

Simplicity, Eternality and God's Relation to Time

Joseph Holden, PhD

Copyright Joseph Holden, 2011. All Rights Reserved.

A previous discussion of Greco-Hellenistic influence and corruption has allowed our thinking of God to move beyond the distorted pagan definitions of his “static” attributes into a uniquely Christian context of the dynamic divine nature. The treatment of simplicity and eternity at the outset will serve as a foundation for later discussions regarding the intelligibility of the immutability and impassibility of God in the next chapter. Among the crucial differences between open and classical theism is their respective views of divine simplicity (*simplicitas*), eternity and God's ontological relation to time. In one sense, these attributes are interrelated and reflect the very environment of God's mode of being (*modus essendi*), and in another sense, convey to us what the nature of God is *not*. What is at stake is not only one's concept of God, but the very nature of divine transcendence and God's wholly ‘otherness’ as Being. I will argue that the open view of God, with respect to these attributes, is a radical departure from traditional Christianity and is fundamentally flawed, leaving God metaphysically incapable of accounting for the existence and preservation of temporal effects, nor of his own perfect existence as “God”.

When questioning the simplicity of God, we are considering whether the divine mode of being is one and indivisible, lacking parts, undiluted and unadulterated, or is in some sense, ontologically composite, divided or possessing dimension. Modern theology has met the classical position of absolute simplicity with several challenges that question the very intelligibility of a relational God. Primarily, these challenges can be understood through two fundamental questions. First, if God is uniquely and absolutely simple, which is a negative description of God's mode of being (i.e., not intrinsically or extrinsically multiple), how then can composite creatures bound to a world of multiplicity intimately know this kind of being that is beyond human description? Pinnock views *apophatic* language as a direct result of Hellenistic thinking, which essentially defined God as what the world is *not* and eventually led the early fathers to adopt such abstractions as atemporality and simplicity.¹ Second, if God is described by his creatures in categories different from what he really is (by way of analogy or something else), how then can one say his knowledge of God is accurate? Though both questions appear similar

¹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 72.

and are indeed important, the former addresses whether a *relationship* with God is possible, and the latter deals with the *means* and *extent* to which indirect knowledge can inform us accurately about the divine nature. If coherent answers are not given to both questions, it would seem to lead to an irreconcilable agnosticism, albeit through different routes, forever separating the divine mode of simple being from the temporal and divided mode of creaturely relational and epistemological knowing.

The traditional understanding of God relating to these topics embraced answers offered by the patristic fathers, Augustine, Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas. I agree that this places these thinkers eminently closer to the biblical revelation and offers a coherent metaphysical paradigm that adequately accounts for God's own being and his causal agency of all temporal effects in the world. In this chapter, I will argue that the traditional notion of simplicity and atemporality are not imperfections in God, despite their negative appellations (e.g., in-divisible, a-temporal and so on), but rather are divine perfections stated in negative terms, which have some antecedent positive divine attribute as their foundation. To accomplish this, I will offer a survey of the significant patristic and medieval literature on both simplicity and the eternality of God as well as examine and critique the valuation that open theism places on these doctrines. Through a closer reading of the texts of the church fathers, I will demonstrate that there exists a patristic and medieval consensus that overwhelmingly favors and adequately explains the classical view of God over the open perspective.

On Divine Simplicity: The Patristic and Medieval Consensus. An examination of the significant patristic and medieval literatures describing divine simplicity will reveal open theism's bipolar God, which contradicts the orthodox position. From the earliest writings of Justin Martyr,² Athenagoras,³ Irenaeus,⁴ Clement of Alexandria,⁵ Origen,⁶ Gregory of Nazianzen,⁷ Gregory of Nyssa,⁸ Tatian,⁹ Ambrose,¹⁰ John Cassian,¹¹ Augustine,¹² John of

² Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, V.

³ Athenagoras, *A Plea For the Christians*, IV; VI; VIII; X.

⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II.13.3.

⁵ See Clement, *Stromata*, V.12, in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 2, 464, where he says, "Nor are any parts to be predicated of Him. For the One is indivisible".

⁶ Origen, *On First Principles*, I.1.6, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 4 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1885 [reprint edition]), 243.

⁷ Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oration on Holy Baptism*, XL.7, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1885 [reprint edition]), 361.

⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, XXXIII.1-5, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1893 [reprint edition]), 413-414.

Damascus,¹³ Anselm,¹⁴ Aquinas,¹⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux¹⁶ and many others,¹⁷ we see a central theme of God's absolute unity, and any other notion of divine dependence would directly lead to Manichaean dualism.¹⁸ G.L. Prestige comments on the patristic concept of divine simplicity in this way:

Another line of thought which is largely expressed in negative terms is concerned with the indivisibility of God. He had originally been described as 'one,' more by way of rejecting claims of false gods than with a view to expounding His own essential nature. But it is a clear and recognised philosophical principle that the ground and author of the whole multiplicity of creation must present an ultimate unity.¹⁹

Justin Martyr's (A.D. 100-165) concept of the nature of God was consistent with the orthodox position on simplicity held by modern classical Christianity. He writes, "God alone is unbegotten and incorruptible, and therefore he is God, but all other things after Him are created and corruptible".²⁰ In his *First Apology*, Justin says, "God is unchangeable and eternal, the Creator of all",²¹ and later, he argues against the Stoic pantheism by claiming "God, the Creator of all things, is superior to the things that are to be changed".²² Moreover, as Justin narrates the manner of his conversion, he describes his God as "that which always maintains the same nature, and in the same manner, and is the cause of all other things — that, indeed, is God".²³ Though Justin's strong view of divine transcendence permeates his writings, there does not appear to be any deviation from the classical attributes of God. His implicit doctrine of simplicity can be

⁹ Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, IV, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1885 [reprint edition]), 66.

¹⁰ Ambrose, *On the Christian Faith*, I.16.106-107, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 10 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1896 [reprint edition]), 218-219.

¹¹ John Cassian, *The Twelve Books on the Institutes of the Coenobia*, VIII.4, in *Ibid.*, volume 11, 258. Cassian remarks in this way, "And so as without horrible profanity these things cannot be understood literally of Him who is declared by the authority of Holy Scripture to be invisible, ineffable, incomprehensible, inestimable, simple, and uncompounded, so neither can the passion of anger and wrath be attributed to that unchangeable nature without fearful blasphemy".

¹² Augustine, *City of God*, VIII.6; XI.10, 29, in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 2, 208-209; *On the Trinity*, VI.5-6, 8, in *Ibid.*, volume 3, 100-101.

¹³ John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, I.9, 13; II.22.

¹⁴ Anselm, *St. Anselm: Basic Writings*, 76-77, 83.

¹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.18; *Summa Theologica*, I.3.

¹⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1973), chapter IV.

¹⁷ See Robert M. Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1966), 1-36, 105-110; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 83-108; Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 9-11.

¹⁸ Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 7. See pages 9-11 on the patristic view of simplicity.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁰ Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, V, in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, 197.

²¹ Martyr, *First Apology*, XIII, in *Ibid.*, 167.

²² *Ibid.*, *First Apology*, XX, in *Ibid.*, 169.

²³ Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, III, in *Ibid.*, 196.

deduced from his explicit doctrine of God as unbegotten, eternal, incorruptible, unchangeable, creator and total otherness. His emphasis on God's ontological otherness from creation and divine incorruptibility is a strong argument for and consistent with Justin's view of God's simple unity. His emphatic descriptions of God as "incorruptible" and "totally other" leave one with strong reason to believe Justin's view of simplicity did not differ from classical theology. Since corruptibility is a necessary potential inherent in, and is consistent with, a compounded substance, it is without potential. Understanding Justin's view on simplicity in any way different from the classical position would be philosophically untenable and unfair to Justin himself. In addition, if Justin believed God was ontologically other, it would not make sense to view his doctrine of the nature of God as anything short of being simple, something which all of creation cannot ontologically claim for itself. If it could, God would not be totally other. In a similar fashion, the second-century apologist, Athenagoras, argued against the pagan notion of polytheism in his *A Plea for the Christians* by highlighting the distinction between the created order which at best could offer a compound unity (e.g., a man), which is much different from God's absolute unity. He avers:

And indeed Socrates was compounded and divided into parts, just because he was created and perishable; but God is uncreated, and, impassible, and indivisible — does not, therefore, consist of parts.²⁴

The apologists of the second and early third centuries could not have been influenced by the neo-Platonism of Plotinus, as Hasker believes, since Plotinus did not come to prominence until the mid to late third century. It is simply not necessary to charge that neo-Platonism substantially influenced the early doctrine of God; rather, the fathers' desires and primary concerns were to preserve the biblical portrait of the nature of God among believers. So, the doctrine of simplicity functioned as an apologetic to the debates and controversies confronting the church.²⁵ Later apologists, including the Nicene and post-Nicene fathers, argued as vigorously against challenges to the orthodox faith as those who came before them with very little, if any, discernible change in their core concept of God's uncompounded (*asynthetos*) nature, indicating that Plotinus was not as influential as open theism suggests.

In addition, Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202) gave an apologetic against the position of emanationalism offered by the Gnostics by positing a first cause that is:

²⁴ Athenagoras, *A Plea For Christians*, VIII, in *Ibid.*, volume 2, 132.

²⁵ F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 685.

A vast distance from those affections and passions which operate among men. He is simple, uncompounded Being, without diverse members, and altogether like, and equal to Himself, since He is wholly understanding, and wholly spirit, and wholly thought, and wholly intelligence, and wholly reason, and wholly hearing, and wholly, seeing, and wholly light, and the whole source of all that is good....²⁶

It is from Irenaeus' view of creation that his doctrine of God was developed, viewing the entire created order as distinct from its Creator, yet intimately present to and active at everything that was made. It is his response to Gnosticism that affords his doctrine of God's *simplicitas* to be clearly seen. Since the Gnostic view of God involved radical transcendence from matter and myriads of intermediary aeons or beings, God was seen as remote and unassociated with material creation. The problem, as Irenaeus viewed it, was that God was only a *part* of this comprehensive order of reality, which Gnosticism articulated as a contiguous whole with matter being the lowest and God being the highest. Thus, God is altogether disassociated from material creation, leaving the created world as a product of intermediaries and not God himself—this notion was repugnant to Irenaeus. Therefore, in order to both argue against the Gnostic idea of intermediary creation and to preserve God's ontological uniqueness, Irenaeus removes from God anything that would be found in creation, which includes mutability, materiality, divisibility, temporality and mutable passions. These descriptions would allow for God to be ontologically transcendent from the world because he is totally other, and yet this would also allow God to be the direct Creator of the world. This answered the question of his involvement and relation to it. Irenaeus appears to be unconcerned with offering a more philosophical argument beyond what scripture says. Perhaps it is because of his acceptance and awareness that an immaterial God who is simple and totally other from matter (i.e., the world) would have no problem creating and being intimately involved in the world without necessitating a change in nature.

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215) followed his predecessors on simplicity when he writes:

For on account of His greatness He is ranked as the All, and is the Father of the universe. Nor are any parts to be predicated of Him. For the One is indivisible; wherefore also it is infinite, not considered with reference to inscrutability, but with reference to its being without dimensions, and not having a limit. And therefore it is without form and name. And if we name it, we do not do so properly, terming it either the one, or the Good, or Mind, or Absolute Being, or Father, or God, or Creator, or Lord.²⁷

²⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II.13.3, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1885 [reprint edition]), 374.

²⁷ Clement, *Stromata*, V.12, in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 2, 464.

For Clement, it is God's radical transcendence and totally otherness (*totaliter aliter*) which compels him to emphasize the impossibility of describing the ineffable God with human terms or understanding his essence with finite minds. Since the nature of God has no referent by which to relate, Clement makes clear that these negative descriptions of God do not describe what God actually is; rather, it is decidedly a negative theology telling what God is not. Clement explains when he says:

We speak not as supplying His name; but for want, we use good names, in order that the mind may have these as points of support, so as not to err in other respects. For each one by itself does not express God; but altogether are indicative of the power of the omnipotent. For predicates are expressed either from what belongs to things themselves, or from their mutual relation. But none of these are admissible in reference to God.²⁸

This notion of God as "incomprehensible" may lead one to believe that Clement has divorced the Creator from his creation, resulting in placing God beyond human interaction altogether. However, this conclusion is not necessary since Clement is not addressing God's positive metaphysical nature in itself through terms such as "indivisible"; rather, he makes clear there is no created class or positive description in which God can be placed or analyzed. God is beyond the class of "unity" and "multiplicity" in a created sense as we know it. Therefore, metaphysically speaking, Clement's assertions about what God is not (non-multiple) does not preclude God's dynamism or relationship with his creatures since to be non-multiple (i.e., simple) does not mean non-relational or non-interactive. Rather, it means that God relates, knows, interacts and exists in the temporal world through the mode of *simplicitas*. This approach to God's simplicity continued through to Origen (A.D. 185-254) and into the early middle ages.

In *The Early Christian Doctrine of God*, Robert Grant describes Origen's view of simplicity as characteristic of earlier Christian theology found in the apologists and Clement.²⁹ Origen describes God's simplicity in the following way:

God, therefore, is not to be thought of as being either a body or as existing in a body, but as an uncompounded intellectual nature [*simplex intellectualis natura*], admitting within Himself no addition of any kind; so that He cannot be believed to have within Him a greater and a less, but is such that He is in all parts *Monas*, and, so to speak, *Henas*, and is the mind and source from which all intellectual nature or mind takes its beginning....Wherefore that simple and wholly intellectual nature [*natura illa simplex et tota mens*] can admit of no delay or hesitation in its movements or operations, lest the simplicity of the divine

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God*, 28.

nature should appear to be circumscribed or in some degree hampered...and that which ought to be free from all bodily intermixture, in virtue of being the one sole species of Deity, so to speak, should prove, instead of being one, to consist of many things.³⁰

There appears to be at least two reasons for Origen's view of divine simplicity. First, since God does not exist in a body and is intellectual in nature, God cannot consist of a multiplicity of parts. As such, Origen eliminates the possibility of movement, hesitation or change of any kind since this would imply a creaturely-like "hampering" within the divine operation. Secondly, Origen viewed God as a "one sole species of Deity", which implies a total otherness of the divine nature. For Origen, this meant that God stands above and beyond the metaphysical categories applied to creaturely existence. In his reply to Celsus, he says God does not "partake of 'motion' because He stands firm, and His nature is permanent....But God does not partake even of substance. For He is partaken of (by others) rather than that Himself partakes of them".³¹ Like Clement, Irenaeus and the early apologists, Origen is careful not to place God in the same ontological category as the creature by emphasizing the creature's participation in the Creator's Being rather than the reverse (Acts 17:28). To invert this distinction would essentially place God on equal footing with the anthropomorphic deities of the Greek and Roman empires, and perhaps man himself. Paul of Tarsus highlights this distinction to the Stoics and Epicureans in Athens while also illustrating the ontological implications of such a notion when he said, "Since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art or man's devising" (Acts 17:29). For Origen, man bore the *imago dei* as a different mode of being and, therefore, in this sense, man's participation in the Being of God was ontologically unidirectional³² (Gen. 1:26-28). The notion of God as the "first", "simple" and "uncompounded nature" would continue unabated in the *apophatic* works of the Cappodocian fathers such as Gregory of Nazianzen (A.D. 329-389) when he says, "To be utterly sinless belongs to God, and to the first and uncompounded nature (for simplicity is peaceful, and not subject to dissension)...but to sin is human and belongs to the Compound on earth (for

³⁰ Origen, *On First Principles*, 1.1.6, in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 9, 243-244.

³¹ Origen, *Against Celsus*, VI.64, in *Ibid.*, volume 4, 602.

³² Unidirectional, meaning that humans bear the image of God, but not that God bears the image of the human. Though *epistemologically* speaking, humans recognize simple perfections that are in creation and humans as analogously representing the nature of God. It appears that open theism has not maintained this distinction, leading them to anthropomorphic conclusions regarding the deity.

composition is the beginning of separation)".³³ Gregory of Nyssa (A.D. 335-395) describes the Godhead as "by nature simple, and that that which is simple admits of no composition....He Who is so named is without origin, and from the appellation of simple that He is free from all admixture (or composition)".³⁴ The particularly negative descriptions of God's attributes by the Cappodocians cannot be understood to affirm that God was unknowable or simply a repetition of the One of Plotinus. Rather, it afforded God a unique freedom and independence from the ontological constraints attached to the created order. In this sense then, any attempt by open theology to attach *positive* meaning to words such as "static" or "inert" when speaking of the simplicity of God, either overlooks or misunderstands the linguistic mechanism by which God is allowed to be ontologically independent from creation and act according to his own nature and will.³⁵

Augustine (A.D. 354-430) continued the tradition of simplicity first argued by the early fathers in the following way:

Wisdom is equal with the father, as we have proved above; therefore also the Holy Spirit is equal; and if equal, equal in all things, on account of the absolute simplicity which is in that substance....But if it is asked how that substance is both simple and manifold: consider, first, why the creature is manifold, but in no way really simple. And first, all that is body is composed certainly of parts; so that therein one part is greater, another less, and the whole is greater than any part....For nothing simple is changeable, but every creature is changeable.³⁶

Augustine's notion of God's uncompounded nature was an outgrowth of the scriptural testimony and his answer to the dualism that had previously entrapped him. For Augustine, as a former Manichean, the metaphysical question of the nature of God plagued his spiritual journey. This left him deeply confused and unsure of how the Manichean Good could be identified with the evil material and moral nature of Augustine himself. When he had eventually come into contact with the books of the Platonists, including those of Plotinus, he discovered that God's nature was not to be identified with material creatures as Plotinus had argued in the *Enneads*.³⁷ This being consistent with holy scriptures, he changed his view of God to include the concept of

³³ Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oration on Holy Baptism*, XL.7, in Schaff and Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 7, 36.

³⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *Answer to Eunomius*, II, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1893 [reprint edition]), 252.

³⁵ Prestige, *God In Patristic Thought*, 4.

³⁶ Augustine, *On the Trinity*, VI.5-6, in Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1887 [reprint edition]), 100-101. Also see *Ibid.*, VI.8.

³⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads*, translated by S. MacKenna (London: Faber and Faber, 1956 [2nd edition]), VI.6.13.

transcendence, which meant God was “other”. Further, deity/Good was no longer identified with creation, though God would remain relationally present giving meaning to the created world. This freed him from the notion of God’s “passive nature” being affected by evil; rather, God is viewed by Augustine as active and dynamic while being ontologically distinct from creation. This had profound affects on the Bishop of Hippo and his view of evil since evil was no longer actively threatening the Manichean concept of the passive Good. Instead, evil was reinterpreted as the separating from the Christian active Good as Plotinus has argued.³⁸ Peter Brown describes this theological paradigm shift in Augustine’s thought when he asserts:

For Augustine, Plotinus had argued, constantly and passionately, throughout his *Enneads*, that the power of the Good always maintained the initiative: on One flowed out, touching everything, moulding and giving meaning to passive matter, without itself being in any way violated or diminished. The darkest strand of the Manichean view of the world, the conviction that the power of the Good was essentially passive, that it could only suffer the violent impingement of an active and polluting force of evil, was eloquently denied by Plotinus.³⁹

After intellectually freeing himself from the Manichean cult, Augustine recognized the ontological distinction between God and himself, leading him to understand the error of his ways. He replies in this way:

I found myself to be far off from Thee, in the region of dissimilarity, as if I heard this voice of Thine from on high: ‘I am the food of strong men; grow, and thou shalt feed upon me; nor shalt thou convert me, like the food of thy flesh, into thee, but thou shalt be converted into me.’⁴⁰

There is no doubt that Augustine viewed the Platonists as a rich resource that aided him in his exodus from Manichean thought while also extolling the virtues of the scriptures over and above those of Platonic philosophy.⁴¹ This revolutionary change in Augustine’s life, which was facilitated by the scriptures and the radical transcendence and unity of the One offered in neo-Platonism, effectively helped Augustine to rid himself of the Manichean dualistic influence along with motivating him to offer a new understanding of the nature of evil.⁴² However, the open assertion that Augustine was *negatively* indoctrinated in a substantial manner by neo-

³⁸ Ibid., VI.6.12; Augustine said, “And I inquired what iniquity was, and ascertained it not to be a substance, but a perversion of the will, bent aside from Thee, O God, the Supreme Substance, towards these lower things...” (*Confessions*, VII.16.22).

³⁹ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967, 2000 [first published in London, 1967]), 90; See Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.8.15.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.10.16, in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, 109.

⁴¹ See Augustine’s criticism of Porphyry, Plotinus and the Platonists, in *City of God*, X.1-3, 26-32.

⁴² See Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI.6.12; Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.13.19; *On the Morals of the Manicheans*, V.7.

Platonism is patently false. Augustine describes the relationship between Platonism and the scriptures when he says:

And Thou, willing first to show me how Thou “resistest the proud, but givest grace unto the humble,” and by how great an act of mercy Thou hadst pointed out to men the path of humility, in that Thy “Word was made flesh” and dwelt among men,—Thou procuredst for me, by the instrumentality of one inflated with most monstrous pride, certain books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin. And therein I read, not indeed in the same words, but to the selfsame effect, enforced by many and diverse reasons, that, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’....And that the soul of man, though it ‘bears witness of the light,’ yet itself ‘is not that light;’....This I did not read there.⁴³

Here, Augustine appears to view Platonism as a philosophy that is remarkably similar in general categories. He sees Platonism through the lens of the Christian scriptures and pours Christian meaning into Platonism, not the reverse.⁴⁴ This same method is accomplished by open theism, and all modern theologians, in articulating systematic theology within the categories of neo-Platonism as flowing from the One (Theology Proper), Nous (Christology), World Soul (Pneumatology), Matter (Creation and Anthropology), Salvific introspection (Soteriology), matter’s return to the transcendent One (Personal Eschatology) and so forth. It would not be appropriate to condemn Augustine for introducing into Christianity indiscriminately philosophical or theological substance that was foreign to the scriptures any more than classical theology should charge open theism with indiscriminately embracing the philosophy of Heraclitus, Manichean and Platonic dualism, Herbert Spencer and process theism, though they use similar vocabulary and concepts to describe their view.⁴⁵ One must demonstrate *what in particular* Augustine has adopted that is foreign to the orthodox *substance* of Christianity. Since simplicity pre-dates Greek Philosophy and is a common notion within the Hebrew scriptures and Christianity, it would be a hasty generalization to impugn Augustine on this issue. It appears that Augustine viewed the Platonists as a philosophy that could “in many ways, le[a]d to the belief in God and His word. Then, to exhort me [i.e., Augustine] to the humility of Christ” as it

⁴³ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.9.13, in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, 107-108. Also see *Ibid.*, VIII.2.3.

⁴⁴ This is not to say that Augustine avoided negative influence. However, it can be said that any neo-Platonic influence on Augustine, particularly in his hermeneutic, perspective on the journey of the human soul and stress on the inward reflection has significant substantial differences from Platonism as well.

⁴⁵ In the case of process theism’s influence on open theism, it is clear that open thought has departed from the classical mainstream Christianity, and by their own admission, have substantially been influenced by process philosophy. Pinnock says, “As Augustine came to terms with ancient Greek thinking, so we are making peace with the culture of modernity” (*The Grace of God and the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989, 27). They have shown interest in the views of Hegel, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and A.N. Whitehead (*Most Moved Mover*, 142); See John B. Cobb Jr. and Clark H. Pinnock, eds., *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free Will Theists* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

fortunately did for the Bishop.⁴⁶ Therefore, Augustine's motivation for his doctrine of simplicity could be more appropriately identified as an outgrowth of his desire to solve his own spiritual and metaphysical dilemmas and to offer a coherent theology of God that was free from Manichean dualism. This theology sufficiently answered many of the tenets of neo-Platonism that happened to be similar in some respects to the Christian worldview (e.g., transcendence and evil as separating from the Good).

This unified voice regarding divine simplicity would continue unabated through the high middle ages and is discovered in the theology of Anselm of Canterbury (A.D. 1033-1109). For Anselm, God's simple nature flowed from his belief that One exists as that than which a greater cannot be thought (*id quo maius cogitari nequit*).⁴⁷ This apophatic expression entailed that God not only is numerically one, but that his nature also existed without any multiplicity whatsoever, remaining ontologically and qualitatively one and totally ontologically other from the world. Of course, this led Anselm to work out how the apparent multiple attributes of God could be understood as representing the eternal oneness of the divine nature. He explains:

How then, Lord, are You all these things? Are they parts of You, or rather, is each one of these wholly what You are? For whatever is made up of parts is not absolutely one, but in a sense many and other than itself, and it can be broken up either actually or by the mind—all of which things are foreign to You, than whom nothing better can be thought. Therefore, there are no parts in You, Lord; neither are You many, but You are so much one and the same with Yourself that in nothing are you dissimilar with Yourself. Indeed You are unity itself not divisible by any mind. Life and wisdom and the other [attributes], then, are not parts of You, but all are one and each one of them is wholly what You are and what all the others are. Since, then, neither You nor Your eternity which You are have parts, no part of You or of Your eternity is anywhere or at any time, but You exist as a whole everywhere and Your eternity exists as a whole always.⁴⁸

Anselm viewed the attributes of God as multiple descriptions of the oneness of his Being. This was God's gracious linguistic accommodation to finite minds who cannot possibly understand the simple divine nature in one glance. The implications associated with a compounded God troubled Anselm, prompting him to write:

Since, then, the supreme nature is not composite at all, and yet really is all those good things, it is necessary that all those good things are not many, but one. So any one of them is the same thing as all of them (the same thing as all together and as each individually). So to call the supreme nature 'justice' or 'essence'

⁴⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.2.3, in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, 117. In the same passage Augustine is congratulated by Simplicianus for not falling into the error of other philosophers who are characterized by "fallacies" and "deceit".

⁴⁷ *Proslogion* 15, further supports this apophatic expression where it states God is "a being greater than can be conceived" (*maius quam cogitari posit*), or as the Latin asserts "greater than every possible object of thought".

⁴⁸ Anselm, *Proslogion*, 18, in Brian Davies and G.R. Evans, eds, *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 98.

signifies the same thing as the others (together and individually). So whatever is predicated of the supreme substance with respect to essence is one single thing. And just so, therefore, whatever the supreme substance is, it is with respect to essence, in one and the same way and respect.⁴⁹

Anselm never departed from his belief that God was simple since to do so would necessarily undermine his staunch belief that God was the most ultimate that could be conceived. Perhaps this is why he placed such great emphasis on not only the simple substance of God, but also the conceptual-philosophical integrity of the framework supporting such a notion as the non-multiple.

By the thirteenth century, Aquinas would argue that all composition is finite, divided, contingent and susceptible to the ravishes of decomposition, which when applied to God, reduces the ontological status of his nature to a created effect that is not befitting to the *prima causa* of all being.⁵⁰ Thomas presents his case for God's divine simplicity in the *Summa Theologica* I.3 and *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.18, where in a slightly different arrangement, he comes to the same conclusion that God is *not* composed. The different order of dealing with the question may emphasize the manner in which Thomas is proceeding to demonstrate divine simplicity. In the latter work, the question of whether God is a body comes two chapters after dealing with whether there is composition in God. However, in the former work, the body comes first which may indicate as Leo Elders suggests, that "in the *S.Th.* Aquinas follows a more inductive method and proceeds along the *via remotionis* starting with the denial of cruder misconceptions about God".⁵¹ The "way of remotion" is the method by which Aquinas proceeds to carry out his systematic approach in effort to obtain knowledge of God, and while believing we cannot know fully *what God is* by our own intellect, we are able to have some knowledge of *what God is not* (Deut. 29:29).⁵² In this his third question on divine *simplicitas*, Aquinas proceeds to our knowledge of God through the systematic *denying* of what is not ontologically fitting to a First Cause who exists as the very nature of Being Itself (*ipsum esse*). He had shown this earlier in his second question pertaining to God's existence. Thomas writes, "Now it can be shown how God is not, by denying of Him whatever is opposed to the idea of Him—viz., composition, motion and the like".⁵³ After proceeding through each of the eight questions that follow, his answer to whether

⁴⁹ Anselm, *Monologion*, 17, in *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.3.1-7; *On the Power of God*, 7.1.

⁵¹ Leo J. Elders, *The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1990) 149.

⁵² Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.14. Modern theology has challenged Thomas' way of negation claiming it to be nearer to agnosticism. However, I will argue this is not the case.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, I.3. Introduction.

God is composed is an emphatic “no”. Aquinas enumerates five arguments why God cannot have composition and is therefore absolutely simple:

The absolute simplicity of God may be shown in many ways. First...there is neither composition of quantitative parts in God, since He is not a body; nor composition of form and matter; nor does His nature differ from His *suppositum*; nor His essence from His existence; neither is there in Him composition of genus and difference, nor of subject and accident....Secondly, because every composite is posterior to its component parts, and is dependent on them; but God is the first being....Thirdly, because every composite has a cause, for things in themselves different cannot unite unless something causes them to unite. But God is uncaused...since he is the first efficient cause. Fourthly, because in every composite there must be potentiality and actuality; but this does not apply to God; for either one of the parts actuates another, or at least all the parts are potential to the whole. Fifthly, because nothing composite can be predicated of any single one of its parts. And this is evident in a whole made up of dissimilar parts; for no part of a man is a man, nor any of the parts of a foot, a foot. But in wholes made up of similar parts...certain things are predicable of the whole which cannot be predicated of any of the parts; for instance, if the whole volume of water is two cubits, no part of it can be two cubits. Thus is every composite there is something which is not it itself.⁵⁴

Therefore, simplicity and unity can only be found in God as the First Being and cause of all other beings. Here, it is evident that Thomas rejects composition based on six formidable truths, which can be reduced to negative statements intended to distinguish God from the created order: 1) As First Cause, God *cannot* be composed since parts imply multiplicity which implies prior causality; 2) God’s Being is *not* posterior nor dependent on parts; 3) God is *not* caused as the First Cause since he is the cause of all other composites; 4) God is *not* in potential as all composites are; 5) God does *not* lack any Being; and 6) God’s essence does *not* differ from his existence. It is this final ontological claim (i.e., essence and existence are identical in God) that brings the doctrine of simplicity to its height of explanation and definition in the orthodox church and clearly explains what the doctrine of simplicity is. It is the coincidence in God of essence and existence that implies God must exist *necessarily*. If God were contingent, he himself would require an explanation and would not then differ in ontological kind from his creation. Aquinas’ negative summary has led some, like Pinnock and Hasker, to question the doctrine’s intelligibility.⁵⁵ However, negation always implies prior positive knowledge, especially that of God’s existence as Primary Being and as the First Cause of all other things. This is crucial to understanding what Thomas is arguing, which is namely that we can know of God’s *simplicitas*

⁵⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.3.7; See *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.18.1-8; I.19-27.

⁵⁵ If Pinnock and Hasker do not find the doctrine of simplicity intelligible, they have no grounds on which to deny it since they cannot argue against that which they do not understand. If they mean it is illogical and contradictory, what follows in this chapter will demonstrate that the contradiction rests with the notion of a “dipolar” composite being as First Necessary Cause of all other composite beings.

through “remotion” as articulated through employing the language of negation (e.g., im-mutable, in-finite, a-temporal, im-passible).⁵⁶ That is to say, what can be known of God’s simplicity is gained through *indirect* and *negative statements* based on God’s status as the First Being who is the Cause of the created world (Rom. 1:19-21). This means that there are necessary truths discoverable and attributable to God by way of recognizing the intelligible relationship between God as First Cause and the composite effect. To underestimate this point in Thomas’ thought would be to miss the very medium through which positive knowledge may be obtained, thus avoiding the charge of agnosticism and “unintelligibility” of the doctrine. Thomas addresses this crucial component in his attempt to discover how God is known by us:

Our natural knowledge begins from sense. Hence our natural knowledge can go as far as it can be led by sensible things....But because they are His effects and depend on their cause, we can be led from them so far as to know of God *whether He exists*, and to know of Him what must necessarily belong to Him, as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by Him.⁵⁷

The knowledge of God is “indirect” in the sense that what we know of God is directly mediated by the senses through our observations of the created world. The knowledge of these effects should not be divorced from God, which unfortunately is often the case in an attempt to demonstrate transcendence by appropriating *apophatic* language, since he is *in* the effects as their cause.⁵⁸ Therefore, as Rudi Te Velde affirms, “One may say that the negation is part of the intelligible constitution of the cause as knowable from its presence in the effects”.⁵⁹ However, it must be made clear in what way the cause and effect are related, lest one adopt a pantheism or new form of idolatry. God is in his effects by way of “likeness”, just as a painting resembles the painter and a sculpture resembles the sculptor. This does not mean these effects *look* like their causes, but that these effects, say a painting or sculpture, for example, reflect something of the character or ‘style’ of their causes. It reflects the painter’s abilities, training, desires, talents and so on. The resemblance is in no way univocal, but neither is it inaccurate. This means that creation—the theological doctrine of creation—is part of the divine revelation. The resemblance between cause and effect is, in the end, analogical rather than univocal (i.e., an

⁵⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.14.

⁵⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.12.12.

⁵⁸ Open theism seems to miss this crucial point regarding *apophatic* theology in which they overemphasize the transcendence factor to the extent they ignore the immanence as seen in the cause and effect relationship.

⁵⁹ Rudi Te Velde, *Aquinas On God: The ‘Divine Science’ of the Summa Theologica* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2006), 75.

analogical understanding of God-talk is itself a doctrine of creation). Hence, the classical view of God has never claimed that since the world is composite and temporal, God must therefore be composite and temporal. Rather, we claim that composition and time are analogues of unity and eternity. Though the nature of the analogy can be contested, the God-creation relation is certainly not (as Duns Scotus) univocal. And since the composition inherent in the effect carries with it the intrinsic nature of being posterior to its parts, contingent and dependent, it must rely for its being on an uncaused cause that is itself prior, simple, necessary and non-contingent.⁶⁰ This means that all characteristics of composition and dependency must be negated from God as a direct result of its divided presence in the effect, lest we include God in the very ontological make-up of the created environment. In Aquinas' words:

In consideration of the divine substance we cannot take a *what* as a genus; nor can we derive the distinction of God from other things by differences affirmed of God. For this reason, we must derive the distinction of God from other beings by means of negative differences. And just as among affirmative differences one contracts the other, so one negative difference is contracted by another that makes it to differ from many things.⁶¹

Of course Thomas is emphasizing the necessity of correctly directing our reasoning from effect to cause, and though cause is prior to the effect in the order of being, one's discovery must be from the bottom-up since the differences between cause and effect are found only in the effects themselves. However, one must also remember that being is *ontologically* prior to knowing since what is known must first have real being, while knowing is *epistemologically* prior to being since an evaluation of the data is necessary before reaching any conclusion about the being that is known.

This examination of divine simplicity has served as a basis for an examination of God's timeless eternity and immutability. For it is only possible that God is eternal and immutable on the basis that he is first simple. Therefore, I will now turn my attention to the patristic and medieval witness of this simple God as he relates to time in both extrinsic and intrinsic ways.

On God's Eternality and Relation to Time: The Patristic and Medieval Consensus. From the earliest writings of the patristic fathers, the concept of God's timeless nature and his real relation with and to humankind dominated the thinking of the church. In the Syriac version of his epistle to Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, Ignatius of Antioch (c. A.D. 30-110/117),

⁶⁰ Ibid., 78.

⁶¹ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.14.3.

encourages him to stand fast in the truth despite persecution by discerning the times and looking “for Him that is above the times, Him who has no times, Him who is invisible...Him who is impassible”.⁶² Moreover, in his warning to the Ephesian church to beware of false teachers he declares, “We have also as a Physician the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also man, of Mary the virgin”.⁶³

Like those who came before him, Irenaeus understood God as beyond the categories and terms applied to the created order. Despite a lack of clear discourse on the nature of time and eternity, it is certainly clear that for him, God was “uncreated, both without beginning or end”, and as such, the creation “must necessarily in all respects have a different term [applied...]”.⁶⁴ It appears the driving force behind Irenaeus’ claims was his commitment to the scriptures and his refutation of the Gnostic notion that God was somehow distant from creation. Irenaeus sought to link God with and to his creation so as not to present God as uninvolved and aloof, while simultaneously offering a paradigm that maintained his ontological distinction from creation. One can deduce Irenaeus’ view of eternity from his vivid descriptions of the nature of God as “being truly and for ever the same, and always remaining the same unchangeable Being”.⁶⁵ This concept of God is set in striking contrast from the created order that “continues through a long course of time...inasmuch as all things that have been made had a beginning when they were formed...”.⁶⁶ Therefore, if God is the first, uncreated and unchanging Being, and if creation is created and undergoes change in time, and if God is ontologically unlike anything else, it seems Irenaeus cannot mean anything but timeless eternity when describing God in these terms. For Irenaeus, any description that entails successive moments in God would not fit the God who created all and stands above the time-space-matter domain as transcendent deity. This way of describing God in contrast to creation continued as his pattern in his later arguments to the Gnostics who supposed God could change. He elucidates, “For they [Gnostics] do not know what God is, but they imagine that He sits after the fashion of a man, and is contained within

⁶² Ignatius, *Epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp* [Syriac Version], III, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1885 [reprint edition]), 99.

⁶³ Ignatius, *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians*, VII, in *Ibid.*, 52. The translator notes that the phrase “before time began” can also be translated “before the ages”.

⁶⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III.8.3, in *Ibid.*, 422.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, II.34.2, in *Ibid.*, 411.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, II.34.3, in *Ibid.*

bounds, but does not contain”.⁶⁷ Though indirect, Irenaeus may be viewing eternity as encompassing or “containing” time, which is consistent with the orthodox view of God’s foreknowledge, which sees or “contains” all future events of time in one eternal present whole. And if timeless eternity is essentially a “whole” ever-present now, then it would be ontologically distinct and prior to temporal succession in which all creation participates, which consists of temporal parts—past, present and future.

As far as Clement of Alexandria is concerned, he held that the ineffable God is above the created temporal order and is the first-cause of all that is. Therefore, God is described as the “Father of the universe”.⁶⁸ In the same passage, Clement continues to deny of God the many necessary prerequisites for temporality including potentiality, divisibility, number, parts, limit, dimension, genus and species.⁶⁹ Furthermore, in the *Stromata*, he argues against the conceptual originality of the pagan philosophers, declaring they have borrowed from the early Hebrews and the scriptures when they speak truth, thus making them unaware by natural reason of the timeless benevolent nature of God. Clement states:

It is then now clear to us, from what has been said, that the beneficence of God is eternal, and that, from an unbeginning principle, equal natural righteousness reached all, according to the worth of each several race, — never having had a beginning . For God did not make a beginning of being Lord and Good, being always what He is. Nor will he ever cease to do good, although he bring all things to an end.⁷⁰

Though Clement pushed the limits of negative descriptions of God, he was careful to ensure that our understanding of the ineffable remained in view of a God who is good and cares for man. In his *Exhortation to the Heathen*, Clement ensures that whatever the heathen correctly know of God is attributable to divine inspiration, and therefore, he identifies God as one who possesses an eternal existence and perspective when he declares:

For He [God] can by no means be expressed. Well done, Plato! Thou hast touched on the truth. But do not flag. Undertake with me the inquiry respecting the Good. For into all men whatever, especially those who are occupied with intellectual pursuits, a certain divine effluence has been instilled; wherefore, though reluctantly, they confess that God is one, indestructible unbegotten, and that somewhere above in the tracts of heaven, in His own peculiar appropriate eminence, whence He surveys all things, He has an existence true and eternal.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ibid., IV.3.1, in Ibid., 465.

⁶⁸ Clement, *Stromata*, V.12, in Ibid., volume 2, 464.

⁶⁹ Ibid., in Ibid., 463-464.

⁷⁰ Ibid., V.14, in Ibid., 476.

⁷¹ Clement, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, VI, in Ibid., 191.

Because Clement viewed God as without beginning or end, his descriptions necessitated a unique ontological standing in which negative modifiers were predicable of God. It does not appear that Clement would entertain the openness concept of “temporally everlasting” when speaking of an eternal God since this would depart from a long-standing Greek tradition that viewed matter as a temporal unbegotten. The Greek notion appears to make a radical distinction between temporal unbegotten matter, which is subject to successive moments, motion, rest and change and the eternal unbegotten immaterial being, which is not subject to successive moments, change, motion or rest. For Parmenides, being was simple, immaterial, unchanging, univocal and, therefore, timeless and changeless. Moreover, Plato was careful to distinguish the eternal domain known as the *aion* in which the immaterial Forms changelessly endured and the domain of *chronos* where unbegotten matter was characterized by successive moments, rest and change. For Aristotle, the distinction between time, matter and change, did not eliminate the symmetry between them, nor did he view change, motion or rest as consistent with timelessness. Therefore, whatever Greek tradition one places Clement into, it would appear he meant “timeless” and “changeless” when speaking of the “eternal” God; otherwise, this point would not seem to find a proper fit with his “totally other” view of the divine.

Contemporaries, Cyril of Jerusalem (c. A.D. 315-387) and Hilary of Potiers (c. A.D. 315-367) offered similar statements regarding the Godhead, and in particular Christ himself, which couched deity in terms of timeless eternity. Cyril says:

First then let there be laid as a foundation in your soul the doctrine concerning God; that God is One, alone unbegotten, without beginning, change, or variation; neither begotten of another, nor having another to succeed Him in His life; who neither began to live in time, nor endeth ever.⁷²

Again Cyril asserts of the eternal Christ:

Believe also in the Son of God, One and Only, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was begotten God of God, begotten Life of Life, begotten Light of Light, Who is in all things like to Him that begat, Who received not His being in time, but was before all ages eternally and incomprehensibly begotten of the Father... Who sitteth on the right hand of the Father before all ages.⁷³

Cyril continues to clarify the timeless eternity of Christ through the nature of Christ’s generation when he writes:

⁷² Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, IV.4, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 7, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1894 [reprint edition]), 20.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, IV.7, in *Ibid.*, 20-21.

For He is the Son of David *at the end of the ages*, but the Son of God BEFORE ALL AGES, without beginning. The one, which before He had not, He received; but the other, which He hath, He hath eternally as begotten of the Father. Two fathers He hath: one David, according to the flesh, and one, God, His Father in a Divine manner. As the Son of David, He is subject to time, and to handling, and to genealogical descent: but as Son according to the Godhead, He is subject neither to time nor to place, nor to genealogical descent: for *His generation who shall declare? God is a spirit*; He who is a spirit hath spiritually begotten, as being incorporeal, and inscrutable and incomprehensible generation. The Son Himself says of the Father, *The Lord said unto Me, Thou art My Son, to-day have I begotten Thee*. Now this *to-day* is not recent, but eternal: a timeless *to-day*, before all ages.⁷⁴

Cyril's descriptions of the natures of God and Christ leave the reader with little doubt that he distinguished between what is timelessly eternal and what was subject to time. Cyril makes clear that the weight of evidence placing God beyond temporal place and time is found in the *radical distinction* between creaturely modes of generation and being and God's mode of generation and Being.⁷⁵ This, of course, reduces the importance of understanding the precise meaning held by the early fathers and the Greeks of the "nature" of time in order to solve the problem of whether timeless eternity is rightly applied to the divine nature. It is clear that this simple distinction eliminates the possibility of God's nature being temporal in any creaturely sense of the word. Whatever God's mode of being may be in relation to time, it may not include or be applied to God any temporal category known to man such as succession, moments, change, before, after or the like. It is precisely here that the open view of God's mode and nature of being does not offer or explain how God's "temporally everlasting" mode is any different than creaturely time and modes of being. At the same time, open theism ignores the preponderance of patristic evidence that clearly makes a distinction between modes associated with the temporal creature and the eternal Creator, regardless of one's notion of the nature of time. Simply to say that God is "temporally everlasting" does not contribute anything novel to the notion of time or eternity; rather, it is simply elongating creaturely time so it never begins or ends, which is foreign to patristic thought and biblical revelation. Therefore, the openness view offers no ontological difference between man's time and "God's time". For it would not suffice for open theologians to argue that the Greek notion of time has infected the church view of God's eternity since it is not the nature of time that is in question as much as the radical ontological distinction the fathers made between Creator and creature. Hilary confirms the idea of Christ's timeless existence as he elucidates the distinction between the "Begotten" and "Unbegotten" God:

⁷⁴ Ibid., XI.5, in Ibid., 65.

⁷⁵ The radical distinction between temporal succession and timeless eternity is made throughout the patristic witness and the early Greek writings of Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, and others.

The birth, therefore, does not constitute His [Christ] nature inferior, for He is in the form of God, as being born of God. And though by their very signification, ‘Unbegotten’ and ‘Begotten’ seem to be opposed, yet the begotten cannot be excluded from the nature of the Unbegotten, for there is none other from whom He could derive His substance....He has received from the Unbegotten God the nature of divinity. Thus faith confesses the eternity of the Only-begotten God, though it can give no meaning to begetting or beginning in His case. His nature forbids us to say that He ever began to be, for His birth lies beyond the beginnings of time. But while we confess existent before all ages we do not hesitate to pronounce him born in timeless eternity, for we believe His birth, though we know it never had a beginning.⁷⁶

There are several noticeable features in Hilary’s explanation. First, he appears to view all “beginnings”, even the “ages”, as subject to time, and that time is attached to that which has a beginning. In addition, unlike the Greeks, Hilary seems to classify “unbegotten” as necessarily remaining unmolested by and beyond the scope and ravishes of time.⁷⁷ Second, Hilary’s statement of “timeless eternity” is set in striking contrast to the Greek concept of “eternal time” present in Plato’s concept of eternal changing matter. Just as the Greeks posited, the early church was in full agreement that there is a distinction between what changes and is in time, and that which did not change and is above the categories and descriptions associated with time. Hilary sets God apart from the notion of time when he avers:

But the voice of God, our instruction in true wisdom, speaks what is perfect, and expresses the absolute truth, when it teaches that itself is prior not merely to things of time, but even to things infinite. For when the heaven was being prepared, it was present with God. Is the preparation of the heaven an act of God within time; so that an impulse of thought suddenly surprised His mind, as though it had been previously dull and inert, and after the fashion of men He sought for materials and instruments for fashioning the heaven? Nay, the prophet’s conception of the working of God is far different.⁷⁸

The notion of exhaustive foreknowledge and ontological priority to the “things of time” directly challenges the open concept that describes God as bound to temporal modes of existence. Hilary’s introduction of cause and effect can be seen in the phrase “an impulse of thought that suddenly surprised His mind”, appears to imply that effects cannot be a part of what an eternal being (i.e., God) can experience, especially as a result of causality originating from the temporal world.

⁷⁶ Hilary of Potiers, *On the Trinity*, IX.57, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 9 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1899 [reprint edition]), 175.

⁷⁷ For the Greeks, some things which did not have a beginning (e.g., matter), are not necessarily removed from time, changes and succession. Hilary’s distinction follows in a long tradition that characterized the patristic witness in making the distinction between time and eternity and that which begotten and unbegotten. With this in view, the open notion of God as “temporally everlasting” is more in line with Greek dualism rather than early and medieval Christian thought. See Hilary, *On the Trinity*, I.13, in *Ibid.*, 44, where he declares Christ is “immortal” and “eternal”.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, XII.39, in *Ibid.*, 227-228. Hilary says, “But this fisherman of mine [the Son], unlettered and unread, is untrammelled by time, undaunted by its immensity; he pierces beyond the beginning. For his *was* has no limit of time and no commencement; the uncreated Word *was in the beginning*” (*Ibid.*, II.13, in *Ibid.*, 56).

The medieval witness to God's atemporal Being followed along the same lines as earlier Greek thinking, the patristic fathers and the notion of time held by Plotinus. According to Plotinus, that which experiences time also changes, and therefore, time is "the life of the soul in a movement of passage from one way of life to another".⁷⁹ Eternity then, for Plotinus, is a life that abides in the same and always has the all present to it".⁸⁰ It is this view of time and eternity that contributed to Augustine's clear expression of God's relation to time. Augustine argued extensively that both the created world and time had one beginning since change and motion are unique to creation. Therefore, he completely discarded the idea that time existed before creation.⁸¹ Augustine declares:

For if eternity and time are rightly distinguished by this, that time does not exist without some movement and transition, while in eternity there is no change, who does not see that there could have been no time had not some creature had been made, which by some motion could give birth to change, —the various parts of which motion and change, as they cannot be simultaneous, succeed one another,—and thus, in these shorter or longer intervals of duration, time would begin?⁸²

For Augustine, since God did not change, it was impossible for there to be time before the temporal world was created. The nagging question for modern theology then becomes clear: If time exists before creation, what is the mode or mechanism by which it is measured? If the mechanism is change and motion, how would this differ from creaturely time, which also appears to be measured by this kind of transition? If it is not change and motion of some sort, what mechanism accounts for time without change or transition? If time in a creaturely sense applies to God, how then is God ontologically other than His creation? Augustine answers these questions:

God, in whose eternity is no change at all, is the Creator and Ordainer of time, I do not see how He can be said to have created the world after spaces of time had elapsed, unless it be said that prior to the world there was some creature by whose movement time could pass....Then assuredly the world was made, not in time, but simultaneously with time.⁸³

Augustine viewed time as a creation itself (Heb. 1:2), setting it apart from eternity which was ontologically different. He says:

⁷⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, translated by A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: 1980), volume 3, 3.7.11.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, volume 3, 3.7.3.

⁸¹ Augustine, *City of God*, XI.5, in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 2, 208.

⁸² *Ibid.*, XI.6, in *Ibid.*, volume 2, 208.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

In the eternal nothing passeth away, but that the whole is present; but no time is wholly present; and let him see that all time past is forced on by the future, and that all the future followeth from the past, and that all, both past and future, is created and issues from that which is always present.⁸⁴

One can safely assert that Augustine does not see time as motion itself,⁸⁵ nor would time exist in itself, but rather functions in “a field of relations among changeable beings, which become temporal when measured”.⁸⁶ This view of time led Augustine to view God’s mode of Being as consisting “in the excellency of an ever-present eternity” where God’s “years neither go nor come; but ours both go and come...”.⁸⁷ Immediately, we see God’s transcendent mode of *Being* in contrast to the creature’s temporal mode of *becoming*. If time involves the distension of the mind or the conscious soul for the measurement of change as Augustine argued, this would appear to be a liability for God since time would essentially be the measure of God. Thus, in some sense, one could say that change and time itself could contain or measure God. However, as Philip Turetzky correctly observes, “Time measures of motion, and the measure of something cannot be the same as what it measures”.⁸⁸ There must be a standard independent of the motion and change involved.⁸⁹ The implications of such a notion suggest that time is either the Ultimate by which all things are measured, including God, or that there exists some form of Dualism between time, motion and change on the one hand, and God on the other. Moreover, if time is the measure of God’s change, in what sense may we say that God is finite? For finitude implies border, parameters, limits and something that is quantifiable and exhaustible, which is far from any concept of God posited by Christianity at any time in its history until the arrival of contemporary theology.

The classical view of God’s relation to time owes much of its later expression to the formulations of Boethius (c. A.D. 480-524) in Book 5 of his *Consolation of Philosophy*. Emerging from his discourse on knowledge and perception is his thesis that objects are known according to the knower’s nature and not according to the nature of things known.⁹⁰ From this, he offers his analysis of the nature of eternity in order to grasp the nature of God’s knowledge.

⁸⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.11.13, in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, 167.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, XXIV.31, in *Ibid.*, 171-172.

⁸⁶ Philip Turetzky, *Time* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 63.

⁸⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, XIII.16, in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, 168; see the same passage where he says, “thou hast made all time”.

⁸⁸ Turetzky, *Time*, 63.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, translated by Joel C. Relihan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), V.6.1.

For Boethius, “Eternity is a possession of life, a possession simultaneously entire and perfect [*tota simul*], which has no end”.⁹¹ In further elaboration of eternity, he declares:

Therefore: that which grasps and possesses the entire fullness of a life that has no end at one and the same time (nothing that is to come being absent to it, nothing of what has passed having flowed away from it) is rightly held to be eternal.⁹²

In his careful treatment of eternity, Boethius makes clear there is a distinction between what Aristotle and Plato describes as the unbegotten and never-ending material world. This world passes through the flow of time (i.e., sempiternity) and the Boethian concept of eternity that possesses all of its life in an ever-present eternity without successiveness or transition. The former condition does not possess the future things, nor does it remain in possession of what is past but must experience its life in parts as it arrives with the flow of time. Unlike the former, the latter condition possesses what is future and past in simultaneity. Therefore, according to Boethius, God is truly *aeternus* (eternal), whereas, Plato and Aristotle’s material world is *perpetuus* (perpetual).⁹³ He explains the distinction:

For it is one thing to be drawn out through a life that has no end (this is what Plato assigned to the world), and quite another to have embraced the entire presentness of a life which has no end at one and the same time....⁹⁴

This is not to say there is no analogy between God’s eternity and perpetual time, since those things subject to the flow of time can only experience their own successive life in the present (i.e., now). It is easy to assume that change or motion is the very criteria that distinguishes God from the world, but it cannot be if God is beyond the categories of motion and change. Rather, it is the very thing that shows an analogy between the temporal world and divine eternity. Therefore, the movable “present” of time can be said to be a reflection or “image” of the unchanging ever-present of God’s stable and complete eternity. Nothing in time can possess all its life at once, but it nevertheless always exists in the present tense similar to God’s ever-present duration. However, and more importantly, it is not only that time is the measure of motion, but also that God’s eternal Being itself is the measure of all other being. What Boethius describes of eternity by using the words “life”, “whole”, and “simultaneous”, moves in the direction of

⁹¹ Ibid., V.6.4.

⁹² Ibid., V.6.8.

⁹³ Ibid., V.6.14.

⁹⁴ Ibid., V.6.10.

metaphysics and not simply relations. Later Aquinas viewed that which is whole and complete in simultaneity, such as God's eternal Being as pure act (*actus purus*), stands not merely above the act/potential being of creation, but as ontologically other than creation itself. In this sense, then, it is fairly simple to see eternity as directly related to simplicity (i.e., stability and unity) as the measure of temporality and multiplicity on the level of being. From these descriptions comes an ontological difference between time and eternity, making phrases like "what lies ahead" and "what has happened in the past" applicable to the temporal realm, which implies that God's eternity is beyond past, present and future. If this is not true as open theology suggests, then in what sense is God's Being and time ontologically different from the creature's being? It is clear that Boethius removes any form of identity with the temporal world from God's eternity, though allowing for an analogy, one cannot mistake his claim that the difference between time and eternity is not only one of motion and change, but also one of the nature and mode of timeless life and being itself. The classic expression of Boethius and Augustine on eternity would dominate medieval theology and be rediscovered in the works of Anselm and Aquinas.

In his prologue to the *Monologion*, Anselm (A.D. 1033-1109) reminds his readers that he has attempted to be consistent with the "Catholic Fathers" and the "learned Augustine".⁹⁵ This would seem to imply that Anselm would not substantially deviate from Augustine and Boethius on timeless eternity. Conversely, Augustinian and Boethian expositions on eternity appear to emerge from questions of knowledge and the soul, and Anselm demonstrates God's eternity from his idea of God, namely, that there is One who exists that is greater than every possible object of thought.⁹⁶ The existence of this kind of God demanded that God not be "enclosed in any way by place or time" and that temporal things are "less than that which no law of place or time constrains".⁹⁷ Anselm continues to declare the extent of God's eternal nature:

No place or time confines You but You exist everywhere and always. And because this can be said of You alone, You alone are unlimited and eternal.⁹⁸

Anselm identifies with Boethius when he claims that God's eternity has no parts and is whole:

You nor Your eternity which You are have parts, no part of You or of Your eternity is anywhere or at any time, but You exist as a whole everywhere and Your eternity exists as a whole always.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Anselm, *Monologion*, 1, in Davies and Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, 6.

⁹⁶ Anselm, *Proslogion*, 2, in *Ibid.*, 87.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13, in *Ibid.*, 94.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* Cf. *Proslogion*, in *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 18, in *Ibid.*, 98.

He continues:

You exist neither yesterday nor today nor tomorrow but are absolutely outside of time. For yesterday and today and tomorrow are completely in time; however, You, though nothing can be without You, are nevertheless not in place or time but all things are in You. For nothing contains You, but You contain all things.¹⁰⁰

Anselm viewed God as a simple and timeless being since parts are what identify the temporal world as past, present and future. Anything composed of parts is in some way other than the whole. Therefore, the totality of God's simple Being is considered truly eternal. As such, the greatness of God's Being is posited as what engulfs time and is present and active to every moment of it from his ever-present perspective. Like Augustine and Boethius, Anselm believed that God's "eternity is wholly present", while other so-called "eternal" things do not have their eternity fully present to them.¹⁰¹ Here, he distinguishes, like Boethius, the sempiternal from the timelessly eternal. Any notion of God as "temporally everlasting" would be alien to the thought of Anselm, as it would be to those "Catholic Fathers" who came before him. By the thirteenth century, Aquinas would bring the discussion of eternity to an apex.

The notion of time and eternity held by Aquinas relied on Book 4 for its expression of Aristotle's *Physics*¹⁰² and Book 5 of the *Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius.¹⁰³ For Aquinas, as it was for Aristotle, time is associated with change and motion. He states:

For since succession occurs in every movement, and one part comes after another, the fact that we reckon before and after in movement, makes us apprehend time, which is nothing else but the measure of before and after in movement.¹⁰⁴

If time is the measurement of change and motion in terms of gaining something previously unattained or losing something previously gained, then according to Aquinas, eternity can be known by its lack of change and motion. That is to say, one may "attain to the knowledge of simple things by way of compound things, so we must reach to the knowledge of eternity by means of time".¹⁰⁵ Where there is no change, he reasoned, there is no time. Thomas saw change in at least two senses: Substantial change, which is a substantial coming to be or ceasing to be,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 19, in Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 20, in Ibid., 99.

¹⁰² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.10.4.

¹⁰³ Ibid., I.10.1.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

and successive change, which is the transition from potency to act. It is through these two changing events that one can discover eternity. He states:

Thus eternity is known from two sources: first, because what is eternal is interminable—that is, has no beginning nor end...secondly, because eternity has no succession, so it has no beginning and no end.¹⁰⁶

Thus, if time is the measure of change and God undergoes no change, God must be atemporal and unchanging. There is no “history” to God’s Being, nor is God considered the highest of a class; rather, eternity transcends the nature of time altogether. God has no beginning or end, making God timelessly eternal. For whatever has a beginning or end experiences change. According to Thomas, God alone is the very essence of eternity which lacks generation and motion:

The idea of eternity follows immutability, as the idea of time follows movement...Hence, as God is supremely immutable, it supremely belongs to Him to be eternal. Nor is He eternal only; but He is His own eternity.¹⁰⁷

God is changeless, and therefore, eternal. Because God is simple, he lacks parts. All attributes are one in God, for God does not *have* these qualities, God *is* his attributes. This implies for Thomas that God’s essence is his existence, that there is no difference and, therefore, any change would be a substantial change in God which would always be for the worse. Aquinas extended his view of eternity to the knowledge and duration of God, declaring that God knows all things through the eternal nature of his Being as effects preexist in the cause by way of similitude.¹⁰⁸ He states:

God knows all contingent things not only as they are in their causes, but also as each one of them is actually in itself. And although contingent things become actual successively, nevertheless God knows contingent things not successively, as they are in their own being, as we do; but simultaneously. The reason is because His knowledge is measured by eternity, as is also His Being; and eternity being simultaneously whole, comprises all time...Hence, all things that are in time are present to God from eternity, not only because He has the types of things present within Him, as some say; but because His glance is carried from eternity over all things as they are in their presentiality. Hence it is manifest that contingent things are infallibly known by God, inasmuch as they are subject to the divine sight in their presentiality; yet they are future contingent things in relation to their own causes.¹⁰⁹

Therefore, God’s eternity, that is, his eternal mode of knowing, touches or embraces (*includit*) all times by its presence to past, present and future.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., I.10.2.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., I.14.6 ad 1.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., I.14.13.

The Open Theistic Critique of Divine Simplicity. Although both open and classical theists are in agreement that the biblical testimony presents one God in number (Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:4-6), which is opposed to polytheism, the open position distinguishes itself by introducing the notion of *composition* within the divine being. Since it is rare that open theologians directly address the topic of simplicity or engage the significant ancient and medieval texts on the subject, we are relegated to passing comments in various works.¹¹⁰ While offering a philosophical perspective on God’s open and responsive nature, William Hasker highlights the many differences between the classical and open views of God.¹¹¹ He begins by implying that “neo-Platonism, as seen in Plotinus and later on in Pseudo-Dionysius, was a powerful influence on ancient and medieval theology”.¹¹² Accordingly, these are the forces that have significantly influenced the doctrine of simplicity.¹¹³ However, “The doctrine of divine simplicity, so crucial to the classical understanding of God, has been abandoned by a strong majority of Christian philosophers, though it still has a small band of defenders”.¹¹⁴ Hasker, Pinnock et al. have challenged the very *intelligibility* of divine simplicity, identifying it as the “metaphysical taproot”, which when severed, diminishes the prospects for divine timelessness.¹¹⁵ In the clearest expression of God’s nature known among open literature pertaining to divine simplicity, Richard Rice describes the composite nature of God in this way:

The conception of God proposed here shares the process view that God’s relation to the temporal world consists in a succession of concrete experiences, rather than a single timeless perception. It, too, conceives God’s experience of the world as ongoing, rather than a once-for-all affair. It also shares with process theism the twofold analysis of God, or the ‘dipolar theism,’ described above. It conceives God as absolute and relative, necessary and contingent, eternal and temporal, changeless and changing. It attributes one element in each pair of contrasts to the appropriate aspect of God’s being—the essential divine character or the concrete divine experience.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Though the scarcity of any elaboration on simplicity is a reality, one can apprehend their position through indirect statement regarding immutability, impassibility and divine relations.

¹¹¹ Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 127.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 129.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. A “majority” of Christian philosophers may be an exaggeration; however, there has been abandonment of simplicity to some degree among modern theologians. See Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980); Nash, *The Concept of God*, 85-97.

¹¹⁵ Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 129. See Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 117, where he says the “immobility package”, which includes divine simplicity, “is not intelligible and leads to a crisis of faith”.

¹¹⁶ Rice, *God’s Foreknowledge and Man’s Free Will*, 33.

Despite its similarity and close philosophical association with process theism at this point, there are significant differences.¹¹⁷ Hasker adds that the “God-world relation is asymmetrical....The world needs God for its existence. God does not need the world for His”.¹¹⁸ Because of God’s ontological independence in the open view, unlike process theism, creation *ex-nihilo* is a central tenet,¹¹⁹ which demands a primary first cause that is ontologically separated from the created effects. Though there is certainly an aspect of God that seems consistent with the traditional position, such as God’s unchanging character, Rice makes clear that God “learns something from what transpires” in the world and, therefore, demands that God be “dependent on the world” in some sense.¹²⁰ Pinnock’s description of God draws an important distinction between the classical and open doctrine of simplicity when he claims:

The open view sees God as a self-sufficient, ontologically other Trinitarian being who voluntarily created the world out of nothing and graciously relates to it in self-limiting ways out of respect for the freedom that he bestowed on the creatures he made. We hold that God is ontologically other than the world. God does not have to relate to some other reality because he is internally social, loving and self sufficient....As an open theist, I cannot accept that God is metaphysically limited...¹²¹

The “self-limiting” nature of God is not “metaphysically” constrained since God has “voluntarily subjected himself to change”,¹²² meaning that “God’s character is stable but God is not static when it comes to associating with creation”.¹²³ Pinnock clarifies:

I would say that God is *unchanging in changeable ways*, i.e. unchangeable in essence but ever changing in the relationships of love that he values. God is characterized by changeable faithfulness and is not immutable in every respect....Thus, there is contingency in God’s experiences of the world....God has to change in accessing the knowledge of a changing world.¹²⁴

We can deduce from these statements the fundamental belief that God’s dichotomous nature entails unchanging and changing poles, respectively. Moreover, though ontologically

¹¹⁷ For the differences between process and open theism, see Cobb and Pinnock, eds., *Searching for An Adequate God*, 163-200; Ronald Nash, *Process Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987). The main difference between the two views regarding God’s ontological relation to the world is that open theism asserts that God is not ontologically dependent on the world and does not have a corporeal (physical pole) nature, whereas process theism affirms both. However, *practically*, in my view, open theism embraces a God who is ontologically dependent on the world. Rice says, “God’s experience exhibits relationality, temporality, and contingency” (Cobb and Pinnock, eds., *Searching for An Adequate God*, 184).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹¹⁹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 145.

¹²⁰ Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 16.

¹²¹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 145, 149.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 87.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

independent from creation, it is not necessary that these aspects or poles of God be bound to operate under the influence of the opposite pole. In other words, both aspects operate according to its own nature within their unique domains and spheres of influence.

The Open Theistic Critique of Divine Eternality. Open theism has challenged the traditional notion of God's timeless eternity in an effort to again preserve God's relationships and involvement with and in the world. This challenge is universally adopted by open theologians with very little variation in their articulation and rationale. For instance, William Hasker views divine timelessness as limiting God's knowledge and actions, creating an impossible environment for God to *act, know* and *respond*, particularly to prayer, within a changing earthly realm,¹²⁵ and in addition to being heavily influenced by "neo-Platonic metaphysics".¹²⁶ In his words:

In the final analysis, then, I am convinced that the Neoplatonic-Augustinian metaphysic is intimately involved in the doctrine of divine timelessness, which cannot and probably should not survive without it....I will venture the prediction that over the long haul the doctrine and the metaphysic will stand or fall together—that the theory of timelessness, if its metaphysical tap root is severed, will eventually shrivel and die.¹²⁷

In agreement, Boyd sees divine timelessness as a product of Western philosophy since the time of Plato who viewed "time and all change" as "less real and less good than the unchanging timeless realm".¹²⁸ He adds that one's view of divine *foreknowledge* is a symptom of ones view of the nature of time, especially the future.¹²⁹ Endorsing the premise that action necessarily involves change, Rice claims that, "To say God acts, therefore, means that it makes sense to use the words *before* and *after* when we talk about him".¹³⁰ Therefore, since God brings about change, he must by necessity change himself, which "thus involves divine temporality. Time is real for God".¹³¹ In agreement, Pinnock declares that "God is a temporal agent"¹³² and "experiences temporal passage, learns new facts when they occur",¹³³ yet interestingly, God is "above time in the sense that he is above finite experience and measurement of time but he is not

¹²⁵ Ibid., 128.

¹²⁶ Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 129.

¹²⁷ William Hasker, *God, Time and Foreknowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 183.

¹²⁸ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 130.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 125.

¹³⁰ Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 36.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 96.

¹³³ Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 118.

beyond ‘before and after’ or beyond sequence of events”.¹³⁴ He clarifies what it means for God to be temporal in this way:

Scripture presents God as temporally everlasting, not timelessly eternal. It depicts God planning and deliberating, acting and reacting within the temporal. God is presented as experiencing past, present, and future successively not timelessly. God is the one ‘who was and is and is to come’ (Rev. 1:4). As a person acting in the world God has temporal capacity. The Psalmist writes, ‘from everlasting to everlasting you are God’ (Ps. 90:2). Clearly God is temporally related to creatures and projects himself and his actions along a temporal path.¹³⁵

Pinnock’s rationale is clear in that “To act in time God must somehow be in time” and, therefore, “Time, in a certain sense, is a property of God.” Anything other would be contrary to scripture’s testimony of the divine who “experiences temporal duration when he enters give and take relations with us”.¹³⁶ For open theism, “temporally everlasting” means God has no beginning or end, not that he is ontologically separate from the flow of time and change in the classical sense. Nevertheless, there is some way in which God’s time is different from our time, according to Pinnock, since he “does not move from birth to death as we do and is not temporal in the way we are temporal”.¹³⁷ According to Pinnock, the temporal life of God, at least since creation, “is inside not outside time, sharing in history—past, present, and future”.¹³⁸ It is argued that classical theism lost its way when it claimed that God is outside of time.¹³⁹ This was “wrongheaded”¹⁴⁰ and led to several liabilities within classical theism:

- 1) A Timeless God could not create a temporal world and operate in it as our redeemer.
- 2) It would place in Jeopardy the notion of God as a person...If God is personal he is temporal, and if he is temporal then he is inside and not outside of time.
- 3) A timeless God could not genuinely respond, deliberate, or do many of the things the Bible says God does.
- 4) God must know what time it is now and thus not be outside of time.¹⁴¹
- 5) It would be hard to take God’s actions in time seriously if God were timeless, just as it would be hard to imagine God entering into personal relationships if he were unable to change.¹⁴²

¹³⁴ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 96.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 99.

In support of his enumeration of the liabilities inherent in classical theism's notion of divine timelessness, Pinnock summons the work of Nicholas Wolterstorff where he argues:

If God were eternal, he could not be aware, concerning any temporal event, whether it was occurring, nor aware that it will be occurring, nor could he remember that it had occurred, nor could he plan to bring it about. But all of such actions are presupposed by and are essential to, the biblical presentation of God as a redeeming God. Hence God as presented by the biblical writers as fundamentally in time.¹⁴³

Pinnock admits that God's time and its relation to our understanding of time is difficult to grasp, but whatever it may be like, it must account for the relations within creation and the Godhead itself.¹⁴⁴ Though not explicitly articulated by Pinnock, nor by open theism at large, the descriptions of God's "temporally everlasting" duration implies that Pinnock and others have adopted or closely aligned themselves with an "A-Theory" of time. This theory advocates that only the present tense actually exists, the past consists of *memories* and the future is defined as mere *possibilities*. Pinnock says, "With God, I suppose, the past would be perfectly preserved in his memory, all the realities of the present would be known to him, as would all the possibilities of the future, including events which he has promised to bring about".¹⁴⁵ For open theism, both Creator and creature know *indexically*; that is, knowledge and action are categorized as "now" and "then", or "before and after". All knowledge, events, actions and experiences are *tensed* (i.e., past, present or future) and follow a chronological and sequential flow such as *now* P is acting like Z, or back *then*, X *had been* hit with a baseball bat by Q. According to the open view, it is impossible for God to relate, experience and know the world while also remaining above or immune to temporal sequence. Simultaneously, the creature remains time-bound, existing and knowing in a world of change and time. Consequently, God and man are co-laborers, existing side-by-side and working together to create history.¹⁴⁶

Without offering a new theory on the nature of time, nor critiquing the enormous amounts of published material on the subject as this has been adequately accomplished by others,¹⁴⁷ I will confine myself to a critique of the open view of God's temporal duration with a

¹⁴³ Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," in Orlebeke and Smedes, eds., *God and the Good*, 200.

¹⁴⁴ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 99, here, Pinnock also quotes Wolterstorff as saying "God is everlasting rather than eternal" and that "there is temporal succession and flow with God's own life".

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

¹⁴⁷ I will touch on the nature of time only when it becomes necessary since it is, in my view, a secondary issue that *follows* as a created effect from the First Cause. For if the first cause (God) is *actus purus*, there is no metaphysical divine potential to be touched by time. This appears to be a commonly repeated mistake in the open

view to answering Nelson Pike's question, "What reason is there for thinking that the doctrine of God's timelessness should have a place in a system of Christian theology?"¹⁴⁸ I will argue that the open view of God's "temporally everlasting" duration offers no ontological distinction between the creature and Creator and fails to justify how such a paradigm offers an advance in divine-temporal interaction over the classical alternative, which is in line with traditional Christianity as presented by Augustine, Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas.¹⁴⁹

An Evaluation of Open Theism's Doctrine of Divine Contingency. Pinnock, Hasker, Boyd and Rice offer no apologetic or mechanism to explain how these two poles avoid the traditional criticism applied to ontological dualism and panentheism.¹⁵⁰ Further, God's interaction between changing and unchanging aspects within the divine being itself and subsequently, its dipolar relation to the world is simply left by open theism unexplained. The initial historical and theological criticisms are obvious.

First, dipolar theism is unorthodox and foreign to the history of orthodox Christianity, rising to prominence more recently in the philosophy of modern process theism under the influence of Alfred North Whitehead¹⁵¹ and Charles Hartshorne.¹⁵² The similarities with process thought are striking as developed in John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin's description of Hartshorne's process concept of God as:

debate, with most attempting to discover the nature of God through their respective view of time instead of discovering time through what must be true about the nature of God. See the excellent treatments on time by David Cockburn, *Other Times: Philosophical Perspectives on Past, Present and Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Richard M. Gale, ed., *The Philosophy of Time: A Collection of Essays* (New Jersey/Sussex: Humanities Press/Harvester Press, 1968); Ganssle, *God and Time: Four Views*; Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); J.M.E. McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, volume 2 (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1927); Alan G. Padgett, *God, Eternity, and the Nature of Time* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1992); Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1970); J.J.C. Smart, ed., *Problems of Space and Time* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964); Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum* (London: Duckworth, 1983); Philip Turetzky, *Time* (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁴⁸ Pike, *God and Timelessness*, 190.

¹⁴⁹ Since any discussion of the nature of time, though a related topic, is essentially different from discussions of whether or not God experiences time in the same manner as creatures, what follows will be limited to the core disagreement between open and classical scholars, namely, the possibility of God's timeless nature and its relation to the temporal world as traditionally defined by orthodox Christianity.

¹⁵⁰ See criticism by H.P. Owen, *The Christian Knowledge of God* (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1969); Gruenler, *The Inexhaustible God: Biblical Faith and the Challenge of Process Theism*.

¹⁵¹ See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: MacMillan, 1929), 523-524, where he describes the two sides of God as "dipolar" when he says the "conceptual nature" of God is *unchanged*, but God's "derivative nature" is consequent to the creative advance of the world.

¹⁵² See John Cobb, Jr., *The Process Perspective: Frequently Asked Questions About Process Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003); Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1964); Whitehead, *Process and Reality; Religion in the Making; Adventures in Ideas*; Cobb and Pinnock, eds., *Searching for an Adequate God*.

Process theism is sometimes called “dipolar theism,” in contrast to traditional theism with its doctrine of divine simplicity. For Charles Hartshorne, the two “poles” or aspects of God are the abstract essence of God, on the one hand, and God’s concrete actuality on the other. The abstract essence is eternal, absolute, independent, unchangeable. It includes those abstract attributes of deity which characterize the divine existence at every moment.¹⁵³

Regarding Hartshorne’s view of divine (fore)knowledge,

To say that God is omniscient means that in every moment of the divine life God knows everything which is knowable at that time. The concrete actuality is temporal, relative, dependent, and constantly changing. In each moment of God’s life there are new, unforeseen happenings in the world which only then have become knowable. Hence, God’s concrete knowledge is dependent upon the decisions made by the worldly actualities. God’s knowledge is always relativized by, in the sense of internally related to, the world.¹⁵⁴

Furthermore, the similarities shared with the open view of divine passibility and God’s responsive love are described as:

The responsiveness includes a sympathetic feeling with the worldly beings, all of whom have feelings. Hence, it is not merely the content of God’s knowledge which is dependent, but God’s own emotional state. God enjoys our enjoyments, and suffers with our sufferings. This is the kind of responsiveness which is truly divine and belongs to the very nature of perfection.... Upon this basis, Christian agape can come to have the element of sympathy, of compassion for the present situation of others, which it should have had all along.¹⁵⁵

To be certain, there are significant points at which the open concept of God is distinct and even rejects many tenets of process thought, such as God’s material nature, full ontological dependency on the world and God co-relative existence *with* the world.

In addition, it appears that open theism has overemphasized the order and direction of knowing, instead of being, as occupying first priority. This most certainly has influenced their concept of the nature of God instead of appropriating, as Thomas does, necessary ontological truths that follow from a Being that exists as the Primary First Cause.¹⁵⁶ The implications of

¹⁵³ John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 47. For further similarities see Cobb and Pinnock, eds., *Searching for an Adequate God*. See Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1948), 15, where he says, “there must be two really distinct aspects of the divine being, supposing God to exist, both of which cannot be necessary, although one of them may be so. It is this two—aspect doctrine which, as I hope to show solves the traditional theistic paradoxes”.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁵⁶ This, in my estimation, is a result of abandoning substance metaphysics in favor of “relational metaphysics”. Pinnock says, “The primary category in Christianity is person not substance” and “As an open theist, I cannot accept that God is metaphysically limited”. Apparently, Pinnock sees metaphysical necessity in God as contrary to God’s commitment to a free world, these “commitments” are what has constrain God’s actions (*Most*

inverting the order of knowing with the order of being are metaphysically devastating and have led to ultra anthropomorphic descriptions of God, which are more inherent to creaturely similarities than of their differences. This is, in my estimation, due to their deprecation of natural theology, philosophy and the abandonment of proper analogy in their zeal to preserve the sacred Creator-creature relations. Therefore, open theology has concluded that God must ultimately be in some sense temporal, changing, contingent, divided and vulnerable in order to relate to a temporal and changing world. Without negating from God the ontological differences between the First Cause and temporal effect, one is left mired in anthropomorphic religion. Open theism's fundamental mistake, then, is the failure to negate what is ontologically true of an effect's (i.e. creature's) dependent and contingent mode of being from the Cause's (i.e. God's) independent and necessary mode of Being, which appears to be the same flawed approach held by process theism under Whitehead and Hartshorne.¹⁵⁷ Within the intelligible relationship between First Cause and effect and the subsequent negation from the First Cause, what is inherently creaturely (in this case division and composition), rests the notion of divine perfection. That is to say, God ontologically exemplifies in his very Being, and according to his own mode of being in the most perfect and simple way, the qualities of the creature. Therefore, what we indirectly know of God is based in prior positive knowledge deduced directly from the relationship between the cause and effect and through God's distinct existence as the First Being and Primary Cause. Simplicity must necessarily follow from this kind of Being. Therefore, viewing simplicity as a divine "defect" fails to recognize the fundamental ontological difference between effects and their cause. Open proponents may argue that the implications of such logic are detrimental to the Christian doctrine of God as a whole since the effect also possesses knowledge, will, being and so forth, which are also inherent in God's Being. Should we negate these attributes from God's nature as classicalists do with composition? The classical response has always been that one's negation ought to be limited to the divided, contingent, dependent, changing and temporal aspects inherent in the effect, which cannot necessarily be found in the First Efficient Cause. That is, we negate from God any form of creaturely mode of being, such as composition, temporality, dependence, contingency, division and changing form of

Moved Mover, 79, 149). Pinnock adds, "The open view shares something with process thought: what we want to overcome is the tilt towards the metaphysic of being and attain a metaphysic of becoming" (*Most Moved Mover*, 142).

¹⁵⁷ See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 523-524, where he says, "analogously to all actual entities, the nature of God is dipolar".

knowledge, will and being, since this mode of being cannot be attributed to a First Cause who is himself Being.

Aquinas explains why simplicity is not adverse in God when he said it “is not in any way part of what is caused by Him; and that creatures are not removed from Him by reason of any defect on His part, but because He superexceeds them all”.¹⁵⁸ That is, excess is not a defect, but rather a perfection since simplicity exists in the Cause in a way that is not limited as it is in the effect. David Burrell makes an important corollary in Thomas’ thought on this “superexceeding” way of God:

Aquinas is reminding us that if the concrete form [i.e., of wisdom] connotes a subsistent thing’s being wise, it also expresses a note of possession which suggests achievement (and hence implies potentiality). So we must employ the complementary abstract form to show we know that God would not be wise in that way. His way of being wise would rather be to be wisdom itself: to be the norm rather than the normed.¹⁵⁹

The implication of Burrell’s statement is at once striking since essentially, if the effect owes its very being to the First Cause, and in this case Burrell uses “wisdom”, it must be viewed as essentialized in God as wisdom itself. Not only is this important for our understanding of God as perfect simple Being, but for understanding that he *is* necessarily whatever he “has”. This understanding has, for the most part, been illusive to open theology, contributing to their failure in making the necessary metaphysical conversion that distinguishes creatures who *have* being from God who *is* Being.¹⁶⁰ Open theism should be cautioned not to view negative, transcendent and abstract language as implying that God is an “abstract being” with no determinate reality¹⁶¹ who is only known through what he is *not*. God is *ipsum esse per se subsistens*, and as such, is distinguished not only as the cause and sustainer of all being, but is also known positively as the perfect and simple First in Being in himself and through himself and to himself (Rom. 11:36).

Second, there appears to be no metaphysical explanation of how a first cause, who is necessary, everlasting and perfect, can possess a changing, composite, temporal and in some sense, dependent nature. It would immediately appear logically contradictory to affirm

¹⁵⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.12.12.

¹⁵⁹ David Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 25.

¹⁶⁰ This is seen in the mode of divine knowing and willing posited by open theism. There is no metaphysical/ontological characteristic in God that distinguishes the way he knows from the way in which creatures know. Both are unchangingly temporal, mutable, dependent, affected, responsive, passible, fallible and limited to present and past tense, being primarily distinguished by *speed*, *consistency*, *accuracy* and *quantity* (i.e., how fast?; how often?; how factual?; and how much?).

¹⁶¹ See Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 88, where he calls the classical God “aloof” and abstract”. Pinnock deprecates the *via negativa* as “Hellenistic thinking” of God and “leads to negative abstractions such as atemporality, unchangeability, simplicity and apathy” (*Most Moved Mover*, 72).

contraries (e.g., necessary and contingent) of one being at the same time and in the same sense. Open theism may argue that these contrary attributes are applied to each respective pole in God without ontological crossover or that the unchanging pole is not purely actual in the classical sense, but more likened to *consistency through time*, which involves temporality. However, this would not explain how each pole would significantly differ since both would be subject to the flow of time and, therefore, be in a state of potentiality, which is characteristic of the finite part of the created world. In this sense, God would not exist as an ontologically distinct class of being above creation as its first cause. If, for example, as open theism has argued against the classical position, the changing cannot relate to the unchanging in any meaningful way, how does the unchanging and changing pole in God relate to each other in a meaningful bipolar environment? If open theism admits that there is an unchanging pole of God whose mode of being is pure actuality, then God cannot by their own admission relate to the world. Nor can he relate to his own changing pole, which would make it difficult to understand how the open notion of God's relation to his creatures is somehow superior to the classical view (which asserts that God's whole being is dynamically involved in the world as Being subsisting in all other being). Moreover, if God is temporal in the unchanging pole by experiencing the passage of time measured in "befores and afters", as open theism claims, God is not really ontologically distinct from the rest of creation that is necessarily subject to composition, time and change, implying that God is constantly moving from potency to act along with all other temporal contingents.¹⁶² And if there is no difference between these two poles, they are identical in being, resulting in God's monopolarity instead of dipolarity. If these two poles are really as ontologically different as they appear, it would necessitate two natures in God, resulting in either metaphysical dualism, which is more closely aligned to Plato's *Agathos* and *Demiurgos* than to traditional theism which asserts God is essentially one.

Third, positing a purely actual pole in God in the classical sense, which I believe open theism does not, appears to be counterproductive to open theism, since it would be subject to the same criticisms (e.g., Greek and Hellenistic negative influence) applied to classical theism's concept of a purely actual God. This scenario would jeopardize the paradigm since open theism

¹⁶² In order for the open view of God's "temporally everlasting" unchanging nature to be successful, they would need to demonstrate how the "time" of the unchanging and changing pole substantially differs from creaturely "time". Open discussions on time are largely relegated to critiques of the classical view involving sweeping statements and undeveloped arguments. However, even if the classical view is proven incorrect, it does not necessarily mean the open view of time *is correct*. More on this later in this chapter.

must explain how pure act could create the changing pole and still be considered as part of God since God is the first uncaused Being. To argue that God may be “self-limiting” is equally unsatisfactory since how could a purely actual being be limited and still change? All change requires the *potential* to change. One would either have to abandon the belief in a purely actual pole or admit there is no real difference between the changing and unchanging poles in God. In this case, there is nothing to suggest that God is ontologically “other” from the created order, which would necessitate a prior cause for God. Despite open assertions that God is ontologically distinct and independent from the world in his unchanging pole,¹⁶³ practically and metaphysically, the act/potency pole, which contains God’s will, knowledge and compassion, would merely be a distinct species of the same *genus* as the created order. This either results in the deification of man or the radical anthropomorphic nature of God, both of which have traditionally been undesirable. The changing pole would always be an aspect associated with finite-godism, which cannot guarantee final victory over evil or offer compassion with any ontological difference than that of the creature.

For classical theism, the logic is clear—if the openness models of God can relate to the world through its unchanging character, why is it considered impossible for the classical God to relate to the world through an unchanging nature? For openness thinkers, “unchanging” means something different than it does for classicalists. In the former, it means *consistent* (without the implication of timelessness), whereas in the latter, it implies to *absolute ontological timelessness*. Essentially, the open definition could be challenged on the basis that it does not remove *temporality* from the open nature of God. For this implies change, which implies finitude, which implies composition, which implies potency, which are all part of the derived created order. Thus, the open God would not be a sufficient “first cause” of all other beings, let alone his own composite being. Therefore, to answer this question by simply distinguishing between the classical notion of unchanging being as a corollary meaning “timelessly eternal” and the open concept of “temporally everlasting”¹⁶⁴ being a corollary meaning “the passage of time”, does nothing to *qualitatively* remove the open God from the realm of divided, composite, contingent and temporal creation. It is evident that the open bipolar God, as articulated by Rice and

¹⁶³ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 79.

¹⁶⁴ Pinnock says this designation does not refer to timelessness in a classical sense. He says, “The God of the Bible is not timeless. His eternity means that there has never been and never will be a time that God does not exist. Timelessness limits God” (*The Openness of God*, 121).

Pinnock, is divided and composite, and as such, cannot break free from being ontologically equivalent to the act/potency found in creation. If this is the case, then open theism can only offer a God who is like the creature, albeit more in quantity, extent, knowledge, power and so on, but nonetheless a qualitatively act/potency being in need of a prior first cause which is itself not composed. This notion of God leaves one skeptical of how this package of attributes would be an improvement over the classical position. Alternatively, classical theism argues for the totality of God's ontological otherness as pure *actus purus* and *ipsum esse*, which ontologically distinguishes God from creation, accounts for the temporal effects in the world and accounts for his own self-existence (*aseity*). Therefore, with simplicity as part of the divine package of attributes, I see no reason to assume, as open theism does, that God is in any sense "other" from his creation.

An Evaluation of Open Theism's Doctrine of Divine Temporality. In my estimation, the most serious attempt to engage the church fathers, and particularly Aquinas, comes in Hasker's *God, Time and Foreknowledge*. Even here, the primary focus is nescience and not eternity, per se. In this work, Hasker makes sweeping comments without developing the author's supporting material.¹⁶⁵ For example, Hasker criticizes the timeless knowing process in God posited by Aquinas when he says, "I cannot keep myself from thinking, like Alston but unlike Thomas Aquinas, that it is far better if God has 'immediate awareness' of facts than if he knows them only as 'similitudes' within his own essence".¹⁶⁶ It appears that Hasker is aware of the problems associated with denying God's eternal knowledge through "similitudes" as they exist in God. However, he misunderstands what Aquinas is saying, primarily by assuming temporal "immediate awareness" is somehow a superior mode of knowing than what can be known by God through his timelessly eternal mode of knowing. In this same context, Thomas says, "The more perfectly the thing known is in the knower, the more perfect is the mode of knowledge".¹⁶⁷ How is it that Hasker thinks "immediate awareness" known through temporal succession as conveyed through an inferior mode of knowledge (i.e., the creature) is superior to God's immediate and eternal knowledge known through God himself? Since knowing the thing, according to Thomas, is most perfectly known when the known is in the knower, it would be

¹⁶⁵ See pages 2-12, 144, 146, 151, 168-169, 172, 175, 178, 180, 183-184.

¹⁶⁶ Hasker, *God, Time and Foreknowledge*, 184. By "immediate awareness" Hasker means direct and instantaneous knowledge of the event or thought as if one was actually present, as opposed to the classical concept of God's knowledge as coming through himself and in himself.

¹⁶⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.14.6 ad 1.

lesser knowledge to know something which is first outside the knower, especially when the knower (God) is dependent on the thing known and must “wait” for his knowledge. Moreover, Hasker’s objection could have been answered if he noticed Thomas’ belief that eternity is present to and embraces all points in time—immediately and completely.¹⁶⁸ In addition, it appears that Hasker is assuming that Thomas “similitudes” are in some way “replicas” and are thus second-rate objects of knowledge, rather than viewing these objects of knowledge as primary and their actual playing out in the world is secondary. This implies that Thomas’ “similitudes” are more accurately known in God as they pre-exist in God as their efficient cause. These kinds of shallow and sweeping expositions cause me to question open theism’s understanding of the classical position of God’s eternity, which leaves open theology with inadequate grounds on which to critique core theological and philosophical elements.

Second, temporal creation (effects) does not require change in the eternal Creator (cause). It is hard to make sense of the open claim that God voluntarily *became temporal* when creating the temporal world due to the new relationship forged between creation and Creator. Open theism, as well as some other well-known evangelicals such as William Lane Craig, J.P. Moreland and Ronald Nash, have abandoned several classically formulated attributes such as simplicity, timeless eternity and immutability in favor of the view that God is in some sense, temporal *since* creation.¹⁶⁹ However, God need not become temporal, though his *acts* can be temporal in their *effect*. If open theism is correct in its assertion that God can become temporal since he created temporal effects, then logically, the same could be said of the creature becoming ontologically like God since prayer, according to open theism, creates a temporally everlasting effect (i.e., a response) in God. This need not be the case since God can gain new relationships without gaining or losing attributes, much the same way a human being gains a new relationship as “Father” when his son is born, yet does not change in his nature. Moreover, if like natures are required to relate and identify with another, how is it that man, who is characterized by open proponents as “other than God” relate to the open God? What is more, even the open God could not be involved or relate with himself since part of God is contingent and the other is necessary,

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., I.10.2 ad 4; I.57.3.

¹⁶⁹ See William Lane Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity* (Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001); *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1979), 151-153; J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations For A Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press,), 517-534; Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: Exploring the Difficulties with the Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1983).

part is temporal and the other eternal, and part is relative and the other absolute.¹⁷⁰ Aquinas addressed this subject while answering questions relating to efficient causes in regard to time in addition to the beginning and duration of creatures, especially in the sense of God's creative activity:

The efficient cause, which acts by motion, of necessity precedes its effect in time; because the effect is only in the end of the action, and every agent must be the principle of action. But if the action is instantaneous and not successive, it is not necessary for the maker to be prior to the thing made in duration, as appears in the case of illumination. Hence they say that it does not follow necessarily if God is the active cause of the world, that He should be prior to the world in duration; because creation, by which He produced the world, is not a successive change, as was said above.¹⁷¹

Thomas refuses to acknowledge that all types of creative activity are equal in regards to time or "duration". Therefore, he distinguishes the kinds of causes. The first kind, which is more common to our experience, is the causality that precedes their effects in time, much like the motion of an arm throwing a rock *before* it skips off the surface of the lake. Second, there is the cause and effect that are in duration at the same instant, similar to what Thomas describes as "illumination", or more clearly, as thought is to a particular idea of the mind. However, when the act of creating *ex-nihilo* occurs, there is no medium of successive change or motion involved since creation is not *in* time, rather the cause (God) and the effect (the world) are instantaneous as well as simultaneous. That is to say, since creation is a *substantial* change (coming to be from nothing) and not an *accidental* change (i.e., acquiring something not essential to one's being/nature, which was formerly in potential), it makes no sense to say that change, in the sense of moving from potency to act, was a component of the created effect or of the efficient cause. Therefore, change should be understood as a mode of *signification* rather than a medium of *creation*. Aquinas elucidates:

Creation is not change, except according to a mode of understanding. For change means that the same something should be different now from what it was previously. Sometimes, indeed, the same actual thing is different now from what it was before, as in motion according to quantity, quality and place....But in creation, by which the whole substance of a thing is produced, the same thing can be taken as different now and before only according to our way of understanding, so that a thing is understood as first not existing at all, and afterwards as existing....And yet *to make* and to be made are more suitable expressions here than *to change* and *to be changed*, because to make and to be made import a relation of cause to the effect, and of effect to the cause, and imply change only as a consequence.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Rice, *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will*, 33.

¹⁷¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.46.2 ad 1.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, I.45.2 ad 2.

More properly, change should be identified as a *result* or consequence of the creation inherent within the effect due to the effect's nature as an effect. Though a new relationship has formed between the cause and effect, this new relation does not require substantial or accident change in the cause.¹⁷³ It is altogether unnecessary to view God as temporal and changing due to the effect's temporal and changing nature. Since it not only overlooks proper analogy between cause and effect, it mistakenly assumes the temporal effect must always reflect temporality in the cause. Thomas views certain activities in at least two ways, one of which appears to offer a solution to this perceived dilemma:

There is a twofold class of action; one which passes out to something beyond, and causes passion in it, as burning and cutting; and another which does not pass outwards, but which remains in the agent, as to feel, to understand, to will; by such actions, nothing outside is changed, but the whole action takes place within the agent....Hence the Divine nature alone is its own act of understanding and its own act of will.¹⁷⁴

For Aquinas, of the two ways of acting, it is the “transitive activity”, which implies the action of the agent [cause] rests only in changes residing in that which is acted upon [effect], implying that change and time need not be viewed as something present in the agent.¹⁷⁵ As the fire that burns does not undergo the effects of burning, so a knife does not undergo the cutting it causes. Similarly, the eternal Creator is not affected by the creature's temporality. Therefore, since *ex-nihilo* creation does not require successive change in either the cause or the effect, there is no reason to assume creation has in some way, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, caused God to change his attributes.

Third, the open notion of a temporal God fails to realize the negative spatial implications for God's nature, which both open and classical theology has traditionally avoided or denied. Recognized by Ronald Nash as one of the strongest arguments for divine timelessness,¹⁷⁶ Paul Helm questions the notion of divine temporality by challenging its adherents to accept the necessary connection between spacelessness and God's nature.¹⁷⁷ After surveying temporalist arguments from Nicholas Wolterstorff,¹⁷⁸ Richard Swinburne¹⁷⁹ and others,¹⁸⁰ Helm claims that

¹⁷³ See the next chapter on immutability and divine-temporal relations where I address this problem.

¹⁷⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.54.2.

¹⁷⁵ Davies, *The Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 113.

¹⁷⁶ Nash, *The Concept of God*, 83.

¹⁷⁷ See Helm, *Eternal God*, 41-55.

¹⁷⁸ Wolterstorff, *God Everlasting*, 188ff.

¹⁷⁹ Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, 220-221.

¹⁸⁰ J.R. Lucas, *A Treatise on Time and Space* (London: 1973), 300ff; Pike, *God and Timelessness*, 161ff.

these arguments can be reconstructed by atemporalists in a parallel fashion to indicate that if God's timeless nature is rejected so also must be God's spacelessness.¹⁸¹ For Helm, doubts about God's timelessness equals doubts about divine spacelessness.¹⁸² These conclusions would not set well with open theism since they appear to implicitly advocate God's presence to all space, and though open theologians do not address the subject, we can infer this from their concept of divine-temporal relations and omniscience (i.e., in the past and present tense) which would seem to require God to be omnipresent in some sense. According to Helm, as far as spatial indexical arguments of distance and direction (i.e., here, there, or coming and going) are concerned (i.e., being *here* or *there*), problems arise from them which imply that God cannot be spaceless. Helm writes:

It has now been argued that the arguments currently used to establish that God is in time are strictly parallel to arguments that would establish that God is in space. Moreover, if God is in space in the sense that he can properly use ordinary spatial indexicals then he is enclosed by space.¹⁸³

Helm's challenge is crucial to understanding the implications for divine temporalists, specifically, if God is limited to the *when* of time by knowing something only as it happens in real time, then he is also limited to the *where* of space by being present only in the location of where any particular action occurs. Helm clarifies when he says, "One thing that God's being in space seems to mean is that God has some spatial perspective, as he has some temporal perspective if he is in time".¹⁸⁴ The crucial questions for open theism are these: If a timeless God cannot relate to a temporal world, how can a spaceless God relate to a spatial world? Is it possible for a spaceless God to be located within a "here" or "there" in space? In order for temporalists to be logically and metaphysically consistent with their own argumentation, as Helm states and successfully argues in my estimation, the answers to these questions must be answered in the negative, implying that either God must relate and know the world, as classicalists argue, as perfectly in and through himself as effects pre-exist in their cause, or, abandon omnipresence for ordinary temporal spatial presence. To argue that God is in space in merely a *different way* than creatures is to collapse to a form of argument that traditional theists have been positing all along. The crucial point to Helm's argument from spatial indexicals is that if "here" and "there" are understood of God in the ordinary sense, then God is bound to

¹⁸¹ Helm, *Eternal God*, 43, 46.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

space limitations in the same manner as the creature.¹⁸⁵ In this ordinary usage of the words, for God to say “I am here and I am there” is a contradiction unless, of course, parts of God (or parts of a body) were occupying both spaces. However, if these same indexicals are used in a special sense peculiar to God which finds it acceptable to be “here or there” then there is a way in which God is in space that ontologically differs from the way other individuals are in space, which is precisely what classical theism argues.¹⁸⁶ If this conclusion is indeed the case, then it is difficult to see how open theism views God’s temporality as a superior portrait to that of classical theism, which views God as unbounded by space and time, yet present and active to it through his own mode of being. Previously, Augustine had argued along these similar lines in the *City of God*, XI.5, when responding to those who “believe God is the Creator of the world, but have difficulties about the time [and place] of its creation”. He encourages those who question time and place to be consistent in their thinking, since, as Einstein has demonstrated in his General Theory, time and space are co-relative. Augustine says:

For if they imagine infinite spaces of time before the world...in like manner they may conceive outside the world infinite realms of space....Let them give the same account of God resting in the infinite times before the world as they give of His resting in the infinite spaces outside of it....But if they say that the thoughts of men are idle when they conceive infinite places, since there is no place beside the world, we reply that, by the same showing, it is vain to conceive of the past times of God’s rest, since there is no time before the world.¹⁸⁷

Open theism’s doctrine of God as “temporally everlasting” seems to be challenged by Augustine’s view that time and space are inextricably connected. Since “temporally everlasting” is in no way timeless, and therefore in my estimation, is simply an elongation of time without beginning or end, it would be difficult for Pinnock et al. to avoid the conclusion of the existence of time and *space* before creation. However, this conclusion is contrary to scripture, which says that time, space and matter, are a creation (Gen. 1:1; Ps. 102:25-27; Isa. 9:6; Col. 1:15-18; Heb. 1:2) and to science, which according to Einstein’s General Theory, declares them to be finite and co-relative. That is, there is no time without spatial and material existence. The philosophical problems are immense for open theology, particularly as they pertain to God’s finite nature since there is left to us no obvious ontological or environmental feature within or around God by which to be distinguished from the created order. From this position, it is a short step for open

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 54.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, XI.5, in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 2, 207-208.

theism to entertain discussions of time and space in regards to divine physicality and corporeality. In a startling confession by Pinnock, divine “embodiment” is exactly where open theism is leaning when he avers:

There is an issue that has not been raised yet in the discussion around the open view of God. If he is with us in the world, if we are to take biblical metaphors seriously, is God in some way embodied? Critics will be quick to say that, although there are expressions of this idea in the Bible, they are not to be taken literally. But I do not believe that the idea is as foreign to the Bible’s view of God as we have assumed. In tradition, God is thought to function primarily as a disembodied spirit but this is scarcely a biblical idea....Having a body is certainly not a negative thing because it makes it possible for us to be agents. Perhaps God’s agency would be easier to envisage if he were in some way corporeal....It seems to me that the Bible does not think of God as formless.¹⁸⁸

Pinnock explains how embodiment and *personhood* are concomitants as he continues:

I do not feel obliged to assume that God is a purely spiritual being when his self-revelation does not suggest it. It is true that from a Platonic standpoint, the idea is absurd, but this is not a biblical standpoint. And how unreasonable is it anyway? The only persons we encounter are embodied persons and, if God is not embodied, it may prove difficult to understand how God is a person. What kind of actions could a disembodied God perform? Embodiment may be the way in which the transcendent God is able to be immanent and why God is presented in such terms.¹⁸⁹

One would question the need for God to be embodied in the ordinary sense since the incarnation of Christ seems to have fulfilled the divine spiritual, social and philanthropic requirements of a theanthropic individual, except of course if the incarnation was not enough for some reason. The biblical data is overwhelmingly clear that God is in no sense ontologically embodied as the Creator of the material world (Gen. 1:1; Ex. 20:4; 33:20; Jn. 1:18; 4:24; Col. 1:15; I Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:27). Further, the obvious implications of matter being confined to a particular space, thus effectively eliminating any possibility of divine *omnipredicates*, would essentially place God in the limited and finite category of the created order once again, which, of course, was precisely why the early church fathers so consistently rejected any such concept. Of such a theological axiom was God’s uncompounded nature among the patristic writings, no major father held to such an unorthodox view. Prestige summarizes,:

Because the world was of composite construction it was therefore impermanent, liable to transformation and ultimate dissolution through the chances and mischances of perpetual variation. But deity, said Eusibius c. *Marcell.* I.I.19), is superior to any sensible and compound body. Bodily nature said Gregory of Nyssa (*or. cat.* 7), is necessarily subject to passions and infirmities, because it is compound and flows into dissolution. Unbegotten substance, said Basil of Seleucia (*or.* 25.4), cannot form a natural compound with begotten substance; deity has no parts....A phrase like ‘the divine uncompounded nature’ is employed

¹⁸⁸ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 33-34.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

without explanation or discussion since it expresses what was taken to be an axiom of thought. The divine spirit, says the pseudo-Caesarius (*resp.* 43), is one, of single form, single character, single substance, indivisible.¹⁹⁰

If Pinnock were to argue that God's embodiment is not *essentially* what God is, then God is not a body which contradicts the very notion of God's "embodiment" in an ontological sense. If Pinnock means that it is possible God simply *inhabits* a manufactured body just as a balloon surrounds air, then it does not differ from what we read scripturally of angels who, being spirit, manifest themselves in bodily form as one uses a costume then afterwards discards it. It is not my purpose to argue for God's spiritual nature here, and perhaps there is no need since others have sufficiently accomplished this.¹⁹¹ My purpose is to show how open theism's theology of God fits well within the finite qualities of time, space and matter, which comprise the created order, and according to open theism, comprise God as well. But it appears that Pinnock has another motive for divine temporality. In particular, he posits that for God to be truly a person(al) he must also be temporal, and perhaps even corporeal, which leads us to our next point of critique.

Fourth, the open preference for divine temporality and change over eternity and immutability in order to preserve divine *personality* and avoid a rock-like "stasis" or "lack of involvement" with the world is both unnecessary and confuses what the classical concept of eternity actually conveys.¹⁹² That is, according to open thought, divine personhood necessitates that God be temporal. This leads me to believe that the open perspective on the issue confuses what the classical position means when we say God is "eternal". For God to be *eternal* in a traditional sense is really describing what God is *not*, which is temporal. Therefore, God's atemporal life and involvement are only static in the sense that God continually and fully exists without the possibility of change, as exemplifying perfection, involvement, dynamism, love and so on. As such, God can be no closer to his creation than he is already. Thus God being static in the classic sense of the word would include the impossibility of being in any greater or lesser ontological position to be all that he can be. Moreover, it means that God is not subjected to the limitations of time, space and matter, as creatures are. Therefore, since eternity is removing

¹⁹⁰ Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 10.

¹⁹¹ Augustine, *City of God*, VIII.6-10; XI.4; Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.16-29; *Summa Theologica*, I.3.1-7; I.8.2.

¹⁹² This discussion will be limited to personhood in its proper sense since divine-temporal relations are treated after the section on immutability.

creaturely *confinements* of temporal passage from God's nature, and not the very characteristics of personality such as consciousness/awareness, mind, will and emotions, it cannot be said that questions of temporality, or for that matter of time in particular, necessarily affects one's personhood. To conclude otherwise, as open theism does, that eternity diminishes or altogether eliminates personality, confuses the *mode* of personality with the *existence* of personality. In this sense then, the divine mode of being dictates the operational nature and limitations of this particular personality. Likewise, the mode of being a creature determines the operational nature and limitations of the created kind of personality. Atemporal and temporal modes of personhood simply determine the ontological *limit*, *extent* and *operation* of these distinct personal qualities and, therefore, are in no way determinative of their very existence. The distinction between time and personality can be abundantly seen in nature, similar to the way a rock exists in time, yet remains personality (as I have defined it above) free. Thus, there is more empirical evidence for things in the *temporal* world that lack personality than there is in the *eternal* realm. We can conclude from this that questions of time must be distinguished from questions of personhood, and may be more appropriately termed a *contributing condition* to personality but never a *necessary* or *sufficient* condition. Therefore, the divine atemporal consciousness/awareness, mind, will and emotions have a non-chronological, non-sequential, non-spatial, non-successive and unchanging manner of being and operation.

Several observations are immediately evident within the panoply of open literature, but none are more striking than the conspicuous absence of historical analysis of the classical Greek formulation of time or treatments of the subject of God's eternity by the early church fathers, Augustine, Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas. Later thoughts on God's eternal duration and relation to time would draw upon early Greek expressions of the subject. Though these early expressions of time can be traced to Parmenides (510-450 B.C.) and his notion of timeless eternity and changeless Being as well as Plato's distinction between the eternal (*aion*) world of forms where there is no time and change and the measured time (*chronos*) of the temporal world which involves change,¹⁹³ the clearest expression comes from Book IV of Aristotle's *Physics*. However, Aristotle's notion of time involves change, and he is cautious not to define time as

¹⁹³ See Plato, *Timaeus*, 37C-39E, in John M. Cooper, ed., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 1241, where Plato describes time as an "image of eternity" when he writes, "And so he [Former] began to think of making a moving image of eternity: at the same time as he brought order to the universe, he would make an eternal image, moving according to number, of eternity remaining in unity. This number, of course, is what we now call time".

change itself because “the change or movement of each thing is only *in* the thing which changes or *where* the thing itself which moves or change may chance to be. But time is present equally and everywhere and with all things”.¹⁹⁴ Like Parmenides and Plato, Aristotle makes a distinction between change and time as well as viewing change as a concomitant or corollary of time when he asserts “neither does time exist without change”¹⁹⁵ and that “time is the measure of motion”.¹⁹⁶ Aristotle makes clear that his approach to time eliminates the possibility of crossing temporal and eternal categories. Those things or beings that are eternal (i.e., timeless) are necessarily unaffected by time and, therefore, are not in time.¹⁹⁷ The core of Aristotle’s exposition, and of those who came before him, appear to distinguish between time and its corollary of change and the asymmetrical relation between timelessness and change. It is noteworthy that the idea of “temporally everlasting” or the “time of eternity” is a foreign concept to the rational Greek tradition. The Greek approach to time and eternity would continue to inform those who came after, including the early church fathers, with no substantial departure or alteration until the early church fathers applied it to the very being of God himself.

An Evaluation of Modern Notions of God and Time. To this point, I have primarily considered classical positions on God and time. However, it remains now to address modern notions that appear to favor, to some extent, open theism’s divine temporality model.

Richard Swinburne. Richard Swinburne appears to be convinced by divine temporality due to the resolution it seems to bring to problems created by the classical doctrine of timelessness. Swinburne’s initial explorations into the nature of time resulted in his development of a causal theory of temporality.¹⁹⁸ He develops this notion in relation to God’s temporality in his *Coherence of Theism*, claiming that the assumption of the earliest church fathers that timelessness was essential to a coherent theism was severely mistaken. As a result, Swinburne rejects the traditional doctrine of immutability and simplicity. But even if one assumes the validity of divine changelessness in the classical sense, Swinburne argues that it in no way necessitates timelessness. God could exist changelessly through a temporally changing world

¹⁹⁴ Aristotle, *Physics*, IV.218b 10-14, in Jonathan Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, volume 1, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984 [revised Oxford translation]), 371.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, IV.218B 21ff., in *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, IV.221B 5-10, in *Ibid.*, 375.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ R. Swinburne, *Space and Time* (2nd ed.; London: Macmillan, 1981 [1968]).

where the ever-changing world is precisely what accentuates the divine constancy.¹⁹⁹ This does not seem clear, however, since in Swinburne's formulation of classical immutability, he acknowledges that it requires not only intrinsic but also extrinsic immutability. God cannot undergo non-relational or relational (i.e., Geach's "Cambridge") changes.²⁰⁰ So even though from the passage of time at t^1 to t^2 only the world undergoes change, it would seem that God's relation to the world would require at least Cambridge changes.

Swinburne remains equally unpersuaded by what he regards as a second foundational motivation for the timelessness doctrine: That it grounds the kind of omniscience that includes God's knowledge of future free actions. On Swinburne's account, God's knowledge cannot extend to future libertarian choices without compromising human freedom. This assumption renders the classical tendency to equate timeless with a robust view of divine foreknowledge virtually vacuous.²⁰¹ As William Lane Craig rightly notices, there seems to be an oversight in this kind of thinking that confuses the nature of necessity. That God knows that:

God foreknows that Jones will do x at t^1 .

does entail that

Jones will do x at t^1 .

However, it does not require the fatalist thesis because

God foreknows that Jones will do x at t^1 .

is not equivalent to

Necessarily, Jones will do x at t^1 .

which is what the fatalist thesis requires.²⁰²

What the fatalist needs for their argument to succeed is the truth of a proposition such as the following: God knows that Jones will *necessarily* do x at t^1 . Otherwise, agents seem perfectly free to do otherwise than x prior to t^1 .

¹⁹⁹ R. Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (rev. ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1977]), 226. He develops this idea slightly in his "God and Time," in *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzmann* (ed. E. Stump; Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1993), 202-22 (206).

²⁰⁰ P.T. Geach, "What Actually Exists," *Proceedings from the Aristotelian Society* 42 (1968): 7-16; rep. in P.T. Geach, *God and the Soul* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994), 65-74.

²⁰¹ Swinburne, *Coherence*, 227.

²⁰² See W.L. Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1987), 72. W.L. Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism : Omniscience* (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 19; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 78.

Not only does Swinburne find the traditional theism's view of timeless unconvincing, he also has serious reservations about the doctrine's coherence.²⁰³ The first of these inconsistencies he calls attention to proceeds from his own causal construction of time. For example, Swinburne insists that if God exists at a moment, then there must be a time (call it t^1) prior to the moment of creation and a further time (t^2) where God becomes aware of his creation. The progression from t^1 to t^2 , therefore, marks temporal movement within God's existence as he relates to the world. He considers and finds Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann's ET-simultaneity problematic.²⁰⁴ However, Swinburne does not anticipate the kind of formulation proposed by Helm and most other modern timelessness advocates. Helm urges that one timeless act with numerous scattered temporal effects does not require a temporal progression within the divine reality.²⁰⁵ So while Swinburne's complaint may have some force against the sometimes difficult-to-grasp view of Stump and Kretzmann, Helm's formulation appears immune to Swinburne's overly simplistic incoherence objection. If at $t^=0$ God decrees all of his actions with respect to creation, then this would include his willing at t^1 to create and his act of creating at t^2 , which decision results in the awareness of that act at t^3 . A further confusion introduced by Swinburne involves his apparent assumption of a temporal or tensed existence for God. His objection begs the question, in other words. Swinburne assumes without argument that there is just such a progression in God's actions, which is precisely what those who hold to timelessness denies.

Nicholas Wolterstorff. Wolterstorff contends that we should view God as "everlasting" rather than as eternal, by which he means: God's being undergoes a succession of temporal events that does not end or begin.²⁰⁶ On the basis of God's changeableness, he asserts that it seems "obvious that God", as described by the biblical writers, has "a time-strand of his own on which actions on his part are to be found, and that some at least of these actions vary in such a way that there are changes along the strand".²⁰⁷ Wolterstorff supports this contention mainly

²⁰³ His most sustained development of this objection is found in his "God and Time," 202-22. Interestingly, this point of incoherence is precisely what timelessness advocates charge Swinburne with. See B.P. Göcke, et al., "How to Heckle Swinburne on God and Time," in Mossner, et al. (eds.), *Richard Swinburne: Christian Philosophy in a Modern World* (New Brunswick: Ontos-Verl, 2008), 75-84.

²⁰⁴ E. Stump and N. Kretzmann, "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429-60.

²⁰⁵ See also B. Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Cornell Studies in Philosophy of Religion; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 217-45.

²⁰⁶ This exposition of Wolterstorff's views is based upon his Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," in Clifton Orlebe and Lewis Semedes (eds.), *God and the Good* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 201-202; rep. in as "God is 'Everlasting,' not 'Eternal,'" in 485-504.

²⁰⁷ Wolterstorff, "God is 'Everlasting,'" 495.

upon the premise that the redeeming God of the Bible changes and that change requires time. Wolterstorff remains unconvinced by the Thomistic solution—namely, a single timeless act with numerous temporal effects. He says that even on a theory where temporal effects stand in simultaneous relation to one another, they still have a temporal order-relation (albeit a simultaneous one) since they imply a time strand on which these events can be located. Wolterstorff grants, however, that given the doctrine of simplicity, this objection cannot be decisive since on the Thomistic understanding of God, all aspects of God remain identical so that no two aspects can form the kind of temporal order-relation that Wolterstorff notes. So it really does turn out to be more a criticism of simplicity than timelessness since the timelessness advocate can make good sense of his beliefs within the context of his own system (see Chapter 3 on Simplicity).

More important, Wolterstorff's rejection of timelessness is based on his view of time itself. He believes that time is dynamic or should be understood according to A-theory conceptions, to use McTaggart's terminology. This A-theoretic analysis of time really does seem to function prominently in the construction of Wolterstorff's position. His point about God's redeeming interaction with humanity in the Bible is really about the nature of temporality seemingly assumed by the biblical portrayal of God. He appears to be founding his argument about divine interaction with the world within temporal events. For instance, he claims that in situations that happen "now", the only way to "know" that such events are happening now is through a participation within the now-sequence. But these arguments lose force if one advocates a B-theory of time and/or if one understands tensed language to be reducible to propositional values that can be independent of token reflexive terminology. Helm and others have reemphasized the claims of Pike and Mellor²⁰⁸ that such temporal tokens in no way represent propositions, but instead, token-specific utterances. Divine omniscience concerns God's knowledge of all true "propositions". But utterances have not been reduced to their basic propositional value. When such reductions are made, God can know all true propositions without being required to know all token-reflexive utterances. DeWeese, who remains sympathetic to Wolterstorff's position, even admits its weakness in this regard.²⁰⁹ So, for the

²⁰⁸ Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time* (rev. ed.; Oxford: 2011), 42-45; Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (Schocken Books, 1970), 87-96; D.H. Mellor, *Real Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

²⁰⁹ Garrett J. DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2004), 212.

advocate of divine timelessness, God may not know “Blare is now walking her bulldog”. However, he does know the propositional value of this statement: “At 8:01 pm on January 2nd, 2011, Blare walks her bulldog”. Similar arguments would not hold up with spatial or identity indexicals. For God to be omniscient, no one would require that he know token-reflexive utterances like “I am sitting on a chair” or “I am Bob” since such utterances only remain true as tokens of propositions relative to particular spatially, temporally located entities. God, due to his nature, cannot know propositions indexicalized for individuals. Nor should he be required to. However, he can know the propositional value of these statements, and this seems to be all that is needed for one to hold to classically formulated omniscience. Another response, offered by Stump, notes that the kinds of arguments advanced by Wolterstorff seem to assume that an action and its effect must be simultaneous, which does not accord with the way we naturally understand things. A ball can be thrown (cause) and break a window moments later (effect). The same seems applicable to God’s eternity. Brian Leftow attempts to show this much with his conception of eternity as a reference frame or super-dimension in relation to the temporal world.²¹⁰

J.R. Lucas. Lucas has perpetuated an important criticism against timelessness: That it comprises God’s status as a person. He states, “If the ultimate reality is personal, then it follows that time must exist. God did not make time, but time stems from God”.²¹¹ In a prior work, he states similarly that to affirm timelessness is to deny that “God is a person”.²¹² Lucas claims that an asymmetrical relation between a being’s existence in time and space since beings exist in time necessarily but in space merely contingently. In other words, as far as Lucas is concerned, a temporal sequence necessarily provides the map according to which conscious events or states stand in relation to one another. Some state of consciousness *x*, for example, is only rendered intelligible as it stands in relation to some prior conscious state *y* or some future conscious state *z*. This does not seem true with respect to space, which can be considered independently. While it is true that conscious human states do occur at moments in time within a temporal sequence, Leftow points out the problem in this reasoning when he says that “that all *human* mental events and states *do so* hardly entails that all mental events and states *must do so*”.²¹³ Again, the support

²¹⁰ Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 283.

²¹¹ J.R. Lucas, *The Future: An Essay on God, Temporality, and Truth* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1989), 213.

²¹² J.R. Lucas, *A Treatise on Time and Space* (London: Methuen, 1973), 300.

²¹³ Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 283. Emphasis in original.

of classical timelessness has nothing to do with whether God does in fact act in temporal sequences. Of course he does. The crucial issue rests upon whether a timeless God can be causally responsible for effecting changes in a temporal world without himself undergoing change. It seems to me that the failure of this argument rests in that it just states that a timeless God cannot do this because we have no analogy for such activity with respect to human conscious states and events. It asserts that *necessarily* conscious states must occur in a temporal sequence based on the way they take shape in human experience. But as Leftow observes, this is ad hoc. We have evidence in things like the laws of logic where a set of logically related principles can shape temporal reality while themselves remaining unsubjected to time. It seems possible that God's conscious states and his eternal acts could have similar bearing upon temporal reality without themselves being temporally organized. A further response to make relates to the analogy between human minds and the divine mind that Lucas insists upon. Logically, there exists no necessary analogy between the two. It could very well be the case—in this case in a number of ascertainable ways, for example: The organization of an omniscient mind seems that it would be qualitatively, not just quantitatively different—namely, that the divine mind just has different levels/forms of structure than the human mind. The latter does not necessitate the former. Temporality, in other words, does not seem to be a necessary feature of a mind. There are some mental states that 'when' does not apply. For example, God knows *what* creatures know, but not *how* they know it. And if beliefs remain eternal in the divine mind, questions about when those beliefs were formed or how they are related to other beliefs will be considered a pseudo-problem or at very least unintelligible—again, if God is timeless.²¹⁴ It does not seem difficult to imagine God's mind being composed of such a non-temporal structure. We could imagine, for example, a mind consisting only of all the mathematical and logical structures that exist. We can also imagine that all of the mathematical and logical structures that exist are stored only in this mind. Perhaps this is in fact how many make sense of the preservation of such laws, as in the argument for the theism from abstract objects advocated by many temporalists. So it would be a mind that could exercise causal powers, volition, emotion, and so on, but it would not be organized by any apparent temporal structure. We may say then that this model extends to all of God's mental states without contradiction.

²¹⁴ Helm, *Eternal God*, rev. ed., 50-51.

Leftow traces this argument that mental states must involve temporal sequence (asserted by Lucas) back to David Hume. And it can be answered by providing counter examples where mental states do not appear to involve these kinds of sequences. I have already provided one such example above. Leftow provides an additional one. He shows that Lucas seems committed to precisely one of these counter examples. He draws specific attention to Lucas's belief on the one hand that God did not have to create agents other than himself and, on the other hand, his belief that God remains infinite in duration. As Leftow notes, it seems possible then that God could exist in a singular timeless experience—knowledge and all—with no beginnings or endings.²¹⁵ Such counter examples prove that mental states and events can exist apart from temporal sequence, thus reducing the power of the argument from personhood and mental states against classical timelessness.

This objection by Lucas should not be dismissed too easily due to what it may be able to do, however. According to Helm, the weight of Lucas's argument can be seen here in that it bears directly upon the argument for indexicals since "The reason why it is thought that God needs to know more than the truth of tense-indifferent expression is that it is claimed that he observes and initiates changes in the universe".²¹⁶ So Lucas's claim to show that minds are necessarily temporal but not spatial challenges the symmetry argument from indexicals based on the time-space relation (i.e., that if we require God to know temporal indexicals, we must require him to know spatial indexicals). Yet, as Helm notices, it is not enough to merely show that minds exist contingently in space but not time, he also has to show that "minds that bring about changes in the states of things in spaces are possibly not in space themselves".²¹⁷ According to Helm, it must be remembered that God brings about changes in space with no spatial relations to the effects he brings about. So the symmetry between God's timeless and spaceless causal power seems to be maintained, despite Lucas's insistence to the contrary.

Peter Geach. The major contribution of Geach was to emphasize the indeterminate nature of the future,²¹⁸ precisely one of the points open theists have adopted as their regular mantra (especially in Boyd). The future as such does not exist on a dynamic or A-theoretic understanding of time. Therefore, it is argued, how can God be required to know a state of

²¹⁵ Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 284.

²¹⁶ Helm, *Eternal God*, rev. ed., 48.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

²¹⁸ Peter Geach, "The Future," *Blackfriars* 54 (1973): 209-18.

affairs that does not yet exist. In addition to various notions of time, libertarian freedom seems to require this much. These notions were later developed into the idea of “present knowledge”, that God only knows what exists in the future through corollary or inferential knowledge, based within the present—this notion, so prevalent in open theism ultimately has its origins in Geach’s thinking. Geach presents several arguments for his indeterminate future. To begin with, he suggests that some things that were going to happen do not happen, which entails an openness to the future. But I do not see why this formulation excludes the determination of the future since the things could be determined to fall out in the ways they actually did occur. In other words, it could be the case that all things that were going to happen that did not happen were fixed in the future to be set in motion to happen but then not happen. Maybe all such events just have that fixed structure. It would be hard to prove either way, so this argument seems inconclusive at best. Geach insists: “Future-land is a region of fairytale”.²¹⁹ A further argument he uses to support this involves his belief that the future is merely made up of “trends and tendencies” in the present that await their fulfillment through future realities. But this seems to be a mere assertion. More importantly, however, is his comparison of the metaphysical status of the past with the future. He says that the past “exists” in a way that the future does not. He intends to take “exist” here in the sense of formal logic as an existential qualifier.²²⁰ While it remains intelligible to speak of tangible past realities, it is not so of the future realities. He uses the example of naming. You cannot name an unborn baby any more than you can baptize one. You can pick a name, he says, but that entity does not have a name until it comes into existence. If it does not eventually come into existence, it never has that name. This is because the existence of the child is located in a future that does not yet exist and, therefore, it cannot be ascribed a name within that reality until it is reality. He sees the vision of the future being “off-stage” until it is brought “on stage” by the present as entirely wrongheaded since some foretold on-stage events never do get brought on on-stage because the future does not take shape in the way foretold since it does not yet exist—neither off stage or on stage. Essentially, Geach describes a problem of reference here, that no one can meaningful and firmly refer to real future objects. He uses the example of a bet. No one gets paid until the race is won because you cannot refer to a winner in

²¹⁹ Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 52.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

the future.²²¹ Helm provides a number of decisive responses to these claims.²²² First, he notes that the connection between the future's existence and our knowledge of the future's existence has nothing to do with the metaphysical status of the future but simply our *ignorance* of the future. The future may very well exist in a very planned and determinate manner, and humanity just simply remains ignorant of that planned future reality. Second, Helm notes that there seems to be no logical connection between the indeterminate future Geach suggests and the view that the future does not already exist. That is to say, the future could be determined and not yet exist. Say, for example, God determined to bring about the future in precisely such a way in a world where the future did not have metaphysical status until it was actualized. Helm's point appears to be consistent with my previous discussion of what was meant by Aquinas when describing the future existing as a real *potential* to/in God, and then becomes actualized to us.

²²¹ Geach, "The Future," 212.

²²² Helm, *Eternal God*, rev. ed., 121-24.