

Platonism as a Path to Palamism: Arguing from Abstracta to Uncreated Divine Energies

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ABSTRACT: Palamism has long been enormously influential within Eastern Orthodox thought, and in recent years it has been gaining attention in non-Orthodox philosophical and theological circles as well. Here I provide an accessible overview of Palamism's core commitments, and then defend one of those commitments (namely, its commitment to the reality of at least one uncreated divine energy) on the grounds of a platonic view of abstract entities.

1. Introduction

'Platonism' is one of those philosophical labels whose meaning varies across contexts, and especially across sub-disciplines. Within the history of philosophy, it generally refers to the philosophical system developed (or allegedly developed) by the historical Plato.¹ From now on let's employ **Platonism** with a capital 'P' to refer to that system. By contrast, within analytic metaphysics and related areas (philosophy of science, philosophy of mathematics etc.) 'platonism' more often refers to the claim that one or more sorts of uncontroversially abstract entities (e.g., uninstantiated universals, uninstantiated haecceities, unactualized possible worlds, sets or numbers, etc.) are real.² Sometimes it is used more narrowly to refer to a

¹ There are interminable disputes concerning whether Plato actually intended to develop a philosophical system (a coherent worldview incorporating interconnected metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical doctrines) and, if so, whether the contours of that system can be accurately discerned from the published dialogues. Some maintain that Plato was no system-builder at all; still others claim that he was, but that the true contents of that system were mostly kept hidden (being reserved for advanced students in the Academy), rather than revealed exoterically through the published writings. I will side with the traditional view (controversial but still upheld by a decent number of Plato specialists); namely, that he did indeed construct a system whose contents are discernible from the dialogues.

² While these are all uncontroversial examples of putative abstracta, and thus provide some rough beginning notion of how the abstract versus concrete division is typically understood in the current literature (e.g., abstracta are viewed as aspatial, atemporal, necessarily existent, causally inert entities, whereas concreta are viewed as spatiotemporal, typically (or always?) contingently existing, potentially efficacious entities), it cannot be claimed that such examples suffice for a full grasp of just what the distinction is supposed to consist in. As a matter of fact, that very question is the subject of much controversy. For helpful entry points into the dispute, see Cowling (2017, ch. 2), Hoffman & Rosenkrantz (2003), and Lowe (1995). For my own views on the nature of the distinction, see Dumsday (2021; forthcoming). Thankfully, for present purposes it will not be necessary to commit to a single detailed account of the abstract versus concrete divide; the rough-and-ready characterization provided above should suffice for the arguments to follow.

commitment specifically to uninstantiated universals (i.e., universals not exemplified by any concrete particular) and an accompanying rejection of any sort of nominalism or merely immanent realism. Here let's use lower-case **platonism** to refer to the broader view. Perennially controversial, platonism still boasts many defenders in the analytic literature.³ As to how those two usages relate, Platonism entails platonism, insofar as Plato's system does involve a commitment to abstracta, but the reverse entailment does not hold. A contemporary platonist might opt to adopt some or all of Platonism, but of course she needn't.⁴

Given that the audience for this paper will consist chiefly of theologians and philosophers of religion, I should also say something about how platonism, as understood here, relates to a specialized usage of 'platonism' sometimes deployed in those disciplines. There the label often refers to the claim that at least some abstracta exist independently and necessarily, where the 'independently' indicates not just independence from contingent concrete particulars but also independence from God. According to this view, if, *per impossibile*, there were no God, it would still be the case that at least some abstracta would exist. This specialized sense of 'platonism'—which for clarity's sake I will refer to as **platonism***—is then contrasted with competing perspectives on the relationship between God and abstracta, such as **theistic activism**⁵ and **theistic conceptual realism**.⁶ For present purposes the important thing to observe is that, from the vantage point of the typical metaphysician or philosopher of mathematics or philosopher of language (etc.) debating the existential status of abstracta, platonism*, theistic activism, and theistic conceptual realism would likely all be seen as forms of platonism.⁷ For them, a platonist is someone who admits the reality of one or more types of abstracta that exist necessarily and independently of our contingent spatiotemporal world. They usually don't care what relationship, if any, is to be posited between abstracta and God (a Being whose nature arguably transcends the abstract-versus-concrete divide), since for the most part they either don't believe in God or at least refrain from engaging conceptually with theism when doing metaphysics. For them, platonism prescind from the debate over platonism*. For most of this paper I too shall focus on platonism, returning to the issue of platonism* only briefly.

'Palamism' likewise has seen varying usages across times and contexts. Most generally it refers to the thought of the mediaeval Byzantine theologian St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359).

³ A representative sampling of significant pro-platonist sources: Berman (2020); Brown (2011; 2012); Fales (1990); Hale (2013); Katz (1990; 1998); Linsky & Zalta (1995); Plantinga (1974); Rasmussen (2014); Sayre (1976); Swoyer (2007); Tooley (1977); and Tugby (2013).

⁴ It is also important to note at the outset that their common affirmation of abstracta should not lead one to overstate the degree to which Platonists and platonists agree on assorted details (e.g., how exactly to characterize abstracta, just what sorts of abstracta are to be posited and why, etc.) The fact that the analytic distinction between the abstract and the concrete is ultimately rooted in Platonic thought should not be taken to imply that there is a perfect convergence on such matters. I will have occasion to re-emphasize this point later on.

⁵ Sometimes referred to by other labels, such as **absolute creationism** or **divine creationism**, this is the view that abstracta exist independently and necessarily vis a vis contingent concrete particulars but still depend for their own necessary existence on God's ontologically prior creative activity.

⁶ Sometimes referred to as **divine conceptualism**, this is the view that abstracta exist independently and necessarily vis a vis contingent concrete particulars but still depend for their own necessary existence on God's mind, being identical with divine ideas (or perhaps with the *contents* of those ideas, if 'idea' refers to the act of thought).

⁷ I say 'likely' since there is some room to question whether theistic conceptual realism fits — this depends on whether an idea (even a divine idea) can properly count as an abstract entity, which is a matter of dispute. For a defence of the claim that it can, see Welty (2014).

Whether or not that thought should be seen as constituting a system (commensurable in principle with Platonism, Thomism, etc.) has been disputed, with some maintaining that such a view of Palamism is a distortion stemming from a pre-Vatican II polemical context between Catholicism and Orthodoxy.⁸ Still, Orthodox scholars generally agree that Palamas's thought does seek to affirm and coherently integrate a key set of insights from earlier Greek and Syriac patristic sources (especially the Cappadocians, St. Dionysius the Areopagite, St. Maximus the Confessor, and St. John of Damascus), resulting in a unified theological *stance* whether or not it counts as a comprehensive *system* of the sort more typically granted an 'ism.'⁹ In any event I will continue to use **Palamism** and its adjective **Palamite** in what follows, cognizant of the need to keep these nuances in mind.

Leaving aside the various doctrinal commitments Palamism shares with any Christian theology simply by virtue of its being *Christian* (e.g., a commitment to Trinitarian monotheism, creation + fall + redemption, the reality of the human soul, the directionality of history, etc.) and concentrating on its distinctives, the following commitments should be highlighted: first, a moderate conception of divine simplicity, according to which there is a measure of objective (i.e., independent of human conceptualization) complexity in the overarching divine Being, yet without that complexity entailing any composition or separability within God (which entailments would compromise divine necessity and aseity). That complexity involves objective distinctions between the divine essence/nature/substance and the three divine Persons (who share that essence equally, though with the Father recognized as the supreme personal principle within the Trinity from whom the Son is generated and by whom the Holy Spirit proceeds), and also an objective distinction between the divine essence and the **divine energies** (which energies are shared between the Persons and serve to manifest both them and the essence). This moderate conception of divine simplicity is comparable in some ways to that upheld within Scholastic systems like Scotism, which affirms objective distinctions between Persons, essence, and attributes (in contrast to Thomism's commitment to an absolute identity between essence and attributes).¹⁰ It is also comparable to views of the doctrine widely held amongst Protestant scholars, who often affirm an objective distinction between the essence and attributes of God.¹¹

⁸ See for instance Russell (2019).

⁹ To what extent Palamas's thought succeeds in faithfully integrating and building upon the thought of prior patristic sources is controversial, though amongst Orthodox scholars the standard view certainly favours the claim of continuity. For defences of that view see for instance Bradshaw (2004), Florovsky (1976), Golitzin (2013), Lossky (1957), Tollefsen (2012), and, again, Russell (2019).

¹⁰ For a concise introduction to the Scotist perspective on this, see Steele & Williams (2019). A number of scholars have drawn attention to surprising theological convergences between Scotism and Palamism, on this and other points. See Bradshaw (2019); Iacovetti (2017); Jones (2005); Kapriev (2018); Knight (2016); Plested (2019); and Spencer (2017).

¹¹ For a recent and accessible example, see the critique of absolute divine simplicity by Moreland and Craig (2017, 530-532). See also the well-known book-length critique by Plantinga (1980). Note that some of the standard arguments in this literature amount to restatements of arguments previously made by Palamas and his predecessors in the eastern patristic tradition. For instance, Plantinga (1980, 46-47) writes that Thomists and other advocates of absolute divine simplicity maintain

...that there is no complexity of properties in him and that he is identical with his nature and each of his properties. God isn't merely good, on this view, he is goodness, or his goodness, or goodness itself. He isn't merely alive; He is identical with his life. He doesn't merely have a nature or essence; he just *is* that nature, is the very same thing as it is. There are two difficulties, one substantial and the other truly monumental. In

Second, there is Palamism's recognition of distinct types of divine energy, including: (A) God's ideas; (B) His intentions or internal acts of will; (C) His outward actions, notably the outward acts of creation, conservation, providential governance, and deification (more on that last one momentarily); (D) His necessary attributes/traits/characteristics, such as goodness, power, infinity, eternity, etc. All of these features of the divine life (and others)¹² have received the label 'energy' at one time or another within the Palamite tradition. What unifies these *prima facie* disparate classes, such as they all count as divine energies? Bradshaw (2004, 273) responds to that question as follows: "We can generalize upon this line of thought to understand the unity of the *energeiai* as a class. Some are contingent, some necessary; some are temporal, some eternal; some are realities or energies, others are activities, operations, or attributes. What could such a disparate group have in common? Simply that they are *acts of self-manifestation*." The divine energies reveal, in differing ways, Who and What God is. By analogy to the ways in which I manifest my nature and character by what I do and by the traits and intentions that enable and motivate what I do, likewise God's nature and character are displayed via His energies. The unity of the class 'energy' is thus functional or operational.

Third, there is the simultaneous affirmation of divine transcendence and immanence. This twofold commitment, seemingly in tension yet so striking and repeated a theme in the Bible, is understood within Palamism by reference to the distinction between God's essence and energies. The essence is utterly transcendent, beyond all human conceptualization and all knowable categories. The energies (or at least *some* of the energies), by contrast, are knowable and participable by creatures.¹³ Most foundationally, creatures exist because of their

the first place if God is identical with each of his properties, then each of his properties is identical with each of his properties, so that God has but one property. This seems flatly incompatible with the obvious fact that God has several properties; he has both power and mercifulness, say, neither of which is identical with the other.

Compare Palamas (1988, 199):

If the energies of God are not in any sense distinct from the divine substance, neither will they have any distinction with respect to one another. Therefore, God's will is not at all distinct from his foreknowledge, with the result that either God will not know all things beforehand for he does not will everything that happens, or he wills also evil things because he has foreknowledge of all things, and either he has not had foreknowledge of all things, which is the same as saying he is not God, or he is not good, which is the same as saying he is not God. Therefore, the divine foreknowledge is distinct from the will, and thus each of these is distinct from the divine substance.

¹² This rough classification schema (ideas + intentions + acts + attributes) should not be seen as exhaustive, nor should its members be seen as mutually exclusive. Perhaps there are divine energies that cross-cut such categories, so that an energy could be rightly classified as both an act and an attribute (or as similar to both but not quite either). Relatedly, there is also the distinction between God's *power* for carrying out a certain sort of contingent act and His *actually* carrying out that act. God's inherent capacity to create needn't ever have been exercised, and if it hadn't been then He would still have retained that intrinsic power as an eternal necessary attribute. Yet upon actualizing that power, God manifests His energy in a different way, as actively creating rather than merely having the capacity for creation.

¹³ Papademetriou (2004, 57-58) writes: "In God's existence a distinction is made between the essence of God, which is 'self-existing,' absolutely inaccessible, and His energies, which are accessible to man. This is the great contribution of St. Gregory Palamas, that he taught the absolute hiddenness of God and the indwelling of His energies in the world, thus avoiding pantheism on the one hand and deism on the other, at the same time

participation in the divine activity of conservation (sometimes referred to as the immanent energy *being* or *omnipresence*). St. John of Damascus in his eighth century work *On the Orthodox Faith* writes of divine energy that “in it they [created things] have their existence, and to all things it communicates their being in accordance with the nature of each. It is the being of things that are, the life of the living...”¹⁴ Palamas himself writes (1988, 201): “God is within the universe and the universe is within God, the one sustaining, the other being sustained by him. Therefore, all things participate in the sustaining energy but not in the substance of God. Thus, the theologians maintain that these constitute an energy of God, namely, his omnipresence.” Relatedly, and drawing on an earlier patristic figure, Palamas writes on the same topic (1983, 96): “The blessed Cyril, for his part, says that the divine energy and power consist in the fact that God is everywhere, and contains all, without being contained by anything. But it does not follow that the Divine *Nature* consists in the fact of being everywhere, any more than our own nature uniquely consists in being somewhere. For how could our essence consist in a fact which is in no way an essence? Essence and energy are thus not totally identical in God, even though He is entirely manifest in every energy, His essence being indivisible.” Elsewhere Palamas writes the following concerning the divine glory, a frequent synonym for ‘energy’ in his works (1983, 67): “How, then, could one think that the glory of God is the essence of God, of that God who while remaining imparticipable, indivisible and impalpable, becomes participable by His supersedential power, and communicates Himself

preserving God’s unity...However, Palamas was not the originator of this doctrine; it is both Biblical and Patristic.” Consider too Lossky (1978, 48-49):

Byzantine theology calls these divine names ‘energies.’ The word is particularly apt for this eternal radiance of the divine nature...[I]t evokes for us these living forces, these outbursts, these overflowings of the divine glory. For the theory of uncreated energies is profoundly biblical: the Bible often evokes the flaming and thunderous glory which makes God known outside of Himself, all the while hiding Him under a profusion of light...We cannot know the divine essence down to its deepest depths, but we know this radiance of glory which is truly God...

¹⁴ *On the Orthodox Faith*, book 1, chapter 14, quoted (in his own translation) by Bradshaw (2004, 209). In using this formulation, St. John is in turn drawing on St. Dionysius the Areopagite, who often writes on this issue; consider for instance the following, from his *On the Divine Names*, chapter 5, 817D (1987, 98): “He is the being immanent in and underlying the things which are, however they are...So he is called ‘King of the ages,’ for in him and around him all being is and subsists.” Or consider this from *The Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter 4, 177C-D (1987, 156): “It is characteristic of this universal Cause, of this goodness beyond all, to summon everything to communion with him to the extent that this is possible. Hence everything in some way partakes of the providence flowing out of this transcendent Deity which is the originator of all that is. Indeed nothing could exist without some share in the being and source of everything. Even the things which have no life participate in this, for it is the transcendent Deity which is the existence of every being.” St. Maximus the Confessor also writes on the immanence of God’s energies in creation and conservation, for instance in his *Ambigua* vol. II (2014, 203-205):

[B]eginning from the moment when God was pleased to give substance to beings and existence to what did not exist, and, through His providence—like an intelligible sun whose power holds the universe together in stability and graciously consents to emit its rays—He deigned to vary the modes of His presence so that the good things He planted in beings might ripen to full maturity, until all the ages will have reached their appointed limit...and because He fills all things with eternal light through the inexhaustible rays of His goodness...

From another work (2018, 127): “The Holy Spirit is absent from no being, and especially not from those that in any way partake of reason. For the Spirit contains the knowledge of each being, inasmuch as He is God and the Spirit of God, providentially permeating all things with His Power.”

and shines forth and becomes in contemplation ‘One Spirit ’with those who meet Him with a pure heart...?’”

That last quote brings us to our fourth and final distinctive, namely the application of the preceding points to soteriology and eschatology. For Palamites, the ultimate fate of those who have, by God’s grace, accepted the salvation freely offered by Christ is **deification**. Florovsky (1976, 67–68) writes: “There is a real distinction, but no separation, between the *essence* or *entity* of God and His *energies*. This distinction is manifest above all in the fact that the Entity is absolutely incommunicable and inaccessible to creatures. The creatures have access to and communicate with the Divine Energies only. But with this participation they enter into a genuine and perfect communion and union with God; they receive ‘deification.’” Through the work of the divine energies, human beings are by grace so glorified by God as to warrant the title ‘divine.’ We become children of God by adoption, to use the Biblical imagery. Palamas writes (1988, 171): “There are three realities in God, namely, substance, energy, and a Trinity of divine hypostases...[T]hose deemed worthy of union with God are united to God in energy...the uncreated energy of the Spirit and not of the substance of God.” St. Maximus the Confessor (who is, again, a principal source of doctrinal inspiration for Palamas and who likewise often uses ‘glory’ and ‘energy’ interchangeably) writes in volume I of his *Ambigua* (2014, 113): “For God in His fullness entirely permeates them, as a soul permeates the body...God will be wholly participated by whole human beings, so that He will be to soul, as it were, what the soul is to the body, and through the soul He will likewise be present in the body (in a manner that He knows), so that the soul will receive immutability and the body immortality...Man will remain wholly man in soul and body, owing to his nature, but will become wholly God in soul and body owing to the grace and the splendour of the blessed glory of God...”

A few related aspects of the Palamite view of deification: as Maximus just pointed out, this glorification is not only of the human soul, but of the human body as well. The resurrected body will, in the eschaton, be deified because it is an essential component of human nature. That glorified resurrection body was prefigured by Christ’s transfiguration. Moreover, ultimate human beatitude consists in this deification by the divine energies, not in the beatific vision (at least as the latter is typically understood within Catholicism, namely, as a graced intellectual vision of the divine nature, which nature is, on Palamism, necessarily cognitively inaccessible to us). Palamas writes (1983, 84): “But you should not consider that God allows Himself to be seen in His supressential essence, but according to His deifying gift and energy...in which one may supernaturally communicate, which one may see and with which one may be united.”¹⁵ Yet participation in the uncreated energies is still participation *in God*, direct communion with the divine. The energies are divine, just as are the essence and the Persons. The energies in which we participate, and by which we both exist and are deified, *are* God—they are God *qua* active and outwardly manifested. Furthermore, deification is, in principle, available in this life (at least for a time) and has been experienced historically by some saints of the Orthodox Church. (By contrast, within Catholicism the standard claim is that the beatific vision is reserved for the saints in heaven.) Finally, deification plays an important role in theological anthropology, being understood as crucial for grasping our purpose as human

¹⁵ Or consider Lossky (1957, 65), who writes: “In the tradition of the Eastern Church there is no place for a theology, and even less for a mysticism, of the divine essence. The goal of Orthodox spirituality, the blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven, is not the vision of the essence, but, above all, a participation in the divine life of the Holy Trinity; the deified state of the co-heirs of the divine nature...”

beings and God's intention in creating us, such that Palamas can write (1988, 201): "Those who have pleased God and attained that for which they came into being, namely, divinization—for they say it was for this purpose that God made us, in order to make us partakers of his own divinity—these then are in God since they are divinized by him and he is in them since it is he who divinizes them. Therefore, they too participate in the divine energy, though in another way, but not in the substance of God."

The preceding bird's-eye overview of some core Palamite distinctives will already be familiar to Orthodox readers, who may justly complain of its brevity and its ignoring of multiple relevant subtleties. But Palamism may be wholly unfamiliar to other readers, so hopefully the preceding will at least succeed as a concise entry point for them. Note that the order of presentation is also one of conceptual dependence: the Palamite doctrine of deification rests on its prior understanding of the immanence versus transcendence dialectic, which in turn rests on a prior understanding of the divine energies, which relies on a moderate doctrine of divine simplicity and accompanying objective distinction between the divine Persons, essence, and energies.

With all that background in place, I can now (finally!) outline the paper's overarching line of argument:

Premise 1 If platonism is true, then it is probably the case that the Palamite account of uncreated divine energies is at least partly true (insofar as the uncreated energy *being/omnipresence* likely ought to be posited).

Premise 2 Platonism is true.

Conclusion Therefore, it is probably the case that the Palamite account of uncreated divine energies is at least partly true (insofar as the uncreated energy *being/omnipresence* likely ought to be posited).

The focus of the remainder will be on the justification of the conditional proposition constituting P1, since the truth of P2 will be assumed. In the next section I will go over some necessary background on platonism (and Platonism), and then in the final section I will draw the connection to Palamism and more explicitly seek to justify P1. By way of a preview, that justification will consist in identifying an explanatory role for Palamite uncreated divine energies within platonist metaphysics, an explanatory role it fulfills especially well (better in fact than some major alternatives, at least when theism is already on the table as an hypothesis), though without counting as the *only* conceivably workable option. Hence there is a need to frame the argument in probabilistic terms.

A quick observation before proceeding in earnest: the idea that there is an underlying connection between platonism and Palamism is not original to me (though the precise framing of the argument, and some of the moves made along the way, are); rather, I believe the linkage is discernible in older literature, notably in Sergius Bulgakov's system (known as **Sophiology**) as early as his 1917 work *Unfading Light*. Bulgakov's Sophiology is plausibly (and most charitably) interpreted as a version of Christian Platonism committed also to Palamism (if often confusingly expressed using the terminology of German Idealism and even western esotericism). That Bulgakov can be read as a faithful Palamite has been suggested by several

in the recent scholarship,¹⁶ though it remains a contentious claim. I might have tried to write this paper as a partly exegetical, partly constructive work, explicating Bulgakov's notoriously difficult thought and reconstructing it for an analytic audience. However, that would have required a much longer effort and, to be done really well, would also have required reading competency in Russian (which I regrettably lack). So I present what follows as a next-best-thing option, hoping that the intrinsic interest of the argument will be enough to hold readers' attention in the absence of the added historical gravitas that would have been afforded by the Sophiology connection.

2. Platonic Background

As noted already, the Platonist and the platonist share a commitment to the reality of abstract entities, and thus overlap to at least some degree. By way of easing into the justification of P1, it will be helpful to take a trip down memory lane and review some of the basic contours of Platonism and the questions it raises regarding abstracta and their relationship to other orders of reality. I warn any Plato specialists that this will (again) be very much an outline, of the sort I dish out in my undergrad ancient philosophy course—hopefully not demonstrably inaccurate, but devoid of nuance and flavour (Platonic pabulum, in other words). For analytic platonists, please bear with me; this historical material will be shown to retain considerable contemporary relevance.

Recall that one of Plato's central concerns was the question of whether or not metaphysical naturalism (a.k.a. materialism or physicalism)¹⁷ is true. Is the only kind of reality *physical* reality? Or is there more to the real than bodies and space and time (i.e., the sorts of things that capture the interest of today's natural sciences)? Plato was a resolute opponent of metaphysical naturalism, and he and the larger Platonic (later Neoplatonic) tradition that followed in his wake produced an interesting series of arguments attempting to disprove it. Here is one of them:

Premise 1 All truths are grounded in reality.

Premise 2 Some truths are not grounded in physical reality.

Conclusion Therefore, some truths are grounded in non-physical reality.

The justification for P1 was simply the (seemingly) commonsensical commitment to a correspondence theory of truth. A proposition is true if and only if (and because) it corresponds to reality; or, in other words, a proposition's status as true is grounded in how things actually are. If I say "it's sunny outside in southern Antarctica right now," that is only true insofar as it is actually sunny outside right now in southern Antarctica. The justification for P2 was chiefly made by reference to mathematics and morality. Mathematical propositions seem to be true irrespective of facts about the physical realm. " $2 + 2 = 4$ " is eternally and

¹⁶ See Ladouceur (2019, 199-205) and Russell (2019, 51-54 and 242).

¹⁷ I am aware that the usage of these three labels varies across the analytic literature (particularly in philosophy of mind as compared with philosophy of religion), and that many draw fine-grained distinctions between them. Here I will simply take them as synonyms.

necessarily true, no matter what happens in the contingent spatiotemporal realm. If the physical universe were wiped out of existence tomorrow (no more space, time, matter or energy), plausibly it would still be true that “ $2 + 2 = 4$.” If the big bang had never occurred, such that the physical universe never came into being in the first place, plausibly it still would have been true that “ $2 + 2 = 4$.” That proposition can only be true if it corresponds to reality, and yet in these seemingly metaphysically possible scenarios there is no *physical* reality. So its truth must be grounded in some sort of non-physical reality. Or consider moral truths, at least some of which were regarded by Plato as being just as eternal and necessary as the truths of mathematics. “It’s wrong to torture kittens for fun” isn’t just true, it’s eternally and necessarily true. It would still be true even if all kittens were wiped out of existence, or if there had never been kittens. Even if the big bang never happened and the physical universe never came into being, in that scenario it still would have been the case that if there *were* kittens it *would* be wrong to torture them for fun. Moral truth is thus, like mathematical truth, independent of the physical realm—in other words, moral and mathematical truths, and whatever sorts of realities serve to ground such truths, transcend the physical realm.

So there are at least two sorts of reality (taking ‘reality’ in a very broad sense as a biconditional on ‘not-nothing’—whatever is real isn’t nothing, and whatever isn’t nothing is real in some legitimate sense of ‘real’): namely, the physical reality and whatever transcendent reality or realities ground the truth of eternal and necessary truths. For Platonism that latter sort of reality is Form. Platonic Forms are abstract universals that exist atemporally, extra-spatially, and necessarily, and which can be known by the intellect but cannot be directly apprehended via the five senses. Examples of Forms might include the number 2, the number 4, the mathematical functions of addition and equality, the substance-universal *cat*, the ethical Form *justice*, etc. Various necessary relations obtain amongst the Forms (e.g., that between determinables and determinates, such that the Forms *shape* and *triangularity* are necessarily related, with the former enjoying an atemporal priority of some sort over the latter, so that instances of *triangularity* are also always instances of *shape* but not vice versa). Moreover, there is also a relationship between the Forms and material objects, insofar as the latter instantiate (a.k.a. exemplify or manifest or participate or reflect) the former. Felix the concrete individual cat instantiates the Form *cat*; indeed, every physical entity (whether substance, property or relation) instantiates one or more accompanying abstract Forms, and could not exist without doing so. In that sense, material things depend on their relationship with the Forms, whereas Forms exist independently of matter; again, according to Platonism the Form *cat* would exist even in the absence of concrete individual felines.

Moreover, the standard Platonic line is that Forms transcend space and time even when they boast spatiotemporal participants. The Form *cat* is never literally located in space and time, though its instances certainly are. This claim gave rise to many complexities and conceptual difficulties for Platonism, and helped to prompt some of the developments proposed by later Neoplatonists (e.g., Proclus’s tripartite division between the unparticipated, participated, and participating),¹⁸ but the underlying notion driving the claim is intuitive

¹⁸ For an especially relevant portion of text see Proclus’s *Elements of Theology* propositions 23–24 (1963, 27–29). See also Dodds’s helpful commentary on the passage (*ibid.*, 210–211). Secondary sources on this can be found in Chlup (2012, 99–111) and Remes (2008, 70–71). This aspect of Procleanism is adopted and Christianized by certain figures in the eastern patristic tradition, notably St. Dionysius the Areopagite and St. Maximus the

enough: abstract universals aren't spatiotemporal entities and cannot be transformed into such (they are causally inert after all, incapable of doing anything or having anything done to them), so whatever relationship they bear to their instances, Forms cannot literally be located in them spatiotemporally.¹⁹

By analogy, and thinking of Forms along the line of patterns or designs or (to use a concept popular today) *information*, there is a clear sense in which an architectural blueprint (the abstract design of a building) is manifested in or realized by the edifice constructed in accordance with it. Yet it would seem a category mistake to claim that the design is present in the building in the same way that water is present in a water bottle—there is no containment relation here, nor a mereological relation in the usual sense (the design isn't part of the building in the way that the chimney is a part of the building). The relationship between abstract information and its realization may plausibly seem a primitive one, irreducible to other sorts of relationship and indefinable in non-circular terms by reference to other sorts of relationship—hence the difficulties involved in describing and understanding it accurately by reference to other terms and concepts, and the frequent resort to analogies.

Perhaps the best-known such analogy within Platonism is the mirror analogy: imagine an apple sitting in front of a mirror in a well-lit room. As central ingredients of this scenario we have (i) the apple, (ii) the mirror, (iii) the apple's reflection in the mirror, (iv) the reflection relationship obtaining between the apple and the mirror, plus (v) some efficient cause explaining the contingent fact that there is an apple in front of the mirror instead of something else (or nothing at all), which presumably involves a free choice by an intelligent agent acting for a purpose. The Platonic analogues are: (i) a Form, (ii) three-dimensional space, (iii) a concrete physical entity located in space and exemplifying the Form, (iv) the metaphysical relationship of instantiation, and (v) a finitely powerful intelligent deity (Plato's Demiurge) that freely and wisely chooses which Forms to instantiate as concrete material objects.

A few of the specific parallels in the analogy are worth highlighting: the apple in front of the mirror is independent of both the mirror and its own reflection in the mirror; if the mirror were destroyed, the reflection would be destroyed too, but the apple would be unaffected. Moreover a reflection, while real in some sense—it's not nothing, after all—is very much a lesser, derivative sort of reality. The apple is the existentially prior entity on which the reflection depends. It might even be said that the apple is more real than its reflection, the latter being merely an appearance of the apple—if talk of degrees of being makes any sense at all, it seems to make sense here. And a reflection must be reflected in or by something—in this case, glass—in order to exist. (The parallels: Form exists necessarily and independently of its material exemplification, and independently of whether there is a spatial realm at all. By contrast, material objects depend on the Forms, and count as lesser entities in comparison with them, to the point where the Platonic tradition would often reserve the label 'being' for

Confessor; on the latter's appropriation of this idea see Tollefsen (2008, 198-200 and 214–217). From there, it would in turn have an impact on Palamism.

¹⁹ This remains a much-discussed issue amongst platonists in the analytic literature, with some abandoning this aspect of Platonism and others seeking to retain it, often in interestingly divergent ways. For examples of starkly differing retention strategies, contrast Moreland's (2001; 2013) platonist constituent substance ontology (whereby abstract universals are never spatially located in their instances and yet still count as constituents of them, in a *sui generis* sense of 'constituency') with van Inwagen's (2014; 2016) platonist relational substance ontology (whereby abstract universals are not spatially located in their instances and cannot properly be considered constituents of them). Incidentally, Moreland's approach amounts to a contemporary restatement of a view akin to Proclus's.

the Forms and refer to material objects as mere ‘appearances,’ though the usage of such terminology is by no means uniform throughout the tradition or over time.²⁰ And exemplification requires a medium or venue, something in which or by which the Form can be manifested. So according to Platonism, without space there could be no material objects instantiating Forms.) The apple is not literally located in the mirror, though its reflection is. (The Form transcends space, though its instances don’t.) The mirror exists independently of the reflection and is essentially unchanged by the images found within it; if the apple is green, then its reflection will be green, and a portion of the glass will contingently look temporarily green, but remove the apple from in front of the mirror and no trace of greenness will linger in the glass. (Three-dimensional space exists independently of the physical objects found within it and remains essentially unaffected by their presence.) There is no necessity that the apple be sitting in front of the mirror, or that the reflection relationship obtains between them; rather, this state of affairs is explained by an intelligent person freely opting to turn on the light and place the apple in the appropriate spot. (The Demiurge freely chooses to act on matter in space in order to make it exemplify a certain Form.)

Like any analogy, that one is far from exact (e.g., a single Form can have many instances,²¹ whereas the apple will have only one reflection in the glass). Still, it gives a further idea of the model Platonism is working with. The mirror analogy also has the benefit of drawing attention to additional items in Platonism’s actual ontology, which ontology includes: Forms + material objects + the participation relationship(s) obtaining between them + space + at least one deity.²²

Importantly, there does seem at least modest rational warrant for each of those items, once the opening dichotomy between Forms versus material objects is accepted. Granting that concrete physical things are manifestations of abstracta, it does make some sense to think that abstracta would need something to be manifested *in* (space), or, if one prefers to be a relationist about space,²³ at least something to be manifested *by* (like inherently formless matter/energy/stuff/substrata)—or perhaps both. At any rate, abstract information, if it’s to be manifested, needs a medium in which and/or by which to be expressed. (E.g., the purely abstract architectural design needs a bunch of stuff—lumber and bricks and concrete, etc.—plus a physical location in which to put them all, if the design is ever to be physically exemplified. The abstract musical score needs instruments and band players and a concert hall to put them in if it is ever to be performed. Of course, in such macro-level examples these

²⁰ It was noted in the Introduction that historical Platonism and contemporary analytic platonism do diverge on significant details regarding abstract entities, and this would be one such area: whereas Platonists were often quite comfortable speaking of degrees of being, and of material entities as lesser realities or mere appearances, one rarely finds such affirmations among platonists. Contemporary platonists also tend not to view material realities as less *knowable* than abstract entities—indeed, in the contemporary literature knowledge of the latter is usually thought to carry special problems not applicable to knowledge of physical objects.

²¹ Indeed, one of the additional explanatory roles traditionally assigned Forms is that of grounding commonalities across otherwise numerically distinct objects. This ‘one over many’ argument for the reality of universals likewise remains much-discussed in the analytic literature.

²² Of course, Platonism was in fact polytheistic, and the tradition would become ever more floridly so in its later Neoplatonic phases (especially via the systems of Iamblichus and Proclus).

²³ Recall that substantialists about space believe that space is a thing, a substance in its own right. Plato’s *Timaeus* is usually read as advocating substantialism about space. Alternatively, one might be a relationist, maintaining that what we think of as ‘space’ is reducible to physical objects and the distance relations obtaining between them. Presumably most analytic platonists will wish to remain neutral (*qua* platonists anyway) concerning the substantialism versus relationism debate.

materials themselves exemplify various universals/Forms, and so themselves require a medium or vehicle for that exemplification, but they still function to illustrate the basic point.)

Moreover, while the reality of the Forms seems obviously necessary (provided they are real at all), the existence of any particular physical thing does not. Though it might be too strong a claim to say that physical things *demand* an explanation as to why they exist at all and why they exist as belonging to the kinds that they actually do belong to (i.e., as exemplifying these Forms rather than others), *prima facie* it seems sensible to be on the lookout for possible explanations of these facts. They seem explicable in principle (we can imagine coherent explanations for them), so why not? And since any attempted recourse here to other physical objects as explanations will end up seeming circular and unhelpful (the material objects being invoked as explanations would themselves be contingent exemplifications of Forms and so just as much in need of explanation), it makes sense to turn to a non-physical entity. If that non-physical entity is capable of engaging in acts of libertarian free choice, that will be a bonus, insofar as it can then provide a rational explanation for the aforementioned facts without undermining the contingency of those facts. But that involves positing a powerful non-physical entity with a mind. All of which, taken together, amounts to a probabilistic abductive argument for there being a god (or at least something like a god).²⁴

Though stated exceedingly roughly, that is the basic Platonic natural theology made available to us via the *Timaeus*. Considered on its own terms, it has its virtues, and in general outline it remains defensible today. The analytic platonist trying to think through the role of abstract universals and how they relate to contingent physical particulars is liable to stumble into much the same dialectic, though of course with plenty of room for variation in how—or whether—the issues are addressed.

Still, this Platonic picture is also incomplete, leaving many open questions. Plato himself clearly recognized this, as did his Neoplatonist successors. In some cases more or less clear answers were forthcoming in the tradition, in other cases not so much. Among those questions: (a) space seems just as contingent as the material objects dwelling within it (though Plato himself would have denied this), and presumably also boasts an accompanying abstract universal which it is exemplifying (the Form *space*), so won't it need to be created as well, and

²⁴ Incidentally, here the Judeo-Christian God is especially useful in explanatory terms for the Platonist, being able to create *ex nihilo* and thus account for both facts (the contingent existence of physical things *and* their contingent kind memberships). Plato's own Demiurge, being too limited in power to be able to create *ex nihilo*, could only be invoked to explain the second fact. This added explanatory power was exploited by the early church Fathers in their ongoing dialogue with pagan thought. Consider for example the following, from St. Gregory of Nazianzus's *Orations* (oration 28, 2nd theological oration, chapter sixteen):

For what is it which ordered things in heaven and things in earth, and those which pass through air, and those which live in water; or rather the things which were before these, heaven and earth, air and water? Who mingled these, and who distributed them? What is it that each has in common with the other, and their mutual dependence and agreement? For I commend the man, though he was a heathen, who said, What gave movement to these, and drives their ceaseless and unhindered motion? Is it not the Artificer of them Who implanted reason in them all, in accordance with which the Universe is moved and controlled? Is it not He who made them and brought them into being? For, suppose that its existence is accidental, to what will you let us ascribe its order? And if you like we will grant you this: to what then will you ascribe its preservation and protection in accordance with the terms of its first creation. Do these belong to the Accidental, or to something else? Surely not to the Accidental. And what can this Something Else be but God? Thus reason that proceeds from God, that is implanted in all from the beginning and is the first law in us, and is bound up in all, leads us up to God through visible things.

won't it need its own vehicle or medium of exemplification? And won't that lead to regress worries, whereby a hyperspace serves as a medium for the exemplification of space, but itself is in need of a vehicle or medium of exemplification, etcetera ad infinitum? Much the same can be said if one is a relationist about space and thinks of the medium of exemplification as the intrinsically bare stuff/matter/energy/substrata underlying individual physical things (or the cosmos taken as a whole). Either way, for information to be manifested it needs a medium or vehicle of manifestation. And *prima facie* it looks like what's needed, ultimately, is a non-contingent medium of exemplification that need not itself exemplify any Forms; if one assumes that all concrete entities must exemplify one or more Forms, then that would entail that the medium of exemplification is not concrete, and since it can't be abstract, it must belong to another sort of ontological category, one that is neither abstract nor concrete (if indeed there can be such a category). Alternatively, one might suggest that this hypothetical non-contingent medium of exemplification is concrete, but that not all concreta need exemplify a Form, and that this unusual concrete entity needn't do so.²⁵ Plato's original system, apparently satisfied with space (a.k.a. the receptacle) as medium or vehicle of exemplification (possibly leaving a role here for matter too) did not address this potential concern.

Or consider another question (b): a non-physical deity may be able to explain causally why material objects contingently exemplify the Forms that they do (and, if powerful enough to create *ex nihilo*, may also be able to explain why those material objects contingently exist in the first place), but if that non-physical deity itself exemplifies Forms, won't it also require such explanations? Another regress might seem to loom. Of course one easy way around that explanatory demand is to posit the deity as a concrete entity that nevertheless exists necessarily rather than contingently, and which necessarily stands in the exemplification relationship to all the Forms it essentially exemplifies (with any contingent exemplifications being the product of the deity's own free choices). Such a model of God has become fairly popular within analytic philosophy of religion, especially with Plantinga laying it out so clearly and defending it so ably across the decades. Yet one much-discussed potential worry about this model is that it seems to place God and the universals/Forms on an existential par, wherein they are all seen as equally necessary entities. Some maintain that this compromises divine uniqueness, or even divine aseity (insofar as it might be claimed that God problematically depends on the Forms He exemplifies for His substantive identity, even if He exists necessarily and exemplifies them necessarily). This concern has been one of the motivations driving some to turn back towards Thomist-style absolute divine simplicity, which sidesteps the issue by denying that God exemplifies distinct properties. It has motivated others to defend theistic nominalism.²⁶ At any rate, Plantinga-style theism, while eminently defensible, remains hotly contested even amongst theists. Moreover, the sort of solution it affords to the explanatory regress worry pertaining to God and His exemplification of Forms is quite different from the solution Platonism—and later, more elaborately, the various schools of Neoplatonism—adopted by way of dealing with the issue of an explanatory regress pertaining to the Demiurge and its exemplification of Forms. That solution basically consisted in situating the Demiurge within a more expansive ontological hierarchy, with its status and nature explained by reference to its placement in that

²⁵ Compare the discussion in analytic metaphysics over whether a bare substratum could ever exist *as bare*, without exemplifying any universals. Most substratum theorists back away from that view, though Sider (2006) sympathetically entertains it (while also entertaining the semi-Platonic notion that these bare substrata are space-time points).

²⁶ See especially Craig (2016).

hierarchy. There is a sense in which the Demiurge is a necessary being, but also in which the Demiurge depends for its necessary existence and its assorted essential characteristics on higher orders of reality, and ultimately a Highest super-Reality or beyond-Being. (That there can be relations of existential priority and dependence amongst necessarily existent entities is a staple claim in Platonism and Neoplatonism.) Why suppose there are any such higher orders, let alone a wholly transcendent order beyond even the Forms?

That question can be answered in the course of addressing a related question about the Platonist ontology, the third and final one to be broached here, namely (c): is there anything in any way held in common between the various orders of being thus far enumerated (i.e., Forms + material objects + the participation relationship(s) obtaining between them + space + at least one deity)? In other words, if material objects often participate in the same Form and thus can be said to have that in common, and Forms themselves often participate in the same Form (if perhaps in a somewhat different sense of ‘participate’—that’s a tricky issue) as when the Forms *triangularity* and *circularity* share in the determinable Form *shape*, is there anything that all members of all these types of entity (Forms and material objects and space and souls and gods) in some manner have in common? Is there anything that absolutely all of them share? Or, to frame the question a bit differently, if we think that all these orders of being so far enumerated can be plugged into one of two overarching categories, that of the *abstract* (the Forms, and maybe the participation relationship) and the *concrete* (material objects and space and gods), is there anything that these two categories (and by extension all their members) can truly be said to share? Initially the answer might seem to be in the negative, since we tend to think of these categories as exhaustive and mutually exclusive. (I.e., necessarily, every entity is either abstract or concrete, such that no entity can be both and no entity can transcend the divide.)²⁷ But that’s not how Platonists and Neoplatonists thought of this issue. For them, true predications can be made of both the abstract and the concrete (and all their members), with the truthmaker for those true predications thereby counting as neither abstract nor concrete, but rather as transcending both categories (because applying equally and in the same way to both and thereby unrestricted to either). For instance, the abstract and the concrete can both truly be called ‘good,’ and by extension so can all their members. Likewise, both categories can truly be attributed ‘unity’ or ‘oneness,’ as can all their members. For some (e.g., Porphyry) ‘being’ was another predication plausibly capable of such universal application (though this was a matter of controversy amongst the Neoplatonic schools). And the usual thought was that these different predications all had the same truthmaker, a neither-abstract-nor-concrete ineffable super-Principle that we cannot fully cognize yet must recognize as real²⁸

²⁷ Van Inwagen (2014, 156) is representative of this mainstream stance when he writes that the “platonist must think of objects, of what there is, as falling into two exclusive and exhaustive categories, the abstract and the concrete.”

²⁸ Or rather recognized as ‘super-real,’ for those who restricted the use of ‘being’ to the Forms. Something like that restricted use of ‘being’ is frequently seen also in patristic and modern Orthodox literature, though with a somewhat broadened sense encompassing all finite created entities. Consider Palamas (1983, 67): “This knowledge [of God], which is beyond conception, is common to all who have believed in Christ. As to the goal of this true faith, which comes about by the fulfilling of the commandments, it does not bestow knowledge of God through beings alone, whether knowable or unknowable, for by ‘beings’ here we understand ‘created things’; but it does so through that uncreated light which is the glory of God.” From the modern literature, Lossky (1957, 25) for instance writes: “All knowledge has as its object that which is. Now God is beyond all that exists. In order to approach Him it is necessary to deny all that is inferior to Him, that is to say, all that which is. If in

because needed as truthmaker for all these true predications (goodness and unity and existence) pertaining to the lower orders.

Moreover, the nature of that relationship had to be unique; this super-Principle wasn't a Form, and so didn't apply to all these entities by way of being exemplified by them.²⁹ It wasn't a concrete physical entity, and so likewise could not belong to physical things as a physical part or aspect. The super-Principle was transcendent in a sense (being ineffably beyond all our standard conceptual categories, even the abstract and concrete), but also had to be thought of as immanent in all these lower orders, somehow functioning as the ground of the most intimate, core predications that can be truly made of a thing (its very actuality and unity and goodness). While some Platonists and Neoplatonists still spoke of these lower orders 'participating' in the Good/One/Being (a.k.a. God, the true Highest Divinity), it was usually understood to be an analogous use or extended sense of 'participation,' not being strictly the same relationship as that obtaining between Forms and concrete particulars (or that among the Forms themselves) but rather a unique *sui generis* relationship.

One of the tasks of the various Neoplatonic schools was thus to take the occasional and inchoate remarks Plato made (in the *Republic* especially) about that super-Principle (Good/One/God) and clarify their meaning and their import for the rest of the system. The details of their accounts could be quite different—for instance the story told by Plotinus about how exactly the super-Principle relates to the Forms and to concrete particular objects was (arguably) divergent from that told by Proclus, as were their claims about how best to try and characterize this ultimately ineffable super-Principle.³⁰ But they shared a core commitment to the claim that the super-Principle functioned as the ultimate source of all the lower orders and their members, emanating them (directly or indirectly) from Itself. So, to bring it back to the earlier question: the Demiurge exists and has the properties it does because its reality and nature are consequent on the necessary activity of the higher orders, and, ultimately, on that of the super-Principle (the ultimate God transcending all the lower gods while also functioning as their immanent ground). The super-Principle in its turn faces no regress worries, since it exemplifies no Forms. Rather, it is the emanative Source of Forms (along with everything else).

To what extent those Neoplatonic speculations provide remotely plausible answers to the questions left over from the comparatively simpler Platonic worldview laid out in the *Timaeus*

seeing God one can know what one sees, then one has not seen God in Himself but something intelligible, something which is inferior to Him.”

²⁹ The super-Principle's transcendence even of the Forms gave rise to significant epistemological complications for the Neoplatonic systems, insofar as the Forms were viewed as the crucial basis of human knowledge. (I.e., Forms are knowable by the intellect, and material objects are knowable by the intellect just to the extent that they participate in Forms.) Since the super-Principle transcends the Forms, it will necessarily remain unknowable by the human intellect. But the Neoplatonists held out hope that by way of mystical practices (Plotinus) or divinely-graced ceremonial magic (Iamblichus and Proclus especially), humans might still attain a degree of union with the divine. The partial parallel with Palamism is obvious: the divine nature cannot be known by the human intellect, but we can still attain union with God via His graciously sharing with us His divine energies (which are appropriated in various ways, including contemplative prayer and reception of the Church's sacraments, especially the Eucharist).

³⁰ Contrast for instance the differing pictures explicated by Gerson (1994) versus Chlup (2012). On the other hand, Perl (2007; 2014) is inclined to view the overarching ontologies of Plotinus and Proclus as mostly compatible. Deep and abiding interpretive disputes abound in this neighbourhood (understandable given the remarkable complexity and difficulty of the primary sources).

and summarized above is of course debatable.³¹ But for better or worse, platonism in general (and theistic platonism in particular) leaves itself open to the aforementioned questions. And to a considerable extent those same questions were encountered by the early Church fathers (especially the Greeks and Syriacs), steeped as they were in an intellectual culture influenced by the Platonic and, later, Neoplatonic tradition(s). They often had to decide whether and to what degree they would repudiate or seek to Christianize those systems. Some went all-in on the Christianization strategy—for instance St. Dionysius the Areopagite’s thoroughgoing appropriation and modification of Procleanism—which had its advantages. (E.g., by identifying the Neoplatonic super-Principle with God the Father, or the divine nature, or the Trinity as a whole, the aforementioned regress worry could be avoided without risk of compromising divine aseity, though at the cost of having to clarify further how the divine attributes/energies/ideas/intents flowed from that divine Source while remaining fully divine and inseparable from it.) Other saints were more selective and eclectic. And it would be overstating the case to suppose that the patristic intellectual tradition was being wholly driven by these interactions—it had an identity and autonomy all its own.³² But the preceding Platonic dialectic did play a role in the patristic tradition, especially regarding how it thought about the relationship between God and creation.

With that admittedly elaborate background context now in place, let’s turn to flesh out explicitly the justification for P1 of this paper’s overarching line of reasoning, which premise reads: if platonism is true, then it is probably the case that the Palamite account of uncreated divine energies is at least partly true (insofar as the uncreated energy *being/omnipresence*³³ likely ought to be posited).

3. Drawing a Line from Platonism to Palamism

The argument I would like to suggest by way of justifying P1 draws on the preceding background material. Historical Platonism is heavily tied in with theism, and for good reason;

³¹ Analytic platonists might be tempted to get off the bus well before the bit about mysticism and magic.

³² This point is emphasized by Lossky (1978, 56–57):

In Plato, the ‘ideas’ represent the very sphere of Being. The sensible world has no verity, only a verisimilitude: it is only real insofar as it participates in the ideas. To contemplate the latter, one must escape the precarious universe of change, the flux of generation and corruption. Ideas represent therefore the superior level of being, not God but the Divine. The ‘daemons,’ the gods, are indeed inferior to them. The ‘creation’ of which the *Timaeus* speaks remains a myth, for the world has always existed: eternally the ‘demiurge’ shapes it by copying it from the model of the ideal world, the true world. Neo-Platonism...establishes the ineffable One above...the ideas, henceforth, are those of divine Intelligence...which emanates from the absolute superior to being itself. St. Augustine, after having read extracts from the *Enneads* translated into Latin, allowed himself to be fascinated by these themes of Plotinus. But the Greek fathers, who knew the philosophers much better, mastered their thought far more easily, and used it in all freedom. For them, God is not only an intelligence containing divine ideas: His essence infinitely transcends ideas. It is a free and personal God who creates all by His will and His wisdom; and the ideas of all things are contained in this will and this wisdom, and not in the divine essence.

³³ Recall from the Introduction that these labels are used in the Palamite tradition to refer to that divine energy by which God conserves contingent creatures in reality.

as noted above, it is plausible to draw an anti-naturalist conclusion from the basic platonic commitment to abstracta,³⁴ and likewise plausible to see a connection between platonism and belief in some sort of a divinity (though one probably oughtn't to try and shoehorn that second, more modest linkage into an ironclad deduction). Partly in an effort to answer additional pressing questions about the original Platonic metaphysical framework—including questions (a)–(c) listed above—later Neoplatonists constructed more elaborate systems, which systems then interacted in significant ways with patristic thought. Through that interaction, modified (improved?) answers became available to (a)–(c). And I maintain that Palamism in particular provides the ingredients for an interesting and largely overlooked (at least in the recent literature) answer to question (a). By showing this, a justification will thereby be provided to P1.

Recall the issue raised in question (a): if, in order to be concretely instantiated, an uninstantiated universal (i.e., Platonic Form) ultimately requires a medium or vehicle of realization, then that medium or vehicle had better not itself be the exemplification of a universal and thus require its *own* distinct medium or vehicle of exemplification, for fear of giving rise to a regress. This suggests that the ultimate medium or vehicle (or media/vehicles, if it be supposed that there could be many numerically distinct such entities) must be rather peculiar, lacking an accompanying Form of its own and lacking of itself any exemplification relationship to any Forms (though of course able to be placed in such a relationship, thereby fulfilling its function as medium for exemplification). It is a vehicle for the realization of Forms, seemingly lacking a discernible contentful identity of its own over and above that functional or dispositional role. Plato's own suggestion as to the ultimate medium or vehicle was his 'receptacle,' which he went on to identify with three-dimensional space. But that identification is suspect, given (1) the apparent contingency of three-dimensional space (especially in light of contemporary physics, wherein space came into existence in the past) which contingency suggests that space too must be the product of a contingent creative act (which creative act will likely be conceptualized by the Platonist—and theistic platonist—as the divinity's efficacious choice to instantiate the universal/Form *space*); (2) the related fact that space seems to have a perfectly respectable accompanying universal/Form (namely *space*) of which it is the exemplification; and (3) the fact that space seems in principle susceptible of

³⁴—though that fact may be less obvious if one starts the inquiry from other sorts of abstracta than those employed in the summary above (i.e., uninstantiated universals, the traditional Platonic Forms). Amongst analytic platonists there is of course much discussion about what sorts of abstracta ought to be admitted and how they interrelate; if, for instance, unactualized possible worlds are more fundamental than uninstantiated universals (perhaps the latter are real only by way of their incorporation in the former), the classic Platonist argument against metaphysical naturalism can still be run, but more work may be involved. For a helpful overview of some of the debates concerning priority among the different classes of abstracta and of how it all ties into philosophical theology, see Pruss (2011). The issue is further complicated from the perspective of some Orthodox theologians committed to an especially strict doctrine of apophaticism, whereby God's transcendence of all our conceptual categories includes even our modal categories. Lossky leans in that direction in some of his writings, for instance his (1957, 45): "If the very foundation of created being is change, the transition from non-being to being, if the creature is contingent by nature, the Trinity is an absolute stability. One would say, an absolute necessity of perfect being; and yet the idea of necessity is not proper to the Trinity, for It transcends the antinomy of what is necessary, and the contingent; entirely personal and entirely nature; liberty and necessity are one, or, rather, can have no place in God."

multiple realization, at least in the context of current physics (with its openness to the reality of a multiverse), which further suggests that it exemplifies a universal/Form.³⁵

That last point, regarding susceptibility to multiple realization, recalls to mind an overlapping and longstanding worry about realist (as opposed to nominalist) substratum theory in the context of analytic substance ontology: if substrata are supposed to be inherently and primitively individuated (in fact serving as both the principle of individuation and medium of instantiation for universals), and yet there are many of them, then it seems there ought to be a single universal/Form *substratum* which they are all realizing. (From the platonist's perspective, one had better not explain their apparent type-identity—the fact that they all count as substrata—by reference to brute fact rather than a shared universal, for fear of looking hypocritical to the ever-vigilant eyes of the resemblance nominalist.)³⁶ But then if every universal/Form needs a medium of instantiation by which it is concretely realized and individuated, that medium should not itself be the exemplification of a universal/Form inherently in need of its own medium of instantiation (again for fear of regress). The substratum of analytic substance ontology seems a questionable candidate for this vehicular explanatory role, in part because there are (allegedly) many of them.

Both the platonist and the Platonist seem to be in need of at least one medium or vehicle of exemplification whose reality does not itself constitute the exemplification of any universal/Form. Plato's receptacle was meant to fulfill that role, but his own view of its nature runs into problems because of the identification with space. The natural alternative at this point in the dialectic is to drop said identification. The question then becomes what to replace it with. As we have just seen, to replace it with one or more bare substrata, as those are usually conceived within analytic metaphysics, also involves problems—perhaps not *decisive* problems (substratum theorists certainly have additional strategies of reply available to them),³⁷ but

³⁵ Perhaps recognizing the difficulty here, Plato rejected the possibility that our cosmos could be part of a multiverse—see the *Timaeus* 31a–b (found in Waterfield (2008, 19).

³⁶ LaBossiere (1994, 369) writes that “since substrata are bare, there are no qualitative differences among them. However, since there are supposed to be numerous substrata, an account must be given of their individuation which involves no appeal to qualitative differences...The individuation of substrata must be taken as a primitive. While such a move increases the cost of the...theory, all theories concerned with individuation must take individuation as a primitive at some level.” This reply seems wide open to the hypocrisy allegation of the nominalist. Or consider Sider (2006, 393), who writes (though in a somewhat different dialectical context): “If there were a monadic universal of *being a particular*, a most inclusive genus under which each particular must fall in order to be a particular, then there could be no truly bare particulars. But substratum theory requires no such universal since it already admits thin particulars as a fundamental ontological category. Thin particulars do not need to instantiate such a universal in order to be thin particulars; they can just be thin particulars!” To this the nominalists will again reply: if you get to have thin particulars (i.e., bare substrata) as a primitive component of your ontology with no accompanying universal, despite their seeming type-identity (their all being exactly the same qua their thin particularity), why can't we claim the same for every trope in existence and dump platonic abstracta entirely?

³⁷ Another option for example is to claim that substrata cannot be said to exemplify commonly any contentful universal/Form, like *substratumhood* or *particularity*, because such alleged universals aren't real; they are not sparse properties but mere predicates, whose proper applications find their truthmakers not in universals but in the substrata themselves taken individually. Thus Moreland & Pickavance (2003, 10) write: “We believe that the properties said to be necessary for bare particulars are not genuine properties; these include simplicity, particularity, unrepeatability, and those of the three categories of transcendental, disjunctive, and negative properties.” Or consider Moreland (2013, 256): “Thus, for example, bare particulars are, indeed, simple, but not in virtue of having the property of being simple; rather, they are as a brute fact just simple in and of themselves.” Such a strategy of reply may carry some weight, but to my eyes it seems vulnerable once again to a hypocrisy

problems sufficiently problematic to provide motivation for platonists and Platonists to remain on the lookout for further potentially workable alternatives that would still fit within their theoretical framework.

Suppose now that that theoretical framework includes Christian theism, at least as an option not wholly excluded from the outset. And suppose further that Palamism is in turn viewed as an option for Christian theists, not wholly to be excluded from the outset. Well, at this point I would suggest that one way of reading the Palamite doctrine of divine energies, and specifically its understanding of the energy *being* or *omnipresence* (by which all naturally non-divine things are sustained in their existence for so long as they exist), is to view that energy as the medium of exemplification.

Palamism, in agreement with Neoplatonism, certainly affirms that God is ontologically prior to any and all platonic abstracta; whatever their precise mode of being, they are all derivative on God, though there is room for positing different sorts of dependence relations between God and abstracta. For instance, God's necessarily existent omniscience ensures that all possible universals eternally and necessarily exist as contents of His awareness, while His necessarily existent omnipotence ensures that all possible universals eternally and necessarily exist as potential objects of instantiation by His infinite creative power. (On my reading of Palamism, the dependence of abstracta on God is overdetermined, coming from at least these two directions, and conceivably more.) So Palamism would still affirm the truth of platonism in the sense of 'platonism' we've been working with since the Introduction, though not the truth of platonism*.

Moreover, all the divine energies, *qua* divine, are ontologically prior to all contingent concrete particulars, whether physical objects or space or human souls or angels or whatever else might populate the concrete realm. My suggestion is that one of these divine energies, which Palamas refers to as 'being' and as 'omnipresence,' functions as the vehicle for the exemplification of any and all universals/Forms (and presumably for any other irreducible abstracta, if any there be). Though there is definitely room for interpretive dispute here, I would suggest that this energy, like some others, exists eternally and necessarily, and would have existed even if no contingent things had ever been brought into being.

To use a frequent analogy from Palamite (and older patristic) literature: if the divine nature is the sun, the divine energies (or some of them anyway) are the sun's rays, given off continually and essentially whether or not there are any planets there to be shone upon and illumined.³⁸ God is essentially active, and those acts manifest His character and essence, even in the absence of contingent entities present to be affected or manifested *to*. These rays include *being/omnipresence*. God's free acts of creation then amount to God's freely and contingently instituting instantiation relationships between His eternal ideas and/or intentions (the latter

charge from the nominalist, who will then want to press this strategy to the extreme: why not reject all sparse properties and assign individual tropes or concrete objects as the truthmakers for all all true-in-ordinary-language property predications?

³⁸ Palamas (1988, 191) writes: "Just as the sun, in that without diminution it bestows a measure of warmth and light upon those who participate, possesses these activities as natural and essential energies, so too the divine communications, in that without diminution they inhere in the one who bestows participation, are natural and essential energies of God, and therefore are also uncreated." Or consider Lossky (1957, 74), who writes that "the energy is not a divine function which exists *on account* of creatures, despite the fact that it is through His energies, which penetrate everything that exists, that God creates and operates. Even if creatures did not exist, God would none the less manifest Himself beyond His essence; just as the rays of the sun would shine out from the solar disk whether or not there were any beings capable of receiving their light."

are sometimes referred to as 'logoi' in the patristic literature) and the eternal divine energy *being/omnipresence*. That divine energy, rather than a bare substratum (or substrata) or three-dimensional space, is the medium of exemplification. It is not itself the exemplification of any universal, having no corresponding divine idea though of course God is aware of it insofar as God is *doing* it—emanating this energy is among His essential activities. (To borrow a concept from the epistemology literature: God's awareness of this energy is non-propositional knowledge, being more akin to knowledge *how* than knowledge *that*. Alternatively it might be described as knowledge by acquaintance rather than propositional knowledge.) This medium of exemplification is thus immune from the aforementioned regress worry. The fact of its not having a corresponding Form also means that (from the perspective of Platonic epistemology at least) it cannot be fully and directly cognized by us—we rationally recognize that it is probably there because positing it is explanatorily useful, providing a better solution to a serious philosophical puzzle than that provided by other major solutions. But it is not directly cognizable by the human intellect, since the human intellect directly cognizes only Forms. Relatedly, it will be difficult to characterize in any way other than by reference to its functional/dispositional role (i.e., its ability to serve as a vehicle for the exemplification of abstracta), which is in turn revealed by this explanatory utility. In that respect, it is somewhat akin to a bare substratum, which is also difficult to characterize in any but functional/dispositional terms. Yet, unlike a bare substratum, we now have a principled reason for denying that *this* vehicle of exemplification itself exemplifies a universal/Form. As a divine energy it transcends the realm of abstracta (something Neoplatonism taught us to expect of anything divine); moreover, since there is only one divine energy *being/omnipresence* serving this explanatory role, there is no analogue to the concern about multiple substrata seeming to entail the need for their inherently exemplifying a shared universal/Form (like *particularity* or *substratumhood*).

Hopefully the basic content of the proposed model is reasonably clear; to try and clarify it further, consider an analogy. Since we have one (imperfect) light analogy on the table already, perhaps a second will be forgiven: imagine a spotlight sitting on a roof, which spotlight is essentially active (it always shines, so long as it exists and is plugged into a power source). Its operator might choose to leave it pointed at nothing in particular, shining into the empty night sky. Or she might deliberately train it on an object she is interested in—maybe her neighbour's kitchen window or the woods across the street or the clocktower on the other side of town. She can shine the spotlight on each of these individually, illuminating them one by one, or perhaps she might choose to adjust the settings on the spotlight, increase the width of the ray, and shine it on all of these objects of interest simultaneously. They would all then share in its light, without the light in any way diminishing. And then a little while later the operator might remove the spotlight from them and shine it elsewhere, or train it back on the empty night sky.

I trust that the elements of this analogy are obvious, but just to make things explicit: the analogue of the operator would be the Persons of the Trinity; the spotlight the divine nature; the ray of light emanating from it the divine energy *being/omnipresence*; the various objects and locations that are contingently illuminated by the spotlight's ray are the platonic abstracta, existing eternally as objects of divine awareness and potential objects of divine power; and the illumination of those objects and locations by the ray is the exemplification relationship.

This model of course leaves a number of questions open for further inquiry; for instance there is the question of whether this divine energy should itself count as concrete, or instead as neither-abstract-nor-concrete, as transcending that divide just as the divine nature does

(arguably) and being incapable of adequate conceptualization by us. That the One/Good/God transcends the abstract-versus-concrete distinction is a clear commitment of Neoplatonism and also one legitimate (though likely not obligatory) way of reading the apophatic commitment of Palamism (i.e., its recognition of our inability to conceptualize or categorize the divine nature). The question here would be whether that sort of transcendence should also be attributed to this specific divine energy, or whether, as that by which abstracta obtain instantiation/concretization, it should itself be categorized as concrete. To me this seems debatable, though my initial inclination is to think that the medium of exemplification/concretization ought itself to be thought of as concrete.³⁹

Another question that might be raised is whether this interpretation of the Palamite teaching on the divine energy *being/omnipresence* entails too robust an understanding of divine immanence. Do we really want to portray a divine energy as in any sense a component or constituent of a contingent created thing? Well, it is important to recall that the standard Platonist line is that the core identity of any contingent created thing is found in the universal/Form it exemplifies and inherits. The nature or essence of a particular concrete electron is the universal/Form *electronhood* it exemplifies. My essence as a human being is the universal/Form *humanity* that I exemplify.⁴⁰ This universal/Form does not have to be actualized, and thus I exist only contingently. The divine energy *being/omnipresence* is that by which I exist, so long as I exist, but that divine energy remains clearly distinct from my essence. I am not by nature a participant in that divine energy, and so I am not by nature in any sense divine. I am made a participant in that divine energy by God's grace, by His free decision to create me. But, having been made, I am indeed a participant in that divine energy simply by virtue of my actualization. I partake of that divine energy, and so it might be said to be a 'part' of me (me *qua* actualized/concretized), though not in anything like the usual mereological sense of 'part.' This divine energy isn't a part of me in the way that my leg is a part of me (a

³⁹ I take it Lossky (1978, 49) would disagree with my inclination, since he views this energy as unknowable and thus presumably not subject to any such definite categorization by us: "The energetic manifestation does not therefore depend on creation: it is perpetual radiance, which is in no way conditioned by the existence or non-existence of the world. Certainly we discover it in the creature, for 'since the creation of the world, the works [of God] render visible to intelligence His invisible attributes' (Romans 1:20): the creature is stamped with the seal of divinity. But this divine presence is a permanent glory, eternal, a non-contingent manifestation of essence, and as such unknowable."

⁴⁰ Or, if there are real abstract haecceities, then presumably my core identity would consist in that universal/Form + my haecceity (or perhaps just the latter, if it includes the former by entailment). Though it needs to be kept in mind that, *qua* concretized, my actual individual substance cannot be completely identified with that universal/Form or that haecceity (if such there be). A wholesale identification would be a confusion of the abstract and concrete realms. The universal/Form remains transcendent even when something exemplifies it. (Though there are complexities here; recall the points made in footnotes above regarding the disputes within Platonism and analytic platonism concerning how best to understand the transcendent status of universals/Forms *vis a vis* their concrete instances.) Florovsky (1976, 62) emphasizes this point, writing that "the *created nucleus* of things must be rigorously distinguished from the *Divine ideas* about things... The Divine pattern in things is not their 'substance' or 'hypostasis'; it is not the vehicle of their qualities and conditions. Rather, it might be called the *truth of a thing*, its *transcendental entelechy*. But the truth of a thing and the substance of a thing are not identical." Lossky (1957, 96–97) takes a similar stance: "The ideas or acts of will, which Dionysius calls 'models'... are not identical with created things. While they are the foundation of everything which is established by the divine will in the simple outpourings or energies, relationships between God and the beings which He creates, the ideas remain nevertheless separate from creatures, as the will of the craftsman remains separate from the work in which it is manifested. The ideas foreordain the different modes of participation in the energies..."

proper part of me or piece of me), nor in the way that my intellect might be called a ‘part’ of me (an essential characteristic of me), but rather as that through which I am contingently instantiated so long as I am instantiated. This divine energy is that which illumines my finite nature and renders it actual and able to exercise its own characteristic activities, such that every act of mine is conducted in synergistic cooperation with the divine energy that actively undergirds and sustains it. Importantly, this is one key respect in which the traditional Platonic mode of speaking about the medium/vehicle of exemplification—namely as a purely passive receptacle—must be viewed by the Palamite as at best incomplete. The medium/vehicle of exemplification is energetic presence that actualizes and renders active finite entities that previously had been merely prefigured as the contents of God’s eternal ideas and as the potential objects of His infinite creative power. That by which creatures are exemplified is dynamic, not passive.

This does result in an ontologically robust sense of divine immanence and omnipresence, perhaps one that warrants the label ‘panentheism’ (a label some modern Palamites have seen as legitimate)⁴¹ but not one that warrants the label ‘pantheism.’ The created cosmos is not by nature divine and cannot be identified with God, nor can any created thing dwelling within it. But via His energies (most fundamentally this energy *being/omnipresence*) God is as intimately present to creation as it is possible to be. Ware (2004, 159) expresses this point as follows:

If the doctrine of creation is to mean anything at all, it must signify that God is on the inside of everything, not on the outside. Creation is not something upon which God acts from the exterior, but something through which he expresses himself from within. Our primary image should be that of *indwelling*. Above and beyond creation, God is also its true inwardness, its “within.” Moreover, the work of creation is surely not to be understood as a once-for-all event occurring in the remote past, an initial act that constitutes a chronological starting point. It is not a past event but a present relationship...[A]t each and every instant God is the constant and unceasing *arche*, the source, principle, and sustainer of all that exists. It means that without the active and uninterrupted presence of God in every part of the cosmos, nothing would remain in existence for a single moment.

Later he adds (*ibid.*, 166): “Ontologically, from the very beginning God is fully and completely present in the creation through his divine energies. All things necessarily participate in the divine energies; otherwise they would not exist at all.” Or consider Lossky (1957, 89):

The divine energies are within everything and outside everything...[T]hese divine rays penetrate the whole created universe, and are the cause of its existence...The act of creation established a relationship between the divine energies and that which is not God, and constituted a limitation, a determination of the infinite and eternal effulgence of God, who thereby became the cause of finite and contingent being. For the energies do not produce the created world by the mere fact of their existence, they are natural processions of the essence of God...Thus the divine energies in themselves are not

⁴¹ In addition to Sergius Bulgakov (cited in the Introduction), who frequently self-identified as a panentheist, other Orthodox scholars accepting the legitimacy of this label (properly construed) include Dumsday (2021a), Knight (2007), Ladouceur (2019), Louth (2004), Nesteruk (2004), Raslau (2022), and Ware (2004).

the relationship of God to created being, but they do enter into relationship with that which is not God, and draw the world into existence by the will of God.

On the model I have outlined above, which I take to be consistent with these Palamite pronouncements, the elements of the creative process are (predictably) all divine: (x) the universals/Forms are seen to be divine ideas and/or potential objects of divine power; (y) the medium of their realization is viewed as one among the many divine energies (namely *being* or *omnipresence*); and (z) God's free rational institution of the exemplification relationship between those universals/Forms and that energy is viewed as the act of creation.⁴² However, while the elements are divine (God's ideas + the divine energy *being/omnipresence* + a divine act of will), it remains true that the contingent coming-together of these elements, their product (i.e., the contingent cosmos and all that is within it) is inherently finite and always infinitely ontologically distant from the essence of its Creator. As Theokritoff (2008, 66) writes: "[I]t is a cosmos shot through with the radiance of divinity. God is at once totally other, totally beyond everything that is, and in everything by the ecstatic power inseparable from himself." Or as Palamas (1988, 173) himself puts it: "Every nature is utterly remote and absolutely estranged from the divine nature...But...all participate in him and receive their constitution by this participation, not by participation in his nature, far from it, but by participation in his energy. Thus is he the very being of beings..."

It should be emphasized that the model I have outlined here is not the only way to construe the metaphysics of Palamism with respect to creation; there are other ways of conceptualizing the divine energy *being* and its relationship to contingent concrete entities, and some Orthodox would view my interpretation as too heavily Platonic in its background ontology. Still, I think it one legitimate reading of this aspect of Palamism, and one that has the advantage of highlighting its potential relevance to analytic metaphysics and philosophical theology. If Palamism can do explanatory work for platonism (and Platonism), perhaps it can make further contributions to other areas of discussion, including areas of broader interest.

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⁴² Like any act of God, this contingent creative act of will also counts as a divine energy, though distinct from the eternal and necessary divine energy *being/omnipresence*. Palamas (1983, 96) is helpful on this sort of distinction among energies: "There *are*, however, energies of God which have a beginning and an end...[W]hile all the energies of God are uncreated, not all are without beginning. Indeed, beginning and end must be ascribed, if not to the creative power itself, then at least to its activity, that is to say, to its energy as directed towards created things." After all, some created things do cease to be—God's active conservation of them (an energy) ceases to apply to them when the exemplification relationship is revoked.

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