

СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ДИСКУРСЫ

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Divine Atemporal-Temporal Relations: Does Open Theism Have a Better Option?*

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Open theists argue that God’s relationship to time, as conceived in classical theism, is erroneous. They explicate that it is contradictory for an atemporal being to act in a temporal universe, including experiencing its temporal successions. Contrary to the atemporalists, redemptive history has shown that God interacts with humans in time. This relational nature of God nullifies the classical notion of God as timelessly eternal. Therefore, it lacks a philosophical and theological basis. Because God is in time, He does not know all future contingencies and, therefore, changes. This study examines open theism’s appropriation of the A and B theories of time to the divine-human relationship. The study argues that divine temporality does not solve the tension of divine-human relationships, especially in relation to the future. Further, historical divine temporality does not negate the fact of divine atemporality. It mainly stems from God’s choice to create temporal creatures and His relationship with them. Furthermore, if it is not logically and metaphysically contradictory for an omnipresent being to act in space, then it follows that an atemporal being can act in time. Whether time is understood from the metric or psychological point of view, it does not transcend God, and therefore, the limitation it places on human creatures with respect to the future does not apply to God. Lastly, although a few philosophers reject the notion of eternity as timelessly eternal, the doctrine has a philosophical and theological basis in the Scripture.

Keywords: Divine a/temporality, Divine-human relations, time, change, Open Theism, immutability, foreknowledge, determinism

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Божественные атемпорально-темпоральные отношения: нет ли у открытого теизма варианта получше?

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Открытые теисты утверждают, что понимание отношения Бога ко времени в классическом теизме ошибочно. Они объясняют это тем, что для вневременного существа действовать во временной вселенной, включая его участие во временной последовательности событий, является противоречивым. Вопреки атемпоралистам, история Искупления показала, что Бог взаимодействует с людьми во времени. Такая реляционная природа Бога, как кажется, сводит на нет классическое представление о Боге в качестве вечного вневременного существа. В силу этого, согласно открытым теистам, данное представление не имеет под собой веского философского и теологического основания. Поскольку Бог находится во времени, Он не знает всех будущих поворотов событий и, следовательно, изменений. В данном исследовании анализируется применение открытым теизмом теорий времени А и Б к божественно-человеческим отношениям. В исследовании утверждается, что божественная темпоральность не снимает напряженности в божественно-человеческих отношениях, в особенности что касается будущего. Кроме того, историческая божественная темпоральность не отрицает факта божественной атемпоральности. Это проистекает главным образом из решения Бога создать временных существ и построить Свои отношения с ними. Более того, если для вездесущего существа действовать в пространстве не является логически и метафизически противоречивым, то из этого следует, что вневременное существо может действовать и во времени. Независимо от того, понимается ли время с метрической или психологической точки зрения, оно не превосходит Бога, и поэтому ограничение, которое оно накладывает на человеческие существа в отношении будущего, к Богу не относится. Наконец, хотя некоторые философы и отвергают понятие вечности в качестве вневременной, эта доктрина все же имеет свое философско-богословское основание в Писании.

Ключевые слова: Божественная (а)темпоральность, Божественно-человеческие отношения, время, изменение, открытый теизм, неизменность, предвидение, предопределение

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Introduction

The classical notion of divine eternity and God's relationship to time from the atemporal point of view has come under critical scrutiny in recent years to the extent that many² contemporary philosophers believe that given that the notion of eternity connotes timeless present, reality will be constant to God; therefore He cannot change His plans. Further, since reality is constant and God's knowledge is exhaustive, divine timelessness will result in theological determinism. Also, since divine timelessness places God in a different timeframe from humans, the divine-human relationship is impossible. Furthermore, divine timelessness also connotes that humans are not free, and God will be responsible for their immoral actions. However, it is clear from redemptive history that God changes His plans in response to humans and has acted temporally. Not only these, but it is clear that humans are not only free but also negotiate the future with God, including frustrating His plans.

In what follows, I will summarise the argument presented by open theism (OT hereafter) against classical theism (CT henceforth) and offer a critical response. I will argue that open theism's alternative does not provide a robust concept of divine eternity for enhancing the divine-human relationship despite collapsing the creator-creature distinction upheld in classical theism. Further, I will examine if it is metaphysically and logically impossible for an atemporal being to relate with temporal beings and remain constant. Furthermore, I will examine God's relationship to time, given His attributes of foreknowledge and immutability in relation to human freedom.

The argument:

1. *Divine timelessness connotes changelessness*

Given that divine eternity connotes instant timeless knowledge of reality, an atemporal being seems to have no reason to adjust earlier initiated plans. However, this is not the case with God, as in the Bible. He often changes when humans frustrate His plans or change in relation to Him, either positively or negatively. Due to this seeming paradox, OT argues that God is not timelessly eternal, so the future is open to Him. Because He is in time, He will eventually adjust His plans to adapt to what humans will contribute. These adjustments often result in grief and regret when humans act contrary to the expectations of God. In its reading of Numbers 23:19, 1 Samuel 15:29, Malachi 3:6, and James 1:17, OT rejects the doctrine of divine immutability. This is because as much as humans are free, it follows that their actions will not always align with God's plans. This will inevitably cause God to adjust, adopt or adapt His plans to suit His associates. OT argues that since God changes His plans, it must follow that He is not

² Open theists and a few classical theists find the notion of divine atemporality appalling, unintelligible and unbiblical. See [Hasker 1989].

timelessly eternal as understood in classical theism [Sanders 2007b: 15]. Instead, He is everlasting.³

2. *Divine timelessness implies exhaustive divine foreknowledge*

To say God is timelessly eternal is to say He transcends time so that nothing in time is hidden from Him. Alternatively, *reality* is constant to a timeless being in such a way that yesterday and tomorrow make no difference to such a being [Sanders 2007b: 203]. Due to the preceding submission, open theists argue that this is not the case because the sacrifice of Isaac (the *now I-know* statement of God to Abraham), the perhaps passages of the Bible and changes in divine plans connote that God is not timelessly eternal and therefore exhibit divine ignorance [Ibid.: 50–51]. From the conclusion that God is not timeless and, as a result, experiences temporal successions as humans do, it also means God is not all-knowing as understood in classical theism. He does not know the future exhaustively, especially the contingent acts of free moral agents. Because doing so will render human freedom ineffective. The assertion that God is all-knowing, according to OT, is that He knows what is logically possible to know [Pinnock 1994: 121].

Further, OT argues that the future does not have the same ontological status as the past and present. Therefore, divine omniscience is present knowledge. Because the future does not exist like the past and present, God cannot be charged with ignorance of the future [Sanders 2007b: 200–201]. This explains why He *looks* forward with hope, faith and trusts that His plans will work out as expected. John Sanders explains that God is weakly immutable and does not have a specific plan or agenda for the future. Because God has no particular plan for creation, He has often had to adjust His plans. He adopts a flexible strategy in relation to what humans will contribute to the divine project [Sanders J. 2010: 141–142].

3. *Divine timelessness implies future fixity (theological determinism)*

Open theists argue that if God is timelessly eternal, as understood in CT, and reality is constant and immediate to God, then it follows that all that God knows is eternally determined. There is nothing one can do about it [Sanders 2007b: 203]. For instance, if God knew from eternity past that this paper will be published by *The Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences*, nothing can change it because it has been eternally determined. However, this is not the case. I could publish the paper somewhere after being contacted by the chief editor to submit it for review and publication.

Contrary to theological determinism, which the notion of divine timelessness propagates, in love, God left the creation open with open routes. OT argues that conceiving God as timelessly eternal implies a static view of time and, thus, determinism. Then all good and evil things, even our sins, will always exist. Eventually, it means that there will be no time when God will triumph over evil as Christians

³ Nicholas Wolterstorff also believes that God is everlasting because the notion of divine timelessness is alien to the Bible and a product of Greek philosophy, which must be cast out of Christian thought. See [Wolterstorff 2010].

expect it to happen at the eschaton. Since God knows everything timelessly now, it means He does not know what I am doing now. After all, there is no “now” or “then” for a timeless God. On the contrary, God knows the past and present and gives salvation at a particular time. Lastly, a timelessly eternal God cannot have plans for creation to be executed in the future [Sanders 2007b].

Contrarily,

4. *From redemptive history, God changes strategies*

Sanders noted that a careful reading of the Bible reveals that it portrays God as ‘authentically’ responding to humans. He cites the story of Hezekiah to show that God changes His plans. He argues that God had ordered the prophet Isaiah to announce to King Hezekiah to put his house in order because he would never be healed from his illness. However, King Hezekiah knew he could change the divine plan through prayer. Hezekiah prayed, and God responded positively by sending the prophet to announce plan ‘B’; namely, Hezekiah would no longer die. This text, among many, reveals that there is divine flexibility in handling the divine project. This divine flexibility is contingent upon human inputs. God, from the foregoing, undergoes changing states. God changes “His thoughts and deeds toward us and the rest of His creation matching His thoughts toward the creature with the creature’s actual state at the time God thinks of it” [Hasker 1994: 133–134].⁴

Further, God withdrew some plagues in Egypt because of Moses’ request. God intended to destroy the entire nation of Israel because of the Golden Calf and restart again from scratch. However, Moses did not accept this plan “B” but insisted that God should revert to plan ‘A,’ and God readjusted to plan ‘A.’ Sanders argues that sometimes God may go as far as granting humans what is not His will. Such instances include the calling of Aaron to do the public speaking for Moses; when Moses hesitated to take the offer. Also, the Israelites asked for a King, which was not the will of God. But God granted the request despite knowing it was not the best option [Sanders 2007b: 280–282].

Another example is when God regretted making Saul the King of Israel. Because He regretted the promise to Saul according to the original plan to make him and his descendants kings forever equally changed. There will have been no Davidic dynasty except for this change in the divine project. Sanders rhetorically asked, “If God always knew that he was never going to have Saul’s line be kings, was God deceitful? There is a give-and-take quality to these texts. If God is affected by creatures and is responsive as these texts indicate then God has a before and after – succession – in his experience. This means that God is temporal and has a history” [Sanders 2007a: 40–41].

William Hasker states that OT rejects divine immutability [Hasker 2004: 197]. He argues that God is unchanging in His nature and character, His wisdom, power and faithfulness to us. He nonetheless changes in His experience from time to time.

⁴ Richard Rice takes a bit radical stance in this regard. He seems to suggest that the life of God changes as far as He has changing thoughts and emotions as well as living in a temporal world. He states that “God’s Life exhibits transition, development and variation. God experiences the temporal world in a temporal way” [Rice 1994: 22].

The argument flows from how both Hasker and Sanders conceive divine eternity. Since they both argue that God is, in time, experiencing the temporal succession of events as humans do, it logically follows that the future is not yet settled. As a result, God changes some of His thoughts and decisions. Open theists argue that their concept of divine immutability aligns with the Bible and tradition. Since God is relational and open to creation, He will adjust, adapt and adopt what humans and the creation will provide to the divine project where necessary [Hasker 2008: 27].

Clark Pinnock also holds that divine immutability concerns God's essential nature and His faithfulness, but not about His relationship to the creation: "The Trinity is unchangeably what it is from everlasting – and nothing can change that. Furthermore, we can always rely on God to be faithful to his promises; he is not in any way fickle or capricious. Immutability ought to focus on the faithfulness of God as a relational, personal being" [Pinnock 1994: 117].

5. *God expects several future actions and outcomes which never turn out as He expected because humans have libertarian freedom*

Sanders states that, based on the wealth of scriptural passages that support human freedom, another view of human freedom aside from the compatibilist perspective has emerged. This view affirms that "an agent is free with respect to a given action at a given time if at that time it is within the agent's power to perform the action and also in the agent's power to refrain from the action" [Sanders 2007b: 235]. The most common line of reasoning in schematising human freedom, Sanders argues, must include: (1) we can have a genuine love relationship with one another, (2) we are expected to be rational in our thoughts, and (3) we are morally responsible both for our good and evil actions [Ibid.].

In granting humans libertarian freedom, God has what it takes to handle every eventuality. "God is endlessly resourceful and wise in working towards the fulfilment of his ultimate goals. Sometimes God unilaterally decides how to accomplish these goals but He usually elicits human cooperation such that it is both God and humanity who decide what the future shall be" [Sanders 2007a: 35]. What God and people do in history matters; the Hebrew midwives' story is an example of this. If the Hebrew women feared Pharaoh rather than God and killed the baby boys, God would have responded accordingly, and a different story would have emerged. But they did what they felt was good of their volition. When Moses killed the Egyptian, he refused to prefer Pharaoh's palace over His people and contended with God during the Burning Bush experience is also another example [Ibid.].

The argument for human freedom is schematised by Hasker thus:

(FW) N is free at *T* with respect to performing A=_{df}

It is in N's power at *T* to perform *A*, and it is in N's power at *T* to refrain from performing *A*. According to Hasker, the said agent should have "the *power to perform a particular act under a given circumstance*, and not a *generalised power to perform acts of a certain kind*" [Hasker 1989: 66–67]. If one can perform a particular act at *T1* but is restricted from performing such action at *T2*, probably by folding her hands to the back, it is no longer within her power to accomplish such an act. This infringement on her ability to perform the said action is contrary to the nature

of creation. Humans are free, rational and responsible and have the liberty to develop their inherent potential [Hasker 2008: 157].

Therefore,

6. *Divine Timelessness is incoherent and unintelligible*

Hasker argues that the traditional concept of divine eternity as timelessly eternal fails to meet several criteria for a viable doctrine. He proposes two criteria to measure the relevance and intelligibility of the doctrine of divine timelessness. 1. The doctrine of divine timelessness should be about *God* as understood in the Jewish/Christian faith as the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe. Not only these, but God has also been constantly acting in history. However, the doctrine of eternity as timelessly eternal does not represent the Jewish and Christian understanding of God. It does not portray God from the relational point of view. 2. It should adequately address the paradox of divine knowledge and human freedom. However, the classical model does not better solve this paradox. As a result, it has no philosophical advantages [Hasker 1989: 146]. In Hasker's opinion, for a doctrine to be intelligible, he argues, it must be:

...expressible in grammatically well-formed sentences. (This I assume that a sentence consists of *words*, as opposed to nonsense syllables, of the language in which it is written). We may also require that an intelligible doctrine should not be contradictory or otherwise logically impossible. It would seem, furthermore, that a proposition is not understood unless it is possible to give an account of at least some of the nontrivial inferential relationships that hold between it and other relevant propositions [Ibid.: 147].

However, as understood in CT, divine timelessness does not meet the above requirement of intelligibility because the idea of timelessness is non-existent in our lives as humans. And if we were to sketch an analogy of the doctrine from a human point of view, it would be an uncompletable analogy. To conceive God from the point of divine timelessness, we must conceive the doctrine in such a way that 1. *God knows* 2. *acts* and 3. *responds* to the temporal activities of temporal beings. According to Hasker, any definition of divine timelessness, which does not emphasise these three fundamental elements, ceases to be a viable doctrine of divine eternity [Ibid.: 147, 150–151].⁵

Sanders argues that two concepts of time apply to the discussion on divine eternity. He explains that because CT and OT subscribe to different ideas of time, they hold different notions of divine eternity. He argues that understanding God from a timelessly eternal point of view has significant challenges in relating the concept of divine eternity to God's activity in history. Sanders refers to the '*dynamic view*' or the '*A*' theory, tense or process theory, and the '*stasis view*' or the '*B*' theory,

⁵ Contrary to this conclusion, Hasker, 4 pages later, argues that conceiving God from the divine timelessness point of view is intelligible, especially if it is conceded that God is both active and responsive to what goes around [Ibid.: 155]. But this is precisely what proponents of divine eternity emphasised. It is either that open theists do not understand the proponents of divine eternity, or they merely exaggerate what does not exist. It is like creating a problem where there is none and at the same time providing the solution to the problem.

tenseless or block theory of time. In the dynamic theory of time, the present has a special ontological status; as a result, the past and the future do not exist. The activities that took place last year once existed in a time, but they no longer exist today. The future, in the same manner, despite that we speak about it as an actual entity, does not exist. It's merely a concept in our minds. An essential element of the dynamic understanding of time is that nothing is static or permanent except for change. Contrary to the 'A' theory, the past, present and future have equal ontological status in the 'B' theory of time. As a result, what has existed will always be, and some things that are not yet in existence will undoubtedly exist in the future. Whatsoever has existed, is, and will exist is part of the 'block' because God sees them timelessly in His eternity. These different understandings of time have implications for one's concept of eternity. Contrary to the understanding of time from the metric point of view, Sanders states that time, as applied to God, must be understood psychologically because, before the creation, He had such experience [Sanders 2007b: 200–201].

7. *An atemporal being cannot act in time, given the dynamic theory of time*

Richard Rice states that “to say that God acts, therefore, means that it makes sense to use the word *before* and *after* when we talk about Him” [Rice 1994: 36]. It then follows that everything that happens in history was not completely determined at the beginning of history. Instead, all things are a series of events that unfold in time. OT argues that conceiving God as timelessly eternal places God in a different time frame altogether from ours. It follows that He cannot interact with humans acting in a different time from His. Besides, the Bible shows that God changes some of His plans. It follows that God is not eternal. Otherwise, there will be no reason for any adjustment in His plans because an eternal being will know from the inception if such a plan is successful. “That God changes in some respects implies that God is temporal, working with us in time (at least since creation). God is everything through time rather than timelessly eternal. God experiences duration as He interacts with us in history” [Sanders 2007b: 15]⁶.

Sanders rhetorically asks: “If God always knew that he was never going to have Saul's line be kings, was God deceitful? There is a give-and-take quality to these texts. If God is affected by creatures and is responsive as these texts indicate then God has a before and after – succession – in his experience. This means that God is temporal and has a history” [Sanders 2007a: 40–41]. If it is granted that God has 'before' and 'after' in His experience, then it must follow that God is temporal. He has a history as we do.

Instead of conceiving God as *atemporal*, OT holds that God is temporal and He is not timeless. When an allusion is made to God's eternity, it does not mean that God is atemporal, and therefore temporal categories do not apply to Him. Instead, God is *everlasting*. Contrary to the creatures, God has always existed and will continue to exist. “Time is not an alien medium within which God is ‘trapped’ or ‘lim-

⁶ Clark Pinnock also holds the same assertion as that of Sanders. In this regard, he rhetorically asks: “How can a timeless God be the creator of a temporal world? Why is God described as being involved in temporal realities?.. Do we not praise God, not because He is beyond time and change but because He works redemptively in time and brings about salvation...?” [Pinnock 1994: 120].

ited'; rather time, in the sense of a changeful succession of states is inherent in God's nature" [Hasker 2008: 27].

Pinnock holds a slightly different position from Sanders in this regard. Instead of being affected, God is immune. He argues, "When I say that God is eternal, I mean that God transcends our experience of time, is immune from the ravages of time, is free from our inability to remember, and so forth. I affirm that God is with us in time, experiencing the succession of events with us. Past, present and future are real to God" [Pinnock 1994: 120]. This follows that Pinnock's view of divine eternity is a softer version of the classical notion of divine atemporality. Thomas J. Oord, another open theist, goes from divine temporality to divine *pan-temporality*. He argues that the Bible teaches that God is '*time-full*' (italics added) rather than timeless. In conceiving God from the perspective of love, God cannot be love and timeless because love takes time to develop [Oord 2010: 79].

Open theists maintain that the future is open and unsettled, contrary to the past. However, God's timelessness cannot be open and unsettled. Every fact that is timelessly known is determined to occur precisely as it is determined. It logically follows that there is no relationship between a timeless being and temporal beings and their actions. Hasker distinguishes between 'hard' and 'soft' facts to account for the relationship between divine eternity and future contingencies. He argues that to say the future is entirely settled and we can do nothing about it is a hard fact. However, as understood in the open view, contingencies are a soft fact because the future is open. Because of its openness, humans can contribute their influence to bring what the future holds to fruition. Such issues, which God eternally decreed, and there is nothing humans can do about it, are hard facts. However, not everything is eternally decreed, namely, human contingent actions. Hasker argues that "[t]he doctrine of divine timelessness affords no help in whatever in understanding God's divine providential governance of the world... The theory does not... give any help in understanding the topics of providence, prayer and prophecy" (italics original) [Hasker 1989: 175, 177].

8. The Bible does not teach divine timelessness

Hasker argues that: "First of all, it is clear that the doctrine of divine timelessness is not taught in the Bible and does not reflect the way biblical writers understood God... there is simply no trace in the Scripture of the elaborate metaphysical and conceptual apparatus that is required to make sense of divine timelessness" [Hasker 1994: 128]. If God is timelessly eternal, how can He act in time by responding to the prayers of His children? And above all, how can God be born, grow up, live with and among humans, die and rise in time in the person of Jesus Christ? This, accordingly, is a pointer to the fact that God is not timelessly eternal. From this conclusion, Hasker states that the assertion that God is timelessly eternal is a '*strange doctrine indeed*' [Ibid.: 128-129]⁷.

⁷ Cf. [Hasker 1989: 145-146]. Hasker expatiates further that "According to the liturgy, *Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again*. But although those of us who are Christians take ourselves to know that this is true, a timeless God does not and cannot know any such thing" [Hasker 2011: 1-20, 5].

OT argues that conceiving God as timelessly eternal denudes God of the personalism and intimacy revealed in the Bible, which is essential for our relationship with God. As a result, “the doctrine of timelessness is inadequately motivated apart from Neoplatonic-inspired metaphysic that few Christian philosophers, at this juncture, can bring themselves to embrace” [Hasker 2004: 100]. In relating divine timelessness to divine sovereignty, OT argues that: firstly, both divine timelessness and simple foreknowledge are helpless in resolving the tension between divine control and human freedom. Secondly, divine timelessness is not biblical because no scriptural passages support it. Philosophers and theologians are the ones who are instead reading divine timelessness, middle or simple foreknowledge into such verses. For instance, classical theologians hold that divine eternity is taught, especially in 2 Peter 3:8: “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” The assertion that divine atemporality is taught in Peter does not make any sense to Hasker. Despite this rejection, he offers no further explanations of these passages [Ibid.].

Possible Objections

9. *OT's notion of time*

Obviously, conceiving God as timelessly present presents some difficulties, given that God operates from a time frame different from the human time frame. Further, divine timelessness in relation to God's knowledge of the future raises a few questions about the nature of God's knowledge with regard to human freedom. OT's questions against the classical notion of eternity are legitimate. However, OT also faces the same challenges, and I doubt they have provided a better response than CT. Lawrence Wood notes that the nature of time OT subscribes to is Newtonian, which was developed by Hendrik Lorentz rather than Einstein. This Lorentzian understanding of time places a dichotomy between time and space and denies the simultaneity of occurrences of events in space against the framework of time [Wood 2010: 42–66, 52].

Arguing that in the dynamic view of time, the present matters and that both the past and the future don't really exist will inevitably lead to the question: are there actual truths that are not known to God? For instance, Olusegun Obasanjo was indeed the president of Nigeria in the year 1999: a historical fact. Could such a fact cease to exist because it was in the past? I don't think so. If it is conceded that the past doesn't have the same ontological status as the present, then such a conclusion suggests that there are no memories or connections between the past and the present, with the future. Secondly, is it true that CT believes that the past, present, and future have the same ontological status in God? Undoubtedly, it is clear that the past and the present can never be the same as the future. Despite a continuation of the present and dependent upon it, the future cannot be identical to the past, just like the past cannot be identical to the present.

As seen above, God experiences time psychologically before creation in open theism. In that case, one could also argue that since God had experienced time psychologically before creation but was not bound by such time, nor was He temporal

at that time, He can equally act in time today, yet not be bound by it or necessarily needs to be temporal to relate with temporal categories. From the foregoing, Katherine Rogers is right to argue that “To say that all of time exists and is ‘present’ to God’s eternity does not render temporal events eternal any more than to say that all of space exists and is ‘present’ to God’s ubiquity renders spatial objects ubiquitous” [Rogers 2000: 63].

10. *Divine immutability does not equal immobility*

The common line of argument against the classical notion of divine immutability, which open theists build their case on, is that divine immutability connotes immobility. However, it is not very likely if the classical concept of divine immutability nears or equal immobility. First, classical theists, for instance, Augustine,⁸ although they speak of God as immutable, do not speak of Him as immobile. The change denied in God is *constituent* or what is rightly called *intrinsic* change. It is clear that God undergoes accidental changes in His relationship, especially with humans, as argued by OT also.

Further, divine immutability pertains to God’s character and *chessed*. Brian Leftow, a defender of classical theism, states that “The doctrine [of divine immutability] consists in the assertion that God cannot undergo real change, such as the change involved in learning, growing or reddening. Divine immutability does not entail that God cannot begin or cease to exist, if these are not real changes in the thing which begins or ceases. Nor does it rule out purely extrinsic changes in God, changes such as becoming admired” [Leftow 1998: 710–711]. He will not fail in His promises and is always loyal to His covenant. He swore by Himself to keep His promise to Abraham. I wish to state that by divine immutability, I mean the understanding that God’s essence remains constant. However, His divine sovereignty is in such a way that in remaining faithful to His covenant with humans, He adds and subtracts some earlier decisions because of finiteness and the mutable nature of humans. Without addition and subtraction in the divine plan in line with human nature, there can be no second chances and forgiveness. In other words, intrinsically, God is immutable but mutable extrinsically and relationally in His nonessential properties.

Second, as shown in the Holy Bible, the Redeemer has interacted with creatures and responded to their input. Because God has chosen to create, He has also willingly chosen to enter a temporal relationship with the creation. This explains why God is remorseful in the Old Testament, as seen in Genesis 6:6, 1 Samuel 15:11, Jonah 3:10 and many more. Cornelius van der Kooi and Gijsbert van den Brink argue that when people change, either for good or bad, in their relationship with God, God often adapts His plans. These changes do not really mean that God regrets His earlier decisions. Instead, He “changes in strategy in his attempt to reach the same goal” [van der Kooi, van den Brink 2017: 145].

Thirdly, logically speaking, God is immutable because He cannot change for the best or the worst. This has been the line of the argument. In their treatment

⁸ In connecting divine eternity to divine immutability, Augustine argues that because time does not limit God, He transcends the future; everything comes and goes, but God remains the same. See [Augustine 1997: 304, 316–317].

of Numbers 23:19, 1 Samuel 15:29, Malachi 3:6 and James 1:17, van der Kooi and van den Brink noted that these passages “do not mean that we can massage away the sharp bends in God’s interaction with us. What he has built, he breaks down; what he has planted, he plucks up (Jer. 45:4)” [van der Kooi, van den Brink 2017: 145]. Changing strategy is part of the divine plan. It is a recurrent theme in the Bible. Suppose God is immutable in character (as argued by OT), yet He relates and interacts with humans who are mutable in character. In that case, it follows that an immutable God, as understood in CT, can also adjust His plans yet remain immutable. It follows that divine immutability is authentically biblical. God is mutable in His relational attributes but is immutable in His divine essence.

11. It is not metaphysically and logically impossible for an eternal being to relate with temporal beings in as much as it is not logically and metaphysically contradictory for an omnipresent being to act in space

The notion that an atemporal being operates in a different time frame from temporal beings raises a question regarding the nature of their relationship [Deng 2018: 4.1.2]. For instance, one of the arguments against the classical notion of divine omniscience pertains to the relationship between the knower and the subject of knowing. For example, if God knew that Peter would deny His Son before the actual act, God’s knowledge of the action would change as soon as the act was executed due to the temporality of the subject of knowing. This also applies to the divine-atemporal-temporal relations due to how atemporal and temporal beings relate to time and space. This is a significant objection. However, the question that naturally follows OT’s insistence that the creator must be temporal to relate with the creatures is, was there a time God was atemporal, then He became temporal due to His act of creation? Alternatively, how could an atemporal being create a temporal creation in time? As shown above, although God changes, God did not change in His essential nature after creation; therefore, He is still atemporal after the creation of the cosmos. He only entered a temporal relationship with the creation because it is temporal. In other words, God’s choice to create in time is a choice for starting a temporal relationship. God only undergoes an external, not an internal, change. Therefore, acting in time does not make God temporal nor nullify the classical notion of divine eternity as unintelligible and incoherent. God’s actions and His relationship with creation are temporal, but God’s essence is atemporal. Even OT admits that there is a fundamental difference between God and creation. Although God acts in time, He transcends time [Geisler 2011: 527].

Further, OT argues that divine atemporality contradicts the biblical notion of God as the Redeemer who changes for the sake of the creatures. However, it is clear that Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas and all classical theists who hold divine eternity do so intending to show God’s continual Lordship and providential governance of the creation. In other words, the notion of divine atemporality allows the atemporalist to show how God masterfully interacts with temporal creatures in time yet living above the limitations associated with temporality. Although OT rejects the tenseless understanding of time, presentism also faces numerous challenges and, in the end, results in risk-taking in divine providence, as considered in 14 below [Rogers 2000: 55, 60].

From the foregoing, “if God is spacelessly present in his creation there are matters that he cannot know” [Helm 1988: 44]. Since OT argues that God is in time because He has been acting in time, it logically follows that He is in space since He has also been working in space. In other words, the argument that a timeless being cannot act in time itself is incoherent. We could also argue that a “spaceless immaterial being cannot create items in spatial relation to one another without Himself being in spatial relationship to them” [Frame 2001: 149]. However, this is not the case, as OT also holds the traditional notion of creation as *creatio ex nihilo*. Obviously, open theists do not claim that God is always present in space. If God’s divine omnipresence means that God cannot create material beings in space, then it follows that God’s knowledge in relation to space implies that God may not know there is a mouse ‘here’ because He is everywhere. Therefore, since it is logically and metaphysically possible for an omnipresent being to act in space, it also follows that an atemporal being can act temporally within time, and His relationship with temporal categories does not render them necessary or atemporal categories.

12. Divine eternity does not imply theological determinism because God’s knowledge of human contingent actions does not render them necessary actions; rather, it confirms that such actions are contingent and free actions

OT argues that whatsoever God knows, because of His eternal nature, will come to pass necessarily. Therefore, human freedom will be infringed upon. In line with Augustine and Boethius, this argument that divine knowledge confers some level of necessity on contingencies is one aspect of the argument. However, the doctrine of divine eternity, as conceived by Boethius, solves the problem. God does not ‘look ahead’ to see. He simply ‘looks’ simultaneously at what goes on as a whole [Wood 2010: 64].

In dealing with Peter’s denial of the Lord to examine the tension between divine omniscience and human freedom, Sanders argues that it was not the knowledge of Peter’s action by Christ that caused him to deny Jesus. It was the lack of his spiritual preparation to face the temptation to deny Christ. Sanders argues that it was easy to make this denial a reality and contingent upon Peter’s freedom: “All that need be determined by God in this case would be to have someone question Peter three times and have a rooster crow” [Sanders 2003: 31]. And that was precisely what happened, and Peter willingly gave in and succumbed to the bidding of the evil one. If this is the case, one can also argue that it is not always that divine foreknowledge of human contingent actions renders such actions necessary. This follows that divine atemporality and exhaustive divine omniscience do not lead to theological determinism. In this light, Augustine argues,

If I am not mistaken, it is the fact that you would not necessarily be making a man sin because you foreknew he was going to sin. Your foreknowledge would not itself make him sin, though he is certainly going to sin; otherwise you would not foreknow that it would happen. Just as you do not compel past events to happen by your memory of them, so God does not compel events of the future to take place by His foreknowledge of them [Augustine 1968: 175].

13. *The Bible contains traces of both divine atemporality and temporality*

William Craig argues that biblical writers were not developing the doctrine of divine timelessness or divine temporality when they addressed God in a way that points to divine timelessness or divine temporality. Though the writers of the Bible speak about “God as temporal and everlasting, there is some evidence, at least, that when God is considered in relation to creation, He must be thought of as the transcendent Creator of time and the ages and therefore as existing beyond time” [Craig 2001: 20].

If God lives His life in time as we do, His life will be affected differently, and God cannot be stable. The argument that everything is timelessly present before God does not mean that everything is *temporally* present to Him. Instead, it means that He can also relate to temporal categories despite seeing everything at once. The distinction between God’s act of creation in time and His eternal self-existence must be understood in dealing with creation and time. Because God owes His existence to no one without origin in time, His choice of creation does not lead to divine-self limitation. As a result, we need to emphasise that God created everything that exists in time and that although time is not *a thing*, it is not independent of the creator, nor does it confer any limitation on Him since His existence is ontologically prior to time. There was no time before God brought the temporal world into existence. Therefore, God frames the ages and is ontologically prior but not chronologically prior to time [Geisler 2011: 526]. The argument that everything is timelessly present before God does not mean that everything is *temporally* present to Him. Instead, it means that He can also relate to temporal categories despite seeing everything at once. Since God transcends creation, He equally transcends time [Helm 2002: 122, 125]. Although God incarnated in time, lived, died, resurrected and accomplished salvation in time, “[t]he Eternal did not become temporal, nor did the divine nature become human at the Incarnation any more than the human nature became divine” [Geisler 2011: 528].

A few biblical passages like 2 Timothy 1:9, 1 Corinthians 2:7, Isaiah 57:15 and Hebrews 1:10–12 seem to teach divine timelessness. OT argues that divine eternity is not taught in the Bible. However, the Bible also teaches that God has neither a beginning nor an end; therefore, He is eternal. His existence is permanent, contrary to creation which came into existence in time [Craig 2001: 15].

As a result of the fact that both divine temporality and divine atemporality can be extrapolated from the Bible, arriving at a concrete doctrine of divine timelessness is difficult. The argument presented above by OT has not yet proven whether God is timeless or not. Craig rejects the appeal to the special theory of relativity because the epistemological underpinnings of the theory can be challenged [Ibid.: 74]. The doctrine of divine timelessness is beneficent to Christian theology. It frees God of the limitations of being in time. Also, the doctrine provides God with the basis to overcome the limitation that comes with change, ignorance and temporal frustration. However, we cannot present a ‘watertight’ argument for divine timelessness if libertarian freedom is upheld [Frame 2001: 153–155, 157].

14. *Divine temporality leads to divine ignorance and risk-taking in divine providence. It does not solve the tension of the divine-human relationship, and it is not a viable solution to the problem of evil*

Open theism insists that, due to the temporal nature of creation and the need for a robust notion of the divine-human relationship, God's knowledge of the future is not exhaustive; therefore, He takes risks because everything may not turn out as He expects. Hasker argues that "*God takes risks if He makes decisions that depend for their outcomes on the responses of free creatures in which the decisions themselves are not informed by knowledge of the outcomes*" [Hasker 2004: 125].

It is logically possible to argue that God is a risk-taker and ignorant of some state of affairs if it is conceded that He experiences temporal successions of time as humans do. In other words, it makes sense to state that God takes a risk if He does not know everything about the future due to His decision to create free creatures. However, does divine ignorance resolve the tension of the divine-human relationship? Further, is divine ignorance logically and biblically consistent with the divine nature? As stated in sub-section 11 above, OT's notion of divine ignorance is logically inconsistent with OT's concept of divine omniscience in relation to human freedom.

Furthermore, the assertion that God *foreknows*⁹ only a few things because of human freedom does not bring the amount of comfort supposed by open theism. It has critical pastoral implications and brings little comfort amid suffering. Such a God may not be worthy of human trust [Wood 2010: 66]. That God does not know all states of affairs causes His wisdom to be questionable. It follows that God takes many decisions of which the implementation cannot be guaranteed. We may not know how many erroneous decisions God may have made in the past, on which God looks back with regret, or how many He will make in the future. As a result, it may not be wise to trust God for guidance [Ware 2002: 198–200].

15. *Given its ontological and functional aspects, the doctrine of the Trinity¹⁰ seems the starting point for understanding the divine-human relationship*

The doctrine of the Trinity is an essential notion that is exclusive to the Christian faith. As a result, it informs the formulation of many Christian doctrines. Christians affirm that each Person of the Trinity is distinctively God. Despite this distinction, the traditional understanding of the Trinity rejects commingling and individuating the Persons of the Trinity to avoid the heresy of modalism or tritheism. Every theological doctrine in which this is not considered may likely be unbalanced and unfaithful to biblical and confessional Christianity.¹¹ Although the doctrine of the Trinity does not

⁹ I am adding the prefix 'fore' to divine omniscience here as used in OT, not necessarily because I believe that God *foreknows* the future in a literal sense or as humans would *foresee* the future. I would prefer to think of God as having immediate knowledge of reality in line with Boethius. See [Boethius 2008: 524]

¹⁰ Although Arminianism serves as a precursor to OT, open theists fail to explore the doctrine of the Trinity as other proponents of Arminianism do, for example, Fred Sanders. He has written extensively on the doctrine of the Trinity. See his: [Sanders 2010; Crisp, Sanders 2014; Sanders 2016].

¹¹ The Nicene Creed is a classic example of this explication: "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith...: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance..."

directly address the tension of the divine-human relationship, it provides a framework for understanding the divine-human relationship that takes into account the ontological distinctions between God and humans.

God, in Christ, entered into human history and lived as humans do. In the incarnation, God entered time and tangibly engaged with humanity yet retained His divinity. Furthermore, through the third Person of the Trinity, believers enter into a unique relationship with the divine, even in their finiteness. OT upholds the doctrine of the Trinity, especially its notion of personhood and divine relationality before creation. However, OT's argument for the need for temporality after creation raises a few questions and objections. If the Triune God was relational before the creation, it follows that this relational nature continues after the creation. In that case, divine self-limitation¹² or temporality is not necessary.

Conclusion

Although OT's critique of the status quo has resulted in a healthy debate on the philosophical and theological understanding of God's relationship to time and the implication of such a relationship for divine-temporal relations, it has no better option than the traditional understanding of the concept. This is because, as shown above, the argument that divine atemporality connotes changelessness, exhaustive divine foreknowledge and determinism raises many questions and objections. I have argued that divine immutability does not equal immobility because the Redeemer has worked at least since creation. From OT's insistence that what God foreknows must come to pass necessarily, yet Christ's knowledge of Peter's denial did not lead to the denial, we can deduce an inconsistency in OT's argument against the classical notion of divine foreknowledge. Contrary to OT, divine foreknowledge of predetermined and contingent actions affirms that such actions are contingent or necessary. I have noted that the ontological and functional aspect of the Trinity is the starting point for understanding the divine-human relationship.

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¹² The notion of divine-self limitation is an essential notion in OT through which open theists believe that by revising and redefining the classical concept of God, they can both hold that the nature and existence of the entire universe place a significant limitation on God's being and hold that God is not limited both in knowledge and the exercise of divine control. See [Hasker 1989: 196].

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