Where the Bootstrapping Really Lies: A Neo-Aristotelian Reply to Panchuk

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ABSTRACT: Modified Theistic Activism is the view that abstract objects not essentially possessed by God fall under God’s creative activity in one way or another. Michelle Panchuk has argued that this position succumbs to the bootstrapping problem such that God is and is not logically prior to his properties—an incoherent and necessarily false state of affairs. In this essay we respond to Panchuk by arguing that our neo-Aristotelian account of substance and property possession successfully avoids the bootstrapping problem. Moreover, her own neo-Augustinian account of universals contains many conceptual deficiencies and ultimately succumbs to an epistemic iteration of the bootstrapping problem. Finally, we argue that the reasons provided for thinking only created beings need universals to ground character is unmotivated. In clarifying and defending our position, our hope is to bury once and for all the familiar claim that traditional theists cannot be realists with respect to abstract objects because of divine bootstrapping.

THEISTIC ACTIVISM is the view that abstract objects exist, are identified with various constituents of the divine mind, and are created by God. One such item—property—is typically identified by the activist with divine concepts. God produces these concepts via intellectual activity. Thus, divine concepts are causally dependent on God and yet part of God. If theistic activism is true, the theist is able to endorse realism with respect to universals and other abstracta and endorse a traditional and strong asety-sovereignty doctrine such that God does not depend on anything distinct from himself for his existence and everything distinct from God does depend on him for its existence.

It is widely thought, however, that theistic activism is incoherent because it succumbs to what has been called the bootstrapping problem. In a nutshell, the problem is this. On the activist picture, God is and is not logically prior to his properties—an incoherent and necessarily false state of affairs. In our published work we argue that the theistic activist can avoid the bootstrapping critique by making the following moves: (1) substances should be understood in broadly Aristotelian terms as deep unities in which the whole is the final cause of its proper parts, and (2) God’s essential properties exist a se as uncreated entities within the divine borders (that is, as a part of God).¹ Michelle Panchuk has recently argued that this modified theistic activist

¹This would include any properties had essentially by God’s properties, including so-called second-order properties of properties. For example, if properties are essentially abstract, then the property being abstract is also uncreated, existing a se within the borders of the divine substance (sans creation) and exemplified by the properties had by God (but not God simpliciter).
solution to the bootstrapping problem is unsuccessful. From the rubble of the failed activist project Panchuk proposes a neo-Augustinian solution that is claimed to have all the benefits of the activist picture—realism regarding universals and endorsement of a strong aseity-sovereignty doctrine—without the unfortunate attribute of being incoherent and thus necessarily false. In what follows, we clarify and defend our modified theistic activism in response to Panchuk. In the first section of this paper we argue that her critique of our solution to the bootstrapping problem fails. In the next section we argue that her neo-Augustinian account of universals contains many conceptual deficiencies and ultimately succumbs to an epistemic iteration of the bootstrapping problem. In the last section of this paper we argue that the reasons provided for thinking that only created beings need universals to ground character is unmotivated. In clarifying and defending our position, our hope is to bury once and for all the familiar claim that traditional theists cannot be realists with respect to abstract objects because of the bootstrapping problem. Moreover, we hope to show that our position is rationally preferable to neo-Augustinianism with respect to the debate regarding God’s relationship to abstract objects.

1. DIVINE BOOTSTRAPPING

Panchuk considers a version of the bootstrapping problem originally formulated by one of us (Gould) that focuses on the claim that properties are identical with divine concepts. The point of the original article was to show that there is a version of the bootstrapping problem that can be generated that is unique to theistic activism when properties are identified with divine concepts, and yet that there are resources available to overcome the activist iteration of the bootstrapping problem if the moves suggested above are followed. While we think that theistic activism can avoid the incoherency charge generated by the bootstrapping problem, we do not (for theoretical reasons) ultimately opt for theistic activism full stop. Our preferred position does not identify properties (and relations) with divine concepts but understands them as sui generis fundamental entities. Thus, on our view, some platonic abstracta—and the properties God has and the relations God bears to his metaphysical parts—exist a se as part of the divine substance, whereas the rest exist as created entities in Plato’s Heaven. Panchuk reproduces the conceptualist version of the bootstrapping problem as follows:

(1) God’s concept being divine = the property being divine. (assumption of the claim for the sake of a reductio)
(2) The property being divine is logically prior to God (that is, the divine substance). (from the principle of character grounding)

(3) God (that is, the divine substance) is logically prior to the thought that he is divine. (premise)

(4) If God (that is, the divine substance) is logically prior to the thought that he is divine, then God is logically prior to any necessary constituents of the thought that he is divine. (premise)

(5) The concept being divine is a necessary constituent of God’s thought that he is divine. (premise)

(6) Therefore, God (that is, the divine substance) is logically prior to the concept being divine. (from 3, 4, and 5)

(7) Therefore, God (that is, the divine substance) is logically prior to the property being divine. (from 1 and 6 and the law of identity)

(8) ~ (2 & 7). (from the fact that logical priority is asymmetrical)

(9) Therefore, ~ (1). (from 2–7 by reductio

The principle of character that grounds supporting premise (2) is this: properties partially explain the character of things that have them. Thus, God’s having the property being divine partially explains God’s character. Fido’s having the property being brown partially explains Fido’s character, and so on. The notion of “logical priority” in view throughout the argument is to be understood as a kind of asymmetric dependency such that if object O is logically prior to object S, then object S depends in some way on object O for its existence (but not vice versa). The argument as formulated leads to a contradiction given the theistic activist central claim in (1) regarding properties as divine concepts.

Our way out of the incoherence charge is to distinguish two senses of “logical priority” that operate in the argument, given an Aristotelian understanding of substance and property possession. In premise (2), the kind of logical priority in view is what we call “metaphysical” in that God’s essential properties partially explain God’s character. The logical priority in view in (3)–(7) is a different kind of logical priority: what we call “final causal” priority. Gould’s explanation of these two different senses of explanation and priority are as follows:

God’s essential properties partially explain God’s character (hence are logically prior in the metaphysical sense). Still, the divine substance is a fundamental unity that is the final cause of its constituents (including its concepts and essential properties) and in that sense explains them and is logically prior to them.

Thus, on this Aristotelian notion of substance, we understand the substance to be a fundamental whole that is a final cause of all its proper parts, including its essential

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7Ibid., p. 139.
properties. As we say elsewhere, “As a final cause, the divine substance explains why it possesses the essential properties that it does and why it possesses the essential properties it does as a deep unity.”

Panchuk’s main complaint against our solution is that our notions of substance and final causality are not sufficiently clear and when plausible attempts to make sense of these critical notions are given, the resultant account fails to avoid the bootstrapping problem. Perhaps, suggests Panchuk, an Aristotelian substance is best understood as a composite of substantial form and matter, called a “thin substance” or “nature,” together with the substance’s accidental properties, which make up the “thick substance.” Since the thick substance is the final cause of the substance’s accidental properties, there is a “sense in which a single property may be both prior to and posterior to the substance. . . . [An accidental] property is metaphysically prior to its thick substance but is both metaphysically and causally posterior to the thin substance.” The problem with this picture, according to Panchuk, is that a substance can only be the final cause of its accidental properties, not its essential properties since “a substance must already be a substance of a certain kind for the notion of final causality to make sense with respect to it.” Thus, God cannot be the final cause of the essential property being divine as statements (3)–(7) of the bootstrapping argument claims, and the problem remains unsolved.

Next Panchuk considers J. P. Moreland’s contemporary defense of a broadly Aristotelian account of substance. She judges that it too is incapable of avoiding the bootstrapping problem. According to Moreland, a substance is a final cause of all properties—essential and accidental—that inhere in it. But, Panchuk claims, “without the notion of substantial form, it is hard to see how to make sense of the claim that final causality is at work in the reductio.” Panchuk argues that the contemporary Aristotelian faces a dilemma: either the nature of the substance is a substantial form or it is a collection of essential properties. If the nature of a substance is identical to a substantial form, then the bootstrapping problem is unsolved as above. If, however, the nature of a substance is understood as a collection of essential properties, then it is incorrect to say that the substance’s nature is the final cause of its essential properties, for the substance’s nature just is its essential properties. Either way, the contemporary defender of Aristotelian substance, like its traditional counterpart, cannot find a way out of the bootstrapping problem.

In reply, we distinguish between a thing’s nature and its essential (and accidental) properties. A thing’s nature picks out what it is in the most fundamental sense, whereas a thing’s essential properties flow from or are entailed by its nature, thereby

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8 Gould and Davis, “Modified Theistic Activism,” p. 76.
9 Panchuk, “Created and Uncreated Things,” p. 103.
10 Ibid., p. 104.
11 Ibid.
12 In what follows, we shall use “nature” and “essence” interchangeably. We also note that sometimes essential properties are dubbed necessary properties and accidental properties are called contingent properties. In keeping with our previous usage, we shall continue to adopt the essential/accidental divide instead of the necessary/contingent. An essential property then is a property that must be had by object O in every world in which O exists, whereas an accidental property is had by object O in some but not all possible worlds in which O exists.
expressing (in the metaphysical sense) the thing’s character. Thus, contra Panchuk, we think that an individual dog substance can serve as the final cause of its essential properties, including its substance kind property being a dog. In the same way the divine substance serves as the final cause of God’s essential properties, including the property being divine. On Panchuk’s account of thin substances, the substantial form “includes all the essential properties of the substance” and “is the internal cause of many of the substance’s accidental properties.”

We maintain, on the other hand, the irreducibility of natures to essential properties; all properties—essential and accidental—are internally caused by and distinct from the nature of the substance.

To be clear, we do not think that natures are collections of essential properties. In doing so, we part company with the modal essentialist. According to modal essentialism, a property F is essential to object O just in case F is possessed by O in every possible world where O exists. Object O’s essence or nature, then, just is the set of all essential properties F₁–Fₙ had by O in every possible world where O exists. Real or serious essentialists, on the other hand, argue that the notion of essence or nature is best thought of in non-modal terms. If so, then the neo-Aristotelian defender of substance has at least two additional options not considered by Panchuk. E. J. Lowe nicely sets out the alternative explications of essence for the real essentialist:

\[ \text{[A]n entity’s essence is just what that entity is, as revealed by its real definition. But what } E \text{ is is not some entity distinct from } E. \text{ It is either identical with } E \text{ (and some scholars think that this was Aristotle’s view) or else it is no entity at all.}\]

Lowe goes for the second option, whereas we prefer the first. The real definition of a substance picks out the kind of thing the substance is. By way of example, the real definition of dog is “a living organism of the doghood kind”, which expresses the substantial kinds being a living organism and being a dog. Particular dogs, on the other hand, are simply the various instances of the substantial kind dog that we find in loving homes throughout the natural world. The real definition of God is “a personal being of the divine kind”, which expresses the substantial kinds being a personal being and being divine. The divine substance just is the instantiation of the substantial kind divinity. Thus, individual substances do not have natures, rather they are instances of substantial kinds; they are “particularized natures.”

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13Granted, the substance’s exemplification of its essential properties will be simultaneous with the substance’s coming into being (in the case of finite substances), still the proximate cause of the substance’s essential properties will be his nature. In the case of the divine substance, God’s essential properties will exist simultaneously and everlastingly (if temporal) or atemporally with the divine substance, still the proximate cause of God’s essential properties will be its nature.

14Panchuk, “Created and Uncreated Things,” p. 103.

15Some real essentialists think that all modal truths are grounded in essences. See Lowe in Metaphysics: Aristotelian, Scholastic, Analytic, ed. Lukás Novák, Daniel Novotny, Pokop Sousedík, and David Svoboda (Frankfurt-am-Main: Ontos Verlag, 2012), pp. 104–10. In this essay, we leave it an open question whether modal truths (and falsehoods) other than essentialist truths (and falsehoods) can be grounded in this way.

16Lowe, Metaphysics, p. 108.

17This explication of real definitions, with slight modification, is from Ross D. Inman, Substance and the Fundamentality of the Familiar: A Neo-Aristotelian Mereology (New York: Routledge, 2018).

18Ibid.
Why go for Platonic properties in addition to natures? For all the familiar reasons that Panchuk notes in her essay: they are needed as part of a robust and satisfactory account of the character of particulars, attribute agreement, abstract reference, and subject-predicate discourse. Platonic properties are not tied to (relational ontology) or rooted within (constituent ontology) a substance in a haphazard way, however. The substance as a whole grounds its ontological structure. Among the substance’s essential properties, we distinguish between a thing’s constitutive and consequential properties. Thus, there is a hierarchical ordering among a substance’s essential properties. Some—the constitutive properties—are more closely tied to what the thing is and partially enter into its real definition, whereas others are less definitive yet logically entailed by the substance’s constitutive properties. Accidental properties specify how a thing is. By way of example, consider the following atomic sentences:

(A) Socrates is a man.

(B) Socrates is either a man or machine.

(C) Socrates is wise.

On our Platonic account, the subject term “Socrates” in (A)–(C) picks out the individual substance, the particularized nature that is Socrates. In sentence (A) the predicate “man” refers to a Platonic property, namely, the property being a man that is had by Socrates and that is partially constitutive of Socrates’s real definition. In sentence (B) the predicate “either a man or machine” refers to the property being a man or machine, a property possessed essentially by Socrates as a logical consequence (i.e., the logical inference Addition) of a constitutive property of his. Finally, in sentence (C) the predicate “is wise” refers to the property being wise, a property accidentally or contingently possessed by Socrates.

Panchuk favors E. J. Lowe’s Four-Category Ontology, a theory that invokes property instances and universals to account for the character of substances. Our neo-Aristotelian account of substance is similar in spirit. We countenance individual substances, Platonic properties, and property instances. For Lowe, properties are universals had in two different ways by substances: substance kind universals (e.g., being a man, being gold) are exemplified dispositionally and non-substance kind universals (e.g., being red, being round) are exemplified occurrently. On our account there too are substance kind and non-substance kind properties, Platonic properties all had either essentially or accidentally by an individual substance as determined

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22 E. J. Lowe, The Four-Category Ontology (Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 2006), pp. 19, 30–32. Both substantial kind and non-substantial kind universals are called “attributes” by Lowe in his four-category ontology. For Lowe, a substantial kind universal is an attribute that characterizes a substance kind and which is exemplified by a substance.
by its nature. Regarding property instances (e.g., *Socrates’s wisdom, the Polar bear’s whiteness*) or modes of substances, Lowe takes them to be simples whereas on our favored view they are complexes of Platonic properties, an individuator, and the exemplification relation. For both views, however, property instances are ontologically dependent entities, as Lowe puts it: “depending for their existence and identity upon the individual substances . . . to which they ‘belong.’” Granted, on our view, Platonic properties exist *extra se* when un-instantiated by individual substances, still the property instance *qua* mode of an individual substance is an inseparable part of the substance. Importantly, on both accounts, substances are irreducible. We take serious the Aristotelian idea that individual substances are fundamental unities, irreducible to bundles of universals or compresent tropes.

In an earlier essay, “How does an Aristotelian Substance have its Platonic Properties? Issues and Options,” Gould provides an argument for this neo-Aristotelian view of substance, an argument that Panchuk surprisingly ignores. In the earlier essay Gould argues that the deep unity and natural grouping of properties within a substance are best explained by postulating a substantial nature that “brings about” via final causation the properties possessed by the substance. Appeal to top-down, whole-to-part final causation is the best explanation for why the essential properties (as well as the causal powers and capacities) of individual substances are uniformly co-instantiated in things of that particular kind. Since the argument provided in the earlier essay was untouched by Panchuk, we find no reason to think the above account incoherent or implausible. Moreover, since our account of substances as fundamental unities is squarely within the Aristotelian tradition, many should find it attractive irrespective of concerns related to divine bootstrapping. We conclude that Panchuk’s attempt to resurrect the bootstrapping problem with respect to theistic activism is unsuccessful.

2. NEO-AUGUSTINIANISM, PARTICIPATION, AND RESEMBLANCE

In our original proposal we cautioned against construing properties and relations as divine concepts. The linchpin of *unqualified* Theistic Activism is Morris and

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23 While our view does not draw a distinction between two kinds of exemplification—dispositional and occurrent—we see no reason why we could not adopt a similar strategy as Lowe for explaining dispositional and occurrent predicates via appeal to natural laws and substantial and non-substantial universals. See Lowe, *The Four-Category Ontology*, pp. 28–32.

24 Ibid., p. 27.

25 Following Patrick Toner, “On Substance,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84 (2010): 28, “non-separable” is defined as follows: “X is a non-separable part of Y if X could not possibly exist and not be a part of Y.”


Menzel’s principle of concept-property conflation: “All properties and relations are God’s concepts.” This principle, we noted, rapidly leads to grief when coupled with standard attempts to explain the notion of a substance. Here we gave two examples, but there are, of course, others. First, if substances are property bundles, then (given this principle) there are no mind independent objects; you, the planet Venus, and the Trump Tower are nothing but bundles of divine ideas. Secondly, even if we move to a Lockean substrata ontology, things do not fare much better. For on that view, concrete particulars are “built up” out of properties being tied to bare (propertyless) particulars. But if the principle of concept-property-conflation is true, to construct a substance, God must form conceptions of a thing (a bare particular) of which, by hypothesis, he can have no conception. This position is scarcely coherent.

Here Panchuk thinks that we have overlooked a third alternative: a neo-Augustinian nominalism that incorporates theistic exemplification. This position, she tells us, “successfully evade[s]” all of the problems plaguing its rivals. It is a dual-aspected form of nominalism. First, it declares that there are no abstract, platonic, universals—such things as being human or being red that can be exemplified by multiple particulars. Instead there are tropes or particularized properties: Socrates’s humanness or this book’s redness. Secondly, these tropes “constitute (or partially constitute) the nature of the particular.” We can bundle them together, if we like, or stack them in a “layer cake” to get a full substance. Either way, Panchuk says, we “easily escape” the difficulties plaguing attempts to wed the principle of property-concept conflation with standard versions of bare particularism or bundle theory.

But is that really clear? It is not. Ironically, Panchuk’s charge of an oversight results from an oversight of her own: passing over our critical remarks on trope nominalism. Whether it is compresence (for bundles) or compounding (for layer cakes), the nominalism she recommends requires some relation or ontological “glue”

30In passing, Panchuk gestures at (but carefully avoids endorsing) a “blobish account of particulars,” according to which “particulars have no internal structure and are not built up out of combinations of properties.” Our ignoring this view, she claims, results in a “false dilemma” (“Created and Uncreated Things,” p. 109). But here there is confusion. For the problems we adduce for the bundle and bare particular theories of substances occur under the assumption of the principle of concept-property conflation: properties and relations do exist, and they are identical with divine concepts. As Moreland points out, however, blob theory is a species of extreme nominalism (J. P. Moreland, Universalis [Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Univ. Press, 2001], p. 74). So this complaint from Panchuk isn’t strictly relevant. Of course, we can try to make it relevant (as Panchuk suggests) by adding a dash of the principle of concept-property conflation to blob theory. We can treat blobs as internally simple, homogeneous entities, but then go on to say that they sustain external property attachments. Would not this skirt our original criticisms? Sadly, it would not. For an internally simple, homogenous blob B is nothing less than a bare particular. To say that B has an (external) property P is just to say (given the principle of concept-property conflation) that God has a concept of B. But that actually is not possible. For in and of itself B is propertyless, in which case if properties are divine concepts (as Panchuk holds), it follows that God has no concept of B. Thus, contrary to hypothesis, B has no (external) properties. The principle of concept-property conflation and blob theory are incompatible.

32Ibid., p. 108.
33Ibid.
34Ibid.
to cement together otherwise disparate tropes. If the principle of property-concept conflation is true, this relation is not primitive; it is analyzable in terms of God’s conceptual activity. Socrates’s trope compresence (compounding) is effected by God’s thinking those tropes together. That is just what compresence (compounding) is. However, given that causation is also a relation (and thus, at root, a divine association of ideas), the conjunction of this sort of nominalism and the principle of concept-property conflation entails:

(10) God’s thinking Socrates’s tropes together causes the compresence (compounding) of Socrates’s tropes.

This ultimately resolves to the vacuous:

(10*) God thinks of his thinking together Socrates’s tropes together with his thinking Socrates’s tropes together.

This is hardly a point in favor of her recommended form of nominalism, especially since (as we pointed out) it implies that the “concept of causation as an extramental relation goes completely by the wayside.”

In any event, Panchuk claims a second advantage for her nominalist position, namely, that it includes a theistic account of exemplification—one that makes sense of the principle of concept-property conflation. Concrete particulars are said to exemplify divine concepts by participating in them. They do this by (1) deriving their being from them (as exemplar causes) and (2) by resembling them. To say that a concrete particular—Socrates, let’s say—derives its being from a divine idea is just to say that God has created Socrates “in accordance with” his idea of Socrates. Accordingly, Socrates will resemble that very idea. For whatever God creates will be “something like his idea of the thing that he intends to create.” Each trope or property instance, therefore, “resembles exactly one divine concept.”

But here we strike a problem—indeed, a couple of problems. For as Panchuk develops it, such nominalism clearly requires and makes explicit use of the following (partial) analysis of resemblance:

\[ \text{resembles}: \text{A property instance } P \text{ resembles a divine concept } C \text{ only if (i) } P \text{ exists and (ii) } P \text{'s existence results from God’s having created } P \text{ using } C \text{ as an exemplar.} \]

Fair enough. If God uses \( C \) as his template in creating \( P \), then \( P \) will resemble \( C \). But here’s the rub. Panchuk goes on to say that God has a “concept of himself,” namely, “the universal being divine” of which, it turns out, he is a property instance. The problem is this: If every property instance resembles just one divine concept, then it looks as though God resembles, \( \text{being divine} \), in which case his existence results from his creating himself using one of his own ideas.

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36Ibid., p. 60.
38Ibid.
40Ibid., p. 112.
Now to evade this flagrant sort of bootstrapping, Panchuk calls up a very different concept of resemblance that risks being ad hoc:

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\text{resembles}_2: \text{A property instance } P \text{ resembles a divine concept } C \text{ only if (i) } P \text{ exists and (ii) } C \text{ represents } P. 
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Thus Panchuk holds that God “only resembles his own concept because the concept represents him,”\(^{41}\) not because (as resembles\(_1\) requires) he creates himself using “God’s concept of himself.”\(^{42}\) Instead, what we must say is that God resembles\(_2\) \text{being divine} by virtue of that concept representing him.

It is, of course, convenient for the nominalism she recommends to have had this backup notion on standby to save the theory. Unfortunately, it does what it (probably) should not do, while failing to do what it should. Notice, first, that resembles\(_2\) renders resembles\(_1\) superfluous. If God can resemble \text{being divine} by way of that concept’s representing him, why would the same not go for every other property instance? Each would have a corresponding divine concept that represents it with resemblance simply coming along for the ride. If that is the way things go with God’s ideas, we can bypass this exemplar cause business altogether. It is a nice add-on, but we do not need it for present purposes. Representation is doing all the heavy lifting.

The fact of the matter, however, is that Panchuk’s divine concepts utterly fail to represent. Take, for example, \text{being divine}. It does not represent God; it lacks the requisite propositional structure to do a thing like that. To be sure, we can say that it is predicative of God, that it correctly describes him. We can also say that God exemplifies \text{being divine}. Still, if we think about it carefully, it is obvious that this property does not represent him—or anything else—as being one way or another. It is mere a concept, nothing like a proposition or state of affairs.

And yet surely, one might say, since God \text{is} divine, \text{being divine} must be truly predicative of him, and this represents him as being divine. Unfortunately, this line of thinking renders an important part of her recommended sort of nominalism an empty tautology. To say that \text{being divine} represents God as divine because he is in fact divine tells us nothing. Our goal at the start was to unpack the notion of exemplification in theistic terms. The idea was that a property instance exemplifies one of God’s concepts by resembling it. If we then go on to explain resemblance in terms of representation, and representation in terms of exemplification, we have explained precisely nothing. We have only said that a property instance exemplifies a divine concept if it exemplifies it.

Perhaps Panchuk will reply that these sorts of worries are wholly misguided. They only arise because we are (falsely) presupposing that “resemblance is itself a relation, and therefore must be explained by a universal.”\(^{43}\) Yet there is “no problem in taking resemblance as a primitive notion.”\(^{44}\) Indeed, “[e]very theory must suggest

\(^{41}\)Ibid.
\(^{42}\)Ibid.
\(^{43}\)Ibid., p. 110.
\(^{44}\)Ibid.
something as primitive.”\textsuperscript{45} No doubt Panchuk is right when she says that explanations must come to an end. At some point, we are justified in treating certain concepts in a theory as primitive. Perhaps, as Panchuk suggests, the resemblance relation is like that. It is an explanatory primitive, not to be explained or defined in terms of simpler, more basic concepts like common property possession, set membership, or the like.

Still, it does not follow that resemblance is ontologically primitive—that categorically speaking it is not a relation, and therefore (given the principle of concept-property conflation) identical with a divine concept. Panchuk seems to think that if we christen resemblance as a primitive, we can avoid the idea that “resemblance is itself a relation, and therefore must be explained by a universal.”\textsuperscript{46} But this is doubly mistaken.

In the first place, the principle of concept-property conflation does not say that properties and relations are explained in terms of universals (that is, divine concepts). It says straightforwardly that that is what they are. It is a kind-identity claim. Secondly, resemblance has to have some ontological status; after all, it plays an essential role in the form of nominalism she recommends. If it does not exist, then it is not true that “[e]ach property [instance] resembles exactly one divine concept,”\textsuperscript{47} in which case this whole idea that divine concepts serve as exemplar causes comes apart. On the other hand, if resemblance does exist, but is neither a divine concept nor a platonic property-universal, then what is it? It is clearly not a concrete particular. We might be forgiven for thinking that (on Panchuk’s view) it has no ontological status whatsoever; it is neither a universal nor a particular. It is a mere ontological orphan, and as such cannot bear the tremendous weight placed on it by the theory.

In any event, Panchuk’s reflections on resemblance betray the fact that this relation is not in fact explanatory primitive. With respect to resembles, she comments: “it makes sense to take God’s ability to create what he intends—that is, God’s power—as a primitive fact.”\textsuperscript{48} In other words, God’s power is the basic fact; resemblance is the derivative. And then when it comes to her rescue notion of resemblance—namely, resembles,—she states, God “resembles his own concept because the concept represents him.”\textsuperscript{49} Notice, once again, how resemblance is presented to us as being grounded in something more basic: representation.

These are some of the problems eating away at the recommended sort of nominalism. There is a final difficulty, however, that may go even deeper. And this has to do with the back story, which sets forth an account of the grounding of God’s concepts. Consider the following passages from Panchuk:

God’s concept of himself is the universal being divine. . . . What he eternally knows when he knows himself is identical to the concept of being divine.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{45}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{46}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{47}\textsuperscript{Ibid., p. 109.}
\textsuperscript{48}\textsuperscript{Ibid., p. 110.}
\textsuperscript{49}\textsuperscript{Ibid., p. 112, emphasis added.}
\textsuperscript{50}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}
The [rest of the] divine ideas are multiple only insofar as God knows himself as multiply imitable, while the object of knowledge is nothing other than the one unchanging divine essence.\textsuperscript{51}

So not all divine concepts are created equal. There is one that is primary: \textit{being divine}. All the rest are secondary and derivative, arising from God’s knowing that \textit{being divine} can be imitated in various respects by a host of possible property instances. If a property instance \(P\) resembles \textit{being divine}, if it imitates that concept in some respect, then we have the \textit{derivative} divine concept \(\textit{being } P\).

But isn’t there a problem here? It is God’s knowing that \(P\) resembles (imitates) \textit{being divine} (in some respect) that is supposed to explain his having \textit{being } P\) as a concept. But how can that be? According to the backstory, \textit{being } P\) is \textit{explanatorily posterior} to God’s knowing that \(P\) imitates his nature. And yet, surely, God must have the concept of \(P\) in the explanatory moment \textit{prior} to his knowing he is imitable by \(P\). After all, you cannot know that \(P\) resembles the divine nature unless you have the ideas \textit{being divine} and \textit{being } P\) and can compare them for likeness.

One might think of it this way: how can God, explanatorily prior to his having the idea \textit{being } P\), possibly know that \(P\) imitates the divine essence? In that explanatorily prior moment, there simply is no divine concept of \(P\), and so no basis for knowing that \textit{being } P\) imitates \textit{being divine}. One might respond that God’s knowledge here is not based on comparing concepts, but rather on knowing his own essence—knowing he has the intention and ability to create a property instance \(P\) that would thereby imitate \textit{being divine}. But this does not help. For it is not enough for God to know he has power. The salient question is: \textit{the power to do what}? To create property instance \(P\)? Well then, he would have to know—explanatorily before he could know—that \textit{being } P\) was among his concepts. It simply will not do. This is bootstrapping with a vengeance.

Here is a final way out. Could Panchuk perhaps deny that there are multiple divine concepts? Many Thomists and neo-Augustinians adhere to the doctrine of divine simplicity, and Panchuk inclines in that general direction. If that doctrine is right, there is no complexity in God at all. God would not have many ideas but only one, his idea of himself: \textit{being divine}. Still, if we are taking the nominalism that she recommends seriously, \textit{being divine} would then be the (sole) exemplar cause—the only one God could employ in creation. This way out of bootstrapping certainly creates more problems than it solves.

First, on this view, if God has created, the world would be something like a divine emanation—an emanation \textit{from} God of God’s \textit{being}—that is, his concept of himself: \textit{being divine}. In that case, the world, which after all is nothing but a large concrete particular, would also be divine since (by hypothesis) \textit{being divine} is an exemplar cause whose effect could only be a perfectly resembling property instance of \textit{being divine}.

But then any sort of creation on God’s part would really be impossible given the plausible assumption that God cannot create a duplicate of himself. And if that

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., p. 107.
is right, there should not be a created world. Yet clearly there is. So a defensible nominalism of this sort seems to commit us to the view that God has not and indeed cannot create a material world. That is a rather hefty price to pay to avoid our modified theistic activism, especially if (as we have argued) the complaints raised against it are so easily dispatched.

According to Panchuk, modified theistic activism saddles us with a God who is "metaphysically compromised by his own concepts." But given all of her position’s conceptual deficits—deficits not present in modified theistic activism—it is hard not to see this claim as a case of unwittingly getting the “compromised” shoe on the wrong theoretical foot.

3. CREATED AND UNCREATED BEINGS AND CHARACTER GROUNDING

In a short concluding section, Panchuk notes that “Augustine assumes that only created beings” need universals to ground character. This is because created beings alone “depend for their existence on the intentions of another.” God, on the other hand, exists a se so his “character can only be explained in relation to [himself].” Thus, on Augustine’s approach, “we must conclude that God does not stand in relation to universals as other things stand in relation to them.”

Augustine seems to endorse, according to Panchuk, something like the following principle:

Ultimacy Constraint for Character Grounding (UCCG): For any X, if X’s character can be wholly explained in relation to itself, then X does not need universals to ground its character.

What reasons are given in support of this principle? The dialectic seems to be as follows: (1) Neo-Aristotelian attempts to avoid bootstrapping while endorsing a strong aseity-sovereignty doctrine are unsuccessful; (2) a neo-Augustinian account of universals avoids bootstrapping worries and, in conjunction with this new principle, upholds a strong aseity-sovereignty doctrine; (3) therefore, “we must conclude” that this new principle is true.

By way of reply, we have argued that Panchuk’s attempt to show our neo-Aristotelian account of the divine substance incoherent is unsuccessful. The neo-Augustinian account of universals and exemplification, however, is replete with conceptual problems and succumbs to its own version of the bootstrapping problem; it is incoherent. Moreover, and importantly, our neo-Aristotelian account of the divine substance does uphold a strong aseity-sovereignty doctrine such that God is “causally and metaphysically prior to everything that is not God.” Finally, our account allows for a unified theory of predication for both human and divine

52Ibid., p. 112.
53Ibid., p. 111.
54Ibid.
55Ibid.
56Ibid.
57Ibid., p. 112.
predicates and is therefore more lovely on this score, in addition to those noted in section two than Panchuk’s neo-Augustinian account. Thus, we reject this new principle as unmotivated. God, the divine substance, is a particularized nature that has essential and accidental properties and is the sole creator and sustainer of all distinct reality, including the Platonic horde of Plato’s Heaven. Modified theistic activism is rationally preferable to neo-Augustinianism as an account of God’s relationship to abstract objects.