I don’t claim to understand what something like “God is neither finite nor infinite” amounts to; but I think the apophatic idea is that the “meaning” of such a claim (or eventual claim?), its “momentary tension,” is not a straightforward assertion that is emphatically true or false. Rather is it the sort of thing that we must revisit, or “re-earn” again through this sort of discourse in order to understand it (!), in some way. As Sells explains, “Rather than pointing to an object, apophatic language attempts to evoke in the reader an event.”

Though I think Sells’ above exposition is helpful here, I admit that I still struggle to grasp exactly what apophatic language is attempting to accomplish. Do the notions of “meaning” or “truth” or “falsehood” have any corresponding notions in apophatic language? If not, what exactly is being “communicated” to the listener? Concerning our

53 Ibid., 10.
discussion, I think we can largely put such questions aside. More apt for us is the question of what the logical upshot of this apophatic approach to theology is for the logical voluntarist who wants to escape the brunt of the vacuity objection? Sells makes a comment that I think is apt here: “For the apophatic writer, the logical rule of non-contradiction functions for object entities [i.e. understood as everything other than God]. When the subject of discourse is a non-object and no-thing [i.e. God], it is not irrational that such logic be superseded.”\textsuperscript{54} Therefore, a logical voluntarist who is sympathetic to this apophatic approach to theology might utilize it to reject the vacuity objection above. Such a response might go: Since God is beyond our intellectual ability to comprehend we cannot justifiably believe that the valid arguments of our cherished logical systems apply to him. In fact it seems that logic, as we see it, requires kataphatic (i.e. clear assertive) claims—even in its use of negation. Therefore, given the perspective of apophatic theology, the vacuity objection concerning logical voluntarism (i.e. all language applied to God is vacuous) is just an unsurprising result given the kind of “no-thing” God is.\textsuperscript{55}

However, I don’t think appealing to apophatic theology lets the logical voluntarist get away so freely. There is a stiff price to pay for opting for this position. I think this will become apparent in the following three response to the apophatic view.

First, I want to push back against the conception of God the apophatic view presents. Why believe that God is transcendent to the point of requiring apophatic

\textsuperscript{54} Sells (1994), 4.

\textsuperscript{55} One may object that I’ve subtly shifted from talking about what God can or can’t do to what God is or is not. But I think the distinction is closely related. It seems intuitive to me that if we cannot say what God is like, then we more than likely cannot say what he can do or not do. Therefore, I do not believe I’ve shifted to an unrelated subject. Thanks to Stewart Shapiro for pressing this point.
theology? Most advocates of the western tradition of religion have gladly affirmed that God is transcendent and mysterious: There are things about God that we cannot fully understand or know, now or perhaps ever. Scriptural passages like the following have often informed such a view: “For my [i.e. God’s] thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD,” (Isaiah 55:8).56 But, as Michael Rea highlights, analytic philosophers of religion “typically share the supposition that we can arrive at clear knowledge of God, even if that knowledge is not complete and some mysteries remain.”57 Put simply, believing that God is transcendent is consistent with denying apophatic theology as the only or best way to make claims about God. Affirming that God is transcendent does not require denying the legitimacy of positive affirmations concerning God. Thus, I do not see why believing that God is transcendent gives any credence to upholding apophatic theology, and so I don’t see this as a good reason to uphold logical voluntarism either.

Second, it seems to me that the advocates of apophatic theology want to have their cake and eat it too. Even though they claim that God is not bound by what we perceive as rational, apophatic theologians are usually adamant that their position does not entail irrationality. As we’ve seen with Lossky, Eastern Orthodox Christians traditionally uphold the apohatic approach to theology. In addition, this tradition also emphasizes personal experience as a primary means of spirituality. But, traditionally, members of this church believe that the dogmas of the Eastern Church must act as a

56 Traditional western Christians affirm New Testament passages like the following to uphold God’s transcendence: “For nothing will be impossible with God,” (Luke 1:37).

57 Rea (2009), 9.
corrective to subjective mystical experience. Any interpretation of such experience must cohere with their official teachings. Lossky comments: “Outside the truth kept by the whole church personal experience would be deprived of all certainty, of all objectivity. It would be a mingling of truth and falsehood, of reality and illusion: ‘mysticism’ in the bad sense of the word.” He re-emphasizes this point: “For the inner experience of the Christian develops within the circle delineated by the teaching of the Church: within the dogmatic framework which moulds his person.”\textsuperscript{58} Christos Yannaras, another Christian writer in the Eastern Church, says things similar to Lossky here. “The priority of empirical participation in relation to the intellectual approach to ecclesial truth means neither cloudy mysticism and refuge in emotional exaltations, nor to overlook and devalue logical thought.”\textsuperscript{59} But how did the Eastern Church come to their official dogmas? It seems to me that they relied upon the experiences of the first Christians, including their written Scripture concerning these experiences. The outcome, claim advocates of the Eastern Church, is the dogma of their church. Yannaras writes: “The result was an excellent achievement of Greek reason which, without betraying Christian truth and the apophatic knowledge of this truth, remained absolutely consistent with the demands for philosophical formulations.”\textsuperscript{60} We see here that Yannaras is quite explicit in claiming that the official apophatic claims of the church are logically consistent with other philosophical claims, presumably among these claims are the valid arguments of

\textsuperscript{58} Lossky (1957), 9, 21.
\textsuperscript{59} Yannaras (1991), 18-19.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 19.
logic. So here, along with Lossky, Yannaras affirms that apophatic theology does not imply irrationality, or an “anything goes” result. Claims of spiritual experience must be consistent with the claims of the church, which are the result of apophatic theology. But, it seems to me, given the commitments of apophatic theology, too much rope has been given up to still have the intellectual grip on theology that apophatic theologians claim they have. Yannaras cannot claim, for example, that our knowledge of God is totally incomprehensible and simultaneously claim that our theological formulations are “absolutely consistent” with other philosophical claims. Take X to be a placeholder for some piece of apophatic knowledge concerning God and take \( p \) to be some clear affirmation of philosophy. Thus, an instance of Yannaras’ general claim is the following:

\( (X \& p) \) is true.

But one can’t affirm (21) without knowing that both sides of the conjunction are true. Given the nature of apophasis—as laid out earlier by Sells as a “tension” or “event”—one cannot affirm (21) because \( X \) may contain (for all we know) \( \neg p \), or perhaps \( X \) doesn’t contain the kind of thing that we can call “true” or “false.” Thus, despite affirming that apophatic theology does not entail irrationality, there’s nothing to prevent what we normally take to be irrational (i.e. invalid, untrue) claims. Despite assuring us to the contrary, apophatic theologians do not give us any reason to justifiably believe that irrationality is not so entailed. Therefore, here again is another reason to avoid apophatic theology and thus another reason not to use it as a defense of logical voluntarism.

Third, the western tradition of theology has long affirmed the transcendence of God without the costs of apophatic theology in that it has long held what is often called the doctrine of analogy, which Thomas Aquinas (AD 1225-74) is usually credited with
developing. Aquinas held that when a word is applied to both a created being and to God, it is not being used *univocally* (i.e., with exactly the same meaning) in the two instances; yet neither is the word being used *equivocally* (i.e., with two completely different meanings) as when “bank” is used to apply to the land next to a river or the place where you deposit your paycheck. Rather, when a word is applied to both a created being and God (e.g., Sally is *good* and God is *good*), then the word is being used *analogously* (i.e., with some overlap of meaning). Theologian Michael Horton explains the motivation for this view:

> When we say that God is good, we assume we know what *good* means from our ordinary experience with fellow human beings. However, God is not only *quantitatively* better than we are; his goodness is *qualitatively* different from creaturely goodness. Nevertheless, because we are created in God’s image, we share this predicate with God analogically. *Goodness*, is attributed to God and Sally, is similar but with greater dissimilarity.\(^{61}\)

Given this motivation to see God as qualitatively different from all created things (i.e. transcendent), the doctrine of analogy should be seen as a theory of how to understand predication concerning claims about God. Again, the western theistic tradition has long affirmed this theory as a part of how to understand God’s revelatory claims about himself, and claims made about God inferred from his revelation.

But the apophatic thinker may claim that the theist who adheres to the doctrine of analogy is being disingenuous for pushing the vacuity objection against logical voluntarism as being problematic for understanding religious language. In other words, by being committed to the doctrine of analogy he is already claiming that statements

\(^{61}\) Horton (2011), 55.
about God cannot be understood in a usually straightforward (i.e. univocal) way. Therefore, the traditional western theist is being inconsistent in rejecting logical voluntarism on the basis of the vacuity objection.

However, I think that there is wiggle room for the Abrahamic theist to explain his commitment to the doctrine of analogy while still justifiably rejecting logical voluntarism on the grounds that it obliterates the means of understanding God’s revelation. I think the traditional theist must admit there is a limit to the application of the doctrine of analogy when it concerns claims about God and logic. I know of no particular claims from Scripture that specify that “God is logical” or “God is rational.” Nevertheless, it seems clear that many theists want to affirm such claims as inferences from other revelatory claims concerning God. Of course it is obvious that God’s logical acumen far outstrips even the most brilliant minds among we humans; so Sally can’t be as rational or as intellectually acute as an omniscient mind such as God’s. But surely such claims as “God is logical” or “God is rational” cannot be understood analogically in the sense that when the premises are true of some valid logical argument, then the conclusion must be true for us; while also claiming that for the same argument that somehow the conclusion does not have to be true for God. Thus I’m suggesting that the doctrine of analogy has some limitation of application: it cannot be fully applied to claims about God and logic. If such claims are not understood univocally, then it seems we have—if not logical voluntarism—something akin to it lurking close behind. So it seems to me that the traditional theist can unhypocritically adhere to the doctrine of analogy (in the modified form I’ve suggested here) while still rejecting logical voluntarism and its apophatic interpretation.
Given these responses it seems to me that appealing to apophatic theology does not get the logical voluntarist out of the problems concerning God and language that the vacuity objection points out. If the apophatic perspective is adopted, then I don’t see how any substantive philosophical reasoning concerning God can be done—the kind done by most philosophers of religion, theologians, and even the everyday theists claim to do. I suppose the apophatic theologian could continue to talk and theorize as the traditional western theist does, but always keeping in the back of his mind that none of these claims can be taken in any sort of usual fashion. But it seems to me that most traditional western theists should find this cost far too high and very unsatisfying. When one makes a claim that he believes to be true, or an argument that he takes to be valid or cogent, there is some satisfaction based on the underlying assumption that his claims and arguments are matching up with the world—maybe not perfectly, but at least attempting to. It seems that language concerning (at least) most subjects should be more than a mere game. If my wife says “I love you,” I personally would take no joy in this utterance if it did not mean what I normally thought it to mean, namely that my wife did indeed love me. If the theist adopts the apophatic interpretation of theism, then claims concerning God (e.g., “God [is] merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,” (Exodus 34:6)) cannot be taken too seriously either. But it seems to me that many theists usually take religious claims like these very seriously; and so they should reject the apophatic theological suggestion.
3. Conclusion

In this chapter we clarified logical voluntarism more fully and looked at the motivations, theistic and non-theistic, for holding this view. We then examined how the objections often leveled against moral voluntarism carry over, for the most part, to logical voluntarism. We saw how the incoherence and unintelligibility objections were perhaps not successful in that logical voluntarism cannot be deductively refuted. Nevertheless, we argued that the traditional western theist has justifiable grounds for rejecting logical voluntarism on the basis of the vacuity objection: logical voluntarism destroys the main source of datum concerning God for the traditional theist in that it implies that claims about God cannot be understood in any usual straightforward way of interpreting language. In the last section we investigated what would follow if the logical voluntarist accepted the outcome of the vacuity objection by adopting the apophatic tradition of theology. We argued that the apophatic interpretation had too high of a cost for the traditional western theist.

In conclusion, since logical voluntarism does not cohere with the commitment to the understandability of special revelation associated with traditional Abrahamic theism (i.e. it does not respect at least part of the notion of God as laid out in Chapter 1), I believe logical voluntarism does not count as a good explanation of the relationship between God and logic. Therefore, we should reject logical voluntarism as an acceptable explanation of the relationship between God and logic.

Perhaps the second option of the Logiphro will be a better way of thinking about the relationship between the God of classical theism and logical consequence.
CHAPTER 4: LOGICAL NON-VOLUNTARISM

To recount, we began our investigation of what relationship may exist between God and logic by following the infamous Euthyphro question from philosophical antiquity. As we saw, a good contemporary rendering of Socrates’ original question to the religious zealot Euthyphro goes like the following: “Are morally good actions morally good simply in virtue of God’s favoring them? Or does God favor them because they are—independently of his favoring them—morally good?”\(^1\) For those who wish to establish a strong relationship between God’s commands or will and morality, the question presents at least two problematic options, which has become known as the Euthyphro Dilemma: either God’s will or commands determine the nature of moral goodness (i.e. moral voluntarism) or God wills or commands that which is morally good, and yet the nature of moral goodness is something independent and antecedent to God’s willing or commanding it (i.e. moral non-voluntarism). Suggesting that this ancient question and its attending dilemma are a natural and helpful way to orient our own investigation, I proposed a similar Socratic question concerning God and logic: “Are valid logical arguments valid simply in virtue of God’s favoring them? Or does God favor them because they are—independently of his favoring them—valid?” Like the

\(^1\) Again, Antony (2009), 71.
original Euthyphro question, this one also seems to give at least two options: either God’s will or commands determine the validity of arguments (i.e. logical voluntarism) or God wills or commands what is logically valid, and yet validity is independent and antecedent to God willing or commanding it (i.e. logical non-voluntarism). I dubbed this the logical Euthyphro dilemma, or simply the Logiphro for short.

In the last chapter we investigated the voluntarist horn of the Logiphro and concluded that it demands too high of a price for the traditional western theist. Thus, we concluded that logical voluntarism does not count as a good explanation of the relationship between God and logic. This leaves us with the other horn of the Logiphro dilemma, logical non-voluntarism. This chapter will investigate whether logical non-voluntarism is a philosophically viable alternative to conceive of the relationship between God and logic.

In §1 I will clarify what the thesis of logical non-voluntarism is, and what advantages the view gives, especially in contrast to logical voluntarism. This section will first present logical non-voluntarism as a platonist conception (i.e. a theory that appeals to abstract objects). Though I will also discuss a nominalist conception (i.e. a theory that does not appeal to abstract objects) of logical non-voluntarism in §3, there are three reasons for presenting the platonist version first. One, as I’ll explain in §1, a platonist rendering of non-voluntarism is the most naturally suggestive and historically influential interpretation of such a view. Two, logical platonism (as well as other kinds of platonism) is clearly more popular than nominalism among theistic philosophers and
theologians.² And three, given the problems for platonist construals of logical non-voluntarism to be discussed in §2, this will naturally lead to discussing a nominalist understanding of logical non-voluntarism as a possible alternative in §3. Logical nominalism is a vast subject and deserves a full discussion in its own right. But, since Richard Swinburne is the only theistic philosopher I know of who has developed a fully detailed nominalist account of logic, I think his view serves as a legitimate representative for conceiving of logical non-voluntarism in a nominalist way. §3 mainly concerns his view and the various problems it incurs. But I’ll also argue that these problems are most likely symptomatic of any nominalistic account of logic.

Like the last chapter, the overall conclusion of this chapter is negative. I believe we will see that both platonist and nominalist accounts of logic are problematic for upholding logical non-voluntarism. Therefore, I will conclude that logical non-voluntarism also does not serve as a good explanation of the relationship between God and logic. As with the voluntarist horn of the Logiphro dilemma, I’ll conclude that logical non-voluntarism must be rejected as well.³

² Interestingly, Boersma (2011) makes the book-length case that theists must be platonists in order to remain orthodox within the western tradition. However, it seems to me that most theologians and theistic philosophers are motivated to platonism on more philosophic, as opposed to religious, grounds.

³ In sum, I am arguing that the Logiphro is a false dilemma. I’ll fully address in Chapter 5 that I believe that there is at least one other legitimate option than just the two options (logical voluntarism or logical non-voluntarism) that the Logiphro initially presented to us.
1. Clarifying Logical Non-Voluntarism

1.1 Robust Logical Non-Voluntarism

In earlier chapters and above, logical non-voluntarism has been characterized as simply the position that the logical validity of any argument is a feature that is independent of and antecedent to God’s commanding or willing it. That is, on this view the notion of logical consequence has complete independence from divine willing or commands. Thus, unlike logical voluntarism, logical non-voluntarism claims that God does not, and cannot, command or will a change to the validity status of any argument. 4 So, for example, modus ponens is valid regardless of God’s will or commands; and likewise, affirming the consequent is invalid despite God possibly willing or commanding to the contrary. Worded this way though, logical non-voluntarism is simply the negation of logical voluntarism. But, if that is all that logical non-voluntarism amounts to, then it is a broad position indeed. 5 For then any view of logic that rejects the logical voluntarist position would count as logical non-voluntarism. This would include any explicitly non-theistic view of logic as well as any view of logic that simply fails to reference God, which, I think should be obvious, would include most philosophers’ view concerning logic. So we need to severely pare down logical non-voluntarism quite a bit and clarify our intended target.

4 Remember that in the last chapter I explored a more nuanced version of logical voluntarism (the limited possibilism reading) that claimed that even though God has the ability to change, by command or will, the validity status of any argument, one could assert that he never does so. In short, my criticism against that move was that if indeed God truly had the power to change the validity status of any argument, then we could never justifiably believe that he never does so despite whatever assurances he might give.

5 Thanks to Chris Pincock for bringing this point to my attention.
Obviously, the position of logical non-voluntarism we have in mind is an explicitly theistic position. The version of logical non-voluntarism we’re targeting holds that God’s will or commands have nothing to do with the logical consequence relation, particularly its validity status. But note that we’ve only been emphasizing logical non-voluntarism, up to this point, as being independent of God’s will or commands. But, it seems to me, that logical non-voluntarism should also be understood more inclusively as not only independence from God’s commands or will, but also to include that logic is also ontologically independent from God. That is, it’s not only the case that logical validity is free from God’s commands or will but that it’s also the case that God’s very being also does not ground, cause or explain the existence of logical consequence. This is a very robust notion of independence. So much so, we can no longer remain metaphysically neutral in our stance towards logical consequence. We now need to be able to explain the ontological dynamics of this non-voluntarist relationship between God and logic. Therefore, how should we metaphysically conceive of logical non-voluntarism’s claim of logic’s independence?

Perhaps the most natural way to conceive of a view like logical non-voluntarism, or at least the most historically influential, is suggested by Plato’s dialogue the Timaeus. In this work Plato gives an account of the world as a creation of a Demiurge ("dêmiourgos," Timaeus, 28a), sometimes translated as Divine Craftsman. A traditional interpretation of the Timaeus\textsuperscript{6} takes this Divine Craftsman as the being that created our physical world (the temporal and changing world of becoming) by using Plato’s Forms

\textsuperscript{6} For further details concerning the traditional interpretation see Armstrong (1947), 44-52.
(part of the eternal and changeless world of being) as exemplars or templates. However, so the usual interpretation goes, the Divine Craftsman did not create the Forms nor could he affect them in any way since they are eternal changeless entities like himself. Logical non-voluntarism is, I think, most easily conceived as following something akin to this picture. In the same way that Plato’s Divine Craftsman has no power or control over the Forms—the Forms are independent of his will or commands—so the logical non-voluntarist’s God has no ability to will or command differently what reality constitutes logical entailment—logical consequence is independent of God’s will or commands. But in addition, on Plato’s picture the Forms have an ontological independence as well. In other words, the Divine Craftsman does not create, ground, or explain the existence of the Forms. So, similarly, logical non-voluntarism can conceive logical consequence as being ontologically independent from God in a similar way. God does not create, ground, or explain the validity of logical arguments. For, like Plato’s picture, the reason logic is independent from God and his considerable influence is because the reality that makes up logic seemingly shares features that God himself possesses such as eternality, immutability, etc. Thus, the entities that constitute logical consequence exist independently of God’s ontologically creating or sustaining power as well as being independent of God’s changing power, via his will or commands. Call the above picture robust or platonic logical non-voluntarism.

But if this is the picture of logical non-voluntarism we have in mind, what exactly is the platonic reality that constitutes robust logical non-voluntarism? Do Plato’s Forms constitute logical consequence? There are various candidates that might fit the robust
non-voluntarist bill, entities such as possible worlds,\textsuperscript{7} propositions, relations, etc. Such entities are often referenced in the literature as abstract objects in contrast to the everyday concrete objects of our normal experience. Philosophers throughout history, including today, often appeal to abstract objects in their theorizing. But abstract objects are highly contentious things. Not only is their very existence debatable, the philosophical literature is rife with controversy over how to even satisfactorily characterize the distinction between abstract and concrete objects.\textsuperscript{8} Nevertheless, many philosophers still appeal to abstract objects as an explanatory resource in their philosophical theorizing. One familiar example is the way that some philosophers of language explain the notion of meaning by appealing to propositions. They claim that a proposition is the object expressed by the utterance of a token indicative sentence. Thus, so the explanation goes, the proposition can become the object of thought or belief and thus becomes the common factor between different persons and languages. Note that philosophical theories that appeal to abstract objects do not necessarily entail religious commitments or theistic implications. Many non-theistic philosophers have gladly appealed to such objects. Despite their possible origin with Plato or his account of the Divine Craftsman, the notion of abstract objects is not necessarily theistically committing.

Note that I have not specifically pinned down what sort of abstract objects robust logical non-voluntarism appeals to though. For our purposes, our investigation only

\textsuperscript{7} Possible worlds are not abstract objects on some views. Most famously, David Lewis argued that the best theory of modality must posit concrete possible worlds. See his historic (1986).

\textsuperscript{8} See Rosen (2012) for a discussion of many such problems.
requires that we acknowledge that robust logical non-voluntarists appeal to abstract objects of some kind.

So robust logical non-voluntarism is the view that the logical validity of any argument is a feature that is independent of God’s ability to change (i.e. independent of his will or commands) and also that logical validity is ontologically independent of God’s creating or sustaining power (i.e. ontologically independent). We offered the *Timeaus* picture as a natural way to conceive of robust logical non-voluntarism. With this picture in mind, robust logical non-voluntarism claims that logical consequence is ontologically independent and free from God’s will or commands because logical validity is constituted by abstract objects (of some kind), which have features that make them independent in these ways.

What advantages does this view of logic bring compared to logical voluntarism?

**1.1 Advantages of Logical Non-Voluntarism**

For the one trying to understand and argue for what sort of relationship exists between God and logic, there are at least two major advantages for opting for robust logical non-voluntarism.

First, robust logical non-voluntarism neatly avoids all of the major criticisms we saw leveled against logical voluntarism. It does not suffer from the incoherence or unintelligibility objections that logical voluntarism immediately invites since it does not add to or subtract anything from our accustomed and effortless ways of comprehending logic or language. Thus, our usual ways of understanding logic remain intact. Moreover, robust logical non-voluntarism does not suffer from the vacuity objection.
against logical voluntarism that I argued plays havoc with humanity’s ability to understand any sort of communication (i.e. special revelation) that God may give. Since by the robust logical non-voluntarist’s lights the logical consequence relation is completely independent of God, when God chooses to communicate with humans in some known language to them, then humans can straightforwardly take God to mean what such utterances would normally mean.

However, a robust logical non-voluntarist might allow that God has some sort of privileged epistemic access to logic due to his omniscience. This idea is similar to the way that a moral non-voluntarist might claim that even though God’s commands do not establish what is morally right, he nevertheless is an authority on what is morally right in virtue of his superior character and omni-benevolence. As John Milliken suggests, God might “provide a nice shortcut for figuring out what agents could nevertheless come to on their own.”\(^9\) But beyond this suggestion of God being an excellent moral advisor, the moral non-voluntarist maintains that God’s commands or will are really superfluous to the moral status of actions since the canons of moral rightness are independent of God’s will. Similarly, according to the robust logical non-voluntarist, even though the canons of logical validity are independent of God’s commands or will, or his creating or sustaining power, nevertheless it could be that God might report to us facts concerning logic also in virtue of his superior knowledge. But even if this were the case, as with the moral non-voluntarist, the robust logical non-voluntarist strictly maintains that neither

\(^9\) Milliken (2009), 146.
God’s will nor his being has any bearing upon the logical knowledge revealed. I think this point bears fleshing out a little more.

I know of no one, including myself, who holds the following view. Suppose God had given Moses, in addition to the familiar ten moral commandments, a list of ten logical commandments. As the former commandments are supposed to be used by humans to judge the moral correctness of some action, suppose the latter could also be used to judge the inferential correctness of some bit of reasoning. Nevertheless, the robust logical non-voluntarist’s position emphasizes that even if God had indeed given such commandments, this in no way would show that God’s will or commands, or his creating or sustaining power, is responsible for the validity status of logical arguments. Moreover, even if the class of all inferences that God sanctions (i.e. those sanctioned by the ten logical commandments and inferences from it) overlapped exactly with the class of all valid logical arguments, this still would not show that God’s will or commands, or creating or sustaining power, is the cause of or grounds for the validity of these arguments. Just as the notions of creatures with a kidney and creatures with a heart overlap exactly (as far as I know), nevertheless the notion of having a kidney has nothing to do with grounding, causing, or explaining the notion of having a heart. In the same way, the robust logical non-voluntarist claims God (his will or commands, or his creating or sustaining power) and logic are also completely distinct and unrelated. At most, claims the robust logical non-voluntarist, God might be the source of some (or even all) of our logical knowledge, but nothing more.
A second advantage of robust logical non-voluntarism is that it fits well with the widely shared intuitions concerning logical necessity. Earlier, in Chapter 1, I argued for the following characterization of logical consequence:

\[ \Phi \text{ is a logical consequence of } \Gamma, \text{ if at every possible world in which the uniform substitution of the non-logical content in } \Gamma \text{ and } \Phi \text{ renders every member of } \Gamma \text{ true, then it also renders } \Phi \text{ true.} \]

By using possible worlds language (LC) appeals to the common modal intuitions that logical consequence is a relation of necessity between conclusion and premise(s). The idea is that if an argument is deductively valid, then this means that if the premises (if any) are true, the conclusion is necessarily true as well. In addition we saw in that chapter, J. C. Beall and Greg Restall characterize logical consequence in terms of universal applicability, another common intuition concerning logic:

The fact that logical consequence is necessary means that logical consequence applies under any conditions whatsoever. If we consider what might happen if A were the case, and we reason from the premise that A, validly to a conclusion B, we ought, by rights, be able to conclude that if A were the case then B would be the case too. The applicability of logic is not a contingent matter; it works come what may, whatever hypotheses we care to entertain.\(^{10}\)

Since it’s widely held that logical consequence seems to hold “come what may,” then the validity of an argument seems to be something that cannot be changed or modified. If a valid argument is indeed necessarily valid, then it seems that nothing—including the will or commands, or the creating or sustaining power of God—should to be able to change that. Robust logical non-voluntarism maintains such intuitions because this view holds

\(^{10}\) Beall and Restall (2006), 15-16.
that the validity status of arguments is a feature beyond God’s creating or sustaining power, or his will or commands to alter in any way.

Since robust logical non-voluntarism avoids the nonsense invited by logical voluntarism and respects the deeply held intuitions that many already hold concerning logic, this view seems to be an excellent way of construing the relationship between God and logic. However, despite the above advantages, many theists will find this picture of robust logical non-voluntarism with its commitments to abstract objects to be an unacceptable explanation of the relationship between God and logic. In Chapter 2 we were briefly introduced to this problem for moral and logical non-voluntarism. I now want us to see that this problem is nested in an overarching theistic worry. In recent years, there has been a growing body of literature among analytic philosophers of religion about issues related to God and platonic entities (i.e. abstract objects) of all kinds.\(^{11}\) There are a host of problems that have been alleged against positing the existence of abstract objects in relation to God. We’ll now investigate those problems and see how they might bear on robust logical non-voluntarism.

### 2. The Problem of God and Abstract Objects

In a recent article, Paul Gould lays out what many theistic philosophers consider to be the problem of God and abstract objects.\(^{12}\) In order to see the general nature of this problem, and how it might apply to robust logical non-voluntarism, we must first

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investigate and clarify a core doctrine of traditional western theism, one which Gould
dubs the *aseity-sovereignty doctrine*. He provides a brief synopsis of this doctrine with
the following:

(i) God does not depend on anything distinct from himself for his existing; and
(ii) everything distinct from God depends on God’s creative activity for existing.\(^{13}\)

For the western theistic tradition, claim (i) points out that God’s existence is taken to be
an *a se* existence. That is, God is understood to be a being whose existence is completely
independent and self-sufficient. God neither relies upon anything for his existence nor
has need of anything outside of himself for his continued existence. In addition, claim
(ii) of this doctrine posits that all objects and realities distinct from God are taken to be
dependent upon God’s creative activity in some way, i.e. everything apart from God is
created by God. Though Gould’s wording does not make this explicit, this latter claim is
also usually understood to include that all objects distinct from God are dependent upon
God for their *continued* existence as well. So claim (ii) should be more correctly
understood as, apart from himself, God created everything—call this the *creation
condition*; and in addition, God sustains everything’s continued existence—call this the
*dependence condition*.\(^{14}\) Furthermore, this clarification implies an added explicit
condition to claim (i). Given that everything distinct from God depends on God, per
claim (ii), it follows that God’s *a se* existence displayed in (i) is an existence unique to

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for brief but good historical overviews as to why traditional western theists have upheld the aseity-
sovereignty doctrine.

\(^{14}\) In this work I will not be addressing the following question: “Did God create himself?” Given
what I’ve written above, I think it’s clear that my answer should be “no.” But I’ll not attempt to defend that
answer here other than say that this corresponds with the general western theistic tradition.
God. In other words, God, *and God alone*, neither relies upon anything for his existence nor has need of anything for his continued existence. Call this the *uniqueness condition*. With these conditions made explicit, let’s revise Gould’s wording of the aseity-sovereignty doctrine to the following:

(a) God, *and God alone*, does not depend on anything distinct from himself for his existing; and
(b) everything distinct from God depends on God’s creative *and sustaining* activity for existing.

I’ll call claim (a) the *aseity intuition* (which includes the uniqueness condition) and claim (b) I’ll call the *sovereignty intuition* (which includes the creation and dependence conditions). Since both of these intuitions and their included conditions are core to the traditional Abrahamic theism, few theists in this tradition will willingly, or at least quickly, surrender any part of them.

With this revised doctrine in place we can now begin to see how any theory that posits abstract objects, like our current conception of logical non-voluntarism, is more than likely going to be problematic for such theists. In general, the problem seems to be that either (1) the existence of abstract objects end up making God dependent upon such objects in some way (i.e. violates the aseity intuition); or (2) the existence of abstract objects implies they are uncreated (i.e. violates the creation condition of the sovereignty intuition); or (3) the existence of such objects implies that their continued existence is independent of God in some way (i.e. violates the dependence condition of the sovereignty intuition as well as denying the uniqueness condition of the aseity intuition). I believe that this also correctly characterizes the sorts of problems that our
current proposal of robust logical non-voluntarism will run into. But let’s look at these problems in detail.

2.1 Practical Worries

Before going on to what I consider to be the more pressing philosophical problems pertaining to God and abstract objects, let me first address what seem to me to be more like a group of worries than actual philosophical problems. Some theists might worry that the existence of abstract objects does not sit well with traditional notions of God’s sovereignty and omnipotence, and from their perspective in very practical ways. For example, if there exists some things that are resistant to God’s power (will, commands, creating or sustaining power), then this seems to imply that God is not really sovereign over every thing, or that he is not truly all powerful (i.e. omnipotent). A similarly related problem is the concern that the existence of abstract objects would operate as restraints against divine freedom. That is, there would exist entities that God could not affect, and thus could not freely act upon. If this were true, if God was not in control of all creation, or all-powerful, or completely free, then many theists fear that God could not be reliably depended upon. Theologian Michael Horton elaborates that if

15 Gould claims that the main problem with abstract objects, in relation to the aseity-sovereignty doctrine, is that they are necessarily existing objects. However, Kit Fine (among others) has pointed out that, in general, one cannot infer claims about independence from claims about necessity. For example the set \{2\} exists necessarily. Yet, it still depends for its existence upon something else, namely the existence of the number 2. See Fine (1994). But even though modality may not be the source of the independence of abstract objects, everyone agrees that abstract objects, if they exist, are independent in some sense. (Though sets with contingent members may be an exception to this idea.) For my purposes, I don’t think I need to identify what make such objects independent, only that they are usually considered to be so. Thanks especially to Scott Brown, and David Blanks, for helping me to see this issue more clearly.
God was not completely sovereign, all-powerful, or completely free, then theists “would have no confidence that [God] could overcome evil or rescue [them] from death.”\textsuperscript{16}

However, I believe this host of worries is, at best, exaggerated. For all of these seem to me to be clear non-sequitors. Given that our investigation has already ruled out logical voluntarism as a viable possibility, it seems that we’ve already accepted the idea that God is limited to some degree, i.e. he cannot do the logically impossible. Similarly, remember that one objection against the moral voluntarist was the abhorrent command objection: God cannot turn an obviously immoral action (e.g. rape) into a moral action by willing or commanding it to be so. Given that most theists accept this objection against moral voluntarism, and as I’ve argued they should also accept a similar objection against logical voluntarism, it seems to me that most theists already accept “limitations” of a sort on God. Therefore, the robust logical non-voluntarist position that claims God is completely unable to affect the entities that constitute the validity of any logical argument seems congruent with this notion. Furthermore, the “limitations” that moral non-voluntarism and robust logical non-voluntarism imply concerning divine sovereignty, power, and freedom do not really exacerbate any sort of practical worry that theists like Horton suggest. Rather, the fact that God \textit{must be} logical (as well as the fact that God \textit{must be} moral) should give theists more confidence towards God. So it seems to me that the above sorts of worries are answerable and thus really unproblematic.

\textsuperscript{16} Horton (2011), 235.
2.2 The Ultimacy Problem

Let’s now turn to a more substantive issue of how the problem of God and abstract objects might relate to robust logical non-voluntarism. For example, philosopher Brian Leftow contends that traditional western theists acknowledge God to be the *ens realissimum*, i.e. “ultimate reality,” or, as is sometimes said, God is “the universal ground of all being.”\(^{17}\) Though this may sound a bit vague or mystical, I think Leftow explains the intuition, and its appeal, very clearly:

It is a common theistic belief that God’s existence is not derived from anything else—that “God made the universe, but nobody made God.” This belief is bound up, for example with the common theistic belief that God is the real source of the universe. For if something else created God, and then God created the universe, it would seem to most that this other thing was the *real* source of the universe, and God just an intermediary.

Let us put this belief about God’s existence a bit more formally: it is part of the ordinary theist’s concept of God that no regress of true explanations can go past God’s existence, i.e. that when one has traced some phenomenon back to the fact that God exists, one can go no further.\(^{18}\)

So, following Leftow, holding that “God is the universal ground of all being,” is at the very least shorthand for believing that God is the ultimate explanation for *any* existing entity. Theists hold that God is not the intermediary source of some entities but the “*real source*” of *all* entities. However, given the way Leftow has stated it, it’s ambiguous whether this idea rules out the *Timaeus* picture we were presented with earlier.\(^{19}\) For Plato seems to imply that even though the Divine Craftsman needed the Forms in order to

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\(^{17}\) For an extended treatment of this notion and the platonic notion of “chain of being” see Lovejoy (1957).

\(^{18}\) Leftow (1990), 584.

\(^{19}\) Thanks to Chris Pincock for bringing this point to my attention.
make the physical cosmos, this Craftsman himself is still evidently eternal, i.e. he was not made by something else. So, in a sense, the Divine Craftsman is still the ultimate explanation for Plato’s universe. However, the Divine Craftsman still had need of the Platonic Forms as templates for creating the world. So to explain the universe one does have to, in a sense, “go past God’s existence” as Leftow says, since the creation of the universe includes, along with the Divine Craftsman, the Platonic Forms as well. On this reading, and I’m sure that this is the worry Leftow has in mind, a *Timaeus*-like picture would be unacceptable to most theists. On Plato’s account of the universe theists could only say, at the most, that the Divine Craftsman is just *part of* the ultimate explanation. This picture contradicts the creation condition of the sovereignty intuition since the Platonic Forms are uncreated as well as contradicting the uniqueness condition of the aseity intuition since the Platonic Forms have *a se* existence in addition to God.

But I think Leftow is suggesting perhaps a deeper difficulty, one that is sometimes called the *ultimacy problem*. This problem supposedly arises when the positing of (at least some) abstract objects implies that God’s own existence is explained by such objects. To illustrate this problem, consider one kind of abstract object: properties. As we’ve seen the platonist story go, abstract objects, like Forms, exist independently of God in a very robust way such that these abstract properties would also exist independently of God. Note though that God is usually conceived as having properties. He has, for example, the properties of being good, being powerful, being wise, among many others. But if these properties are abstract objects, as sometimes conceived, then God’s being is

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20 Coined, as far as I know, by Gould (2011), 258.
grounded in something other than God, namely these abstract properties. And this would mean that God is not the ultimate explanation of his own self. But, as Leftow states, “theists want all explanations to trace back to God, rather than through God to some more ultimate context.” So the ultimacy problem points out that the existence of at least some abstract objects, like properties, not only violates the uniqueness of the aseity intuition, but it seems to also invite the idea that God’s own being would be dependent upon these objects.

But does the ultimacy problem extend to all platonist theories including robust logical non-voluntarism? Perhaps the answer to this question depends on what sort of entities the robust logical non-voluntarist opts for here. Let’s suppose, for illustration, that a robust logical non-voluntarist takes possible worlds as existing abstract objects in order to secure the fully independent relationship of logical validity. Thus the logical entailment relation holds because there are an infinite number of possible worlds that make it so. In addition, note that in the western theistic tradition God is usually taken to be a necessarily existing being. Combined with this possible world picture, this latter claim would mean that God exists at every possible world. In other words, God’s necessary existence is explained by claiming that at any possible world that may obtain, God would exist there. But, as Leftow points out, this picture “threatens to make God’s existence derive from items independent from Him: the worlds are there independently, that He is in all of them entails God’s existence.” So it appears that a robust logical

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21 Leftow (1990), 587.

22 Ibid., 27. I think Leftow is being a bit sloppy here. I believe he meant to say that God is at, not in, all possible worlds. Thanks again to Chris Pincock for highlighting this point.
non-voluntarism that posits possible worlds as abstract objects falls foul of the ultimacy problem. For according to this picture God’s necessary being would be grounded by something other than God, namely the abstract possible worlds.  

Despite this example, I believe the robust logical non-voluntarist may not necessarily be saddled with the ultimacy problem. For suppose he opts for another kind of abstract object instead. Suppose the positing of propositions is sufficient to explain logical consequence. Thus, the robust logical non-voluntarist would claim that the logical entailment relation holds because there is an infinity of propositions such that whenever, for any $\Gamma \vdash \Phi$ (where $\Phi$ is some proposition and $\Gamma$ some set of propositions), the uniform substitution of the non-logical content that renders every member of $\Gamma$ true also renders $\Phi$ true. Does the ultimacy problem arise here? One might think so if we consider ontological arguments for God’s existence. There are many sorts of these arguments but all have the same general structure. Such arguments proceed from some purported logically necessary proposition and endeavor to show that it is a consequence of that proposition that God exists. But, as Richard Swinburne complains, if such an argument were sound, “God would seem less than totally supreme if he depended for his existence on something quite other than God—for instance, on such a general logically necessary principle.”

Swinburne is suggesting here that if we did have a sound ontological argument, and if the above robust logical non-voluntarist’s picture were

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23 I think it should be obvious that this same problem would arise even if possible worlds were concrete objects. In such a scenario God’s necessary existence would be dependent on these concrete possible worlds and so his divine existence would still not be ultimate.

24 Swinburne (1994), 145.
accurate concerning propositions as abstract objects, then this would imply that God’s existence is a result of, and thus dependent on, the necessary proposition of this argument.

But I think Swinburne is mistaken for this example is unsuccessful in giving us an instance of the ultimacy problem. For one thing, it seems to me that the robust logical non-voluntarist may object there are any sound ontological arguments for God’s existence. At the very least, there are surely no such arguments that are undisputed by a good number of philosophers. Ironically, this would be a plus for the theist robust logical non-voluntarist; for if there are no sound ontological arguments for God’s existence, then there is no possibility for God’s existence to be dependent upon the proposition(s) of that argument and thus no ultimacy problem.

But if, for the sake of argument, there were a sound ontological argument for God’s existence, I still don’t believe the ultimacy problem arises here. For it’s usually thought to be the case that theories that posit propositions see such entities as truth-bearers, not truth-makers. A typical feature attributed to propositions is that they correspond, in some way, to facts or states of affairs that give the propositions their truth-values. For example, the proposition *Columbus is the capital of Ohio* is true because it corresponds to the fact or state of affairs in the world that makes it true. The proposition does not make the fact or state of affairs true. Rather, the direction of truth making is reversed: the fact or state of affairs makes the proposition true. Swinburne’s complaint is guilty of getting this order backwards as well. If there was a sound ontological argument that necessarily implied the proposition *God exists*, the soundness of the propositions in the argument would only be true because of the facts or states of affairs that made them
so. Thus, *God exists* would be true because God himself is the fact or state of affairs that makes that proposition true. So, God’s existence would not be dependent upon the proposition *God exists* or any of the propositions that made up the supposed ontological argument in question.

So even though the ultimacy problem may arise for certain platonist theories, it seems that the robust logical non-voluntarist may get around this problem depending on what sort of abstract objects he may posit. However, as we’ve seen, it’s still the case that the existence of abstract objects, of any kind, still violates the uniqueness condition of the aseity intuition, as well as the sovereignty intuition. So let’s return to these problems, for I think the robust logical non-voluntarist has larger difficulties than what the ultimacy problem has presented, or may present.

2.3 Problems Related to *Creatio Ex Nihilo*

Probably the most outspoken critic of any view that posits abstract objects alongside of God is the theistic philosopher William Lane Craig. The following is a nice rundown of the biggest problems that Craig sees with such views:

The chief theological failing of Platonism [i.e. theories that posit the existence of abstract objects] and therefore for its unacceptability for orthodox theists is that Platonism is incompatible with the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and so fundamentally compromises divine aseity. For Platonism posits infinite realms of being which are uncreated by God. The physical universe which has been created by God is an infinitesimal triviality utterly dwarfed by the unspeakable quantity of uncreated beings. Moreover, the metaphysical pluralism entailed by Platonism’s denial of *creatio ex nihilo* robs God of His aseity. The divine attribute of existing *a se* is traditionally understood to be a unique perfection of God, the *ens realissimum* (ultimate reality). God alone exists self-sufficiently and independently of all things. All other beings exist *ab alio* and are contingent in their being. By contrast Platonism posits endless infinities of beings, each of
which exists *a se* not *ab alio*. God Himself is reduced to but one being among many.²⁵

There are at least two issues that Craig brings up here. First, Craig notes that the abstract objects usually appealed to by philosophers almost always imply an infinity of such objects. Craig has all sorts of platonist theories in mind here, especially those that appeal to numbers or sets. But considering robust logical non-voluntarism alone, Craig’s worry still applies since this view also implies an infinity of abstract objects as well. For example, most philosophers take the implication of double negation introduction to be clearly valid. Thus, for any claim \( P \) it validly implies \( \sim \sim P \). But if that’s the case the following arguments are also valid:

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(1) \quad \sim \sim P \mid \sim \sim \sim P \\
(2) \quad \sim \sim \sim P \mid \sim \sim \sim \sim \sim \sim P \\
(3) \sim \sim \sim \sim \sim \sim \sim P \mid \sim \sim \sim \sim \sim \sim \sim \sim \sim \sim \sim \sim P \\
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As should be obvious, this chain of double negation introduction arguments extends indefinitely. Moreover, the premise of any one of these arguments also implies *every* conclusion in *all* of the arguments after it. Thus we have several infinities of valid arguments here—and this is with just *one* claim and *one* logical connective! Assuming the robust logical non-voluntarist picture, the above would imply that we have infinities of entities (be they propositions, possible worlds, or whatever) that make up these arguments. Craig’s concern about this picture is that it makes the created physical

²⁵ Craig (2012), 46.
universe a “triviality” and elsewhere he exclaims that the “profligacy” of this picture “truly takes one’s breath away.” However, I’m not exactly sure what problem Craig is troubled by here. As I think his next concern shows, it’s not really the number or magnitude of abstract objects that’s problematic for the traditional western theist.

The second and more primary problem that Craig highlights is that the existence of abstract objects alongside of God is incompatible with the traditional doctrine of classical theism that God has created *ex nihilo*. The Latin phrase “*creatio ex nihilo*” literally means “creation out of nothing.” This doctrine asserts that everything that is created by God, which traditional western theists hold is everything apart from God, is created from absolutely nothing and thus not from some pre-existent matter or entities of any kind. Craig notes that theories that posit abstract objects usually hold that these objects are uncreated (like Plato’s *Timaeus* picture), which also fits with our characterization of robust logical non-voluntarism thus far. So the incompatibility that Craig highlights here with the *creatio ex nihilo* doctrine is an incompatibility with what we’ve been calling the creation condition of the sovereignty intuition—that everything distinct from God depends on God’s creative activity. But even more, Craig claims that the existence of abstract objects also “fundamentally compromises” or “robs” divine aseity. In particular, the worry Craig is pointing to here is that such objects would violate the dependence condition of the sovereignty intuition—such objects are not only not created by God, but also not sustained by him either. Moreover, Craig notes that if there are other entities existing independently of God’s creating and sustaining power, then,

26 Copan and Craig (2004), 173.
like Leftow, Craig observes that this would deny the uniqueness condition of the aseity intuition—God is not the *ens realissimum*, or “ultimate reality.” (Even just one such entity would count as a problem here; thus showing that Craig’s first complaint is beside the point.) Since theories that posit abstract objects violate the sovereignty intuition (i.e. the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*) and the aseity intuition, Craig urges that adherents of the western tradition of theism should not hold such theories, which would include our current offer of robust logical non-voluntarism.

Given these problems, is there any possible way forward for robust logical non-voluntarism?

### 2.4 Absolute Creationism

Christopher Menzel and Thomas V. Morris are two theistic philosophers who take criticisms, like Craig’s, concerning God and abstract objects to be very serious for traditional theism. They suggest a view, dubbed *absolute creationism*, that attempts to respect the traditional sovereignty and aseity intuitions by claiming that God has created *all* entities including even abstract objects.\(^{27}\) However, this idea is not an entirely new one.

In his first century AD work, *On the Creation of the World*, the Jewish philosopher Philo attempted to meld the *Timaeus* account of creation given by Plato with the Genesis account of creation given by Moses. Philo claims that before creating any

\(^{27}\) Morris and Menzel (1987). The name “absolute creationism” is perhaps unfortunate given the connotations usually associated with “creationism.” But Morris and Menzel’s view has nothing to do with the age of the universe or debates about evolution. Rather, the name highlights that God is the ultimate explanation for the existence of anything apart from himself.
part of our current physical world God must have had a model for “there could not exist a
good imitation without a good model.”\textsuperscript{28} This is similar to Plato’s account of the Divine
Craftsman looking to the Platonic Forms in order to create, as when an architect looks at
blueprints in order to construct a building. However, Philo also sought to respect
traditional commitments of classical theism such as the aseity and sovereignty intuitions.
Therefore, he claimed that God first made the model, “conceived by God’s intellect”
before the imitation, or physical world, was made from the model.\textsuperscript{29} So, according to
Philo, before creating the world, God first created (i.e. “conceived”) a model—something
akin to Plato’s Forms or something like what philosophers today reference as abstract
objects. The apparent upshot of this idea is that since the model is also created, like
everything else other than God, it does not violate the sovereignty intuition (at least the
creation condition) and since God alone exists independently (i.e. the model apparently
does not) it does not violate the aseity intuition either.

The absolute creationist view is very similar to Philo’s account above. Menzel
and Morris write the following:

\begin{quote}
[A]ll properties and relations are God’s concepts [i.e. abstract objects], the
products, or perhaps better, the contents of the divine intellective activity, a
causally efficacious or productive sort of divine conceiving. Unlike human
concepts, then, which are grasplings of properties that exist ontologically distinct
from and independent of those grasplings, divine concepts are those very
properties themselves; and unlike what is assumed in standard Platonism, those
properties are not ontologically independent, but rather depend on certain divine
activities.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{28} Philo (English translation ca.1800), 4.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Morris (1987), 166. There is some confusion in the literature whether this view counts as a
version of theistic activism. In short, theistic activism holds that abstract objects (1) exist; (2) depend on
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\end{flushright}
I’ll summarize and clarify in my own words what I take Menzel and Morris to be claiming here. They identify a couple of different kinds of abstract objects, i.e. “God’s concepts.” What these exactly are is unimportant for our purposes. What is important is that Menzel and Morris claim such objects are products of a certain kind of divine creative activity. Unlike human concepts, which are merely “graspings” of abstract objects, Menzel and Morris seem to claim that God’s concepts are identical to these abstract objects. Thus, similar to Philo’s account, absolute creationism appears to give an account of abstract objects that respects both the uniqueness condition of the aseity intuition—since these abstract objects do not exist a se like God—and it appears to respect both conditions of the sovereignty intuition—since these abstract objects are both created and seemingly continually sustained by God. So, prima facie, an absolute creationist account of abstract objects appears to overcome the various problems we’ve seen associated with philosophical accounts of God and abstract objects. Therefore, it seems that this account could be easily co-opted by robust logical non-voluntarism. In broad strokes, such an account would contend that all logical arguments hold their continued and permanent validity independently from God. And this would be so because such arguments are constituted by abstract entities (of some sort) that are identical to divine concepts, which are created by God thus getting around the sorts of worries that Craig and other theistic philosophers have put forward.

God’s creative activity; and (3) are identified with constituents of the divine mind. The question is whether (3) holds true for absolute creationism. Gould (2011), 265-269 gives a good overall discussion of the moves surrounding this issue.

31 In the next chapter we’ll see that there is perhaps more than one way to interpret Menzel and Morris’ view.
Overall, I think this is a very interesting view. But it’s also interesting that few have been willing to follow Menzel and Morris (and Philo) in their suggestion. The reason being that various objections have been raised against absolute creationism. One such objection is sometimes called the *bootstrapping objection*.\(^{32}\) Simply stated, the bootstrapping objection points out that the absolute creationist account of God creating (at least certain) abstract objects presupposes that those objects already exist. For example, it doesn’t seem that God can create the abstract property of *being powerful* unless he already has the property of *being powerful*. Bootstrapping objectors claim this problem generalizes to other (if not all) abstract objects on Menzel and Morris’ view. Therefore, the problem for absolute creationists is to find a way out of this explanatory circle. Many see this as a completely damning problem. But Paul Gould suggests what he takes to be an obvious way out, at least concerning properties. He writes:

> Why not hold that it is only properties distinct from God that are created by God? On this suggestion, all of God’s essential properties (that is, divine concepts) exist *a se* as a brute fact within the divine mind, and it is only those properties that are not essentially exemplified by God (that is, necessarily satisfied in God) that are created by God.\(^{33}\)

This move seems incredibly *ad hoc* to me. Gould however proposes that this is only the case “if there were no independent motivations for thinking abstract objects exist.”\(^{34}\) Gould is suggesting here that there are other reasons sufficient for adopting a view of properties, distinct from God, as real abstract objects. Presumably these reasons are the

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\(^{32}\) This problem has been pointed out in various places, such as Bergmann and Brower (2006), Gould (2011), Craig (2012), *et al.*


\(^{34}\) Ibid.
sorts of theoretic ones shared with non-theistic philosophers who see explanatory power in appealing to abstract objects.

But even if this move is not *ad hoc*, another problem arises as it relates to robust logical non-voluntarism: If God created all abstract objects distinct from himself, including those that constitute logical consequence, couldn’t God have created any sort of logic he wanted to?35 In other words, the absolute creationist picture seems to question whether logical consequence is really independent in the way that robust logical non-voluntarism was supposed to preserve. In other words, an absolute creationist account of robust logical non-voluntarism seems to reduce to the position of logical voluntarism, with its ensuing problems that we saw in Chapter 3. For if God created the abstract objects that constitute logical consequence, and presumably if God was free to choose to create whatever he wanted to create (i.e. his decision to create was a contingent matter), then logical consequence may have been different than what it is now. And as the vacuity objection pointed out in the last chapter against logical voluntarism, this means we cannot justifiably believe God operates in his revelatory communication with the same logic we do.

But perhaps the absolute creationist account of robust logical non-voluntarism could deny the presumption that God could create whatever he wanted to—at least in the domain of certain abstract objects.36 For example, the absolute creationist might theorize that geometric objects are abstracta created by God. So, for example, the Euclidean

35 Thanks to Stewart Shapiro for highlighting this point.

36 Thanks to Tamar Rudavsky for pointing out this response.
triangle would be God’s creation. Nevertheless, the absolute creationist might suggest that God could not fashion the Euclidean triangle in any old way he wanted to due to the fact that this object has a nature or structure that necessarily constitutes what it is. Thus God could not have made, say, a Euclidean triangle with four sides, or whose inner angles summed to more than or less than 180 degrees. Again, if this were not so, we would be back to a sort of voluntarism and its ensuing problems.

So the absolute creationist rebuttal on offer here is an interpretation of robust logical non-voluntarism that claims God created the abstract entities that constitute logical consequence. But this does not entail logical voluntarism because God could not fashion these abstract objects, and thus the resulting logical consequence relation, in just any arbitrary way he might have wanted to choose. And this is due to the fact that such objects and the logical consequence relation have an intrinsic nature or structure that necessarily constitutes what they are.

Unfortunately, I think this move has its own problems. Foremost, it seems to me that we have a regress issue with this picture. Remember that the absolute creationist, like Philo, says God must make a good model before being able to make good imitations. And the above suggestion claims that God is not free to make models in just any arbitrary way. Rather, models seem to have an intrinsic nature or structure that necessitates what sort of entities they may be. But this sounds like models (i.e. abstract objects) must follow the pattern of other models, or meta-models. For if abstract objects have a certain nature that they must have in order to coherently exist (i.e. to escape voluntaristic implications), then it seems there are other (abstract?) objects that they must be patterned after. And if this is so, we need an explanation of how these meta-models, these higher
objects, have the existence and nature that they do. Thus we have the original problem again that this suggestion was meant to overcome. And unless we’re given a different answer, it just leads to a regress of the same.

Moreover, philosopher Greg Welty argues that whatever absolute creationists try to do to overcome this problem only invites other problems that are endemic to their project. For if abstract objects are created by God, one must ask “does God look to something external to himself as the exemplar for this particular act of creation? Or does something internal to God play this role?” Of course the absolute creationist believes that creation is not imposed on God from outside of himself. This was the main point of putting forward this view. But Welty clarifies that his question is of a different sort; not “‘does something external to God force God to create the framework he does?’ but rather, ‘does something external to God provide the model for the content of the framework which God does in fact create?’” Welty claims there are only three possible responses to this question and none of which are favorable to the absolute creationist project.

First response: The absolute creationist could claim that God creates the abstract objects, and the model for this act of creation is something external to God. But this suggestion, as we’ve seen, is clearly a violation of the sovereignty intuition, as well as a violation of the uniqueness condition of the aseity intuition. By way of re-iterating why many traditional western theists reject this, Alfred Freddoso comments:

[S]omeone might point out that Platonic entities have traditionally been construed as exemplars (or paradigms or models) according to which created things are

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37 Welty (2006), 198.

38 Ibid., 199.
fashioned. But if such exemplars were wholly distinct from God and independent of God, then his creative activity would be constrained by standards which originate outside the divine intellect. In that case God in creating would be more like the imitator who copies an original painting than like the creative genius who produces the masterpiece “on his own.”  

Given that absolute creationists like Menzel and Morris (and perhaps Philo) identify themselves as traditional western theists, this first response is unacceptable.

Second response: The absolute creationist can claim that God creates abstract objects, and the model for this act of creation is something internal to God. This seems to be closer to Menzel and Morris’s view who claimed that “all properties and relations are God’s concepts,” or “divine concepts are those very properties themselves,” or “we characterize properties as God’s concepts.” These appear to be straightforward identity claims. Properties and relations are two kinds of abstract objects and they are identical with divine concepts. But how are we to understand divine concepts here?

We were told that “divine intellective activity [is] a causally efficacious or productive sort of divine conceiving.” Thus there is a causal relation between the divine intellective activity and the existence of abstract objects. In addition, “properties are not ontologically independent, but rather depend on certain divine activities.” So there is a dependence relation between abstract objects and divine activities. And it seems clear from Menzel and Morris’ discussion that they see this dependence relation as causal. Welty suggests that the most plausible way to think about this picture is by

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40 Morris and Menzel (1986), 166.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.
analogy with the thinker/thought relation in human beings. Thus, suggests Welty, the best way to understand this concerning God is that “he thinks the thoughts he does because he purposely intends to think those thoughts; that is, he wills to think them.”

Even as human thoughts are created by the internal and intentional human activity of thinking, so abstract objects are created by God’s active thinking, which is internal to God. Applied to robust logical non-voluntarism, Menzel and Morris’ view would suggest that whatever kind of abstract objects constitute logical consequence, they are identical with divine concepts that result from God’s intentional active thought.

However, as we’ve already discussed, this leads to a regress. For if abstract objects are God’s concepts, then one can naturally ask, “Does God create his concepts according to his concept of what he is to create?” Or, as Welty asks, “in general, if abstract objects are divine ideas and God creates abstract objects, then what divine idea is exemplified in (i.e. serves as the exemplar for) the act of creating the abstract object?”

It seems no answer can be given without the same sort of question arising.

But an absolute creationist may try to get out of answering this dilemma with a third response, claiming that God creates abstract objects but this act has no exemplar or model. In other words, the absolute creationist tries to cut off the regress by claiming that abstract objects are created sui generis. This may seem like a cheat but I believe it fits well with an adherence to the traditional doctrine of creatio ex nihilo. But an additional problem arises here for the absolute creationist: this response would be a major

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44 Ibid., 200.
reconfiguration to his view. Remember the absolute creationist claim that abstract objects are the result of the intentional thoughts of God. But if God created X without a model that he intentionally worked from, then this suggests that X, though a creation of God, is not an intentional creation of God. In essence, this response harks back to neo-Platonic views of emanation: that there are objects whose existence is causally dependent upon God but God did not intentionally bring about; they are merely emanated from God with no reference to (or perhaps even in spite of) God’s will. This is of course an abandonment of the traditional doctrine of divine creation where everything created by God is the result of his divine intentions to do so. But more importantly, in this context, it would be more than a mere modification to absolute creationism. As Welty puts it, this response is equivalent to: “God doesn’t create abstract objects at all.”45 For this response turns the view into an absolute emanationist picture, not an absolute create-ionist one.

2.5 Summary Assessment of Platonic Logical Non-Voluntarism

Let me now summarize our discussion of robust or platonic logical non-voluntarism thus far. We saw that Plato’s Timeaus picture of the Divine Craftsman was very suggestive for logical non-voluntarism. In the same way that the Divine Craftsman could not affect the Platonic Forms, so this view claims that God cannot and does not affect logical entailment and all of the arguments that obey it. This comparison suggested that logical entailment is constituted by abstract objects. So this construal of logical non-voluntarism claims that the reason the validity of logical arguments is

independent of God’s power and being is because all such arguments are constituted by abstract objects (whatever those objects might be). Given that such objects are resistant to divine omnipotence (commands or will, or creating or sustaining power), the logical arguments constituted by them are also so resistant. But we’ve seen various problems that make this view unacceptable for many traditional western theists. In the broadest sense, every platonist theory, including absolute creationism, violates, in some way, either the aseity intuition or the sovereignty intuition of traditional theism. Thus the platonist or robust construal of logical non-voluntarism is guilty of violating these core intuitions as well. Since these intuitions are core beliefs of traditional western theism, theists in this tradition will reject robust logical non-voluntarism.

However, at this point, one wonders whether logical non-voluntarism really need to appeal to such metaphysically rich notions as abstract objects? Maybe the *Timaeus* picture has simply misled us. For logical non-voluntarism seems to primarily be a theory about dependency, not ontology.\(^46\) Couldn’t logical entailment be construed as independent of God apart from appealing to abstract objects, and thus still affirm the thesis of logical non-voluntarism? This seems to me to be a *prima facie* promising possibility. Moreover, it’s an alternative that actually more than one theistic philosopher has opted for. Let’s investigate whether such a conception of logical non-voluntarism can do any better than its platonist cousin.

\(^{46}\) Much thanks goes to Scott Brown, again, for helping me to see this point more clearly.
3. Logical Non-Voluntarism and Nominalism

I describe a platonist theory, generally, as one that appeals to abstract objects to explain some phenomenon. For analytic philosophers, especially, abstract objects are usually appealed to in order to explain some domain of discourse. Nominalist theories are described in various ways but always in contrast with platonist theories such as robust logical non-voluntarism. Thus, for my purposes here, I define a nominalist theory, generally, as any theory that claims that some discourse in view can be fully explained without appealing to abstract entities. So, even when a particular discourse might reference things that are traditionally understood to be abstract objects (like possible worlds or propositions), a nominalist theory would interpret these words as not referencing abstracta.

In the same way, given the problems we’ve seen with robust logical non-voluntarism, it seems to me that a logical non-voluntarist might also claim that logical discourse is explained without reference to abstract entities of any kind. If this view of logical non-voluntarism can be made good, it would follow that logical consequence is not dependent upon, or constituted by, abstract objects but be dependent upon non-abstract objects of some kind. Moreover, as a form of non-voluntarism, whatever these objects may be they must still exist independent of God’s control and being. Call this picture of logic lean or nominalist logical non-voluntarism.

The obvious upshot of this form of logical non-voluntarism is that since it does not appeal to abstract objects, then it seems to get around all of the problems that come from violating the aseity or sovereignty intuitions that burdened robust logical non-voluntarism. However, some immediate questions arise: Does lean logical non-
voluntarism successfully explain logical discourse as well as respecting commonly held
intuitions concerning logic? Likewise, does nominal logical non-voluntarism explain
how the non-abstract entities that make up logic (whatever these may be) are independent
of God’s being or his ability to change or modify? Are there any successful theist logical
nominalist theories out there?

Despite all the problems we’ve laid out in §2 above, platonist theories of all kinds
are still very popular among theist philosophers. In fact, I know of only two such
philosophers who can be properly called logical nominalists. In the remainder of this
chapter we will primarily investigate one of these theist philosopher’s attempts to
construe logical discourse as a nominalist theory. As I believe we’ll see, there are serious
problems as to whether any theory of nominalism can adequately explain logical
discourse as well as respect common logical intuitions. Moreover, I think lean logical
non-voluntarism does not successfully protect the independence of logic as logical non-
voluntarism desires and this seems to be a problem for any sort of logical nominalism one
might put forward. However, let’s now investigate these attempts to ground logical non-
voluntarism in nominalism.

3.1 Craig and Nominalism

As we’ve seen above, William Lane Craig takes the existence of abstract objects,
of any kind, to be problematic because it violates core intuitions of traditional western
theism. Given these problems, his writings have investigated and suggested various
views that attempt to evade them.⁴⁷ We’ve already looked at some of these attempts in
Craig’s overwhelming conclusion is clear: There is no way to circumvent the problems that abstract objects create for traditional theistic belief. Therefore, he claims that traditional western theists must opt for nominalism. This is a sweeping claim. Craig gives this recommendation in full generality: platonism is \textit{never} acceptable for the traditional theist in \textit{any} domain. Thus, even though Craig never discusses the specific implications for logic, his recommendation implies a full endorsement of logical nominalism as well.

However, it must be noted, up to this point Craig has done little to offer any sort of positive nominalist proposal of any kind. Up to now his discussion has taken the following general outline:

1. Traditional theists must take either a platonist or nominalist construal of any discourse.
2. Due to various problems, such theists should reject a platonist construal of any such discourse.
3. So, traditional theists must have a nominalist construal of any discourse.

But I believe that this conclusion is \textit{too} sweeping in that discussions concerning platonism and nominalism should be taken on a subject-by-subject basis. For example, suppose we discovered a nominalist theory of reference and predication that could explain well our talk of properties. Nevertheless, I don’t see what this state of affairs would have to do, at least directly, with whether nominalism or platonism should be adopted to explain, say, mathematical discourse, or modal discourse, or even logical discourse. Even if nominalism could explain our property talk, that does not imply that nominalism can explain our math, modal, or logic talk.

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47 See Copan and Craig (2004), and Craig (2012) and (2013) for these various attempts and their problems. Also, see Gould (2011) for a good general overview of the available options.
Again, Craig’s criticisms against abstract objects are fully general, thus applying to even a platonist construal of logical non-voluntarism. Therefore, Craig’s recommendation of nominalism implies an endorsement of lean logical non-voluntarism (like most theistic philosophers he denies universal possibilism and thus logical voluntarism). Nevertheless, it seems to me that we are owed at least something of a theory of logical nominalism before we endorse such a construal of logical non-voluntarism. Fortunately, another theistic philosopher has done some work toward that goal.

3.2 Swinburne and Logical Nominalism

Theistic philosopher Richard Swinburne has developed a view of logic that fits squarely with logical nominalism. His understanding of logic arises from his treatment of logical necessity, or what many philosophers call “broadly logical necessity.”48 It is clear from his discussion of this issue that this notion includes what I’m calling logical entailment or logical consequence. According to Swinburne, logical necessity is “not a very deep feature of the world.”49 He claims that at least one major reason that it has been supposed so is that logical necessity has often been thought to characterize abstract entities like propositions, possible worlds, and the like—a picture that we are already familiar with. As I pointed out with the ultimacy problem above (see §2.2 of this chapter), one reason Swinburne seems motivated to reject this platonist picture, at least


49 Swinburne (1994), 96.
for logic, is because of the implication this view has for God.\textsuperscript{50} It’s interesting to note though that Swinburne seems to be mainly motivated by two other issues in adopting his nominalist picture of logical necessity.\textsuperscript{51}

First, Swinburne seems uncomfortable with the implications that logical platonism would have for our world. He clearly sees that if logical platonism is true, then this means there is a world of abstract entities that governs, in some sense, the nature and behavior of ordinary mundane things in our world. For logical necessities and relations of the abstract world have consequences for how things must be in our physical world. For example, if modus ponens is a valid logical argument constituted by abstract entities in some platonic realm, then it seems that in our world (when it’s true) that if it rains the sidewalk will be wet, then when it rains, necessarily, it is the case that the sidewalk is wet. Swinburne rightly states that “Logical necessities, claims the Platonist, make it inevitable that the world is one sort of place rather than another—by a hard inexorable necessity than which there is none harder.”\textsuperscript{52} Though Swinburne does not give an explicit argument against this point, it’s clear from the tone of his discussion that he is bothered in some way by this other-worldly control or effect on our world.

The second reason that motivates Swinburne to reject logical platonism is more explicit though. Swinburne clearly has a philosophical commitment to theoretical parsimony. He claims: “There is no need to postulate a timeless realm [of abstract

\textsuperscript{50} Murphy (2003), 4 suggests similar.

\textsuperscript{51} See his (1994), chapter 5 and his (2010).

\textsuperscript{52} Swinburne (1994), 105-6.
entities] since everything that the Platonist adduces as grounds for adopting his way of
talking can be redescribed without the need for it. I shall argue that the nominalist is
basically correct.”53 This claim is worded generally. But Swinburne has logical
platonism particularly in sight so he goes on to argue specifically for a form of logical
nominalism. Swinburne defines logical nominalism as the view that logic is mainly
concerned with facts about how humans use language. Swinburne explicitly claims:

[T]he only logical relations and necessary truths that we have any reason to
believe to exist are put forwards on the basis of facts of language that can be
described without this apparatus [i.e. abstract objects]—in terms of how speakers
of a language treat its sentences, together with facts about the referential context
in which those sentences are used.54

Swinburne builds up his view of logical nominalism with what he takes to be the basic
notions of negation, self-contradiction, and minimal entailment. He claims that these
notions belong only to token sentences. Swinburne’s overall picture is not novel and so
is similar to other types of logical nominalism; therefore I don’t need to go into much
detail here on how his view operates.55 But, basically, Swinburne claims that valid
logical arguments “are simply generalizations about language.”56 He summarizes:

53 Swinburne (1994), 106.

54 Ibid., 106. By appealing to “facts about the referential context” Swinburne admits that this is
not a pure, but a modified, nominalism since it’s a theory that appeals to more than just token words or
token sentences. However, as I defined at the beginning of §3, I take a nominalist theory to be one that
does not appeal to abstract objects. Therefore, despite Swinburne’s appeal to “referential context”, his
view of logic still counts as a purely nominalist theory on my view.

55 In fact, Swinburne’s account seems to be a classic example of psychologism—logic is the study
of human inferential practice—which is almost universally rejected in logic today due to the historic
criticisms of Frege and Husserl. See Hill (2001), 7-11. However, a minority of philosophers including
myself finds the charge of psychologism to be vague and overblown. See Jacquette (1997a), (1997b) and
(2001) for a full discussion of the real, and not so real, threats of psychologism. Little of my criticisms
against Swinburne overlap with these issues.

56 Swinburne (1994), 108.
Logic [. . .] concerns only relations of public sentences to each other. It codifies the rules for which sentences commit their utterer to which other sentences, it binds together a packet of sentences to which a speaker is committed by a given sentence. Logic is thus concerned with human behavior—a matter of psychology; not of how we reason casually, but of which minimal entailments we would publicly recognize if pushed.\(^57\)

For example, on Swinburne’s view the valid logical argument of modus ponens is just one of the ways that we’ve agreed to be committed in our discourse. So, if someone makes a claim of “If \(P\) then \(Q\)” to be true and also claims “\(P\)” as true, then we believe this person is committed to “\(Q\)” as being true as well. Logical necessity is thus redefined as, not being a “come what may” relation between abstract entities, but as the rules of a linguistic game such that if someone does not “play” by the rules of the game we would conclude that this person is either confused, ignorant, or cognitively deficient in some way of the linguistic rules.

In similar nominalist fashion, Swinburne holds that the logical nominalist can still use the language of logical platonism—such as “propositions,” “possible worlds,” etc.—as long as such words are understood as shorthand, or stand-in fictions, with no platonist commitments. In this sense, Swinburne admits that logical platonist talk is useful but ultimately dispensable.

On Swinburne’s view, it should be clear here that if logic is concerned with just how people use language, then logical rules are just as conventional as grammatical rules. In other words, since grammatical rules differ from language to language, logical rules just happen to be one of the ways that people have decided to understand the modal

\(^{57}\) Swinburne (1994), 114.
relations between their words and sentences. Thus, on Swinburne’s view, the relation of logical entailment is just a description of convention established by human usage. Individual valid logical arguments are just characterizations of linguistic conventional patterns.58

3.2.1 Problems for Swinburne’s Account. Let’s now return to our overall dialectic. Following the broad outline of Craig’s argument, we saw above that theistic philosophers and logicians can either construe (for instance) logic along platonist or nominalistic lines. Given the problems that arise with abstract objects in relation to God, we concluded that a traditional western theist will reject logical platonism. However, I pointed out that a theist should not so quickly adopt Craig’s proposal for nominalism—of any sort—without a theory. Swinburne has offered a nominalistic theory of logic. Is this a successful account of logic? And if so, does it work as a metaphysical account of logical non-voluntarism?

58 In some ways, Swinburne’s view is incredibly naive. Inferentialists—philosophers who emphasize the role of inferential practice for philosophy of logic—understand that the sort of view that Swinburune is advocating here is far too sparse. Note the following quote from inferentialist Robert Brandom:

Even if, to begin with, attention is restricted to inferential properties, it is clear that not just any notion of correctness of inference will do as a rendering of the sort of content we take our claims and beliefs to have. A semantically adequate notion of correct inference must generate an acceptable notion of conceptual content. But such a notion must fund the idea of objective truth conditions and so of objectively correct inferences. Such properties of judgment and inference outrun actual attitudes of taking or treating judgments and inferences as correct. They are determined by how things actually are, independently of how they are taken to be. Our cognitive attitudes must ultimately answer to these attitude-transcendent facts (Brandom (1994), 137).

At minimum, Brandom recognizes that focusing purely upon inferential practice alone is not enough for establishing objective truth conditions and thus objectively correct inferences (i.e. inferences that match valid logical argument forms). Though I don’t develop this criticism exactly in this way here, a later criticism of Leftow, which I do discuss, seems to get at some of the same issues.
Unfortunately, I think Swinburne’s theory is a very poor account of logic. Leftow (2010), for one, has taken up criticisms specifically against Swinburne’s logical nominalism, only two of which criticisms I will focus on here.\textsuperscript{59} Though I only gave a rough summary of Swinburne’s view, Leftow notes that Swinburne never actually gives an explicit description of his notion of “minimal entailment.” So Leftow provides one.

For any language $L$, minimal entailment is:

\begin{equation}
(\text{ME}) \text{ L-sentence } r_1 \text{ minimally entails } L\text{-sentence } r_2 \text{ iff most } L\text{-speakers would take } L\text{’s rules to commit someone to asserting } r_1 \text{ to } r_2.
\end{equation}

But Leftow highlights that there is a problem with this description, namely that the word “most” creates problems for Swinburne’s account.

\begin{quote}
[T]here does not appear to be a precise minimum per cent of the speaking population at which it becomes the case that ‘most’ speakers are primed to assent that the rules commit someone asserting $r_1$ to $r_2$. Rather, there are cases when it is clear that enough are primed to constitute ‘most’ (99.9 per cent), cases where it is clear that not enough are (4 per cent), and cases in a middle zone where it is just unclear whether there are enough to be ‘most’ in this context (56 percent?). So some account of the semantics of vagueness must fill out our understanding of Swinburne’s theory.\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

Leftow’s main point here is that on Swinburne’s view of logic, we cannot always clearly know when $r_1$ minimally entails $r_2$. The inherent vagueness in relying upon what most people would affirm leaves the validity of many logical arguments up in the air. (Not to mention that this means we have to do statistical analysis in order to determine the

\textsuperscript{59} Leftow takes on Swinburne’s overall view of modality, something that I’m not interested in doing here.

\textsuperscript{60} Leftow (2010), 143. In a footnote, Leftow speaks of a personal correspondence with Swinburne, thus I think we can conclude that Swinburne finds (ME) to be an acceptable characterization of his notion of minimal entailment.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
validity of an argument. (!)) This is a far cry from our usual understanding of logical necessity. However, in the spirit of philosophical charitableness, Leftow attempts to supply Swinburne’s account with the materials it needs.

Swinburne’s notion of minimal entailment assumes, or includes, a notion of rules that commit a speaker of a language to other sentences in the language. Thus, Leftow argues that this notion of minimal entailment commits one to the following notion of determinate commitment:

(DC) If the rules commit someone to P, it is determinate that they commit him/her to P.62

I think (DC) is fairly self-evident, so I won’t provide Leftow’s argumentation for it. But, in short, Leftow believes it is implausible that there can be rule commitment without determinate commitment. Note then, that on Swinburne’s account of logic it follows from (DC) that where the rules are indeterminate, there are no minimal entailments. Once making the vagueness in this notion clear, Leftow goes on to investigate whether Swinburne’s account of logic can be saved by any of the major theories of vagueness. It turns out, as Leftow argues, that Swinburne’s account of logic is either incompatible with any of these theories, or the vagueness theory in question is just implausible.

For example, supplying Swinburne’s logical view with a supervaluationist or “gap” theory of vagueness, the middle zone in question that most speakers are primed to assent to some particular argument’s validity would be neither true nor false (i.e. there is no fact of the matter). But given (DC), this is incompatible with Swinburne’s view of

62 Leftow (2010), 144.
logic. So a supervaluationist account of vagueness will not help Swinburne. Another example, an epistemicist account of vagueness would claim, despite appearances, that there is some precise cut-off percentage that definitely determines what arguments speakers would or would not assent to the validity of. However, epistemicism is massively implausible. Leftow looks at a couple of other theories of vagueness with similar results.

Leftow concludes from this investigation that there is no major theory of vagueness that is either plausible or compatible with Swinburne’s notion of minimal entailment. Since the notion of minimal entailment is central to Swinburne’s nominalistic account of logic, it follows that his account fails. Leftow thinks this result is unsurprising since we have strong intuitions that logical necessity is about more than just what most people will assent to. As Leftow states:

[E]ntailment does not actually turn on what ‘most’ speakers are primed to say. Standard modal accounts of entailment define it in non-vague terms. They have found wide acceptance because there are widespread intuitions that entailment is not a vague concept. On a standard strict-implication account, P entails Q just if it cannot be the case that P is true while Q is false. This is no vague matter. […] Nor does entailment seem a matter of convention. It may be a matter of convention what ‘P’ and ‘Q’ say. But given sufficient conventions to settle what they say, it is not a matter of convention whether it cannot be the case that P is true while Q is false.63

But Leftow pushes further problems upon Swinburne’s account by drawing attention to Swinburne’s understanding of the law of non-contradiction (LNC). Swinburne states:

Philosophers postulate propositions as what is meant by some sentence, and then endow these with (sharp) properties. A sentence means either this proposition or that one. They decide that they are either true or false. So contradictions must be

false . . . the ‘impossibility’ of [a contradiction being true] is a consequence of the understanding of ‘contradiction’ in this framework. In ordinary language, ‘it is raining and it isn’t raining’ can be true. That’s why it doesn’t express a proposition of the form ‘p & ~p’. . . the necessity arises from the framework that we have . . . created; the rules of classical logic as opposed to human language.\(^\text{64}\)

Based on the above, Leftow agrees that we do sometimes use ordinary-language constructions like “it is raining and it isn’t raining” to say something true—in this example to express that the weather is a borderline case, perhaps misting.\(^\text{65}\) Such examples, claims Swinburne, show that when we insist that contradictory sentences cannot say anything true in our logic, we are just adopting a convention to treat such sentences differently. But, as Leftow points out, this explanation sits ill with Swinburne’s overall account of logical laws being “generalizations about language”\(^\text{66}\) or “of logical relations between sentences recognizable in many particular cases.”\(^\text{67}\) For, if we do in fact violate the LNC in ordinary speech, then including it as a valid argument form in our logic textbooks would mean that logic is not really a generalization of what most people would affirm, as Swinburne so claims. Moreover, Leftow argues against Swinburne that sentence constructions like “it is raining and it isn’t raining” are not affirmations of contradictory sentences.

If someone says ‘it’s raining and it’s not’ and I say ‘You’ve contradicted yourself’, the reply will surely be: ‘Not really. You’re missing the point.’ Ordinary speakers do not think that this is both a contradiction and true, even

\(^{64}\) Swinburne (private correspondence), cited in Ibid., 146, footnote 13.

\(^{65}\) Or, a rather common phenomenon when I lived in Florida, on some occasions I could look out the windows on one side of my house and see that it was raining (and sometimes quite the downpour) while looking out the windows on the opposite side of the house it was bright and sunny!

\(^{66}\) Swinburne (1994), 108.

\(^{67}\) Ibid., 109.
speakers innocent of formal logic. They take it as a striking way to say something true indirectly; the conventions are not that contradictory sentences are sometimes true, but that false sentences can sometimes be used as a way to suggest true ones. There is a perfectly good ordinary-language way to say what someone who tokens ‘it is raining and it is not raining’ wants to suggest which does not violate \([\text{LNC}]\)—viz. ‘it’s misting’.  

Given the plausibility of this explanation, such utterances are not affirmations of contradictory sentences, which in turn takes away much of the steam that Swinburne used to claim that the LNC, like all valid logical arguments, is simply an adopted logical convention.

Leftow seems to focus upon this issue because he claims, and I agree, that “we have strong intuitions that [LNC’s] truth does not depend on us.” Therefore, unless Swinburne gives us a good argument for the conventionality of LNC, it seems we should go with our strong intuitions concerning logic first. The closest Swinburne comes to giving such an argument is that he claims contradictions lack “ultimate sense”: if the consequences of sentences include an explicit contradiction,

although it is prima facie conceivable that these sentences be true, it is not ultimately conceivable; they only make initial sense. They do not make \textit{ultimate sense}. [They are] not conceivable by someone who begins to fill out [. . .] what a world would be like in which [they were] true.

But this notion of inconceivability is problematic for Swinburne. If inconceivability is just being unable to imagine or picture a world that would make a contradiction true, then Swinburne’s account is in trouble. For example, we can’t imagine or picture the null-  

\[\text{68} \text{ Leftow (2010), 147. He uses “principle of non-contradiction,” i.e. PNC, instead of my use of LNC.}\]

\[\text{69} \text{ Ibid., 148.}\]

\[\text{70} \text{ Swinburne (1994), 111, 113.}\]
set’s existence or non-existence. But regardless of our cognitive or imaginative abilities, the null-set surely either exists or it does not. Thus, inconceivability does not seem sufficient for logical impossibility, or for lacking sense. Leftow concludes that if being inconceivable is just entailing a contradiction, it can’t explain Swinburne’s claim that contradictions lack ultimate sense. On the other hand, if being inconceivable is something other than entailing a contradiction, there is another problem for LNC’s supposed conventionality. Swinburne affirmed that contradictions cannot be true because we cannot conceive of them being true. But this is presumably something beyond our control. Since conventions are within our control (i.e. we establish them), it follows that the LNC cannot be a matter of convention.

In summary, I believe we can conclude that Swinburne’s nominalist explanation of logical necessity is not a successful account of logic. Along with Brian Leftow, we’ve investigated at least two big problems for this account. Swinburne’s logical nominalism fails to successfully explain logical discourse and it violates common intuitions concerning logic. And as I think is clear, if an account of logic fails as a successful or plausible explanation, then it surely won’t help as a non-voluntarist explanation of the relationship between God and logic.

But this is only one version of logical nominalism. It does not follow that there are no other successful versions of logical nominalism that the logical non-voluntarist may appeal to. Are there any other better nominalist logical theories?
3.3 Problems for Logical Nominalism (Generally)

I now want to step away from focusing upon a particular account of logical nominalism and show why I believe any account of logical nominalism has little hope of being any more successful. I won’t be so bold as to offer an argument that claims to defeat every form of logical nominalism. Rather, I’ll look at two other classic approaches that attempt to establish a thoroughly nominalist account of logic. 71 I’ll then show how a similar criticism applies to both forms, as well as Swinburne’s own nominalist account. I believe this will be good evidence for inductively concluding that any form of logical nominalism will most likely suffer from the same problem and thus logical nominalism is not available to the logical non-voluntarist as a plausible way of construing the relationship between God and logic.

3.3.1 Empirical Logical Nominalism. One nominalist account of logic that seems initially quite plausible is the idea that we establish valid logical arguments by experience. For example, we might claim that we have good reason to believe that if it rains, the sidewalk will be wet and since it is raining, this indeed logically implies that the sidewalk is wet because we have seen many cases of this form—where “if A then B” and “A is the case”—and every time it turned out that “B is the case.” This sort of approach seems straightforwardly intuitive. Unfortunately though, it faces one overwhelming obstacle: the very process of confirming a generalization by examination of its instances presupposes at least some logic. For instance, in the above example it seems that one

71 This section is highly indebted to Maddy (2007), 202-6.
must use modus ponens in order to confirm modus ponens, as well as the law of universal introduction. Therefore, empirical logical nominalism seems to beg the question in establishing logic.

More modern forms of empirical-type logical nominalism have not fared any better. In W. V. Quine’s work, logic is empirically confirmed as part of its place in the seamless whole of our best scientific theory:

A self-contained theory which we can check with experience includes, in point of fact, not only its various theoretical hypotheses of so-called natural science but also such portions of logic and mathematics as it makes use of.\(^{73}\)

Given that logic is part of this overall theory, Quine believes that if we are presented with some recalcitrant datum, we could choose to revise even the valid laws of logic:

Revision even of the logical law of excluded middle has been proposed as a means of simplifying quantum mechanics; and what difference is there in principle between such a shift and the shift whereby Kepler superseded Ptolemy, or Einstein Newton, or Darwin Aristotle.\(^{74}\)

For Quine, the supposed necessity of logic just arises from its centrally located place in the web of belief, which is usually insulated from sharp empirical input at the sensory periphery of the web. But, as Quine says, logic can be revised if enough recalcitrant data (i.e. some contrary empirical experience) pushes us to do so. But, similar to the prior approach, it’s hard to see how revision, in light of recalcitrant data, does not presuppose

\(^{72}\) It could be that Quine abandoned this view later. See Maddy (2005) for an examination of Quine’s development of his views.

\(^{73}\) Quine (1954), 121.

\(^{74}\) Quine (1951), 43.
some logic—at minimum the LNC. For how does one know that there is conflicting data unless one assumes the LNC?

Though this is primarily an epistemological point, I think it’s clear that highlighting this problem shows that an empirical approach provides no help in establishing that logical arguments are constituted by non-abstract entities as logical nominalism claims. Therefore, since the empirical testing of the validity of logical arguments cannot be done without presupposing at least some of those arguments as already existing, an empirical approach to logic provides no help in establishing logical nominalism.

3.3.2 Conventional Logical Nominalism. Another nominalist account of logic, one that was very popular at one time, is what we might call conventional logical nominalism. This view is fairly close to Swinburne’s account. Conventional logical nominalism claims “that we are free to adopt any logic we want to without coming into conflict with any pre-existing facts, that we choose the logic we have for its various pragmatic virtues, that we both create and come to know the logical truths through this act of decision.”\footnote{Maddy (2007), 204.} Quine is often credited with the fatal argument against conventional logical nominalism. As we saw illustrated earlier (see §2.3 of this chapter) the number of valid logical arguments is infinite. Since we are finite beings, we obviously cannot list them all. Therefore, a logical conventionalist must give a finite list of general arguments from which we can derive all of the rest. But, as Quine points out:
Each of these conventions in general, announcing the truth of every one of an infinity of statements conforming to a certain description; derivation of the truth of any specific statement from the general convention thus requires a logical inference [. . .] In a word, the difficulty is that if logic is to proceed mediately from conventions, logic is needed for inferring logic from the conventions.\footnote{Quine (1936), 103, 104.}

Given the criticism against Quine’s empirical view of logic, it is ironic that Quine points out a problem here for conventional logical nominalism that we also saw for empirical logical nominalism. According to Quine, it seems that we must presuppose at least some valid logical arguments in order to be able to list all of the other valid logical arguments, as conventionalism so requires. In other words, logical conventionalism seems to assume some logical arguments while simultaneously claiming that all such arguments are simply matters of conventions.

\textbf{3.3.3 Overall Problem for Logical Nominalism.} At this point it’s interesting to note that Swinburne’s nominalist account also suffers from the same problem. One of Swinburne’s former students, philosopher Benjamin Murphy, argues that any possible language must operate within the bounds of certain necessary truths, including the necessary truths of valid logical arguments.\footnote{See Murphy (2003), 6-9.} He thus concludes that it is no accident, generalization, or convention that we have arrived at affirming the validity of the logical arguments that we do. For the validity of argument forms does not seem to be based upon contingent truths about human decisions but based upon necessary logical truths. In essence, Murphy is arguing that at least some logic must be presupposed in order for
people to affirm the validity of other argument forms. Brian Leftow makes a similar point against Swinburne:

> Convention comes in at the level of what sentences say what. But once it is determinate what they say, whether we can conceive what they say is a fact about our powers of conception. We do not determine what these are. Our natures, not our language, impose their limits: it is up to us what sentences say what, but it is not up to us what is conceivable to us, and so it is not up to us what conceivable situations we can use sentences to express. If narrow logical modalities are relative to anything, then, they are relative to our natures, not our conventions.  

I’ll not take the time to trace out Leftow’s argument, but he goes on to claim that our natures are dependent on, what he calls, an “absolute modality.” In short, Leftow claims that our natures are dependent upon deeper necessities beyond conventions or generalizations, which include the valid arguments of logic. If this is correct, then our “choice” of logic is constrained by logic. So, again, we see the same criticism brought against Swinburne as other forms of logical nominalism: logic must be presupposed in affirming logic.

Given that all of the forms of logical nominalism we have looked at here suffer from the same problem, it seems plausible to conclude that most any form of logical nominalism will have the same sort of problem. Therefore, I inductively conclude that logical nominalism is a problematic account of logic. It does not serve as a successful account of logical discourse. And moreover, given our main topic, if it’s not a successful account of logic, then it also cannot serve the logical non-voluntarist in their explanation of the relationship between God and logic.

78 Leftow (2010), 148.
3.4 Summary Assessment of Nominalist Logical Non-Voluntarism

One might point out that the all of this argumentation concerning logical nominalism is completely beside the point. For, as we’ve said more than once now, logical non-voluntarism is a theory primarily about dependence and independence relations, not a theory primarily about ontology. However, as I’ve tried to argue, what one theorizes about ontology might very well have implications about dependency or independency.

Nevertheless, I’ll take the above criticism seriously in the following way. For the sake of argument, let’s imagine that all of the above criticisms were overcome. In other words, let’s assume that there exists some nominalist account of logic that successfully explains logical discourse and also adequately explains our widely held intuitions concerning logic. If this were the case, would the logical non-voluntarist then have a successful basis for claiming that the validity of the logical consequence relation is fully independent of God’s will or commands? And would this also show that logic is truly ontologically independent where God’s being does not cause, explain, or ground the logical consequence relation?

I think not. For if valid logical arguments are just generalizations about language, mere conventions established by pure fiat, or empirical verifications, then surely all of these contingent entities are within God’s power to affect. Language is presumably always changing and evolving due to human usage and change. And conventions, by definition, are entities simply established by human beings while empirical verifications are the result of investigating the world of contingent experience. It should be obvious that linguistic entities and conventions are something that human beings can and do
change. But if logic is constituted by linguistic or conventional entities, per the claims of some logical nominalist theory, then one can hardly claim that linguistic and conventional entities are independent of God as logical non-voluntarism wants to so claim. If humans can change such things, surely God can as well. And if a successful logical nominalism was built upon empirically verified contingent realities, then surely these contingent things are entities that an omnipotent divine being can affect as well. Therefore, I see no help for the logical non-voluntarist by appealing to logical nominalism. Even if there was a nominalist theory that successfully explained logical discourse and respected common logical intuitions, such a theory would not have the resources to keep the non-voluntarist’s primary thesis intact, namely that logic is independent of God’s will or commands, or independent from his creating or sustaining power.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter we investigated logical non-voluntarism: the view that the validity of logical arguments was a feature independent and antecedent to God’s willing or commands and independent of God’s creating and sustaining power in the sense of causing, grounding or explaining logical consequence. We first clarified and then investigated a platonist construal of logical non-voluntarism. We saw that it suffered from several problems violating core intuitions of traditional Abrahamic theism thus making the view an unacceptable explanation of the relationship between God and logic. As an alternative we investigated a nominalist construal of logical non-voluntarism. Though this approach initially gets us around the problems brought on by a robust logical
non-voluntarism, we’ve seen that logical nominalism fails as a viable explanation of logical discourse and does not respect commonly held intuitions concerning logic. Moreover, even if this were not the case, I’ve argued that logical nominalism is insufficient to uphold the non-voluntarist position.

Since these two alternatives exhaust the options for conceiving logical non-voluntarism, I conclude that logical non-voluntarism is not a viable option for explaining the relationship between God and logic.

So what now?
CHAPTER 5: A VIABLE THIRD ALTERNATIVE

It appears that our investigation of how to think about the relationship between God and logic has given us rather disappointing results. Following the map set out by the Logiphro dilemma, we asked: Are valid logical arguments valid because God’s commands or wills to make them so (i.e. logical voluntarism); or, like the rest of us, does God acknowledge valid logical arguments as valid because their validity is something independent and antecedent to his commands or will (i.e. logical non-voluntarism)?

Our investigation in Chapter Three, of the first option logical voluntarism, encountered various objections; but we saw that the vacuity objection ultimately made this position untenable for traditional western theists. For such theists hold that God has intelligibly communicated to certain individuals in history, which in many instances has been faithfully recorded and disseminated via Scripture. But the vacuity objection shows that logical voluntarism exacts too high a price from theists who hold such a position. For one could not justifiably believe that a logical voluntarist God’s special revelation means what we would normally take such utterances or words to mean. Thus logical voluntarism destroys the notion of special revelation and so theists who hold to the importance of special revelation must reject it.

Unfortunately our next investigation in Chapter Four, of the second available option logical non-voluntarism, also ran into problems. As we saw, logical non-
voluntarism can be construed as either a platonist or nominalist theory. For platonist logical non-voluntarism, we saw that it violated key intuitions and conditions of the aseity-sovereignty doctrine, a core part of traditional western theism. However, we also saw that a nominalist construal of logical non-voluntarism is also problematic, and not for theological reasons, but given issues strictly related to logic. For the evidence suggests that logical nominalism is not an adequate account of logic. Thus, it cannot help the logical non-voluntarist position. Since both platonist and nominalist logical non-voluntarism are problematic, logical non-voluntarism must be rejected as the way to think about the relationship between God and logic.

In summary then, neither logical voluntarism, nor logical non-voluntarism, seems to be a tenable way of conceiving the relationship between God and logic. And perhaps this should be an unsurprising result, for as we discussed in Chapter Two one objection to approaching the question concerning the relationship between God and logic with a Euthyphro dialectical structure is that it would more than likely fail. This pessimistic prediction was based upon the almost universally perceived success of the original Euthyphro dilemma in supposedly overcoming any philosophical attempt that seeks to ground or explain morality in God’s will or commands. We have attempted a similar sort of explanation between logic and God’s commands or will; and it appears we have failed as well. So perhaps we have indeed entered a lame horse into a philosophical horserace.

However, remember that we gave some reason back in Chapter Two to question whether the original Euthyphro dilemma is as successfully damning as usually believed. I noted there is a growing body of philosophical literature that challenges this age-old critique. I suggest in the following that we look to some of this literature to see how the
Euthyphro dilemma has been challenged. We will see that some of the perceived success of the Euthyphro dilemma comes from it being nested within a larger critique of any sort of theologically based ethics in general. So, in §1.1, I want us to see how the Euthyphro dilemma fits within this larger critique. In §1.2 we’ll briefly re-investigate the original Euthyphro dilemma and then introduce a long-held, but rarely spelled out or fully addressed, theistic challenge that lays claim to a viable third alternative to moral voluntarism or moral non-voluntarism. In §1.3 we’ll try to clarify what this alternative is.

Starting in §2, I will attempt to re-fashion this third alternative to the original Euthyphro dilemma into a working logical theory that is a legitimate third alternative to the Logiphro dilemma. In §2.1 we’ll revisit Absolute Creationism to see a hint at what sort of model we’ll need. In §2.2 and §2.3 we’ll look at the recent work of philosopher Greg Welty as he builds upon some notions from Aquinas in order to build a model about the relationship of necessary truths to God. And then in §3 I’ll attempt to build upon Welty’s work and provide a model of God’s relationship to logical consequence, one that to my knowledge has never been given before. In conclusion, I will present what I believe is a satisfying philosophical position that explains the relationship between God and logic by overcoming all the problems associated with both logical voluntarism and (robust) logical non-voluntarism.

1. Returning to the Euthyphro Dilemma

When we investigated the updated (to our context) Euthyphro dilemma back in Chapter Two we saw that it basically challenged a specific kind of ethical theory—one that attempts to explain or ground morality in acts of divine will or divine commands.
But, as briefly mentioned in that chapter, there are other ways to conceive of ethics in relation to God. Thus I find it interesting that the Euthyphro dilemma is usually referenced as justification for rejecting any theologically based moral theory. Therefore, before returning to the Euthyphro, I think it might be helpful to back up and see how the general rejection of any theologically based ethic might go. Then I’ll suggest how I believe the Euthyphro critique fits with this outlook such that the Euthyphro dilemma can then be simply sighted as the primary reason for rejecting any theologically based ethical theory.

1.1 Theologically Based Ethics

The notion that morality is grounded in or depends primarily upon God was once widespread and very popular in western thought. And to reject this claim was once considered completely devastating to ethical theory and practice. The following comment from John Locke is fairly emblematic of this historical perspective:

[T]hose are not to be tolerated who deny the being of God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all. At minimum here, Locke seems to think that unless God exists, or unless human beings believe that God exists, then ethical notions (particularly promises and other types of obligations) don’t really exist either. For without God, Locke claims, these ethical notions simply “dissolve.” And if such notions do not exist, presumably moral notions like promises and obligations lose their normative force. I think this is why Locke claims

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1 This section is highly indebted to Garcia and King (2009), 1-8.

2 Locke (1689), 52.
that the “bonds of human society” would not exist either since he presumably thinks that without a general belief in God, we would be causally left with anarchy. Thus Locke contends that God, or again at least belief in God, is necessary for the practical efficacy of ethics in maintaining human civilization. According to Locke, in order to have morality then it must be theologically grounded.³

Similarly, this close connection between God and morality has come out in other philosophical contexts as well. Some theistic philosophers have taken the connection between God and morality to be so close or so intuitive that it is sometimes given as a premise in so-called moral arguments for God’s existence. Such arguments usually take something like the following general form:

(1) If God does not exist, then some apparent and important feature F of ethics is illusory.
(2) The apparent and important feature F of ethics is not illusory.
(3) Thus, God exists.

Note how claim (1) is similar to what Locke claimed above. However, in our own day, there’s a very clear consensus among philosophers that claim (1) should be considered just outright false. So the idea that God is necessary for any sort of ethical feature seems completely false to most.⁴ In fact, there is a fairly widespread acceptance that a God-based morality has actually impeded moral and philosophical progress, as Derek Parfit claims, “Belief in God, or in many gods, prevented the free development of moral

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³ I’ll not discuss the supposed validity of this argument here. I merely offer it for illustrative purposes.

⁴ It should be noted that many contemporary theistic philosophers reject this claim as well.
reasoning.”

Thus, the idea that ethics is, or must be, theologically based, or that the connection between God and morality is close or even helpful, is considered a very outmoded idea indeed by many philosophers in our day. The complete history of how God-based morality fell out of philosophical favor is, I’m sure, a very complex picture. But I believe philosophers Robert Garcia and Nathan King give a plausible summary of how this result came about:

During the Enlightenment, belief in God waned while moral reasoning flourished. Moreover, the idea that God plays an essential role in ethics was subjected to serious critique. It is fair to say that in the wake of the Enlightenment, belief in God was widely taken to be unsupportable by reason. Theism was defrocked, in no small part, by numerous published critiques of the traditional arguments for the existence of God; the impact of such objections is still with us. As a result, many thinkers have concluded that God is either unreal or unknowable—and in either case, unavailable to play a role in an ethical theory.

We see here that Garcia and King mainly lay the blame for theologically based ethics’ demise upon the overturn of traditional arguments for God’s existence, especially those that rose in favor during the Enlightenment (approx. AD 1650-1800). This reasoning seems fairly convincing. For if there is no good reason or argument to believe in God, and if we still want to hold to the objective reality of ethics (i.e. claim (2) above), then it clearly follows that ethics cannot be grounded in God. Since it’s probably the case that most contemporary philosophers are atheists or agnostics, this explanation of the unpopularity of conceiving ethics as based upon God makes much sense.

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5 Parfit (1986), 454. As with Locke above, I’m not interested in discussing the validity of this view.

However, it seems to me, that the primary reason or argument often appealed to against any sort of theologically based ethic is not an atheistic or agnostic presupposition. Though the spirit of the Enlightenment and the rise of atheism and agnosticism surely popularized attacks against God-based morality, I find that the main reason that such conceptions of morality are pooh-poohed today is usually associated with the Euthyphro dilemma from ancient philosophy. But again, we’ve seen that the Euthyphro dilemma operates mainly as a criticism of theories that attempt to explain morality in terms of God’s commands or will. How does the Euthyphro dilemma operate as a justification for rejecting any theological conception of morality? I think there is a sort of implicit reasoning that goes like the following: Even if God exists, the Euthyphro dilemma shows that God plays no integral or interesting role in ethics. For the moral voluntarist picture is wracked with problems (e.g. the no reasons objection, the abhorrent commands object, etc.). And the moral non-voluntarist position shows that since God is merely a reporter of those moral truths we might discover on our own, then, at best, all God can really contribute to moral thought is the role of being a moral advisor, or perhaps a life coach. Thank you very much, so the reasoning goes, but we humans are just fine on our own without bringing religion into the mix. And so I think the above is why someone like Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker can simply claim concerning God-based morality, in one clean sweep: “Plato made short work of it 2,400 years ago.”7 Thus I believe the Euthyphro dilemma often operates in the above way as a general reason for rejecting any sort of theologically based ethic. And I think it should go without saying that this sort of

reasoning would seem to transfer fairly easy over to our investigation. For even if God exists, then trying to argue for some theory that explains logic in relation to God will seem fairly useless as well.

However, as I’ve already said, there are various critics in a growing body of philosophical literature who have questioned whether the Euthyphro dilemma is such a slam-dunk against any theologically based moral theory. So let’s return to the Euthyphro dilemma and examine what some of these philosophers have said in response to it.

1.2 The Euthyphro Dilemma Revisited

We’ve already given some time to investigating the Euthyphro dilemma back in Chapter Two. However, to help reorient us, theistic philosopher Keith Yandell gives a concise presentation of the Euthyphro dilemma in the following, which should sound very familiar to us by now:

One argument for the autonomy of ethics from religion starts from the old dilemma taken from the Platonic dialogue Euthyphro. Succinctly it goes: either the good is good because the gods choose it or the gods choose it because it is good. We can easily revise this so that it applies to monotheism: either God arbitrarily decides what is good or bad, right or wrong, or what is good or bad, right or wrong, is determined by something independent of God’s choice. In the former case, nothing is intrinsically good or bad, right or wrong. In the latter, God’s sovereignty is compromised. Either alternative is incompatible with traditional monotheism. So ethics is autonomous from religion. This has been taught in countless introductory courses in philosophy and ethics.

The argument is a dilemma: there are just two possibilities. Neither is compatible with ethics being based on monotheism. So ethics cannot be, and so is not, based on monotheism.8

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8 Yandell (2012), 101. Note how Yandell also assumes that the Euthyphro is a critique of any theologically based ethic.
Yandell explains that the Euthyphro dilemma purports that there are only two options for conceiving of a theory that grounds ethics in God’s will or commands, and both are problematic. One, ethics becomes completely arbitrary upon God’s capricious choice (i.e. moral voluntarism); or two, ethics actually turns out to be superfluous to God’s will and commands (i.e. moral non-voluntarism). This should be old hat to us by now. But let me restate the criticism in another way: The Euthyphro dilemma shows that either moral voluntarism makes ethics too dependent upon God; or, moral non-voluntarism makes ethics too independent from God. Neither option is acceptable, especially to traditional western theists. Since, according to the Euthyphro dilemma, these are the only two options available, then it seems that any sort of divine command ethical theory—or as we saw in the last section, any sort of theologically based ethic—is out the door.

But there has been a growing body of philosophical literature by those who wish to defend a God-based morality from this infamous argument. It’s at this point that I believe our investigation becomes instructive. For many theistic thinkers (not only now but throughout history) have charged that the Euthyphro dilemma is a false dilemma. Yandell explains: “A dilemma argument is successful only if the alternatives presented exhaust all possibilities. Offering only two possibilities, this dilemma does not.”

Generally, a dilemma is false if there are one or more legitimate possibilities other than what the dilemma in question offers. In other words, a false dilemma is false in the sense that it claims these options are the only options available, when in fact there may be other

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viable alternatives. Moreover, a false dilemma can be false in a further way if it turns out that at least one of these further possibilities is a successful option.

So Yandell claims that moral voluntarism and moral non-voluntarism are not the only two available options to the Euthyphro dilemma. And this is exactly what the growing body of philosophical literature I keep referring to has been claiming. And, moreover, this is not a new criticism but one with much historical precedence. David Baggett and Jerry Walls explain:

[There is a] third alternative, though [it] is hardly a philosophical novelty. It has a venerable history in the tradition of Christian thought [as well as traditional western theism generally] that has taken a number of notable forms, including the following: Augustine’s “divine ideas tradition”; Leibniz’s effort to root mathematical truth in God’s noetic activity; Aquinas’s insistence that anything, that in any way is, is from God; Berkeley’s radical idealism; Descartes’ view of constant creation; and even Jonathan Edwards’s misguided attempt at temporal parts theory—all of these were efforts motivated by the theological conviction that God is at the root of all that is.¹⁰

So if there is indeed a third viable alternative as the above philosophers claim (for this quote does not say exactly what that alternative is), this would mean that the Euthyphro dilemma is a false dilemma and thus answerable as an attack on a theologically based conception of ethics. Again though, let me reiterate that our primary interest here is not to resolve the Euthyphro dilemma against theistic ethical theorizing. Rather we are looking for some insight on how to overcome our own version of the dilemma. For if there is a suggestive viable third alternative to the Euthyphro dilemma, perhaps an analogous third alternative can be offered against the Logiphro dilemma as well. Given

¹⁰ Baggett and Walls (2011), 87. The longer bracketed thought is my own.
this hopeful thought, it behooves us to investigate and get clear on what this third alternative to the Euthyphro dilemma exactly is.

Before doing so though, I believe attention should be drawn to what I see as a major shortcoming in this literature concerning this historical third alternative. As Baggett and Walls claim, this third alternative is not novel and has taken sundry forms in the writings of many different major thinkers of the western theistic tradition. However, many of the philosophers in the *current* literature, that claim to defend or uphold some version of this third alternative, rarely give much explanation or detail to this supposedly successful option. Contemporary defenders seem to do little more than list historical adherents as authorities, as Baggett and Walls have done above (though they go on later in their (2011) work to spell out their view), or they purposely give incomplete explanations. Philosophical theologian Gijsbert Van Den Brink makes a typical comment in this regard:

Fortunately, there is a rather easy way out of this [Euthyprho-like] dilemma, which is hinted at (but not straightforwardly worked out) by some of the authors discussed in the preceding subsections, and which is in fact so well-known and well-founded in the classical tradition that it will suffice here to sketch out only its main lines.\(^\text{11}\)

As Van Den Brink notes, this third alternative is “not straightforwardly worked out” but only “hinted at” by many authors. And frustratingly, Van Den Brink himself does little more than “sketch out” this alternative as well.

\(^{11}\) Van Den Brink (1993), 201-2. Likewise, Copan and Craig claim: “Historically, the mainstream position in response to the challenge of Platonism has been conceptualism” (2004), 189. Yet, they do little to spell out exactly how this conceptualism view goes.
Therefore, going against this trend, I want to try and clearly lay out this third alternative to the Euthyphro dilemma—again, in order that, hopefully, we can construct our own version of it for the Logiphro dilemma. To that end, I’ve found the thoughts of theistic philosopher Alvin Plantinga to be most helpful in this regard. I think an investigation of Plantinga on this subject will go far in aiding us to clearly explain the third alternative to the Euthyphro dilemma and thus how it might be extended to our own problem.

1.3 Answering the Euthyphro Dilemma

*Does God Have a Nature?* is Plantinga’s 1980 Aquinas Lecture at Marquette University. As the title suggests, Plantinga seeks to establish whether God has a nature, and if so an explanation of just what that nature consists in. Though this subject may seem fairly far afield from the moral issues of the Euthyphro dilemma, Plantinga engages in a host of questions about the relationship of God to necessary truths, including the supposedly necessary truths of morality. I find the whole of this little book very interesting. But it is at the end of this book that Plantinga gives the following enticing thoughts:

Can we ever say a pair of necessary propositions \( A \) and \( B \) that \( A \) makes \( B \) true or that \( A \) is the explanation of \( B \)? Could we say, perhaps, that [Necessarily \( 7 + 5 = 12 \)] is *grounded in* [It is part of God’s nature to believe that \( 7 + 5 = 12 \)]? If so, what are the relevant senses of “explains,” “makes true” and “grounded in?” These are good questions, and good topics for further study. If we can answer them affirmatively, then perhaps we can point to an important dependence of abstract objects upon God, even though necessary truths about these objects are not within his control.\(^{13}\)

\(^{12}\) Thought primarily taken from Plantinga, the rough outline of §1.3 is highly indebted to Baggett and Walls discussion in their (2011), 87-92.
Here Plantinga is particularly talking about God and abstract objects. But let’s sidestep this metaphysical furniture for what I take to be the more interesting and important point here, which is, I suggest, the last sentence where Plantinga makes a distinction between dependence and control. What Plantinga hints at here is, I believe, an important distinction for resolving the Euthyphro dilemma. For with it the theist might explain that, say, moral truths are dependent on God (thus denying moral non-voluntarism) yet maintain that such truths are not within God’s control (thus denying moral voluntarism). If this suggestion could be made good, then this would supply the theist with a legitimate alternative to the Euthyphro dilemma. Again though, we only have a hint here from Plantinga’s concluding comment.

Fortunately Plantinga returned to this issue two years later in his presidential address to the American Philosophical Association entitled “How to Be an Anti-Realist,” where he offered a way to affirm a non-control dependence relation between God and necessary truths. What Plantinga calls “anti-realist” here, following Kant, is any view that posits that things in the world owe their fundamental structure and perhaps existence to some activity of minds. Plantinga spends much of this address arguing against versions of this anti-realism represented by arguments from former American Philosophical Association presidents Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty. For all the problems he points out for anti-realism, Plantinga still admits that there is strong intuitive support for such a view, or something closely akin to it:

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13 Plantinga (1980), 146.
How could there be truths totally independent of minds or persons? Truths are the sort of things persons know; and the idea that there are or could be truths quite beyond the best methods of apprehension seems peculiar and outré and somehow outrageous. What would account for such truths? How would they get there? Where would they come from? How could the things that are in fact true or false—propositions, let’s say—exist in serene and majestic independence of persons and their apprehension? How could there be propositions no one has ever so much as grasped or thought of? It can seem just crazy to suppose that propositions could exist quite independent of minds or persons or judging beings. That there should just be these truths, independent of persons and their noetic activities can, in certain moods and from certain perspectives, seem wildly counterintuitive. How could there be truths, of for that matter, falsehoods, if there weren’t any person to think or believe or judge them?  

Of course platonism, like the version of robust logical non-voluntarism discussed in Chapter Four, goes strongly against this anti-realist intuition since versions of it affirm that there are certain truths that exist independently of anybody knowing them. Plantinga quips that such views are “realism run amok.” We’ll not discuss Plantinga’s sidestepping the fact that many illustrious philosophers have opted for such “crazy” realist ontologies. Despite his critical perspective here, it’s clear that Plantinga is not rejecting the objectivity associated with platonism, but only its mind-independence. Plantinga attempts to resolve these competing notions in the following:

So what we really have here is a sort of antinomy. On the one hand there is a deep impulse towards anti-realism; there can’t really be truths independent of noetic activity. On the other hand there is the disquieting fact that anti-realism, at least of the sorts we have been considering, seems incoherent and otherwise objectionable. We have here a paradox seeking resolution, a thesis and antithesis seeking synthesis. And what is by my lights the correct synthesis, was suggested long before Hegel. This synthesis was suggested by Augustine, endorsed by most

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14 Plantinga (1982), 67-8. I should be clear here that I am in no way sympathetic to Plantinga’s anti-realist sympathies. However, his anti-realist intuitions do motivate a conclusion that I am sympathetic with, as I’ll show.

15 Ibid., 68. Of course there is a whole tradition of philosophers who see nothing quite so “crazy” about such forms of realism.
of the theistic tradition [Note again the appeal to traditional authorities], and given succinct statement by Thomas Aquinas:

“Even if there were no human intellects, there could be truths because of their relation to the divine intellect. But if, per impossible, there were no intellects at all, but things continued to exist, then there would be such reality as truth.” (De Veritate Q. 1, A.6 Respondeo). The thesis, then, is that truth cannot be independent of noetic activity on the part of persons. The antithesis is that it must be independent of our noetic activity. And the synthesis is that truth is independent of our intellectual activity but not of God’s.  

Let’s try to slowly piece together what Plantinga is claiming here. On the side of anti-realism, Plantinga wants to affirm the intuition that truth is mind-dependent—truths cannot exist without some mind knowing them. On the side of platonism, Plantinga wants to affirm the intuition that there are many true propositions that are independent of our mental input or control (this is the objectionable incoherence of anti-realism he refers to). His suggested resolution to these competing intuitions, following Aquinas, is that truth is independent of human intellectual activity but it must be dependent on some other intellectual activity. Plantinga thinks that the best candidate mind for upholding all true propositions is God’s mind.

Plantinga’s suggestion here hearkens back to the distinction he made in the concluding thoughts of Does God Have a Nature? For he is attempting to show here how propositions (i.e. “truths”) depend on God without their truth being subject to his control. But what exactly is the nature of this relation between God and propositions? Plantinga clarifies his position: “It is thus not the case that a proposition is true because God believes it. On the other hand it is the case, I think, that a proposition exists because God

16 Plantinga (1982), 68. The bracketed comment is my own.
thinks or conceives it.”

Thus Plantinga is not suggesting that propositions are true or made true just because God believes them, which invites a voluntarist interpretation; rather, God believes a proposition because it is true. Yet, the proposition exists because God thinks it, which denies non-voluntarism—that truths exist independently of some mind. Plantinga concludes with the following:

[T]he fundamental anti-realist intuition—that truth is not independent of mind—is indeed correct. This intuition is best accommodated by the theistic claim that necessarily, propositions have two properties essentially: being conceived by God and being true if and only if believed by God. So how can we sensibly be anti-realists? Easily enough: by being theists.

I’m not particularly interested into entering the details of Plantinga’s overall argument here. But I am interested in the fact that we have now identified some resources for filling out the sought for third alternative for overcoming the Euthyphro dilemma. For on this proposal God believes propositions that represent moral truths because they are true. Thus his believing does not make them true and so moral voluntarism is denied. But these same propositions exist because God thinks them. Thus the existence of moral truths is dependent upon God and so moral non-voluntarism is denied. Baggett and Walls attempt to fill out Plantinga’s picture as it applies, more specifically, to ethics:

[C]onsider the proposition that it is bad to torture sentient creatures for the fun of it. Such a proposition is plausibly taken as necessarily true. On Plantinga’s creative anti-realist view, God believes such a proposition because it is true, rather than its being true because God believes it. Consistent with Plantinga’s rejection of universal possibilism [i.e. voluntarism], not even God could alter the truth value of the proposition. [..] His version . . . is not, however, a pure divine independence theory [i.e. platonism or non-voluntarism] . . . for the proposition expressing such a truth exists due to God’s thinking it, which he always had and

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17 Plantinga (1982), 70.

18 Ibid.
always will. So the proposition expressing such a necessary truth depends on God, even though God does not and cannot alter its contents. Of course God has not the slightest intention to alter it, for there’s perfect resonance between his nature and will. From this perspective, Plantinga affirms a substantive dependence relation of necessary truths on the creative activity of God, carefully distinguishing such dependence from the issue of control.19

Again, this approach is not novel but resonant with, even if not as explicit as, other theistic philosophers’ response to the Euthyphro dilemma. For example, Paul Copan claims, “the ultimate resolution to this Euthyphro dilemma is that God’s good character or nature sufficiently grounds objective morality.”20 Note that Copan appeals to God’s nature as opposed to Plantinga’s notion of God thinking or conceiving, while Baggett and Walls claim that the propositions expressing such truths exist “due to God’s thinking [them], which he always has and always will.” Moreover, “God has not the slightest intention to alter [them], for there’s perfect resonance between his nature and will.”21 So Baggett and Walls idea coheres with Copan’s claim that God’s thoughts (at least concerning necessary propositions) are the result of his nature, which according to the classical picture is immutable and eternal. Similarly, William Lane Craig states: “On the theistic view, objective moral values are rooted in God. He is the locus and source of moral value. God’s own holy and loving nature supplies the absolute standard against


20 Copan (2008), 158. As worded, appealing to God’s “good” nature makes it look as if Copan is begging the question. If the adjective “good” is left out, I believe Copan’s reasoning is the following: the moral character of moral truths is grounded or parasitic upon the moral nature of God.

21 I think Baggett and Wells state this poorly. Given what else they claim about God, I believe they should’ve said: “God cannot have any intention to change any moral truth.”
which all actions are measured.” And so, adds Craig, God’s “commands flow necessarily from his moral nature.”

Let me try to pull all of this together and clearly recapitulate this third alternative to the Euthyphro dilemma. Applying Plantinga’s (and others’) ideas, we have the following. The third alternative claims that the Euthyphro dilemma is a false dilemma. Moral voluntarism and moral non-voluntarism are not the only two available options for conceiving of a God based ethic. Moral truths or principles are neither constituted by God’s commands (moral voluntarism), nor are they completely independent of God (moral non-voluntarism). Rather, moral truths and principles are constituted by God’s mental activity of conceiving or thinking of them according to his immutable and eternal nature (third alternative). God believes the moral truths because they are true, independently so of his believing they are true. He doesn’t make them true by his believing them (thus denying moral voluntarism). However, the moral truths only exist because he thinks or conceives of them (thus denying moral non-voluntarism). So God’s mental activity is responsible for the existence of moral truths, but God is not in control of their moral content.

Therefore, by claiming that morality is grounded in God’s thinking or conceiving, and ultimately his nature, the theist appears to get around the objections of both horns of the Euthyphro. Contra moral voluntarism, God doesn’t command what is good based

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22 Kurtz and Craig (2009), 30. This response is so common among theistic philosophers I’m shocked that it’s rarely addressed in most ethics textbooks in discussions concerning the Euthyphro dilemma. Other theistic philosophers who have given various but similar responses to the Euthyphro dilemma include Adams (1987), 97-122; Frankena (1973), 295-317; Helm (1981); and Quinn (1978). Much more could be said here; but again, I’m not interested in solving the Euthyphro dilemma but mining answers to it for my own dilemma.
upon a purely arbitrary will; rather, God commands what is good based upon his thoughts, which is subject to his eternal and immutable nature. Since God’s nature is good, and immutably and eternally so, his moral commands are good as well—God could not command otherwise. Thus, unlike moral voluntarism, this third alternative does not make ethical principles too dependent upon God. It claims moral truths are dependent on God in the right way: upon God’s immutable nature, not upon a purely arbitrary will. Contra moral non-voluntarism, this third alternative gets around the sovereignty worries. Since morality is grounded in God’s immutable nature, ethical principles are not completely independent of God. Moral truths are not something outside of God that he must consult. Rather, God’s ethical “consultations,” so to speak, are with his own self. His own nature determines the moral character of what is good. Unlike moral non-voluntarism, this third alternative does not make ethical principles too independent from God. Thus, for the traditional western theist, this third option ensures moral truths are independent in the right way: from God’s arbitrary will, but dependent in the right way on his nature and thus not completely independent of God.

I take the above to be the classic theistic response to the Euthyphro dilemma, and one that the recent growing body of philosophical literature is trying to recapture. I don’t claim to have given an exhaustive presentation of how such a theory would work in every detail. Nor have I dealt with any possible objections to this view. Rather, my main aim has been to show that the Euthyphro dilemma has a promising third alternative, which suggests that there might be a similar promising alternative to the Logiphro dilemma.

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23 See Antony (2009) and Sinnott-Armstrong (2009) for two such objections.
And if that’s so, this suggests that there might be a way of construing an interesting philosophical relationship between God and logic.

It’s to this task we now turn.

2. Overcoming the Logiphro Dilemma

As we’ve seen, the structure and end result of the Logiphro dilemma is very similar to the Euthyphro dilemma. The Logiphro dilemma purports that there are only two options for conceiving of the relationship between God and logic. One, valid logical arguments become completely arbitrary upon God’s capricious choice (i.e. logical voluntarism); or two, valid logical arguments are outside of, and thus superfluous, to God’s will and sovereignty (i.e. (robust) logical non-voluntarism). Roughly speaking, it seems that logical voluntarism makes logic too dependent upon God (i.e. the vacuity objection exacts too high a price for traditional western theism) while (robust) logical non-voluntarism makes logic too independent from God (i.e. it violates core intuitions concerning the nature of God), or in its nominalistic version logical non-voluntarism is just an inadequate account of logic. Since, according to the Logiphro dilemma, these are the only two options available, then it seems we have exhausted the options for conceiving of any sort of interesting relationship between God and logic. And thus, as with the original Euthyphro dilemma, it seems that any sort of theologically based view of logic is unavailable.

However, as with the classic theistic response to the Euthyphro dilemma, I want to suggest that the Logiphro is a false dilemma as well—that there is at least one viable alternative to logical voluntarism or (robust) logical non-voluntarism. And, as I’ve
intimated throughout this chapter, I believe that this alternative will be roughly analogous to the alternative provided against the Euthyphro dilemma. However, some work will have to be done in translating the third alternative from applying to necessary moral truths to logically valid arguments. What might this alternative look like applied to the Logiphero dilemma?

I had complained earlier that the current philosophical literature that makes claim to the classic theistic response to the Euthyphro dilemma is often vague and incomplete in their explanation of this response. My complaint applies doubly so when looking at the literature concerning the relation between God and other necessary entities, like valid logical arguments. For, again, such philosophers often say that there is a “classic” response that upholds a particular view of the relation between God and necessary entities, a view that is usually accompanied by a notable list of adherents such as Augustine, Aquinas, Leibniz, among others. But again, usually little detail is give to this “classic” response. I believe our investigation of Plantinga above went some way towards helping us to see how a general outline of a third alternative to the Logiphero dilemma might go—necessary entities are dependent upon God but outside of his control. But can we find any help that might more particularly apply to the relationship between God and logic? I believe the recent work of Oxford-trained philosopher Greg Welty is some of the best, current work on the subject. Though Welty is primarily concerned with the relationship between God and all necessary entities, his work has obvious implications for God and logic as well. Therefore, I suggest we investigate his view.

I believe a good introduction to Welty’s theory, which he calls theistic conceptual realism, will be had if we see what he is mainly reacting against—a view we’ve already
been introduced to back in Chapter Four: Christopher Menzel and Thomas Morris’ Absolute Creationism.\textsuperscript{24} Remember, Absolute Creationism claims that \textit{all} entities, abstract as well as concrete objects, are created by God. Welty has investigated Absolute Creationism and has found various problems with it, some of which we’ve already discussed in (See §2.4 of Chapter Four). To review, we saw that Absolute Creationism concerning abstract objects results in a regress problem. For on the Absolute Creationist view of robust logical non-voluntarism, God is not free to make the abstract objects that constitute logical consequence in just any old way he wants. Many, if not all, such objects have intrinsic natures or structures that necessitate what sort of entities they are to be if created. If God decides to create one of these abstract objects, call it X, then his creation of \textit{X must} take place in a certain way. But then this seems to imply that God must follow the pattern of some other thing, call it Y. And the same problem seems to arise for object Y that Absolute Creationism was invoked in order to solve for object X. Therefore, we have a regress. We also saw, as Welty pointed out, that any attempt to overcome this problem by the Absolute Creationist invited further problems, which were endemic to their project. Since we were only concerned with whether Absolute Creationism could save a platonistic construal of logical non-voluntarism, we didn’t pursue any further analysis of it. But Welty goes on to explain in more detail what went wrong with Absolute Creationism. It’s clear that Welty’s goal is to provide a superior

\textsuperscript{24} As footnoted back in Chapter Four, this view is sometimes called “Theistic Activism,” and is in fact dubbed so by Morris and Menzel (1986). However, the name of that article is “Absolute Creation” and so their view is often interchangeably called both in the literature discussing it. Note that “creationism” here has nothing to do with views about God supposedly creating in six days, or young-earth creationism, etc.
view that overcomes the problems of Absolute Creationism. Therefore, in order to see how Welty arrives at his view, I believe it will be helpful to see in more detail how he responds to Absolute Creationism.

2.1 Absolute Creationism Revisited

In Chapter Four we introduced the following quote from Menzel and Morris, which was cited as a nice crisp synopsis of their Absolute Creationist view. Here is that quote again:

[A]ll properties and relations are God’s concepts, the products, or perhaps better, the contents of the divine intellective activity, a causally efficacious or productive sort of divine conceiving. Unlike human concepts, then, which are grasplings of properties that exist ontologically distinct from and independent of those grasplings, divine concepts are those very properties themselves; and unlike what is assumed in standard Platonism, those properties are not ontologically independent, but rather depend on certain divine activities.25

Earlier I presented this view as it seems to be presented by its authors, viz., Absolute Creationism asserts that there is a causal, creative relation between divine intellectual activity and abstract objects. But Welty makes a very interesting observation about the above paragraph. He reflects that there is a significant ambiguity that runs throughout the set of claims here, which, contends Welty, amount to two very different theses. The first Welty calls the causal dependence thesis, where abstract objects causally depend upon a divine intellective activity, which seemed to me back in Chapter Four to be the obvious interpretation of their view. This causal dependence thesis can be clearly recognized by highlighting claims in the above, such as: “All properties and relations are . . . the

25 Morris (1987), 166. Note the similarity in language here with the things said by Plantinga, and Baggett and Walls, back in §1 of this chapter.
products . . . of divine intellective activity”; the “divine intellective activity [is] a causally efficacious or productive sort of divine conceiving”; and “Those properties . . . depend on certain divine activities.” But Welty observes that there is a second thesis here that he calls the identity thesis, where, as he puts it, “abstract objects are identical to divine intellective activity (or, at the very least, constituted by one aspect of such activity, namely, its ‘content’).”

Welty claims that the main problem with Menzel and Morris’ Absolute Creationism stem from reading their view as a causal dependence thesis, which include the problems we’ve already looked at. Welty notes that the identity thesis does “little theoretical work” for Menzel and Morris since they mainly treat their view with a “profusion of causal language in their articulation of their theory.” In other words, Menzel and Morris clearly present Absolute Creationism as a causal dependence theory, as I also presented it in Chapter Four. So, despite the language that presents a possible identity thesis reading, it seems clear that Menzel and Morris go for the causal dependence interpretation of their view. But Welty suggests there is another interesting and perhaps promising theory lurking in the identity thesis reading of Absolute Creationism.

Again, our interest here is whether Menzel and Morris’ view (similar to Plantinga’s) has the rudiments of a successful theory for construing the relationship between God and logic. Welty thinks Absolute Creationism is partially correct. But he

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26 Welty (2006), 211.

27 Ibid.
proclaims: “I submit that the best way to construe the relation between abstract objects and divine intellective activity is in terms of an [identity thesis], and that all proponents of such a view should purge their treatments of any causal language. Otherwise they will be saddled with unnecessary problems.”

Thus, Welty proposes to give a view of the relationship between God and abstract objects that capitalizes upon the identity thesis reading of Absolute Creationism, and which supposedly gets around the problems identified with causal dependence reading of this view. However, as we’ll see, this is not a return to what we’ve called (robust) logical non-voluntarism. As I’ll endeavor to show, Welty’s view squarely fits with a third alternative approach to the Logiphro dilemma that we are aiming for. But, in order to give a clearly successful third alternative here, we must first see the particulars of Welty’s own theistic conceptual realism. Then we’ll be in a better position to see how we might apply it to our own Logiphro problem.

2.2 The Resources of Theistic Conceptual Realism

In contrast to the theistic activism of Absolute Creationism, Welty explains why he dubs his view what he does:

I prefer to call my model ‘theistic conceptual realism’ (hereafter, TCR) rather than ‘theistic activism’ in order to purge all reference to divine activity, specifically, the activity of creating abstract objects. TCR claims that (at least some of) the divine thoughts can be regarded as functionally equivalent to abstract objects, due to the unique and determinative relation they sustain to any created realm.

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28 Welty (2006), 211.
29 Ibid., 213.
There are a couple of things to note here as far as they pertain to our goal. One, as we’ve already investigated, Welty’s TCR model will attempt to pattern itself upon something like the identity thesis reading of Menzel and Morris’ view. Thus he will argue that abstract objects are identical, or at least functionally equivalent, with divine thoughts. Two, this model patterns itself on something akin to platonism (i.e. “realism”). For the central claim of the TCR model is that at least some of the divine thoughts function as equivalents to traditional, platonistic, abstract objects. Welty continues:

As a version of realism, TCR asserts that abstract objects (such as propositions and possible worlds) are real objects. They are not (as in creative antirealism) mere products of human intellective activity, but have the extramental existence relative to finite minds. However, as a version of conceptual realism, TCR asserts that such objects are ultimately mental in character. This is because what is being considered is a theistic version of conceptual realism, where the abstract objects in question are uncreated ideas in the divine mind; i.e. God’s thoughts.

As we’ll see, Welty builds his TCR model largely upon the thought of Thomas Aquinas. He claims that TCR need affirm only three resources: divine aseity, essential omniscience, and God as intelligent creator. Welty claims with these “we will have the resources for developing an account of (at least some of the divine ideas which enable them [to] satisfy the functional concept of ‘proposition’ and ‘possible world,’ but in a

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30 Given that Welty is attracted to an “identity” reading of Menzel and Morris’ view, it seems clear that Welty himself wants to make identity claims, as we’ll see, between abstract objects and God’s thoughts. However, Welty is often not consistent with his wording and sometimes merely claims that abstract objects are “functionally equivalent” to divine ideas. I merely note this ambiguity and will personally plump for the “functionally equivalent” language in my own view rather than stronger “identity” claims.

way that avoids the pitfalls of” theistic activism (i.e. the causal thesis reading of Absolute Creationism).32 Let’s look at his explication of each of these resources.

First, Welty appeals to God’s a se existence. We’ve already discussed this classical theistic doctrine and its importance for rejecting a platonist construal of logical non-voluntarism back in Chapter Four. But to recall, what we termed the aseity intuition of traditional western theism was the following: God, uniquely, does not depend upon anything distinct from himself for his existence. Thus, there is not at any time, any cause for God’s existence. Additionally, Welty claims that this intuition includes God’s character in that not only God’s existence, but every aspect of his nature as well, does not depend upon anything distinct from God. Though this additional aspect was not emphasized in our discussion back in Chapter Four, I think it is obviously implied within the traditional classical picture of the divine.

Second, Welty appeals to the idea that God is essentially omniscient. Obviously omniscience is included in the classical picture—God exhaustively knows all things. But Welty emphasizes the idea that God is necessarily the kind of person he is, that he necessarily has (at least some of) the properties he has. For example, Swinburne notes that theists claim, among other things,

that God is an animate being of a certain kind which can only have thoughts of certain kinds and perform actions of certain kinds. He could not have thoughts other than true thoughts or perform actions other than ones which effect their desired result. . . [It is] logically impossible that he commit suicide, or abandon his omnipotence.33

Therefore, the second major component of Welty’s TCR model is that God is essentially, and thus necessarily, omniscient, which, again, is part of the classical understanding of God that traditional western theists have long held.

Welty elaborates that there is a vital connection between the first two components that we must be clear about. He says, “Crucial to TCR is the claim that God’s omniscience ought to be understood in light of his aseity.”34 Why does he say this and what work is aseity doing with omniscience here? Welty claims, “The best way to [understand this claim] is to construe such omniscience as his self-knowledge. That is, God perfectly knows himself, and in knowing himself, he knows all creatures, both possible and actual [i.e. that they are actual].”35 Welty’s articulation of God’s omniscience is not new. In fact, he seems to draw most of his inspiration for this notion from Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas claimed: “Now if anything is perfectly known, it follows of necessity that its power is perfectly known. But the power of anything can be perfectly known only by knowing to what its power extends.”36 Aquinas claims here that perfect knowledge of X includes knowledge of all actual states of affairs that X has brought about and all possible states of affairs that X is capable of bringing about. On this conception, if I perfectly know President Obama, I not only know every state of affairs that he has ever brought about, I also know every possible state of affairs that he

35 Ibid.
could bring about. As this applies to God’s perfect knowledge of himself, this constitutes knowledge of all possible states of affairs.

Welty notes here that Aquinas construes divine omniscience in a way that coheres with divine aseity. He articulates the above more particularly, that according to Aquinas “God’s knowledge of possible things is his knowledge of his own power, while his knowledge of actual things is his knowledge of his own will.” This, claims Welty, “follows the Thomistic distinction between the scientia intelligentiae and the scientia visionis, the knowledge of understanding and the knowledge of vision, the knowledge of possibility and the knowledge of actuality.”

Aquinas expounds this in the following:

Whatever therefore can be made, or thought, or said by a creature, as also whatever He Himself can do, all are known to God, although they are not actual. And in so far it can be said that He has knowledge even of things that are not. Now a certain difference is to be noted in the consideration of those things that are not actual. For though some of them may not be in act now, still they were, or they will be; and God is said to know all these with the knowledge of vision [i.e. scientia visionis] . . . But there are other things in God’s power, or the creature’s, which nevertheless are not, nor will be, nor were; and as regards these He is said to have knowledge, not of vision, but of simple intelligence [i.e. scientia intelligentiae].

Welty comments here that Aquinas takes his starting point for the above distinction from Augustine’s remarks that God’s knowledge of creatures are prior to the existence of the creatures themselves. Aquinas goes on to develop from this idea a model of God’s knowledge in terms of something like a blueprint which an artificer, or architect, has for whatever he intends to build. Note the similarity to the Divine Craftsman metaphor originally found in Plato’s Timaeus:

37 Welty (2006), 216. The reference to God’s “own will” I take to be his actual will.

38 Aquinas, (1947), Part I, Q. 14, A. 9, respondeo.
The knowledge of God is the cause of things. For the knowledge of God is to all creatures what the knowledge of the artificer is to things made by his art. Now the knowledge of the artificer is the cause of things made by his art from the fact that the artificer works by his intellect . . . . Nevertheless, we must observe that a natural form, being a form that remains in that to which it gives existence, denotes a principle of action according only as it has an inclination to an effect . . . hence His knowledge must be the cause of things, in so far as His will is joined to it.  

To put this another way, according to Aquinas the divinely omniscient architect, God, has knowledge of all possible blueprints, which is his knowledge of his own power (what God can and cannot do), and thus knowledge of all possible things. In addition, God’s knowledge also includes which blueprints he has decided to enact, which is his knowledge of his own actual will, and thus knowledge of all actual things. According to Welty, “These two aspects of self-knowledge are jointly sufficient to define divine omniscience.”

So because of divine aseity, God’s knowledge of himself—of his power and of his will—is not knowledge obtained from creatures, but is completely independent of and prior to creatures. This is in complete contrast to our own human knowledge of natural objects. For our knowledge of such things depends on what exists—our genuine knowledge of X is primarily the result of X independently existing. But God’s knowledge of such objects is the very basis of natural objects in an analogous way to the architect’s plans being the basis of what gets built. Again Aquinas:

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40 Note here that Aquinas is ruling out universal possibilism, just as we did concerning logical voluntarism.

41 Welty (2006), 216.
Natural things are midway between the knowledge of God and our knowledge: for we receive knowledge from natural things, of which God is the cause by His knowledge. Hence, as the natural objects of knowledge are prior to our knowledge, and are its measure, so, the knowledge of God is prior to natural things, as is the measure of them; as, for instance, a house is midway between the knowledge of the builder who made it, and the knowledge of the one who gathers his knowledge from the house already built.\footnote{Aquinas, (1947), Part I, Q. 14, A. 8, reply 3.}

Welty summarizes the above in the following way, including an appeal to his third resource.

[I]f God is a person, then he has beliefs, powers, and intentions. And if God is not only the creator of the universe, but is an intelligent creator, then his creative acts consist of divine power actualizing divine intentions. […] Most theists in the [western theistic tradition] have wanted to eschew a neo-Platonic notion of creation as divine ‘emanation’ (wherein the creation is ultimately an unintended but inevitable byproduct of the divine nature) in favor of a model wherein God is seen as an artificer or architect who purposefully chooses to create according to a distinct ‘blueprint’ in his mind.

Thus intelligent creation presupposes the existence of divine ideas, insofar as it presupposes a correspondence between God’s idea of the world he wishes to create and the world that gets created.\footnote{Welty (2006), 217-8.}

Thus, Welty emphasizes that the existence of any created world entails the existence of the divine ideas, according to which the world was purposefully (and thus intelligently) created; but the existence of the divine ideas does not entail the existence of a world created according to them. For God could have refrained from creating any world and still he would have the ideas of the worlds that he could have created.

Now that we have the resources of divine aseity, essential omniscience (construed as divine self-knowledge), and God as intelligent creator, what does Welty do with these notions?

\footnote{Welty (2006), 217-8.}
2.3 Theistic Conceptual Realism

Welty takes the considerations we’ve investigated in the preceding §2.2 to build his model of theistic conceptual realism (TCR). Again, Welty is attempting to build a picture of abstract objects as *identical* with divine ideas, such that these ideas *function* as abstract objects have traditionally thought to function in most platonist theories.\(^{44}\) According to Welty, since the divine aseity of God’s knowledge of all possibilities (of everything he can bring about and has brought about) is completely independent of creatures, “then a whole range of God’s thoughts can be seen to function as abstract objects in relation to the created realm.”\(^{45}\) Welty thus goes on to specifically argue for a model of abstract objects as divine ideas. He claims that this model accounts for two types of abstract objects: possible worlds, and propositions.\(^{46}\)

As claimed above, God is an omniscient being. And as we’ve seen, one consequence of this notion is that God perfectly knows the capacities of his own power, and therefore all possibilities. And since modal notions are usually taken to be interdefinable, then from knowledge of possibility is derived knowledge of impossibility,

\(^{44}\) Again, I note that Welty slides back and forth between identity language and functionally equivalent language, whereas the view that I will propose will stick with only the latter.

\(^{45}\) Welty (2006), 218.

\(^{46}\) Welty had argued for the existence of both possible worlds and propositions in an earlier part of his (2006). In brief summary, Welty argues that both types of abstract objects are indispensable to our theorizing. In other words, he claims that both types of abstract objects are needed in order for our theoretical explanations to be able to do the work they are intended to do. He then goes on to give his TCR model of how to think about these two types of abstract objects. In this project, I approach this subject quite differently. I start with Welty’s model of how to think about possible worlds and abstract objects. I then go on to use these entities as an integral part of my answer to the Logiphro Dilemma.

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necessity, and contingency. So the impossible is what is not possible. The necessary is what is not possibly not. And the contingent is what is possible and not necessary.

Therefore, Welty claims that possible worlds are simply God’s knowledge of his own power, of what he is able to instantiate. The notion of ‘God’s knowledge’ is not just a useful fiction, and so neither are possible worlds. God truly has this knowledge—it is as real as his own thoughts—and he creates in accordance with it.

Welty goes on to comment that this conception naturally leads to a theistic version of an actualist conception of possible worlds, akin to the modal pictures embraced by Alvin Plantinga, Robert Adams, and Robert Stalnaker (but rejected by David Lewis). I think an actualist picture of possible worlds is probably most easily comprehended in contrast to David Lewis’ concretist picture of possible worlds. In short, Lewis claims that possible worlds are spatiotemporal wholes existing separately from the world elsewhere in logical space and each actual in itself—as actual as our own world is. But the contrasting actualist picture claims that all possible worlds are abstract objects existing in the world (i.e. the physical universe that we live in) and only one of these possible worlds obtains (i.e. the actual world). It must be emphasized here that on the actualist conception of possible worlds even the actual world is associated with an abstract object: it is just one way the world could be. Unlike other possible worlds, the actual world happens to accurately represent the world. Welty notes that on a theistic conception of actualist possible worlds, existence claims about nonfactual possible worlds are reducible to

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47 One example of how such terms are interdefinable is Swinburne (1994), 96.

existence claims about things in the actual world, for God’s knowledge of his own power is a mental item in the actual world.

However, Welty claims that this is not a “reductive” analysis of modality. Rather, modal facts about God ground modal facts about the world. Welty notes:

In this connection it is crucial to remember that, because of the divine aseity, it is simply a ‘brute fact’ that God is the kind of God he is, with the powers that he has. There is no cause of God’s nature and existence, and thus no cause or ultimate explanation of why God’s knowledge of his nature has the content that it does. This is significant, because it follows that what God is able to do (the possible), and knowledge of what he is able to do, is not dependent in any way upon the existence of anything distinct from God (such as, for instance, human sentences).49

No doubt that in order for human beings to describe these and other facts about God, they must use human sentences. But, following Aquinas, our order of knowing does not determine, and is completely independent of, the order of God’s being and knowing. In sum, “God’s knowledge of necessary truths about himself—for instance, the range of possible universes he could create—is a function of who God is in and of himself, not a function of our contingent ability to describe such knowledge.”50

Welty then turns his attention to propositions.51 Propositions are usually defined as the content being asserted in a declarative sentence, where the content can be clarified with a that-clause. For example, in the declarative sentence “Columbus is the capital of Ohio” the proposition being asserted is that Columbus is the capital of Ohio. And, as

49 Welty (2006), 219-220.
50 Ibid., 220.
51 Again (see fn. 45 above), Welty has already argued for the existence of propositions as abstract objects and he now takes himself to be giving a theistic model of how to think about these entities. Additionally, he has argued that possible worlds cannot be reduced to propositions. I’ll address this issue in §3.1 below.
philosopher of metaphysics Michael Loux says, “Platonists never tire of pointing out, for example, that there is a nondenumerable infinity of propositions specifying, in turn, that each irrational less than the number one is less than the number two.” Therefore, an account of propositions is usually thought to entail that there is an infinite plenitude of propositions. On the TCR model, Welty believes this condition is met. *That Columbus is the capital of Ohio, that Granny Smith apples are red, and that there is an interstellar speck of carbon so small and so distant from human beings that no human has any knowledge of it* are all propositions represented by declarative sentences that “describe possibilities that God has the power to bring about, and God knows this about himself, and therefore has the corresponding thought.” Since God is omniscient, then, at the very least, for any possible way something could be, God knows whether or not he could bring it about. Welty thus concludes that God has an infinite number of thoughts (i.e. propositions).

But what about necessary propositions represented by such sentences as “If 1 is less than 2, then 1 is less than 3”? Welty explains how his TCR model accounts for these:

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52 Loux (1986), 499.

53 Welty (2006), 220.

54 This is actually a highly contentious claim that has been debated by theistic philosophers throughout the centuries. Most contemporary western theists hold that God’s knowledge is infinite, in some sense. But is divine knowledge exhaustively infinite, which has been thought to entail that there exists an infinity of (say) propositions, all known by God; or is God’s knowledge potentially infinite, which would entail that any (say) proposition that might come into being is capable of being known by God? It seems clear that Welty is opting for the former notion of exhaustively infinite divine knowledge. It’s not clear to me that I need to take a stand on this issue either way. It seems to me that all I really need is to say is that there are enough propositions (i.e. divine thoughts) available to capture logical validities. If this entails an actual infinity of divine thoughts, so be it.
Here God knows that he can not “bring these about,” since their truth does not depend upon his will or any act of intentional creation. Rather, it depends upon his essence, for it is a primitive modal fact about God’s power that any world created according to divine power will be correctly described by these and other thoughts (whereas, it is a primitive modal fact about God’s power that any world created according to divine power will be incorrectly described by other propositions, such as “3 is less than 2”). Since God, if omniscient, knows all of this about himself, the thoughts which comprise such knowledge can function as the full range of propositions there are.55

But don’t necessary propositions (and contingent ones for that matter) have something to do with possible worlds? Given that Welty has both categories of abstract objects on the table in TCR, he needs to address the connection between possible worlds and propositions.

In doing so, he makes a threefold distinction between the existence of a proposition, its truth-value, and the modal status of its truth-value. According to Welty, “the divine thoughts constitute the existence of all propositions (regardless of modal status), whereas the divine essence (specifically, the divine power) is the truth-maker for necessary truths (including, of course, necessary truths pertaining to possibilities).”56 In short, the divine thoughts supply the requisite truth-bearers (i.e. propositions), whereas the divine power supplies the relevant truth-makers (i.e. possible worlds). So, according to Welty, for any proposition $P$ that represents some necessary truth, $P$ exists because it is a divine thought and will be the bearer of its requisite truth-value. But what makes $P$

55 Welty (2006), 221. Note that Welty is ruling out universal possibilism, as we did with logical voluntarism back in Chapter Three.

56 Ibid. Following Plantinga’s actualist interpretation of possible worlds, Welty’s model adopts modal logic S5, which counts the following two implications as valid (where $\Box$ is a necessity operator and $\Diamond$ is a possibility operator): ($\Box p \rightarrow \Box \Box p$) and ($\Diamond p \rightarrow \Box \Diamond p$). See Haack (1978), 177 for further explanation.
true, according to Welty, are the possible worlds, which are God’s knowledge of what he is able to bring about.

But what, according to Welty, is the truth-maker for contingent propositions? Here Welty is much more tentative. He claims, “Perhaps that is, ultimately, solely a function of the divine will. Or perhaps it is instead partly constituted by the contribution of human wills. What I say here is not affected by this question.” Welty understands that how one answers this question has implications for, among other things, one’s view of human freedom, the problem of evil, and various other related sticky issues. Since Welty is mainly concerned with explaining necessary truths and necessarily existing entities, I think he can be excused for sidestepping the potential landmines here. Similarly, since our prime target is about logic, which doesn’t seem to be integrally related to the notion of contingent propositions, I think we can put such considerations to one side as well.

In summary, the TCR model of abstract objects claims traditional western theists have the resources within the traditional and classical conception of God to hold that there are the categories of objects (propositions and possible worlds) that function as such abstract objects are traditionally thought to function. According to Welty, these objects are actually divine thoughts, not created by God, but nonetheless exist because of God.

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57 Welty (2006), 221.

58 Just for the record, I’m quite satisfied with a compatibilist reading of human freedom. So I don’t see a problem with claiming that the truth-value of all contingent propositions is dependent on God’s will alone (i.e. human wills make no contribution to the truth-value of contingent propositions). However, contemporary theists are not united on how to think about issues related to human freedom, including the problem of evil. So, like Welty, I’d rather not get into those issues here. Nevertheless, I admit that my ultimate answer to the Logiphro dilemma (similar to Welty’s view) will have implications for these issues.
3. Constructing a Third Alternative to the Logiphro Dilemma

Welty claims that his TCR model can account for all necessary truths. Maybe so. For my purposes I am only concerned whether TCR has the raw materials to construct a theory that accounts for logical consequence (and thus respects the intuitions congruent with it) but avoids the problems we saw for logical voluntarism and robust logical non-voluntarism. I think Welty’s TCR model does indeed provide the resources needed for constructing a viable third alternative to the Logiphro dilemma. However, I believe I need to say more about these resources before laying out my suggested answer.

As I’ve already said, Welty follows Plantinga’s actualist conception of possible worlds. Since I am largely following Welty’s picture, I’ll be appealing to Plantinga’s conception of possible worlds as well. But let’s investigate this conception about possible worlds a bit more as well as investigating propositions, and especially how they relate to possible worlds.

3.1 More Details on Possible Worlds and Propositions

Plantinga appeals to the notion of a state of affairs, viz., “a way things could have been.” Strictly speaking, a state of affairs is not the sort of thing that can be either true or false, i.e. a state of affairs cannot instantiate what Welty calls the property of “alethicity.” A state of affairs is the sort of thing that either obtains or does not obtain. So, for example, Michael Jordan’s being more than six feet tall is a state of affairs, as is Mitch Romney being President of the United States of America. Though both are states

60 Ibid. 44.
of affairs, the former obtains, or is *actual*. The latter is only a *possible* state of affairs since it does not obtain. Plantinga then defines a possible world as a *maximal* or *complete* state of affairs.⁶¹ Thus, any possible world is simply a maximal state of affairs that does not obtain and the actual world is a maximal state of affairs that obtains.⁶²

Plantinga also addresses the relationship between possible worlds and propositions. He claims that a proposition like

(1) Socrates is mortal

is intimately related to a state of affairs like

(2) Socrates’ being mortal.

Some have argued that the relation is so intimate that propositions should just be identified with possible worlds.⁶³ But, following Welty, I think there are good reasons to avoid this identification. One, propositions can be true or false, while possible worlds cannot (at best they obtain or do not obtain). Thus, propositions have a property that possible worlds do not (capable of being true or false, i.e. alethicity) and so possible worlds cannot be propositions. Second, possible worlds are neither believed nor disbelieved (i.e. they don’t serve as the content of such thoughts) but propositions can be

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⁶¹ According to Plantinga, “a state of affairs *S* includes a state of affairs *S’* if it is not possible (in the broadly logical sense) that *S* obtain and *S’* fail to obtain—if, that is, the conjunctive state of affairs *S but not S*’ (a state of affairs that obtains if and only if *S* obtains and *S’* does not) is impossible. [. . . So] a state of affairs *S* is *complete or maximal* if for every state of affairs *S’, S* includes *S’* or *S* precludes *S’.*” Ibid., 44-5.

⁶² Furthermore, Plantinga argues that there is at least one, and at most one, actual world among all of the possible worlds. The proof: “for suppose two worlds *W* and *W*’ both obtained. Since *W* and *W*’ are distinct worlds, there will be some state of affairs *S* such that *W* includes *S* and *W*’ precludes *S*. But then if both *W* and *W*’ are actual, *S* both obtains and does not obtain; and this, as they say, is repugnant to the intellect.” Ibid. 45.

believed or disbelieved. Therefore, I think we’re justified in concluding that possible worlds should not be identified with propositions.  

But there’s still surely a close relationship between propositions and possible worlds. It should be clear that the above proposition (1) corresponds to the state of affair (2). Again, following Plantinga, he comments “it is impossible, in that broadly logical sense, that (1) be true and (2) fail to obtain” and “equally impossible that (2) obtain and (1) be false.”  

Plantinga additionally claims that, “for any possible world \(W\) and proposition \(p\), \(W\) entails \(p\) or the denial of \(p\).”

In addition, it should be emphasized that Plantinga, along with Welty’s earlier explanation, understands propositions to be truth-bearers. Whereas the possible worlds operate as the truth-makers for propositions, understood in the following way. The book on a world \(W\) is the set of propositions true at \(W\). So, to say that \(p\) is true at a world \(W\) is to say that if \(W\) had been actual, \(p\) would have been true. And to say that \(p\) is necessarily true is to say that \(p\) is true at every \(W\).

\[\text{64 Note that some possible worlds may be so simple (e.g. containing only one object) that they can be believed or disbelieved. However, many possible worlds will be far too complex to be believed or disbelieved by we mere mortals.}\]

\[\text{65 Plantinga (1974), 45-6.}\]

\[\text{66 Ibid., 46. In addition, Plantinga notes that for any possible world } W, \text{ Plantinga defines the book on } W \text{ as the maximal set } S \text{ of propositions such that } p \text{ is a member of } S \text{ if } W \text{ entails } p. \text{ The proofs for maximality and uniqueness of any book: “if } B \text{ is a book, then for any proposition } p, \text{ either } p \text{ is a member of } B \text{ or else not-} p \text{ is. And clearly for each possible world } W \text{ there will be one book. There is at least one, since for any world } W \text{ and proposition } p, W \text{ entails either } p \text{ or its denial; so the set of propositions entailed by } W \text{ is maximal. There is also at most one; for suppose a world } W \text{ had two (or more) distinct books } B \text{ and } B’. \text{ If } B \text{ differs from } B’, \text{ there must be some proposition } p \text{ such that } B \text{ contains } p \text{ but } B’ \text{ contains the denial of } p. \text{ But then } W \text{ would entail both } p \text{ and its denial, in which case } W \text{ would not be a possible state of affairs after all.” Plantinga (1974), 46.}\]
Furthermore, I claim that some propositions have logical and non-logical content. In other words, since some of our sentence tokens have distinguishable logical and non-logical terminology, and since I take our sentence tokens to represent corresponding propositional content, it follows that these corresponding propositions are structured by logical and non-logical content. In Chapter One I argued for how we are epistemically justified in making such a distinction. The only additional point I’m making here is that this distinction is found within the very content of some propositions themselves. With these more clarified notions in place, I think we can begin to build a more nuanced picture of possible worlds and propositions.

3.2 A Theistic Interpretation of Possible Worlds and Propositions

Back in Chapter One, I argued that (LC) best represents the extra-systematic notion of the logical consequence relation:

\[(LC) \quad \Phi \text{ is a logical consequence of } \Gamma, \text{ if at every possible world in which the uniform substitution of the non-logical content in } \Gamma \text{ and } \Phi \text{ renders every member of } \Gamma \text{' true, then it also renders } \Phi \text{ true.}\]

I argued there that this characterization of logical consequence captures (at least some of) the major intuitions shared by many concerning logic. In addition, because we did not want to assume any particular ontological commitments at the outset of our investigation, we opted for a neutral metaphysical stance. However, I now claim that \( \Phi \) and \( \Gamma \) are best thought of as entities that function as the traditional abstract objects called propositions and that the modal language in (LC) is best thought of as referencing entities that

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\[67\] See Chapter 1 for what I take this distinction to amount to.
function as the traditional abstract objects called possible worlds. I am not actually claiming that the entities represented in (LC) are the traditional, platonic, abstract object of propositions and possible worlds. Rather, similar to Welty’s TCR model, I am claiming that certain of God’s thoughts function as these traditional abstract objects and so the entities represented in (LC) are identical with certain divine thoughts. Thus, my conception of logical consequence (LC) claims that God’s thoughts function (to be spelled out below) in ways that propositions and possible worlds have traditionally thought to function within platonic theories that appeal to such entities.

Since I am identifying God’s thoughts with objects that function as propositions and possible worlds, I need to be clear on how exactly these different sorts of divine thoughts operate before addressing how they explain logical consequence.

Following Aquinas and Welty’s TCR model, I hold that the classical understanding of God’s a se existence includes every aspect of his nature, including his omniscience. Thus I hold that the entirety of God’s knowledge (of what is actual and what is possible) is not dependent upon anything outside of God. As this conception suggests, the following are jointly sufficient to define God’s omniscience: (a) God’s knowledge of his will and (b) God’s knowledge of his power. But where do divine thoughts enter in here? And how exactly do such thoughts relate to propositions and possible worlds?

Taking my lead from Welty (and Aquinas), I believe God’s knowledge of his own will should be understood in the following way: God knows all the actual states of affairs he has brought about (i.e. all those that obtain) and he knows all of their corresponding true propositions. This facet of divine knowledge is constituted by God’s own thoughts,
which can be distinguished into two categories, each category with a different functional role: divine thoughts that function as actual states of affairs (or the actual world) or divine thoughts that function as propositions corresponding to those states of affairs. God’s knowledge of his own will includes individual divine thoughts that function as a state of affairs. In addition, God’s knowledge of his own will also has the divine thought that represents the maximal state of actual affairs, in the sense that this additional thought functions as the actualist abstract object known as the actual world. Likewise, I understand God’s knowledge of his own will to include all the divine thoughts that truth-functionally evaluate all of the individual actual states of affairs, in the sense that each of these thoughts functions as a proposition, and each proposition is true given that it corresponds to the actual state of affairs, i.e. what God had brought about. In summary, God’s knowledge of his own will is constituted by all the divine thoughts that function either as the actual states of affairs (or the maximal actual states of affairs) he has brought about or function as the propositions that truthfully correspond to these (or the book of the world). Again, to reiterate, because God has an *a se* existence, and his omniscience is included in this existence, then God’s knowledge of his own will is the antecedent *to*, not the result *of* (like it is for us), the actual world. God’s knowledge of the actual world—knowledge of his own will—is thus one facet of God’s omniscience.

God’s *a se* omniscience is constituted not only by his knowledge of his will, but also by his knowledge of his power—what he is able to bring about. Again taking my lead from Welty (and Aquinas), I think God’s knowledge of his power should be understood in the following way: God knows all possible (non-obtaining) states of affairs (i.e. he knows all possible states of affairs that he could bring about) *and* he knows all of
their corresponding propositions. This facet of divine knowledge is constituted by God’s own thoughts, which can also be distinguished into two similar categories, each category with a different functional role: divine thoughts that function as possible states of affairs (or possible worlds) or divine thoughts that function as propositions corresponding to those worlds. In detail, God’s knowledge of his power includes individual divine thoughts that function as possible states of affairs. Likewise, God’s knowledge of his power includes the divine thoughts that represent the different maximal states of possible affairs, in the sense that these additional divine thoughts function as the abstract objects known as possible worlds. In addition, I understand God’s knowledge of his power to include all the divine thoughts that truth-functionally evaluate all of the individual possible states of affairs, in the sense that each of these thoughts functions as a proposition, and each proposition has a truth-value that corresponds to its accompanying possible state of affairs. In summary, God’s knowledge of his power is made up all the divine thoughts that function either as possible states of affairs (or the maximal possible states of affairs) or they function as the propositions that correspond to these possible states of affairs. And thus God’s knowledge of his own power is knowledge of his divine thoughts that function as all possible worlds and his divine thoughts that function as all the propositions corresponding to these possible worlds. Like Welty, I take both facets of divine omniscience—God’s knowledge of his own will (and thus actuality) and his own power—to be jointly sufficient to define divine omniscience.

However, there’s one additional wrinkle I think I must address concerning God’s knowledge of his power. Earlier we saw that Welty suggested that God’s omniscience includes all the possible ways something could be, which, as worded, I affirm as well.
But Welty claimed that this affirmation implies that God has an infinite number of divine thoughts. In other words, as I’ve explicated above, God would have to have an infinite number of divine thoughts that function as possible states of affairs as well as those infinite number of divine thoughts that function as propositions corresponding to those states of affairs. Welty thinks that “intuitively, there are an infinite number of propositions.” He’s partially motivated to this claim by examples like the following: “For each real number r, for example, there is the proposition that r is distinct from the Taj Mahal.” It’s obvious how such examples could be multiplied. But Welty also reasons in the following way:

If God is omniscient, then at the very least, for any possible way things could be, God knows whether or not he could bring it about. This is sufficient for God to have thoughts that match the infinity of propositions that there must be. While there are surely propositions not thought of by any human being, due to lack of imagination or energy on their part, or perhaps due to the complexity of the proposition in question, this is not the case with God. And so the plenitude condition is easily satisfied.

What Welty is calling the plenitude condition is the claim that any successful theory of propositions must guarantee that there are as many propositions as we think there are. If this condition on my own theory requires that I need an infinite number of propositions, I accept it. Given the details of my theory, this would mean that God’s knowledge of his power includes an infinite number of divine thoughts that function as possible states of

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70 Welty (2006), 126.
affairs and an infinite number of corresponding divine thoughts that function as propositions.

### 3.3 Applying The Model to Logical Consequence

With all of the pieces now in place, I think we are now in a position to explicate a theistic explanation of logical consequence—one that avoids the problems of both logical voluntarism and (robust) logical non-voluntarism. Remember that (LC) is our representation of the logical consequence relation:

\[
(LC) \quad \Phi \text{ is a logical consequence of } \Gamma, \text{ if at every possible world in which the uniform substitution of the non-logical content in } \Gamma \text{ and } \Phi \text{ renders every member of } \Gamma \text{ true, then it also renders } \Phi \text{ true.}
\]

We explain (LC) in the following way. \( \Phi \) represents a proposition and \( \Gamma \) represents zero or more propositions. At least some of the propositions represented by \( \Gamma \) and \( \Phi \) must contain both logical and non-logical content. \(^{71}\) This clarified, a valid logical argument (i.e. \( \Gamma \vdash \Phi \)) is one in which at every possible world where the uniform substitution of the non-logical content of both \( \Gamma \) and \( \Phi \) renders all members of \( \Gamma \) (if any) true, then \( \Phi \) is true as well. Of course, in our theistic model there are no abstract objects referenced in (LC). Rather, our reference to “possible worlds” and “propositions” is understood as identifying certain sorts of divine thoughts. Namely, those thoughts that function as the traditional platonistic entities so named.

So logical consequence (LC), and thus the validity of any instance of a valid logical argument, holds in virtue of certain divine thoughts that are functionally

\(^{71}\) This condition on \( \Gamma \vdash \Phi \) is to rule out any non-logical implications, i.e. conceptual implications, material implications, etc.
equivalent to propositions. These sorts of divine thoughts receive their respective truthvalues in virtue of other sorts of divine thoughts that are functionally equivalent to possible worlds. And these latter sorts of divine thoughts are the sorts of things that they are in virtue of God perfectly knowing the capacity of his own power, and thus all possibilities. So logical consequence, the primary focus of logic, ultimately holds in virtue of God’s knowledge of his own power—of what he is able to instantiate.

I think it might be helpful to give a few examples of how validity is explicated by (LC) and then see how our theistic model would explain them.

Take modus ponens, a valid logical argument, recognized by many formal systems of logic. How would we explain the validity of this argument interpreted by our proposed theistic model? Modus ponens is usually represented as \{p, (p\rightarrow q)\} \|- q. Remembering that “possible worlds” and “propositions” are phrases that actually represent two sorts of divine thoughts, (LC) would explain this argument’s validity by saying that \(p\), \((p\rightarrow q)\), and \(q\) represent propositions, at least some of which contain logical, as well as non-logical, content. At every possible world where the uniform substitution of the non-logical terminology of \(p\), \((p\rightarrow q)\), and \(q\) renders \(p\) and \((p\rightarrow q)\) true, then it is also the case that \(q\) is true at all of those possible worlds as well. Put negatively, our theistic model would explain that it is not within God’s power to bring about any state of affairs at which the propositions \(p\) and \((p\rightarrow q)\) are true, but where the proposition \(q\) is also false. Invalidity should be fairly easy to see here as well. Take affirming the consequent, i.e. \{q, (p\rightarrow q)\} \|- p, a clear example of invalidity, according to (LC) this argument’s invalidity would mean that at every possible world the where the uniform substitution of
the non-logical content of the propositions \( q \) and \( (p \rightarrow q) \) are true, there is at least one of these possible worlds where the proposition \( p \) turns out false. Our model would interpret this to mean that it is within God’s power to bring about a state of affairs at which \( q \) and \( (p \rightarrow q) \) are true, but \( p \) is false.

Additionally, how would this model interpret a logical truth (i.e. \( \vdash \Phi \))? Again pointing out that “possible worlds” and “propositions” are actually two sorts of divine thoughts, according to (LC), the logical truth represented by the proposition \( \Phi \) is true at every possible world regardless of what is substituted in the non-logical content of \( \Phi \). \(^{72}\)

Our model explains this as it not being within God’s power to ever instantiate a state of affairs that would make \( \Phi \) false. Similarly, take \( \Delta \) to be some logical contradiction. \(^{73}\)

According to (LC), the proposition represented by \( \Delta \) is not true at any possible world regardless of what is substituted for the non-logical content of \( \Delta \).

Remember that, ultimately, logical consequence holds in virtue of God’s knowledge of his own power. But how are we to interpret the extent of God’s power?

Following Welty’s TCR model, I take the above interpretations of logical validity to be brute facts about God. Welty claimed:

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[I]t \text{ is crucial to remember that, because of the divine aseity, it is simply a ‘brute fact’ that God is the kind of God he is, with the powers that he has. There is no cause of God’s nature and existence, and thus no cause or ultimate explanation of why God’s knowledge of his nature has the content that it does. This is significant, because it follows that what God is able to do (the possible), and}
\]

\[^{72}\text{Note that } \Phi \text{ must be a proposition with both logical and non-logical content in order that others sorts of necessarily true propositions do not counts as “logical” truths.}\]

\[^{73}\text{Note that } \Delta \text{ must be a proposition with both logical and non-logical content in order that others sorts of necessarily false propositions do not counts as “logical” falsehoods.}\]
knowledge of what he is able to do, is not dependent in any way upon the existence of anything distinct from God (such as, for instance, human sentences). Therefore, the fact that when \( \Gamma \) logically implies \( \Phi \), and this means simply that God cannot bring about a state of affairs where all the uniform substitution of the non-logical content of the propositions (if any) represented by \( \Gamma \) are true and \( \Phi \) false, this is just a brute fact about God’s power and nature. As Brian Leftow was quoted in the last chapter: “it is part of the ordinary theist’s concept of God that no regress of true explanations can go past God’s existence, i.e. that when one has traced some phenomenon back to the fact that God exists, one can go no further.”

3.4 Answering the Logiphro Dilemma

Now that we have the metaphysical components in place (i.e. divine thoughts), and now that I think we see how this picture fits with logical consequence as represented by (LC), does the above theistic, metaphysical model of logical consequence avoid the problems associated with logical voluntarism and robust logical non-voluntarism? In other words, do we indeed have a viable third alternative to the Logiphro dilemma?

In short, I believe we do. For example, the above account denies logical voluntarism for it claims there are certain limitations to God’s power. (LC) is, in essence, a partial representation of God’s \textit{a se} omniscient knowledge of his power. On this model, (LC) claims that it is beyond God’s power to bring about certain states of affairs or combinations of certain states of affairs—namely those states of affairs that would violate

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74 Welty (2006), 219-220.

75 Leftow (1990), 584.
logical validity. Though logical consequence is ultimately dependent on God, and thus the validity of any valid logical argument is dependent on God, the model presents God as not in control of logical consequence—logic is not too dependent on him. This model does not suffer the vacuity objection laid out back in Chapter Three. Thus this model denies what we labeled logical voluntarism.

But is this model just a form of logical non-voluntarism? Is it guilty of the sins of (robust) logical non-voluntarism since it seemingly appeals to abstract, platonist entities? As we saw in Chapter Four, robust logical non-voluntarism ran up against the aseity and sovereignty intuitions of traditional western theism in various ways. In general, the appeal to platonic, abstract objects either (1) makes God dependent, in some way, on such objects (violating divine aseity); or (2) such objects turn out to be uncreated (violating creatio ex nihilo); or (3) such objects are beyond need of God’s continued sustainment (violating divine sovereignty). However, the above theistic model is not at fault concerning any of these issues. Concerning (1), the “objects” that (LC) represent are God’s own thoughts, part of his very essence. So God does not depend on them in any way. For example, the necessary existence usually attributed to God would be interpreted on this model as God being unable to bring about a state of affairs where God does not exist. Thus, God does not depend on some abstract objects outside of himself, such as possible worlds, in order to necessarily exist. His necessary existence is just a fact about God’s own essence. Concerning (2), since the divine thoughts that are represented by (LC) are part of God’s nature—it’s a brute fact that God thinks the thoughts he does—they are not creatures and thus not created. Concerning (3), neither are the divine thoughts represented in (LC) objects that are independent of God’s
sustaining power. Since they are part of God himself, they are not objects independent of God. In sum, since on this model logical consequence is rooted in God himself—logic is not too independent of God. Therefore, it is not guilty of the problems associated with robust logical non-voluntarism and thus denies that view.

The only thing missing is giving this model a name. Though fairly clunky, in honor of Welty’s model, I’ll call this model theistic conceptual logical realism.

I conclude that theistic conceptual logical realism is a viable third alternative to the Logiphro dilemma. It avoids the problems of logical voluntarism as well as those of robust logical non-voluntarism. Therefore, I think the best way to think about the relationship between God and logic, is the model provided by theistic conceptual logical realism.
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