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Divine power and divine simplicity, not so simple

Abstract

Is contemporary work on the metaphysics of powers of any use in helping us understand the power of a divine and simple being? This is the question I wish to answer in this question. Here I will construct what I take to be the most plausible ways contemporary power metaphysics helps us answer this question, with some of the moved made being heavily inspired by the work of E. J. Lowe. Ultimately, I aim to show that contemporary metaphysicians have much to offer those interested in this aspect of the divine nature and that the metaphysical work of Lowe and others has potential avenues for philosophers of religion to mine.

## Divine Simplicity and Divine Power, Not Lowe Simple<sup>1</sup>

Claiming that God is all-powerful, or omnipotent, is as standard as it gets amongst theists.<sup>2</sup> However, exactly what God's power is, and how we should understand 'all', is much more controversial. For the purpose of this paper, I'm going to assume that God's omnipotence is best understood in terms of thinking about powers, and that we should understand 'all', which concerns the range of God's power, as merely implying that God's power is wide ranging.<sup>3</sup> Exactly how wide ranging is of great debate, but since it is irrelevant for what I want to investigate here, I can rest content by merely assuming Byerly's view that God has 'all the powers' (2017, 21).<sup>4</sup>

The question this paper will be concerned with is whether it's consistent to say that God has all the powers and is simple.<sup>5</sup> Whilst investigating this potential inconsistency I'll make use of some of Lowe's thoughts on powers too, since, as we'll see, some of what he says may help us formulate an account in which God is both simple and has all the powers. However, that isn't to say that Lowe himself would have been all that interested in affirming divine simplicity, since, as far as I'm aware, the only time he speaks of this doctrine is to note that what he says might be 'open to a charge of heresy ... because I seem to be distinguishing between God and his omniscience in a way which might seem to challenge the doctrine of God's simplicity!' (2006, 204). Nevertheless, since he is immediately concessionary afterwards, writing that he cannot, at present, address 'these theologically deep waters' and so won't presume 'that anything that I have said ... is ultimately defensible from either a metaphysical or a theological point of view' (2006, 204). It may be that Lowe would have wished to affirm simplicity. Sadly, it's likely that we'll never know what he thought of this doctrine,<sup>6</sup> even though here I'll suggest

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<sup>1</sup> I want to thank several people for their help in writing this article. Firstly, Tim Pawl who kindly listened to me talk about my thoughts on all of this whilst everything was feeling in a muddle and helped me see how to structure the ideas in a more coherent manner. Without his help, things would likely still be a mess! And then also to Matthews Grant, Rob Koons, and Jeff Brower, who all kindly looked at the paper and offered various suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> And this by no means implies that every theist claims God is omnipotent, with it often being denied by process and feminist theologians.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the metaphysics of powers see my introduction to them (Page, 2025a). Elsewhere I've started to suggest how to think about God's omnipotence in terms of powers (2025b), as have Renz (2021a) and Lenow (2021).

<sup>4</sup> This isn't to say that I endorse the Byerly view, and I raise some issues with it elsewhere (2025b). However, Pearce notes that omnipotence is *usually* understood as God having all the powers, although he doesn't think it should be analysed in this way (2019, 233). In terms of how to understand the range of God's power, note that even Aquinas is explicit that there is a question as to how we should understand 'all' (*Summa Theologica* I, q.25, a.3, co.). For further discussion of this issue see Leftow's (2009).

<sup>5</sup> It should therefore be clear that my aim here isn't to provide an analysis of omnipotence, but rather engage in what Zimmerman (2016, 85-86) calls a "Divine Power" project, since it is interested in showing how a view of omnipotence is compatible with other doctrines about God.

<sup>6</sup> As Renz (2021b) argues elsewhere, if Lowe understands his four-category ontology as applying to *all* aspects of reality, including God, it doesn't seem as though he could affirm divine simplicity, and so perhaps it is better to think of Lowe's four-category ontology (2006) as applying to all created, or natural, reality.

that some of what he did say might be helpful in showing that a powers view of omnipotence can be consistent with simplicity.<sup>7</sup>

### Divine Simplicity

How to understand divine simplicity is a vexed affair. As Pawl notes, ‘the term does not have an agreed upon definition ... [and] Thus, there is significant leeway in the interpretations of this term.’ (2019, 63) Nonetheless, however the word ‘simple’ ends up being defined,<sup>8</sup> there is widespread agreement that divine simplicity concerns God’s *intrinsic* nature, and therefore the ontology of God. This isn’t to say that divine simplicity doesn’t have any implications as to what is extrinsic to God, for as we shall see it does, but rather that the doctrine itself primarily concerns what God is like in and of Himself irrespective of anything extrinsic to Him.

Amongst classical authors, divine simplicity was generally understood as claiming that there is no *metaphysical* complexity within God, with Augustine, for example, summing this up by saying ‘what He has, He is.’<sup>9</sup> Exactly what forms of metaphysical complexity God’s being lacks will therefore depend upon one’s background metaphysics, but for any metaphysical distinction that brings complexity into an intrinsic nature, God will lack this.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, this isn’t to say that conceptual or logical distinctions can’t be made about the divine nature, for as long as these distinctions don’t imply any real intrinsic metaphysical complexity in the subject, they won’t cause any issues given that simplicity is a doctrine concerning the ontology of God.<sup>11</sup> As such, this form of simplicity is compatible with there being various non-synonymous names which apply to God, for example, being called just, loving, powerful, and holy, etc., so long as these conceptual or logical distinctions don’t imply any real intrinsic

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<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, Lowe didn’t write much about topics in philosophy of religion apart from those to do with the modal ontological argument (2007; 2012; 2013a) and miracles (1987), since these touched upon areas of his wider metaphysical thought. However, as a student reading and being inspired by his work, I often wondered what he thought about questions in philosophy of religion, especially as it seemed to me that his wider metaphysical projects renewed much of the Aristotelian foundations on which later Scholastic thought about God was built upon. It was always something I wanted to email him about, but sadly, due to his untimely death, it’s not something that we will ever get to discuss, at least not in this life. Perhaps we will be able to in the new creation (Revelation 21).

<sup>8</sup> For some additional discussion on different ways of understanding simplicity see: (McCall, 2014; Spencer, 2017; Inman, forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> For several references in Augustine see Leftow (2006, 379, n.3).

<sup>10</sup> There are many defences of this form of simplicity, for instance see: Stump & Kretzmann (1985); Brower (2008; 2009), Tomaszewski (2023; forthcoming), Leftow (2006), Duby (2016; 2023); Pruss (2008); Rogers (1996; 2020; forthcoming); Dolezal (2011); Grant (forthcoming).

<sup>11</sup> For more on these distinctions see Wuellner’s dictionary entry on ‘distinction’ (1956, 36-37), Feser (2014, 72-79), and Tomaszewski (2023, 238-239). Mullins claims that classical theists who endorse simplicity do not allow for conceptual distinctions regarding the divine nature (2021, 90), citing Anselm in support of this claim (Mullins, 2021, 90 – Anselm, *Proslogion* 18). However, the notion of conceptual and logical distinctions, as opposed to *real* distinctions is foreign to Anselm. This is because these fine-grained distinctions were formulated after him, and it seems likely that all Anselm would have had in mind was what became known as a *real* distinction. (For further discussion on *real* distinctions see Feser (2014, 72-79)). Nevertheless, if we do want to say that Anselm, and perhaps others, would not have allowed conceptual distinctions in God, then we should at least be accurate and acknowledge that not all who are called ‘classical theists’ would have agreed.

complexity in God. According to this understanding of simplicity no such intrinsic complexity is required, for even though these names are non-synonymous they signify a thing which is intrinsically metaphysically simple, namely God (Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 35; *Summa Theologica* I, q.13, a. 4 and a.12, co.).<sup>12</sup> This point can perhaps be made clearer by noting that a distinction can be drawn between names, or predications, being true of something, and that which makes those names or predications true. This form of divine simplicity says that there are many non-synonymous names or predications which are true of God, even though what makes these non-synonymous names or predications true is one metaphysically simple thing, namely God.<sup>13</sup>

However, more recently, there have been several less demanding ways of understanding what it is for God to be simple. To take three examples, Crisp suggests that simplicity should amount to the claim that God is not essentially composed of more fundamental elements (2019, 70). Even this allows for some metaphysical distinctions in God's nature, for example, that God could exemplify metaphysically distinct attributes (2019, 70). Rasmussen proposes that God's simplicity should be understood as claiming that God's nature is maximal and independent, lacking any arbitrary boundaries in its fundamental features (Rasmussen & Leon, 2020, 139-152).<sup>14</sup> And finally Swinburne contends that God is simple because 'God's essential properties all follow from the very simple property of having pure, limitless, intentional power' (1994, 154).<sup>15</sup>

Given these diverse ways of understanding simplicity, how exactly we *should* understand simplicity might not be so simple.

### Simply Compatible?

If we take God's omnipotence to be explained in terms of having powers, then one way we might make headway with this question is by thinking about whether we can affirm a powers account of omnipotence on these different theories of simplicity.<sup>16</sup> For if we can't make sense of it on some accounts of simplicity, then this will provide us with some reason for giving up that account of simplicity.

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<sup>12</sup> At the very least, this is what contemporary advocates of this form of simplicity claim for example see: Brower (2008, 16, 23), Beebe (2018, 480-484), Pawl (2019, 73-74), Tomaszewski (2023), and De Haan (2023).

<sup>13</sup> I belabour this point a little due to some confusion often seen in some literature on simplicity. Also see Grant (forthcoming) for further elaboration.

<sup>14</sup> This account seems to also allow that there could, in principle, be fundamental features of God's intrinsic nature which are metaphysically distinct. However, in personal correspondence Rasmussen has suggested he thinks God's most fundamental nature is not composed of distinct properties and is not fundamentally divided into distinct parts or components.

<sup>15</sup> See (Swinburne, 1994, 150-158) for explication of this reasoning. Elsewhere Swinburne does something similar (2016, 247-256).

<sup>16</sup> Note that throughout this article I am going to assume accounts of powers as they are found in the contemporary powers literature. Some theists might think this supposition is problematic and take it that even if God cannot be said to have anything like those powers found in contemporary metaphysics, the term power is still applicable to Him in virtue of something like being the cause of all contingent reality. Aquinas seems to think something like this and for some discussion see Rooney (2023, 328-329). I don't wish to comment on whether this is acceptable, but rather just see if, and how far, we can use the content of contemporary power metaphysics.

In order to appreciate why we might initially think that God having all the powers could cause some concerns for divine simplicity, it is helpful to note that powers are standardly individuated, at least partly, by their manifestation.<sup>17</sup> Yet because of this, and since we are taking it that God is able to bring about a vast range of effects, we might think we should conclude that God has many different powers. Saying this of beings which we take to be metaphysically complex would cause no issues at all, but it might lead to problems for *some* understandings of divine simplicity.

On Crisp's view of simplicity, God essentially cannot be composed of more fundamental elements, although He can have metaphysically distinct attributes. As such, God can have very many distinct powers so long as these do not require that God is composed of something more fundamental. Suppose we also thought that Crisp's account suggested that God's powers must also be fundamental, then a concern will arise if we think that God's powers must depend on categorical properties (Leftow, 2012, 156, 304), and that a relation of dependence implies that that which is dependent cannot itself be fundamental (Schaffer, 2009, 373). However, even assuming this claim about fundamentality, which some do not, we could, along with other contemporary power theorists, hold that powers can be fundamental, and so the powers related to omnipotence that God possesses are either fundamental pure powers or powerful qualities.<sup>18</sup> Given this, it seems that Crisp's view is compatible with a power's theory of omnipotence, with God having multiple fundamental powers.<sup>19</sup>

Rasmussen's account of simplicity also looks compatible with a powers account of simplicity, with it requiring that the powers we postulate are fundamental and maximal. We've already seen how powers can be fundamental and it seems they can also be understood as maximal. However, exactly how we will understand this maximality will depend upon whether we think these powers are single-track, and so capable of only one manifestation 'track', or multi-track, and so capable of multiple manifestation 'tracks'.<sup>20</sup> To see this, suppose that we think all of God's powers are single-track, then in every case this power will be maximal since it will have the maximal number of manifestation 'tracks' it can possibly have, namely one. However, if we suppose that God's powers can be multi-track things will be a little more complex, particularly since it seems there can be at least two different ways for understanding what it is for a power to be multi-track. First we might think of being multi-track as meaning that a power has multiple different *intensities* of manifestation, what I'll call being 'quantitatively multi-track', such as the power of elasticity to stretch to different lengths (Williams, 2011, 588-591). Or second, we might think of being multi-track as meaning that a power has multiple different multiple *types* of manifestation, what I'll call being 'qualitatively multi-track', such as a ball's

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<sup>17</sup> Lots of power theorists take the individuation conditions of a power to concern their conditions for manifestation and the manifestation itself (Bird, 2007, 19). However, others think it is the manifestation alone (Vetter, 2014; 2015). Lowe himself provides some comment on the question of how to individuate a power (2010).

<sup>18</sup> For some discussion and further references of fundamentality and dependence see (Giannotti, 2021a), and for fundamental pure powers and powerful qualities see (Giannotti, 2021b).

<sup>19</sup> There may be some debate as to whether Lowe's view of powers would allow him to think that they are fundamental. For some discussion which suggests he wouldn't take them to be fundamental, see Renz (2021a) and Dumsday (2016).

<sup>20</sup> To give an example, a multi-tracker will say the ball's sphericity can produce many different manifestations, such as an indentation in a cushion, roll, and structures outgoing radiation in a definite way (Heil, 2003, 198-199). By contrast, a single-tracker will say that the one power always makes the same contribution to an effect, no matter how different the effect is (Molnar, 2003, 194).

sphericity being able to produce an indentation in a cushion, the ability to roll, and will structure outgoing radiation in a definite way (Heil, 2003, 198-199).<sup>21</sup> If God's powers are *only* quantitatively multi-track then as long as the range of a power's intensity of manifestation is maximal then the power itself will be maximal. If God's powers are *only* qualitatively multi-track then as long as the range of types of manifestation this power can have is maximal, the power itself will be maximal. Finally, if God's powers are both quantitatively and qualitatively multi-track then they will be maximal insofar as both of these ranges are maximal. The question of which view is preferable, and what maximality should be understood as in each of these cases isn't something I'll discuss here. But it should be clear that Rasmussen's view of simplicity seems able to be made consistent with a powers account of omnipotence too.

Finally, whilst Swinburne's account of simplicity would likely hold problems for a power's view of omnipotence if it implied that all other divine attributes were metaphysically reducible to 'pure limitless intentional power', Swinburne is explicit that his account doesn't require this (1994, 151). Swinburne's account does require that the power in question is intentional, but given that some people think powers by their very nature are intentional in virtue of being directed towards an end (Bauer, 2023), this may not be in any way problematic.<sup>22</sup> However, it seems that what Swinburne means by this is that the power in question is responsive to reasons (1994, 151), and as we'll see shortly, this is how some power theorists, including Lowe (2013b, 165; 2013c), think of some mental powers.<sup>23</sup> Whilst Swinburne's account of simplicity allows God to possess distinct attributes, it's not clear whether he allows that there are multiple powers that God possesses, yet if it does allow for multiple powers, then what I've said here should be sufficient for showing that a powers view of omnipotence can be compatible with his view of simplicity. If, however, his account requires that God has only one power, then more needs to be done, with this being something I'll address momentarily. Assuming what I'm going to say is possible, then Swinburne's account of simplicity is also compatible with a power's account of omnipotence, even if it only requires that God has one power.

However, it seems much less obvious as to whether, what I'll call the classical account of divine simplicity, which denies there is any metaphysical complexity within God's intrinsic nature, is compatible with a powers view of omnipotence. After all, this view of simplicity clearly doesn't allow God to possess multiple metaphysically distinct powers, have any metaphysical complexity within His power, or that there be any metaphysical complexity arising from God having a power. Given this, the remainder of this paper will be concerned with exploring whether the classical account of simplicity is

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<sup>21</sup> Note that I don't mean to preclude a power from being *both* quantitatively and qualitatively multi-track. The language to describe a power's intensity varies in the literature. Mumford and Anjum speak of 'intensity' (2011, 24-25), although in another place 'magnitude' (Anjum & Mumford, 2017, 88), whilst Marmodoro talks about power's having a particular 'strength' (2016, 210). Vetter (2015, 85-94) appears to speak as though she has the distinction I have made here in mind, but her use concerns how likely it is that a power will manifest.

<sup>22</sup> For some discussion of this account of a power's directionality see Oderberg (2017). Renz (2021a) account of God's power provides a discussion about God's role in the directionality of a power.

<sup>23</sup> The power which Lowe thinks is responsive to reasons is the will, and it doesn't seem like how Lowe thinks about this power more generally is the same as how Swinburne thinks of his pure limitless intentional power. For whilst Lowe's power of will is non-causal (2013c, 174), the power Swinburne is referring to is clearly causal.

compatible with a powers view of omnipotence.<sup>24</sup> As such, unless stated otherwise, any reference to simplicity will now refer to the classical account.

### And Then There Was One

In order for a powers account of omnipotence to be compatible with simplicity, it had better not be the case that God has multiple metaphysically distinct powers. But on the face of it, it looks as though God does have very many different powers, since He is able to bring about very many different effects. Here we have a subtype of what I'll call the 'multiple attribute problem', namely how to make sense of a simple God having multiple supposedly different attributes, with us asking how God can be said to have all the powers and yet still be simple.<sup>25</sup> One might, however, think that the problem I'm addressing isn't a subtype of the 'multiple attribute problem', but is just this problem itself. The reason they would think this is if they assumed, like Plato (*The Republic*, 477b-d), that God's goodness isn't moral goodness (Murphy, 2017, 65-66) but rather to do with fulfilling one's ends, which is something that is arguably explainable in terms of powers (Page, 2021; 2018), and that all other attributes God is said to possess can be thought of in terms of powers.<sup>26</sup> But explaining all of God's attributes in terms of powers is a heavy, perhaps impossible burden. Therefore, for the remainder of the paper I'll restrict myself to the more limited goal of thinking about whether God's omnipotence requires us to think that He has multiple metaphysically distinct powers. I'm going to suggest there are two ways that we might go in order to avoid this conclusion, with both making use of some things Lowe said about powers.

### A Multi-track Power

As I've already alluded to, amongst power theorists there are debates as to whether we should think there are multi-track powers in addition to single-track powers. Usually, the distinction between a quantitative and qualitative multi-track power isn't made, with some examples of possible multi-track powers being more to do with a power producing one type of manifestation with differing intensities,

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<sup>24</sup> Given this, I'm not *primarily* interested in what Craig (2025a, 168, 181-182) seems to be, namely as to whether we should *overall* endorse a classical account of divine simplicity. Rather, what I want to know is whether a classical account of simplicity is compatible with a powers view of omnipotence. This will nevertheless be relevant to Craig's question, for if one endorses an understanding of omnipotence based on powers, and finds that the classical account of simplicity is incompatible with this understanding of omnipotence, then this will give them some reason for rejecting the classical account. However, if one has stronger reasons for adopting the classical account of simplicity more generally when compared with a powers based account of omnipotence, then this will give them reason to reject a powers based understanding of omnipotence. Whether we should endorse a classical view of simplicity overall, seems to me to be a very big question indeed, and worthy of much more consideration than Craig gives it (2025a, Ch.5).

<sup>25</sup> This is one of the problems that Plantinga (1980) raises against divine simplicity, and it is the first of the two problems Pruss discusses on simplicity (2008, 152-157).

<sup>26</sup> It may be that moral goods can be translated into power talk; in which case one wouldn't need to deny that God was morally good. Whether that is so would take us far beyond the scope of this essay, but Hacker's books on the moral (2021) and intellectual (2013) powers might help us make some progress in thinking about how God's moral goodness and other divine attributes can be reduced to powers.

whilst others are more clearly to do with one power producing different types of manifestation.<sup>27</sup> Let's suppose that there can be both quantitative and qualitative multi-track powers, with this background Lowe writes the following about qualitative multi-track powers,

'Once we allow that powers may genuinely have multiple manifestation-types which don't fall under any unified description, it becomes unclear why we should think that a single object may have many different powers rather than just one —a power to do all the things that it can do. And that would render the notion of power a rather feeble and trivial one.' (2010, 11-12)

From Lowe's point of view, it is a bug of the multi-track view that it allows for the possibility of there being one power which can account for all different manifestation types.<sup>28</sup> Williams similarly talks about a power like this, calling it a 'super-power' (2011, 594; 2019, 83), and although he thinks accepting such a power is a consistent position to hold, it isn't one that he finds attractive.<sup>29</sup> However, from a theistic point of view, especially for those theists who want to endorse simplicity, they can take this result as a 'feature' of the multi-track view rather than a bug, since it enables God to have a single power which accounts for all types of manifestations. Theists could claim that God's power is both quantitatively and qualitatively multi-track, and that this single power accounts for all the different intensities and types of manifestations that God can bring about.<sup>30</sup>

As I've already noted, Williams is no fan of a 'super-power', but his reasons for thinking this are not ones that theists should find persuasive. Williams suggests that it is the role of science to tell us whether there are multi-track powers and what the different tracks of these powers are, with science, at least at present, giving us no reason to posit a 'super-power'. But why should a theist think that science alone can tell us what has multi-track powers and what these tracks are? Arguably science cannot investigate those powers which are 'beyond' the empirical world, and God is often taken to be paradigmatically unamenable to scientific investigation. As such, supposing God possesses a multi-track power, it doesn't seem that any scientific discovery will have given us knowledge of this, and neither will it tell us which tracks this power has available to it. Therefore, more generally, if multi-track powers are possible, theists have no good reason for thinking that God does not have such a power, and perhaps good reasons for thinking He has the type of multi-track power suggested above, assuming they think He is both omnipotent and simple. In doing so, they'll have avoided the

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<sup>27</sup> It might be that some people purposefully run the intensity and type distinction together, and hold a fine-grained view of a manifestation, insofar as manifesting different intensities should ultimately just be thought of as manifesting different types of powers.

<sup>28</sup> Note that in the context Lowe is speaking about, he seems more concerned with *physical* powers. But God clearly does not have *physical* powers, and so perhaps Lowe would be less concerned about a multi-track power in the divine case.

<sup>29</sup> Williams and Lowe are thinking of this super-power as explaining all manifestations an object is capable of. Given that I am thinking about God, He is potentially capable of 'all' manifestations, although as I've already said, exactly how 'all' should be understood in this context isn't something I'm addressing here.

<sup>30</sup> Adopting a view like this would be what's needed to make Swinburne's account of simplicity consistent with a power's account of omnipotence if his view only allows for the postulation of one power. Additionally, if this type of power is possible, then it might be that Rasmussen's account of simplicity would lead us to it, since a power of this type is what would be postulated given his maximality condition.



implication that God has many metaphysically distinct powers, having ‘reduced’ all His powers down to one.<sup>31</sup>

### A Single-track Power

However, it’s fair to say that the possibility of multi-track powers is not something that is universally endorsed, and therefore it would be nice if there was an option available for single-trackers. Lowe may provide the basis for one when he writes,

‘But what about the question of whether the same power may have more than one manifestation-type? For instance, could *magnetism*—that very power—be essentially not only a power to attract ferrous metals but also a power *to do something else*? I don’t think so—not if we really are correct in characterizing it as being essentially a power to *attract ferrous metals*. If we really can think of ‘something else’ that it is a power to do, such as to *induce an electrical current* in certain circumstances, then I suggest that this merely shows that we need to think more carefully about how we should describe the ‘manifestation-type’ of this power, in order to find a description which covers in a unified way *all* of the supposedly ‘different’ things that the power is a power to do. If we can’t do that, then we should conclude that we are not really dealing with *just one power*. And I suspect that this might in fact be the correct conclusion to draw in the present case: that the phenomena of magnetism involve a number of different, albeit related, physical powers.’ (2010, 11)

The idea, embedded within this passage, is that we may, at times, be able to find a single description of a manifestation type which covers, in a unified way, all the different things a single power can do. We can follow Głowala in interpreting this type of view as saying, ‘a single-track power may have various manifestation types, but they all have to fall under one description ‘F’ indicating the fundamental manifestation-type of the power; and the power in question is principally a power to F.’ (2015, 237-238) Supposing we adopt this view, what we will say is that God’s power has a unifying description such that it can account for the whole range of manifestations that God can bring about. For instance, we might say that the unifying description is ‘being able to bring about any total possible state of affairs’, or adjust this unifying description depending upon whatever we take the range of God’s power to be.<sup>32</sup> I suspect neither Lowe or Głowala would be all that happy with this usage, since my impression is that they think the various manifestation types that can be unified will be rather small, and perhaps more to do with what I’ve called the varying intensity of a power’s manifestation rather than different types of manifestation. But I don’t see why what I’ve suggested here is incompatible with the proposal. Perhaps what it is to be ‘unified under a description’ will need to be debated, but it doesn’t appear to me that the unification I have proposed is a gerrymandered one, especially for those who think God is both omnipotent and simple. As such, I take it that we have a

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<sup>31</sup> Both Lenow (2021) and Renz (2021a), think of God as having a multi-track power.

<sup>32</sup> In other words, what we give as the unifying description will be partly determined by how we understand ‘all’ in God having all the powers. It also seems that this unifying description could deal with both the quantitative and qualitative aspects we may wish to attribute to divine power.

potential way of reducing all of God's powers to one, whilst also thinking of this power as single-track.<sup>33</sup>

### Is There Really Just One Power?

I've suggested two different ways whereby the powers which account for God's omnipotence only require that He has a single power, but one might suggest that I haven't gotten rid of all the different types of power God has. For instance, it might be supposed that the will is a type of power, being what Lowe takes to be a two-way power (2013b, 164–165; 2008, 8, 12), where this power can 'will' or 'refrain from willing' an action.<sup>34</sup> When we think about ourselves it seems clear that we have a power of will that is distinct from other powers we possess, since we might will a particular action, and yet the power required to perform that action may not manifest in virtue of some type of impediment, for example, although I will to raise my arm, my arm fails to raise in virtue of it being paralysed. If this way of thinking is apt for us, then perhaps God, in addition to His power associated with omnipotence, also requires a distinct power of will in order to put His power into action. Going this route would imply that God has more than just one power, although His power of will may be significantly different from His power concerning omnipotence.<sup>35</sup> If one were to take this option, then we will have more than one power, although this power of will shall be distinct from that which I'm trying to explain, namely God's omnipotence. Therefore God's will would just be added to the list of attributes which fall under the more general 'multiple attribute problem', with this asking more generally asking how a simple God can have multiple attributes. Given that answering this problem is something advocates of simplicity have to do more generally for attributes such as goodness, omniscience, etc., the addition of a 'power of will' may not be all that problematic. Assuming that a good answer to the 'multiple attribute problem' can be given, it seems taking this route would leave us claiming something along the lines of what Aquinas says when he writes,

Power is predicated of God not as something really distinct from His knowledge and will, but as differing from them logically; inasmuch as power implies a notion of a principle putting into execution what the will commands, and what knowledge directs, which three things in God are identified. (*Summa Theologica*, Q25. A.1, ad. 4)<sup>36</sup>

However, perhaps we might be able to offer a more radical response. Why not just say that God's will and His omnipotence are one and the same power, and that God's power of will is not two-way, in the sense of willing or refraining from willing a distinct omnipotence power into action, but rather His willing any action is all that is required in order to bring about the effect? God's willing X, therefore, just is necessary and sufficient for X, and no power distinct from God's will is required for this effect to be brought about. There is thus no need to postulate two different types of power in God, one regarding His omnipotence and another accounting for Him putting that power into action, namely His will.

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<sup>33</sup> In conversation Tim Pawl independently suggested something like this approach.

<sup>34</sup> Steward (2012) also thinks of the will as a two-way power.

<sup>35</sup> This is clear given how Lowe understands the power of will (2008; 2013b; 2013c). For some discussion of his approach see Głowala (2022) and Oderberg (2024).

<sup>36</sup> Aquinas says similar things in *De Potentia Dei* q.1, a.2, ad.3 and q.2, a.3, co.

Yet one could counter this by claiming that God can will things that don't end up coming about, and as such we should keep His omnipotent power and power of will distinct. For example, it might be claimed that God wills for all to be saved, even though in the end not all will be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4).<sup>37</sup> However, one could reply that here we can distinguish between God's 'antecedent' and 'consequent' will, and that the will which I'm claiming can account for God's omnipotent power, should only be thought to concern one of these wills. To see this, note that God's 'antecedent will' covers things like, God willing all to be saved, and therefore it may require certain conditions that are distinct from God to be met in order for His 'antecedent will' to be accomplished, such as all freely coming to a saving knowledge of God. By contrast, God's 'consequent will', requires no conditions distinct from God to be met, and as such, whatever God wills by His 'consequent will' will be accomplished. Since omnipotence, as Leftow (2009, 180-183) contends elsewhere, is to do with God's intrinsic powers, then it does not require that God is able to bring about effects which rely on external conditions that are out of His control.<sup>38</sup> As such, when I talk of God's will being the power that can bring about any state of affairs, it is His 'consequent will' which I mean to refer to. God's antecedent will, therefore, might actually be concerned with a category distinct from will, perhaps God's desires, especially if we find it odd to say that God can will something to be the case and yet His will be thwarted.<sup>39</sup>

However, arguably a benefit of keeping God's omnipotent power and power of will distinct is the fact that a two-way power of will can refrain from willing something. But it seems that on a single-track view of omnipotence, we could incorporate the idea of a two-way power. To do this, suppose we say that instead of the omnipotent power having the unifying description of 'being able to bring about any total possible state of affairs', it is instead the will, but also that this is a two-way power. As such, this power enables God to bring about any total possible state of affairs and also refrain from willing anything. Things will need to be thought about differently on a multi-track view, since it's unclear whether a two-way multi-track power makes sense. If it does, then we can adapt what we said about the single-track two-way power we attributed to God. Alternatively, we might suggest that God's multi-track power of will, is such that it can produce any possible total states of affairs in virtue of manifesting one of its tracks.<sup>40</sup> In virtue of willing one of these tracks, we can say that God has refrained from willing anything else since willing one total state of affairs will be inconsistent with willing all other total states of affairs.<sup>41</sup> Could God then refrain from willing anything, and therefore

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<sup>37</sup> Assume for the present that universalism is false.

<sup>38</sup> Leftow gives the example of the power to persuade, as something which relies on external conditions, with this especially being the case if the agent one is trying to persuade has libertarian freedom.

<sup>39</sup> Note also that the language of 'desire' seems to be what is used in 1 Timothy 2:3-4 rather than that of will.

<sup>40</sup> Whether God fully *determines* what this state of affairs is might rely on how we think about God's relation to free creatures, for two different approaches see (Grant, 2019) and (Leftow, 2012, 397).

<sup>41</sup> One might worry here since the power's view of omnipotence claims that God has *all* the powers, and therefore shouldn't we think that in addition to having the powers to bring about any possible total state of affairs He also has the powers to bring about any individual state of affairs? Suppose He does have these as well, so long as we think it is a mark of excellence to bring about a state of affairs in the simplest way possible (Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Section 22), then it doesn't seem that these powers will ever play a role in God's actions. After all, if God manifests both His power to bring about a total state of affairs and all the compatible individual powers, this would bring about an overdetermination case, which although perhaps not impossible, would nevertheless be more complex than merely just using His power to bring about a total state of affairs.

just exist all alone?<sup>42</sup> This might depend upon other things we need to say about God's power, something I'll address in the next section.

Exactly which option one takes, whether the will is taken to be distinct from the power which explains God's omnipotence or not, isn't all that important for what follows. Therefore I'll leave it up to the reader to decide which is preferable, particularly since the defender of simplicity is very likely going to have to overcome the general multiple attribute problem no matter which option they take.

### Intrinsically Complex?

We now turn to the question of whether there is any metaphysical complexity in the multi-track or single-track power that we've ended up with, since simplicity requires that there mustn't be.

Given that powers bring about things when acting, one might worry that this alone will be sufficient to suggest that some complexity will be required. The reason for thinking this stems from Oppy's thought that, 'nothing brings about effects without itself undergoing change is so intuitively obvious—no matter to which subject matter it is applied—that no one really believes it to be false' (2017, 642). If this is right, then unless the change in question is extrinsic, it would seem that any power bringing about an effect is going to be incompatible with simplicity since it will require some intrinsic change in God, something that simplicity cannot allow.<sup>43</sup> However, the best option here is to argue that Oppy is wrong. Oderberg (2024) has done so recently, arguing that 'active powers' are those which can act without the entity that possesses the power being changed in the process.<sup>44</sup> Let us therefore assume Oderberg's account, since my aim here is merely to show how it is possible that a power's theory of omnipotence is compatible with simplicity, and state that God's power is an 'active' power, as Oderberg understands this notion.<sup>45</sup>

However, complexity might rear its head in another way, for powers, even 'active' ones, are typically said to be both dormant and manifesting. To give an example, my power to hit a forehand on a tennis court, whilst being something that I intrinsically possess at present due to much historic practice, is currently dormant whilst I type. However, when I head to the tennis court and the ball approaches my

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Note also, that this concern would only seem to apply to a multi-track view, since on a single-track view, arguably the power cannot manifest in more than one way at once.

<sup>42</sup> Working out exactly what it means for God to exist alone is itself a tricky business, see (Page, 2025c).

<sup>43</sup> If the change in question is extrinsic, then since simplicity is to do with God's intrinsic nature it will cause no concerns here. However, there may still be a problem because simplicity entails timelessness (Leftow, 1991, 150-157), and some have suggested that timelessness cannot allow for extrinsic changes. The best option here is to deny that timelessness is incompatible with extrinsic changes (Page, 2023, 177-181; 2025b, 59-65).

<sup>44</sup> Things are slightly more complicated, for as Oderberg says, 'the mere fact that an object changes in a causal interaction does not mean that it changes *insofar as it is acting*. Rather, it changes *insofar as it is acted upon*.' (2024, 11) However, since God is never acted upon, with this being evident if all His action is *ex nihilo*, He will not change at all.

<sup>45</sup> As Oderberg (2024) notes, and as will become clear below, different people understand 'active power' in different ways. 'Passive powers', as Oderberg understands them, are those which are acted upon by active powers and bring about a change in the entity that possesses them, and therefore given simplicity God has none of these.

forehand side, my power to hit a forehand, whilst being an ‘active’ type, manifests.<sup>46</sup> We might here wonder whether this ‘transition’ from dormancy to manifestation requires some complexity in the power.

Let’s begin by assuming an account of powers which does think complexity is required in virtue of this, namely Marmodoro’s account, which holds that ‘the activation of a power is an *internal* ‘transition’ from one state to another of the very same power: its manifestation is not the occurrence of a new power; rather it is simply a different state of the original power: an activated state.’ (2017, 59) Here it seems explicit that there is some internal complexity in the power itself, and merely by claiming that in virtue of God being simple He will also be timeless (Leftow, 1991, 150-157) and therefore the state of His power won’t change, will be insufficient to avoid the concerning complexity even if it avoids the worry of intrinsic change. What should we say in this case?

Before attempting to answer this question, let me add another distinction that I’ve so far ignored that will be helpful in what follows and important for what to say about God’s power being active if this is an ‘intrinsic state’ of the power. Sometimes when people speak of a manifestation, what is meant is that the power in question is no longer dormant but is now, what we might call, ‘exercising’, whilst at other times what is meant is that an ‘effect’ is being produced.<sup>47</sup> I, like some other power theorists, (e.g. Marmodoro, 2022, 2; Anjum & Mumford, 2017, 87), think it is likely a mistake to run these things together, with this especially being the case for someone who endorses simplicity and thinks that a power’s exercising is intrinsic to the power. To see why, recall that I’ve already claimed simplicity entails timelessness (Leftow, 1991, 150-157) and suppose that God produces an effect, in virtue of His power, at a particular time in creation. If we were to run the exercise and effect of God’s power together and just speak of the power manifesting, then it seems we would have to say that God’s power manifests at the time in creation when its effect is produced. But if this power is intrinsic to God, and the manifestation is an intrinsic state of this power, then it looks as though God will be imbued with temporality in virtue of the manifestation being temporal. Yet, that’s a problem for timelessness. However, if we use the distinction I made above regarding a power’s ‘exercising’ and the ‘effect’ a power produces, then we can ask two questions, namely when is it that God’s power ‘exercises’, and when is it that the ‘effect’ is produced?<sup>48</sup> The answer to the former question is ‘at eternity’, whilst the answer to the latter question will be the specific time in creation at which the effect occurs.<sup>49</sup> Here any problems for timelessness are avoided, and we have a distinction that I’ll make use of again later. We can therefore return to our question as to what, if anything, we can say

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<sup>46</sup> The distinction noted in endnote 44 about the types of changes something might undergo even when employing an ‘active’ power should be evident here. For more detail on this see Oderberg (2024).

<sup>47</sup> For some reasons for holding this distinction note that you might think that some powers can exercise without producing an effect, and you also might think multiple powers need to exercise in order for any effect to come about.

<sup>48</sup> See Leftow (2002, 24, 40-43) for discussion of ‘when’ being an appropriate question to be asked even of a timeless being. Another way of asking my question above is to ask what is the ‘date’ of a power’s exercising and effect, with ‘at eternity’ being a viable date (Leftow, 2002, 41-43; 1991, 50-54).

<sup>49</sup> Active powers also can be dormant and exercising, for as Oderberg notes, the exercise of an active power is still caused (2024, 14), and as such it still needs to be ‘triggered’ (2024, 13) so that it exercises rather than remains dormant.

about the compatibility of simplicity with those views that claim exercising is an intrinsic state of a power.

One option would be to say that there are powers which do not possess both states, namely dormancy and manifesting, but rather they only have a manifesting state.<sup>50</sup> This seems to be what Lowe calls an ‘active’ power (Lowe 2013b, 159-160), but given that we are following Oderberg in our use of ‘active’, we can call it a ‘permanently manifest’ power instead.<sup>51</sup> However, once we go this route, we seem to have another problem to contend with, namely a modal collapse rearing its head. To see this, note that simplicity implies that God is really intrinsically indiscernible across all possible worlds (Tomaszewski, 2023, 238-241), and that if the power God has is intrinsic and only has a manifesting state, then the power will permanently manifest across all possible worlds. The result of this seems to be that given that God’s power has produced the world, and since it cannot be in anything other than this permanent state, creation itself will be necessary.<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps the correct response here is to follow those in thinking that modal collapse isn’t as bad as it might at first seem (Rogers, 2020, 318) and admit that God couldn’t have done other than what He has done. But to many this will be unacceptable and so it would be nice if there was another way to respond to this concern. To do this, what we’ll need to find is an account where God can be intrinsically the same across possible worlds, whilst what is extrinsic to Him differs. In terms of God’s power this will mean that both God’s possession of power and the exercising of that power are intrinsic to God, and yet the effects the power produces are extrinsic, with these effects not implying any change in God in virtue of the power being an ‘active’ power. The idea here will be that given the effects of God’s power are *extrinsic* to God, they can differ across possible worlds, without God changing intrinsically. Is this something we can make sense of on a multi-track and single-track view?

In terms of a multi-track view, it’s not clear that this move helps all that much, since on the multi-track account, it is the exercising of different tracks that makes sense of the different effects being produced. One can see this from the fact that the identity of these tracks is at least partly determined by the effects they contribute towards. So, one track exercising will help explain why one total state of affairs is produced rather than another total state of affairs, and if another track were exercised then a different total state of affairs would be produced. However, if the exercising of this multi-track power is intrinsic, then it would seem that the exercising of a *particular* track will be intrinsic too. But if that’s right, then which track will be exercised will be invariant across possible worlds, and therefore we should expect the effect to be invariant too, given that the exercising of different tracks explains the different extrinsic effects. That’s a problem.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> This doesn’t imply that the exercising state cannot be caused, but that whatever does cause it will necessarily have to accompany this power. Perhaps one might appeal to the divine ideas, since these are necessary and are claimed to be compatible with simplicity (Panchuk, 2021; Doolan, 2023).

<sup>51</sup> I use ‘permanently’ here rather than ‘always’, since ‘always’ may have temporal connotations. Dumsday (2016) talks more about this feature of Lowe’s view, and Marmodoro (2022) also seems to suggest that there can be powers like this. Vetter’s maximal powers (2015, 96) also appear similar to what Lowe calls an ‘active’ power.

<sup>52</sup> This way of setting out the problem shows that Waldrop (2022) is right in thinking that the core debate in the modal collapse argument against simplicity is a substantive controversy over the metaphysics of divine action and not really something about the logic of modality

<sup>53</sup> This theory is also therefore going to be a no go for those who want to say it is possible God could exist alone.

On a single-track view, we have a power which can produce many different effects when it exercises, with all the effects falling under a single description. This account, therefore, has an active power that is permanently exercising and is intrinsic to God, and yet this doesn't imply that the power can only produce one extrinsic effect. This is because on this view, so long as the effect falls under a single-description of the power, then this power is able to produce that effect. So here we have a story where God's power can be permanently exercising and yet the extrinsic effect it produces will differ.

Yet one might suggest, following Głowala, that 'any viable single-tracking theory has to admit some sense in which one and the same power is manifested in various ways' (2015, 246). To put this within our context, this single-tracking theory will have to provide some explanation as to how one and the same exercise of a power can produce diverse effects. This appears essential since if the way the power exercises is invariant it appears the extrinsic effect it produces will be invariant too. What the advocate of this type of single-tracking view will need to deny is that a single-track power needs to exercise in different ways so as to produce different effects whilst also showing that this denial is plausible. One thing they might attempt to appeal to are cases of libertarian freedom, where this is understood as a leeway conception such that it allows for the ability to do otherwise,<sup>54</sup> and state that a being can be intrinsically the same and yet produce different effects.<sup>55</sup> Whilst this might be something for an advocate of simplicity to appeal to more generally, there is a question as to whether it helps here, since the question will be whether in the libertarian case one's power of will is exercised in the same way across the worlds in which there are various effects, or whether the power is the same but its exercise is different and for that reason there are different effects. More would need to be done to show that there can be adequate libertarian theories which closely mirror the case we are considering in order for the appeal to libertarianism to be conclusive here, but an advocate of the view might just rest content in suggesting that merely showing that something can be intrinsically the same and yet produce different extrinsic effects is sufficient to show that this view might be possible. It may well be a good question as to why one effect was brought about rather than another given the invariant intrinsic 'base', both for the libertarian and power theorist, but since all we are after here is the possibility that something can be intrinsically the same and yet produce different extrinsic effects, it doesn't seem as though one *must* answer this question in order to see that there are cases where this is acceptable.

Another concern relates to something we've touched on before, namely the possibility of God existing alone, with this seeming troublesome if the power is permanently exercising and this exercise is invariant across all worlds. After all, the solution given previously, which took God's power of will to be a two-way power such that it didn't require that it be exercised, is ruled out since on this view God's power is permanently exercising. As such, it seems as though this way of suggesting God could exist alone is ruled out. Here one could offer another response, namely that if this single-track power is the power to bring about any possible total state of affairs, then insofar as there is a possible total state of affairs of God existing alone, this power can bring this about. It however seems odd to say

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<sup>54</sup> This is not to suggest that they shouldn't also endorse a sourcehood condition as well, but merely to say sourcehood libertarianism without a leeway conception won't be enough. Note, however, that an understanding of libertarianism that *only* requires sourcehood, may well allow one to say that even if the effect God brings about is invariant across possible worlds, it is still free (O'Connor, 2012, 121-122).

<sup>55</sup> For a helpful related discussion see Grant (2007) where he talks about this aspect of libertarian freedom in relation to the Leibnizian version of the cosmological argument and the doctrine of no real relations.

that the effect of a permanently active power is to bring about nothing. But arguably there is no such state of affairs where God brings about nothing at all, since God is sometimes taken to necessarily will His own goodness, and we might suggest that this is at least something the permanently active power brings about. Alternatively, if one doesn't like this suggestion, then one could instead say that an empty world doesn't mean God brings about nothing at all, but rather He wills something like a normative state of affairs: nothing else shall come into being, and as such His permanent exercise will produce something, albeit with it resulting in God existing, for all intents and purposes, alone.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, we are still left in the admittedly odd situation, on this view, where the very same permanent exercise of a power can bring about a plenitudinous multiverse and also a world where merely God exists, but this will just have to be an oddity one lives with if they take this route.

All of this is what one might say if they take the exercise of a power to be intrinsic to the power itself, but one doesn't have to take that initial step. For instance, some have suggested that a power's exercising can be divided up further, such that we can let part of what it is to be exercising be extrinsic rather than being wholly intrinsic. One option may be to adopt Schrenk's idea that there is some type of 'push' that is distinct from the exercising of the power (2009), or perhaps adapt Marmodoro's suggestion that there can be 'stages' of activation for a power (2014, 130-133; Marmodoro & Grasso, 2020).<sup>57</sup> Supposing we were to take the latter, then the idea would be that the 'former' stage would be the permanently exercising component that is intrinsic to the power, whilst the 'latter' stage of a manifestation and the effect produced are both extrinsic. *If* a distinction like this can be made, then this might help us provide a possible multi-track account to overcome the modal collapse worry, and an alternative way of thinking about the single-track view. So, for instance, focusing on the multi-track view we could say that there is a 'former' stage of a power which is intrinsic to the power and permanently exercising, which track is exercised is a 'latter' stage of the manifestation and therefore extrinsic, and the effect the power produces is extrinsic too.<sup>58</sup> Here, once again, the question might be asked as to how the same intrinsic state can bring about different tracks being exercised or how it can exercise the power in different ways, but the reply to this can be the same as above, namely in stating that insofar as one is a libertarian, arguably they will have to say something similar about free action. Admittedly, more will need to be done to draw out the distinctions required for a power's manifestation in order to make sense of this view, and further questions asked as to whether which track the power manifests can be thought of as a latter 'stage', but it seems an option one might wish to explore further.

Yet, one might instead think that rather than jumping through these different metaphysical hoops to try to make the account work, it would be better to reject the assumption that we started with altogether, namely that there is some aspect of a power's exercise that is intrinsic to the power. Instead, we should say that both the power's exercise and effect are external to the power. On this

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<sup>56</sup> Thanks to Rob Koons for this suggestion. Note also that a multi-tracker could use this suggestion, or the one concerning goodness, when thinking about how they could explain how God could exist alone and yet His power be exercising.

<sup>57</sup> Note that Schrenk speaks of dispositions in his article rather than powers, and that Marmodoro's idea would need a little changing for it to be relevant here.

<sup>58</sup> A single-tracker might instead suggest that there are also two stages of a power's manifestation, one intrinsic and one extrinsic, to try and help them make more sense as to how one and the same exercise of a power can bring about different effects, with the main explanation as to why the effects are different being explained by the extrinsic aspect of the manifestation.



view, all it means for a power to exercise is for the power to produce its effect, but what the production of the effect ‘consists in’ is simply the effect with its relation of dependence on the power, with this implying that the power’s exercise is extrinsic. Equally, all it is for the power to be dormant is for there to be no exercise of the power, such that there is no effect with its relation of dependence on that power, with this again implying that whether the power is dormant is determined by something extrinsic to the power. Here the power is intrinsic to God, but both the effect and the causal-dependence relation are extrinsic to Him. Saying that a power is exercising, on this account, does not require that there be a change intrinsic to the power, but rather just expresses if there is a causal-dependence relation between the power and its effect or not. This view, therefore, has no trouble in saying that God’s power might be dormant, since God’s power will be dormant just in case God is not exercising it, and therefore it does not need to be permanently exercising as before.<sup>59</sup> On this view, therefore, God can exist alone with relative ease.<sup>60</sup>

This view, as with the views before it, can also make use of the libertarian thought that one and the same intrinsic power can bring about various different extrinsic effects, but it doesn’t have the extra difficulty of explaining how one and the same intrinsic exercise can bring about the same effects, since this view doesn’t need to say the exercise is the same across possible worlds. After all, if the exercise of a power is extrinsic and all the exercise ‘consists in’ is simply the effect with its relation of dependence on the power, then if the extrinsic effect is different in one world from another, then so too is the extrinsic exercise in virtue of the causal-dependence relations being different too. We can still ask, why did the power produce this exercise and effect rather than another, but this is more analogous to the libertarian free will case. Additionally, this view may also not need to say what I said above regarding ‘when’ a power manifests. For as Grant notes, ‘the assumption that if God is eternal, then his action must be eternal ... follows from assuming God’s action is intrinsic to God’ (2019, 168). But on this view both the exercise and effect of God’s power aren’t intrinsic to God, rather they are extrinsic, and as I’ve already noted (endnote 43) extrinsic changes arguably don’t imply temporality. As such, we may be able to say that the ‘when’ of God’s power’s exercising and the ‘when’ of its effect are both at some worldly time, with this not implying that God is temporal. However, a worry to be overcome here is whether on this view of extrinsic action there will be an extrinsic relation between God’s eternity and time. If there is then this will cause problems for timelessness, since divine timelessness holds that God is both intrinsically and extrinsically timeless (Leftow, 1991, 22), and therefore cannot have any extrinsic temporal relations. Grant can respond to this worry by claiming that any extrinsic relation he may have to posit here has no real foundation in God (2019, 57), but it’s worth noting that many will see this as a cost to the view.

There are therefore some reasons that can be given for favouring this type of account, but Craig suggests a reason against it, stating that a response which requires one to embrace such a radical externalism is incredible (of the bad variety) (2025a, 177, 174, 175), desperate (2025a, 182, 157, 177), and shows that divine simplicity is not plausibly true (2025a, 182). This is not the time to defend

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<sup>59</sup> This way of thinking about things follows the extrinsic model of divine causation and so advocates can adapt what is said in that more general case here too (O’Connor, 1999; Grant, 2019; 2024; Brower, 2009, 117-120; Pruss, 2008, 157-163).

<sup>60</sup> There has been an issue raised in regard to God’s knowledge which claimed that if a simple God chose not to create anything He could not know that He was alone, but see Pawl and Grant (2023) as to why this shouldn’t be thought problematic.

externalism, but let me note two things.<sup>61</sup> Firstly, here Craig (202a5, 174-182) doesn't try to suggest simplicity is impossible, merely that overall we shouldn't endorse it given these types of commitments and should prefer a complex God instead. Since all I aim to do here is show that a powers view of omnipotence is compatible with simplicity I can live with merely the possibility claim. Secondly, Craig's thoughts that such moves are incredible, desperate, and rest on outré metaphysical views (2025, 168) seems rich to me for two reasons. The first is that arguably most people would say this about much Christian theology, for instance the doctrine of Incarnation, Trinity, New Creation, ... I could go on. The second is that arguably all metaphysical theories end up saying things that seem incredible, granting things that seem desperate, and can therefore seem outré. When you get down to the nitty gritty of metaphysics it's all very strange, with often the choice being which bullets you find tastiest! Hudson is therefore right when he says, 'It is a common but almost never compelling critique to accuse someone of holding a crazy metaphysics. That is scarcely alarming ... *metaphysics is a crazy business.*' (2014, 15)<sup>62</sup> Therefore, given Craig is both a Christian and engaged in metaphysics, I don't think we should find these complaints particularly persuasive.

Supposing then, that we think a Craig style objection can be overcome and we understand both the exercise and effect of the power to be extrinsic, then when we say that a multi-track power exercises different tracks, we just mean to suggest that one and the same power can stand in many different causal relations to different effects, with the effects and the relations all being extrinsic to that power. When a particular extrinsic causal-dependence relation is present, we would say that one track of the power is exercising, whilst if this power stood in a different extrinsic causal-dependence relation then we would say another track is exercising. On this account, the exercise of the power is extrinsic to the power, along with the effect it produces, and so God's powers can be intrinsically invariant even though it is possible that different tracks are exercised across different possible worlds. On this account, therefore, we get no complexity in the intrinsic nature of the power and therefore no modal collapse. We also don't seem to get any intrinsic complexity in virtue of the power being multi-track either, since the tracks are not intrinsic divisions in the power itself, but just ways of expressing that one and the same power can stand in different extrinsic relations of causal-dependence. However, because of this, it is now not totally clear how strong the distinction is between a multi-track power and the type of single-track power that we have posited is. After all, the single-tracker, will also want to say that the single-track power they've posited can stand in different relations of causal-dependence and therefore produce different effects, with all of these falling under the same fundamental manifestation type. Consequently, it might not be that we really have two distinguishing views left here.

However, perhaps one could suggest that a distinguishing feature between the two views is that whilst on a single-tracker view it will be the case that the power is *wholly* exercising, since it only has one manifestation track which can manifest, on the multi-track view the power is not wholly manifesting, since not all of the tracks will be exercising. If we wish to affirm a traditional conception of simplicity, where God is taken to be pure act (Stump & Kretzmann, 1985, 355), we might therefore think that a

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<sup>61</sup> This isn't to say that a defence cannot be lodged. Grant suggests that philosophers with no theological axe to grind have defended something analogous even for human cognitive states (2012, 261-264; 2019, 147), and he has also argued that some type of externalism might be required to make sense of the Leibnizian cosmological argument (Grant, 2007), with the Leibnizian cosmological argument being one that Craig also endorses (2025b).

<sup>62</sup> See Schwitzgebel (2024, ch.2) for an argument to the effect that metaphysics is always bizarre.

multi-track power is problematic in that it doesn't seem to allow for this. Yet, there are two things to say in response here. Firstly, if we characterise each of the tracks of a multi-track power as bringing about a total possible state of affairs, then so long as one of the track's manifesting rules out all the other tracks from manifesting, then arguably the power has no ability to manifest any more than it actually does and so we can claim it is fully actual.<sup>63</sup> Alternatively, given the way we are currently understanding what it is for a power to exercise, there is nothing in the exercise of a power itself that changes anything about the status of God. Only possession of the power itself is intrinsic to God, and whatever the power does is extrinsic. As such, God's nature cannot be in any way less or more than it would be whether no tracks exercise, or whether they all do. So, there is no issue here either.<sup>64</sup>

Given this it seems we have some ways of overcoming the intrinsic complexity concern we might have had when thinking about God's omnipotent power. There are no doubt other questions which one might ask, such as why certain effects were produced by God's power, and I suggest that answering this question will likely come down to explaining things to do with the divine will more generally, with perhaps some of the work on mental powers that Lowe (2008; 2013b; 2013c) and others (e.g. O'Connor, 2000; Jacobs and O'Connor, 2013) have engaged in, being relevant here.<sup>65</sup> Thinking about this further will have to wait for another time. For now, we can turn to a final area where a powers view of omnipotence might cause problems for simplicity.

### The Category of Power

So far it seems to me that we've found no unmovable obstacle in making some form of a powers account of omnipotence compatible with simplicity. However, there is one final concern before us, namely about whether predicating power on God means that He has properties and therefore whether this introduces complexity into the divine nature. Obviously, one could interpret a powers theory in this way, but here I want to *briefly* suggest that one doesn't have to. The reason why this will be brief is because most contemporary defences of simplicity already attempt to find a way to make God's attributes compatible with simplicity, and all I'll be doing here is following their lead.

Before doing this, let me head off a potential concern, namely speaking of powers requires one to be a realist about properties. Here it depends upon what one means about being realist about properties. If by being a realist one means that these properties are basic entities in our ontology, then it's not true, for one might be a nominalist about powers (Whittle, 2009; Vogt, 2022), and therefore although we can say these properties 'exist' they are ultimately reducible to facts about particulars. This might sound problematic given simplicity, but if the particular property in question is only had by the divine

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<sup>63</sup> If one takes this route then it seems as though they will need to say that the power manifests even when God exists alone in order for God to remain pure act, and in doing so they lose one of the advantages of this account.

<sup>64</sup> Yet if this route is taken, then the distinction between multi-track and single-track seems to be lost again.

<sup>65</sup> For instance, this might help overcome Heil's (2012, 121) claim that the reason different tracks of a multi-track power manifest is due to the power coming into contact with different triggers or mutual manifestation partners. It's not clear that God's power will have any triggers or mutual manifestation partners, and perhaps in virtue of being an agential power being able to bring about basic actions, this will not be required. Otherwise, one might have to appeal to divine ideas (Panchuk, 2021; Doolan, 2023) to get the different triggers, but in doing so one will need to be careful to avoid any complexity intrinsic to the divine nature and make sure it remains invariant over all possible worlds.

simple nature, and it is reducible to facts about this particular, then it's hard to see what problematic metaphysical complexity is added to God's intrinsic nature. Yet one can go even further, for as Koons writes, arguably 'a powers ontology could be combined with extreme nominalism, denying the fundamental existence of any properties at all' (2024, 42, 45). If we go this route, then in postulating a power we do not have to say that this means there is an existing property, and as such the power here will clearly introduce no metaphysical complexity into the divine nature.<sup>66</sup>

Let us therefore briefly turn to three different ways of understanding divine simplicity and ask whether a powers theory of omnipotence is compatible with them.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps the most popular account of simplicity, as of late, is the truthmaker account (Brower, 2008; 2009; Pruss, 2008; Pawl, 2019), which suggests that 'divine simplicity just amounts to the claim that God is the truthmaker for each of his true intrinsic predications . . . all the doctrine requires is that for every true intrinsic divine predication, there is a truthmaker, and God is identical with that truthmaker.' (Brower, 2009, 112) Supposing we adopt this type of account, then what we will say is that when we speak of God's power, it does not name a distinct property, but rather it names God alone. For as Pawl writes, the only reason we will end up with a problem here is if we endorse the 'assumption that the truth of "God is omnipotent" requires God's having a property' and Pawl suggests that thinking that predications such as these can only be true if there is such a property 'should be rejected.' (2019, 66)<sup>68</sup> As far as I can tell, there is nothing in a power's view of omnipotence that says this move is unacceptable, and therefore it seems we can adopt this view of simplicity, perhaps claiming all the distinctions we have made regarding the notion of power that might imply complexity are merely conceptual ones.

However, not everyone is keen on truthmaker forms of simplicity, so let's turn to another proposal, namely Leftow's Augustinian inspired account (2006).<sup>69</sup> On this view, 'the claim that God = Fness, where F is an attribute creatures can also bear, really means that God is identical with the *standard* for Fness' (Leftow, 2006, 367). This means that God is the standard for all the different attributes we say He intrinsically possesses. As Leftow notes, this doesn't require that power and wisdom are the same even if God has both, for it 'asserts only that the standard for wisdom = the standard for power = God. ... On Augustine's view power and wisdom remain distinct attributes: to be like God as powerful things are is not to be like God as wise things are.' (2006, 372) Exactly how something simple can be the standard for multiple distinct attributes may be a tricky business, relying on the idea of partial representation (Leftow, 2006, 372-374). But assuming such moves can be made sense of, then once again, as far as I can tell, there is nothing incompatible with this view of simplicity and a power's view of omnipotence. As such, God can be the standard of power, or in this case, the maximal degree of power (Leftow, 2006, 371), without any problem.

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<sup>66</sup> Note that Leftow talks of a way of eliminating God's powers from our ontology too (2012, 304-308)

<sup>67</sup> Obviously whether any of these theories of simplicity are defensible is a huge topic in and of itself and is not something I will speak about here. I also do not want to suggest that these three forms of simplicity are the only forms that are compatible with a powers view of omnipotence.

<sup>68</sup> Leftow (2012, 306-208) seems to suggest something similar.

<sup>69</sup> Leftow raises a few worries about a truthmaker account of simplicity (2016), such as suggesting that it changes simplicity from a claim about there being no metaphysical composition in the Divine nature to a 'claim about God's semantic role' (2016, 46). It's interesting that Leftow has distanced himself from this type of account, since arguably he gave a type of truthmaker account of simplicity in his PhD thesis (1984).

Finally, let's turn to a view of simplicity which holds that God is something *like* a simple property. There have been a number of different accounts which make a move like this, with Mann suggesting that God is a property instance (2015; 1986), Sijuwade thinking God is a type of trope (2022), and Rogers a type of act (1996, 166, 179).<sup>70</sup> If these views can overcome the multiple attribute problem, as well as other issues that are sometimes lodged at them, such as whether something *like* a simple property can be a person (Plantinga, 1980, 47), then surely they are compatible with a power's view of omnipotence, since powers are standardly taken to be a type of property.<sup>71</sup> As such, we have another view of simplicity, which if successful is compatible with a power's view of omnipotence.

## Conclusion

The result of all this, I want to suggest, is that a power's view of omnipotence is compatible with all the different forms of simplicity we have examined in this paper, the classical view, Crisp's, Swinburne's, and Rasmussen's.<sup>72</sup> Through showing this, I hope to have given a clearer picture as to what type of power God will have on the various accounts of simplicity, with the distinctions drawn in some cases, perhaps just being merely conceptual. However, the bigger question of whether one should endorse a power's view of omnipotence and which, if any account, of simplicity should be adopted will have to wait for another time. At the very least, I hope we can agree that although divine power and divine simplicity are compatible, how they are is not so simple!<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Elsewhere, I've suggested that thinking of God as a type of trope, and in particular a type of multi-track power, will help provide a model of the Trinity (Page, 2017).

<sup>71</sup> Mann suggests that not only is God a property, but rather that He is a power (1986, 352-353). Note that since powers can arguably cut across categories (Dummsday, 2019, 75-76, 81, 189-191), there could possibly be substantial powers, and because of this one might try to translate some of these property views into a view about a substance, since it seems that a substance being a person is much less controversial than a property being a person.

<sup>72</sup> This isn't to suggest that there aren't other difficult questions for the more demanding views of simplicity to overcome.

<sup>73</sup> I don't say 'not Lowe simple' here, to make it clear that the complexity doesn't depend on Lowe's metaphysics, but if one enjoys the pun and can remember this caveat when reading the final sentence, then they may substitute 'so' for 'Lowe' if they wish.

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