

DIVINE TRUTH AND THE FACTOR OF TIME:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTE OF TRUTH
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF W.L. CRAIG'S THEORY OF DIVINE ETERNITY

by

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INTRODUCTION

This study explores the meaning of the concept of 'divine truth', or truth as an attribute of the God of Christian theism, from a unique perspective, namely that of current interpretations of the divine attribute of eternity. It basically tries to establish if there is a connection between views of eternity and views of truth, both truth as a divine attribute and truth as a philosophical notion. Since it may not be clear why such a link would exist, it may be helpful to describe very briefly how this possible connection came to my attention in the first place.

The question of 'truth' can arguably be called the very core of philosophical investigation and it certainly has been the main reason for me personally to engage in the study of philosophy. From its early years in ancient Greece, Western philosophy has wanted to know what truth is and how we humans are seemingly able to acquire it in a world that is constantly changing. Plato, for instance, felt that truth can only be truth if it is anchored in an unchangeable reality, and he postulated the realm of the Forms mainly to provide such a foundation. Centuries later, however, Christian theism presented what I believe to be a more profound answer: all truth is anchored not in an impersonal realm but in a person, the Creator God of the Bible. If this is so, then an understanding of truth in all its philosophical implications may have to begin with an exploration of who this God is, and two sources seemed especially promising to me for gaining such knowledge. The first source was of course the Bible and what it says about who God is, the second was the set of divine attributes as formulated by classical theism. Even though the term 'truth' has not played a major role in the traditional list of divine attributes, many of the other attributes could potentially shed light on the 'truth' side of God's nature, and this avenue seemed definitely worth exploring.

While studying the divine attributes, however, I soon realized that most of the complex debates in this area of philosophy seem to have a common element, namely the question of eternity. In fact, it seemed that those attributes that showed the most promise for shedding light on the issue of truth, were also somehow bound up with the question of how to interpret eternity. I realized that if I wanted to use the divine attributes to get a clearer view of truth, I would have to explore the issue of eternity first. Moreover, the question of eternity in its turn could not be

solved without a deeper study of the current debates in the philosophy of time. And this is how the idea came about that there might be an essential link between views of time and views of truth.

While engaged in this exploration of the different views of time and eternity, I encountered one theory that seemed to me highly plausible, namely the view of eternity of philosopher William Lane Craig. His view seemed to me not only very well argued, but also consistent with biblical information on the topic, and it showed great promise for solving some of those thorny debates that plague the study of the divine attributes. Now, if it could solve some of those conundrums, it would most probably also shed light on my original question, the question of truth. And this is how the topic of this thesis came about: How does Craig's solution to the question of time and eternity clarify issues with the other divine attributes, and more specifically, what are its implications for understanding the notion of divine 'truth' and truth in general?

In addressing this question we will follow the following format. The first three chapters will lay a conceptual foundation by highlighting the notion of truth from two different angles, Chapter One and Two exploring how truth and divine truth have been understood in philosophy and in scripture, while Chapter Three approaches our topic from the vantage point of the divine attributes. With this foundation in place, in Chapter Four we investigate the nature of time, both philosophically and from a biblical perspective, exploring for instance whether time is static or dynamic, finite or infinite. Our conclusions regarding time will then allow us to select the most plausible interpretation of divine eternity in Chapter Five. With this proposed new view of eternity in hand, in Chapter Six we first revisit those attributes that were found to be conceptually connected with eternity, and revise them accordingly. Finally, we apply the new insights gained and construct a plausible view of what is the main topic of this study—the nature of truth.

As is the case with any such project, our investigation will be working with certain assumptions and limitations. When we speak of the God of Christian Theism, we refer to the text of the Bible, both Old and New Testament, and also to those doctrines that are traditionally regarded as directly implied by these scriptures, such as the triune nature of God. Moreover, the specific theological tradition we will be limiting ourselves to is the Latin one, and we will thus leave the Jewish and Greek traditions aside.

Another point that needs clarification is that in this study the terms ‘truth’ and ‘divine truth’ are not always kept completely separate. The reason is that in the sources we have chosen to explore the two terms are frequently used interchangeably. To analyze every time whether the view referred to includes or excludes the divine would tend to divert our attention from the main topic, and in the end create more confusion than clarity. Moreover, the relationship between the concepts of truth and divine truth is explicitly addressed in the later part of our investigation, and it is hoped that any potential confusion in the beginning is thereby adequately resolved.

Finally, I want to express my deep gratitude for having been given the time and opportunity to study such an eminently worthy topic as that of divine truth. I can think of no other topic that has more profoundly shaped my own life and thought.

1 – PHILOSOPHY’S QUEST FOR THE NATURE OF TRUTH

1.1 Introduction

Our aim in this thesis is to clarify the divine attribute of truth from a very specific perspective, namely William Craig's theory of the divine attribute of eternity. Normally speaking, the biblical text on the one hand and consistency with the other attributes on the other, would be the two main sources for understanding the attribute of truth. However, thought on some of the divine attributes has been confronted with persistent problems, thereby hampering any deeper understanding of the notion of 'truth' that could have been gained. It is argued in this thesis that Craig's theory of divine eternity has great potential for elucidating some of these known problems, and clarifying these attributes will in turn enable us to gain a better understanding of the attribute of truth itself. Moreover, from the perspective of Christian theism, our vantage point in this thesis, all truth is anchored in God, and a deeper understanding of divine truth will therefore also be profitable to the philosophical quest to comprehend what 'truth' is and how it can exist in a constantly changing reality.

With this larger project in mind, the central concern of this first chapter is to clarify the concept of truth as it has been understood in philosophy. We will start out with a brief section on how the term 'truth' is used in popular western discourse in the early 21st century, a view which is captured in a diagram. Using this contemporary view as our guide, section two then explores the various interpretations of truth that have been developed throughout the history of western philosophy—traditions of thought that in their turn have crucially influenced today's everyday view. Where applicable, we also explore how each of these views interacts with the more specific concept of *divine* truth. In this way, this chapter will lay the first part of a conceptual foundation regarding the nature of truth. In Chapter Two and Three we will complete this groundwork by first investigating the biblical notion of truth, and then exploring what the divine attributes of classical theism can teach us about the meaning and nature of truth.

1.2 Truth in our daily life

At the core of much philosophical inquiry lies the question: ‘What is truth?’ In fact, over the centuries so much thought has been spent on the matter that even our common sense understanding of truth has changed in the process. Because of this influence, it is clear that we cannot use this everyday notion as a standard to evaluate the merit of philosophical truth views throughout history. However, the everyday view can still be helpful to us by providing a common backdrop to each theory, so we can better compare and contrast these views and understand their differences. Let us, therefore, start out with a look at what we commonly mean when we use the term ‘truth’ in normal conversation.

In our own time, our truth view is strongly influenced by the thought of modernity. As a result, we use the term ‘truth’ most frequently for that which corresponds with the facts as they exist ‘out there’, in reality, an actual extra-mental state of affairs. If we look at it in more detail, we find that such truth is almost always attributed to statements. We say that the statement “it is raining” is true when in fact and upon inspection, we find that it is actually raining right now.

It also happens, however, that truth in this ‘reality’ sense is attributed directly to a thing, situation or person. The difference is that in such cases we usually find another type of linkage, not between a statement and a state of affairs, but between a state of affairs and an ideal or original. Such use of the term is synonymous with ‘genuineness’, and it is found in phrases like “a true disaster,” “a true statesman” or “a true work of art.”

Finally, there is a third use of truth that is specifically and uniquely applied to persons. It denotes faithfulness or integrity, the moral quality of a person whose thoughts, words and actions consistently agree with each other and with his actual character, values and aspirations.

To clarify the distinctions between these three concepts of truth, we can picture the interaction between person and world as one involving three units: (a) the person, (b) the thought, word or action, and (c) reality, as in Diagram 1 below. In this diagram, the ‘person’ denotes the identity, character or self of the agent involved in the interaction, that

part of a person that makes her who she is and that is not prone to continual change. The unit in the middle represents the person's modes of interaction with reality and consists primarily of words or statements. In some sense this unit could be regarded as part of the person, but this part is not directly essential to the person's identity or character and its content changes as the person interacts with the world. Next to words, both thoughts and actions are included here, because they also represent interactions with reality; thoughts being unobservable and more closely related to the person-side, while actions are immediately observable and more directly linked to reality.

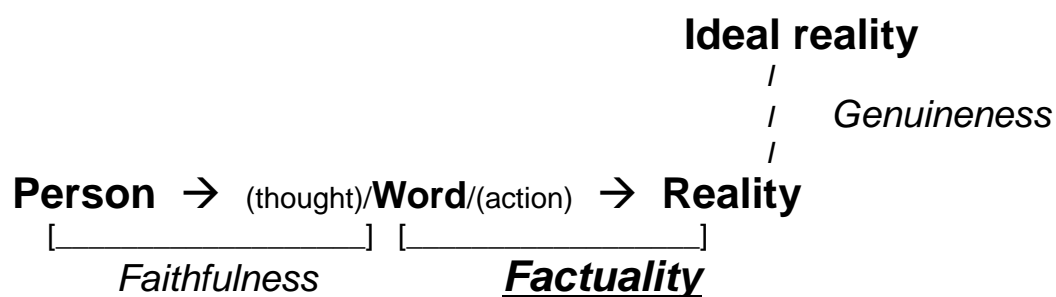


Diagram 1 - Our own popular western view of truth: Factuality first and foremost

We can now get a clearer view of what is meant by the three different ways in which we use the term 'truth'. In all three senses we find the underlying concept of an agreement, but variant uses locate the agreement on different sides of the interaction. Our most common understanding of truth, truth as fitting-the-facts or 'factuality', locates the agreement between words on the one hand and reality on the other, a view also known as the classic correspondence view of truth. Though its roots can be traced back much further in time, this view became the prominent one in modern thought, with scientific thinking being the paradigm example.

As we shall see, our current understanding of truth as genuineness also has a long history, but it cannot boast a similar degree of popularity today. It seems to be related to a now-outdated Platonic view of reality. In our diagram, we can see that this sense of truth is also located on the side of reality, but there is a difference in how this reality is conceived. While truth in the sense of factuality assumed a simple view of reality as basically empirical, genuineness implies a multi-level reality featuring gradations of truth,

with only the highest level really deserving the name ‘true’.¹ Moreover, the agreement in this case is not between two of our main interaction units, but between such levels of reality themselves.

Our third sense of truth is ‘faithfulness’. Here the agreement is located on the personal side of the interaction, between the person’s character or self on the one hand and his thoughts, words and actions on the other. Of course, since we cannot directly perceive the character of a person and subsequently compare that character with words and actions, the observable proof of the agreement is often found between the person’s earlier words and actions and later ones. A person who is true in this sense portrays himself in words and actions as he really is, and it is for this reason that his interactions with other persons show a pattern of consistency over time. This sense of truth is also morally charged. Since the person’s words and actions faithfully reflect his character and intentions, he is reliable or faithful, a person you can count on.

Other common terms that are related to these three uses of truth are ‘truthfulness’ (or veracity) and ‘trustworthiness’. These terms can be interpreted as either faithfulness or as factuality, depending on the context in which they are used. Truthfulness, for instance, can be used in both senses. It can mean that our words correspond with reality as it is (factuality), but it can also denote agreement between a person’s character on the one hand and his words or actions on the other (faithfulness). In the latter case, the person could be truthful only ‘as far as she knows’. She does not mean to deceive, and her words reflect faithfully what is in her mind, but they may not match actual reality. Finally, trustworthiness most often denotes the personal, faithfulness side of truth. Since any such additional terms fit within our three categories and do not add anything new, we will not introduce them as separate notions in the diagram.

In sum, we see that in everyday life in our time we use the term truth in three main senses, namely factuality, genuineness and faithfulness. By far the most common meaning of truth is factuality, and it is mostly used to indicate agreement between *propositions* and empirical reality. Both genuineness and faithfulness are much less common. Genuineness is mainly applied to *things, events or people* as they fit a certain ideal or standard.

Faithfulness is specifically a *moral* attribute of *persons*, denoting agreement between the person's character and words, as well as a consistency between earlier thoughts, words and deeds, and later ones.

1.3 Philosophers' answers to the question of truth

In this section we explore how truth and divine truth have been understood by the different traditions of thought throughout history. We will look at the Greek tradition, the Christian philosophers, the modern tradition and contemporary perspectives, and focus for each era on two thinkers who are deemed characteristic of their time.

1.3.1.1 The Greek tradition: Plato

The Greek word for truth, *aletheia*, literally means un-hiddenness or non-concealment (Bultmann 1933:238). As we already noted when discussing genuineness, the Greeks often believed that truth pertained to the uncovering of what a thing really is, to finding its true nature. Truth was understood as the discovery of actual reality, a realm which in day-to-day life tended to be hidden behind the sensible world of appearances (Cohn 1996:1).

Plato's view on truth is one that gradually unfolds throughout his works, specifically the *Meno*, the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. In the *Meno*, truth is mainly seen as an epistemological concept. One of the fundamental issues Plato tries to address is that of the one and the many: how can we have true knowledge of a thing as it really is if the things as we experience them via our senses are all varied and continually changing? For instance, how can we know what an apple really is if each apple we encounter is different from the next, and even the same apple changes from day to day? As a first step to solving this problem, Plato distinguishes between knowledge on the one hand and belief or opinion on the other.² Knowledge is certain and involves a state of mind that is unshakeable and unchanging, while belief is based on changeable sensation and thus

inherently unreliable. At this stage of the theory, these two still merely denote mental attitudes and do not imply any differences in types of objects (Crombie 1963:51).

Another element found in the *Meno* is that true belief can be converted into knowledge via a process called recollection. Through recollection, or *anamnesis*, we can access innate knowledge that we all have but of which we were previously unaware. Socrates' conversation with the uneducated slave boy who, when properly questioned, is able to solve complex mathematical problems serves as proof of this universal type of knowledge (Plato 1980:41 ff.). Since this knowledge is *a priori*, and thus not based on changeable sense experience, it is reliable and true.

The *Phaedo* is above all a moral treatise, but in his effort to find adequate answers to questions of morality, Plato necessarily also deals with epistemological and ontological issues here. It is in this dialogue, in fact, that the ontological theory is developed that forms the foundation for the epistemological issues first explored in the *Meno* (Gulley 1962:31). Accordingly, the criterion for distinguishing knowledge and belief now shifts from differing cognitive states to the actual objects of these two types of cognition. Belief or opinion is typically about changing physical objects or 'sensibles', and the beliefs based on them are thus hopelessly unreliable. The world that the senses present to us is merely one of appearances. Knowledge, however, has unchangeable entities as its object, entities that transcend the sensible world and exist in a higher level of reality as eternal 'Forms'. Since the objects of this knowledge are immutable, the knowledge itself is certain. In fact, this world of Forms exists at such a high level that even god, or the cosmic soul, uses it as a model to maintain the order of the universe (Audi 1999:217).

Since the *Phaedo's* focus is on ethics, it also expounds the moral side of this metaphysical theory. Sense perception is seen as morally inferior, unreliable, misleading and devoid of truth, while *a priori* knowledge is not so tainted because its object is intrinsically constant and reliable. This does not mean that the world of Forms only consists of moral entities—it comprises both the moral and non-moral, and both are objects of *a priori* knowledge. Rather, it shows that Plato's notion of virtue is strongly

connected with those of order, clarity, rationality and reliability—a view that reflects the common Greek belief and Socratic doctrine that ‘virtue is knowledge’ (op.cit.:2).

The distinction between knowledge and belief is again taken up in the *Republic*, where Plato describes what is involved in the creation of a utopian state. Crucial in this plan is the leadership of such a state, and the discussion therefore focuses on the education and character of those best suited to the task: the philosophers. The mark of a true philosopher is a love of truth, or *aletheia*. The central notion of this term is reliability, and it can be applied to things as well as propositions. Lack of *aletheia* is therefore not falsehood, but rather a lack of certainty (Crombie 1963:53). True philosophers strive for the kind of knowledge that has certainty, reliability and permanence, while “lovers of sounds and sights” (Plato 1982:207) are contented with beliefs about what merely resembles reality.

We saw in the *Phaedo* that the certainty of true knowledge was ontologically founded in the unchangeableness of the Forms. This was Plato’s initial answer to the problem of the variability and change in the sensible world. In the *Republic* he further strengthens this foundation of knowledge. Sensible objects are not only constantly changing; they are also necessarily composites of opposing features, which is a second sense in which they are in flux (Kraut 1992:70). Even in a just man, for instance, there will be both justice and lack of justice. Beliefs about sensibles are therefore partly about being and partly about non-being. In contrast, the Forms are pure being, and “absolute being is or may be absolutely known” (Plato 1982:208). The Form ‘Justice’, for instance, is unqualifiedly and perfectly just and in no sense unjust, and it is by virtue of this absolute and perfect being that it can be fully known.

The analogy of the divided line and the metaphor of the cave help to further clarify the epistemological and ontological framework of Plato’s theory (op.cit.:250-53). We are asked to imagine a line divided into two unequal segments, the shorter one representing the visible world, and the longer one the intelligible world of the Forms. Each part is again divided according to the same ratio, so that both realms have a higher and a lower division, the higher one represented by a longer line segment. We now have a view of

reality as consisting of four parts: the lowest level contains mere reflections of visible objects, next follow the objects themselves, then the lower Forms, and finally the higher Forms. The bigger the line segment is, the more reality and truth the corresponding section of reality contains, so that the higher Forms are most real and true, and the reflections of visible objects are the least so. Corresponding to these four levels of reality, there are four types of cognition that reflect the same ratio of clarity and truth. Finally, at the highest level the mind progresses by the power of thought to ultimately arrive at that which requires no assumption and is the starting point of all: the Form of the Good (op.cit.:252).

The cave metaphor directly follows this analogy, and since Plato states it may be “appended to the previous argument,” it can profitably be used to interpret the same (op.cit.:257). It describes men living from childhood in a cave where no sunlight penetrates. They are chained by the leg and neck and can only see what is in front of them. Behind them is a raised platform with a walking path and parapet, and behind the path a fire is burning. People walking on the track carry objects, the shadows of which are reflected on the wall in front of the prisoners. One day, one of the men is loosed from his chains and shown the true objects. Next, he is taken out of the cave and confronted with true reality above ground. Plato then explains that the prisoners in the cave represent most of humanity, those who have only belief since they are merely acquainted with the reflections of visible things or at best the objects themselves. The one man who is led out of the cave is the philosopher who gains knowledge, first of the lower Forms, then of the higher ones. When the freed man encounters the outside world, he can see its objects because the light of the sun shines on them and empowers his sight. In the same way, the philosopher can have knowledge of the Forms because the Form of the Good “imparts truth to the known and the power of knowing to the knower” (op.cit.:249).

It is also in the *Republic* that Plato introduces his *dialectic*, a method for the acquisition of true knowledge that builds on the earlier notion of *anamnesis* as introduced in the *Meno* (Gulley 1962:44). This method provides an upward path via ever broader hypotheses to the “unhypothesized beginning,” thus resulting in direct acquaintance with the Form of the Good (White 1976:99-100). Once the philosopher knows this highest Form, she comprehends how the other Forms are related to the Good, and so can derive

proper definitions for these other unchangeable entities. The Form ‘Justice’, to take this example again, is of course perfect justice, but the essence of this perfection is grounded in its direct relation to the Form of the Good (op.cit.:101).

Finally, we need to briefly address the question if Plato’s view features any sense of *divine* truth. Since the Form of the Good is the highest principle and also the source of truth (Plato 1982:257), could we speak of something like divine truth in the Platonic tradition? The answer depends, of course, on whether Plato saw the Good as in any sense divine. He calls the sun a deity, and even the “child of the Good,” but never directly attributes divinity to the Good itself (op.cit.:248). Etienne Gilson’s explanation of Plato’s religious context is helpful here. He states that the Greek gods were above all individual living beings. They were deemed immutable, necessary and eternal, and as such might resemble the Forms, but they were always live individuals first. Gilson concludes, “In Plato’s mind the gods were inferior to the Ideas”³ (1941:27). So, even though truth emanates from the highest principle, and from a source that is clearly beyond the natural, it does not hail from a god, and cannot be called divine in that sense.

Still, there may be one or two facets of the Platonic notion of truth that resemble certain features of the later Christian tradition. Plato is clearly looking for a unified metaphysics, and postulating the Good as the highest Form and source of all true knowledge does accomplish this. And it is this specific sense of the unity of truth and its origin in a single supernatural source that resonates with the meaning of the term as it is found in the Christian scriptures. Moreover, it has been suggested that the theory of *anamnesis* presupposes that the *a priori* knowledge found in the human mind was somehow deposited there through a process of divine, or at least supernatural, illumination—a notion that is later expanded upon by Augustine of Hippo (Pasnau 2008).

1.3.1.2 The Greek tradition: Aristotle

Our second representative of the Greek tradition is of course the philosopher Aristotle. In Aristotle’s thought truth is approached from several different angles. It plays

a role in his extensive work in the field of logic, features as an aspect of human knowledge in his psychological views, reoccurs in his metaphysics, and finally appears briefly in his views on ethics.

Aristotle laid the foundation for the discipline of logic by developing his syllogistic method, a system of rules for drawing true conclusions from true premises (Aristotle 1984d). His logic works with propositions that attribute a predicate to a certain subject, and Aristotle deems such a proposition true if it “says of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not”—a clear example of the correspondence or factuality view of truth (1984a:1597). Of course, true conclusions only derive their truth from true premises, which themselves are mere conclusions of previous syllogisms, so the question arises how we can avoid an infinite regress and find true premises that are somehow basic. Aristotle believes that such basic truths, axioms or *archai*, do exist and can be known. He distinguishes several types: definitions, common truths, existence statements, and logical laws like the law of non-contradiction (Edel 1967:122). These axioms are not all merely formal, but include content-filled material truths, and as such can provide a fruitful foundation for all kinds of scientific knowledge.

The question how such basic truths can be more than purely formal leads us to the psychological process by which true knowledge is acquired. In knowing, we start with sensation, and sense perception is always of particulars (Aristotle 1984d:132). Next, from sensation memory arises, and several memories of the same thing produce a single experience (op.cit.:165-6). This experience at first generates a ‘primitive universal’, but when more sensations follow, knowledge of the universal becomes increasingly clear. Aristotle uses the metaphor of a retreat in battle that is stopped, since if “one man makes a stand another does and then another, until a position of strength is reached” (ibid.). Sense perception thus instills the universal through what Aristotle calls ‘induction’, a process which at its highest level yields the *archai* or axiomatic truths that form the foundation of scientific knowledge.

If all knowledge starts with sensation, it is clear how it can be content-filled and material. However, the question now becomes how such material knowledge can be

necessarily true, and this question leads us in turn to Aristotle's views concerning metaphysics. The reason why sense perception of mere particulars can generate knowledge of universals is that all matter actually contains mind, this mental element being its 'form' or the intelligible universal (Frost 1989:232). The universal that is grasped in knowing is therefore not a purely mental construct, but part of the particular, the essence or 'what-ness' of the actual object sensed. If thus in knowing "the thinking part of the soul must be ... potentially identical in character with its object," and if agreement with reality is what makes a belief true, this agreement is clearly established right from the start (Aristotle 1984c:682-83). Seen from this perspective, truth is one of the senses of 'being' (1984a:1660), though it is only so in a secondary sense, since truth is not directly in things but rather in thought (Edel 1982:24).

Though Aristotle uses the term 'form', he does not assign to such universals separate ontological status in the way Plato does. The universal exists in the particular and never apart from it (Muller 1999:30). In fact, he states, postulating such separately existing forms leads to an infinite regress and is thus logically absurd (1984a:1629). However, Aristotle does seem to agree with Plato that true knowledge must be of the universal and of 'that which cannot be otherwise', though this does not always fit well with his focus on the contingent and perishable particular. Philosopher and historian Jonathan Barnes concludes that Aristotle merely recognizes that science must necessarily strive for generality, for the recognition of general patterns (1982:36).

Finally, we find a brief mention of truth as a moral attribute in Aristotle's work on ethics, the *Nicomachean ethics*. Here, the truthful person is described as one who "pursues truth ... alike in words and deeds" (1984b:1779). This means, for instance, that a person should neither overstate nor understate his position, "owning to what he has, and neither more nor less" (ibid.). He should not be boastful, nor overly humble, though the latter is in the end still preferable to the former.

Is there any mention of truth as an attribute of the divine in Aristotle's thought? Again, the deities of the Greeks are clearly too weak to function as the ground of truth. The gods of Plato and Aristotle are beings who in our eyes seem rather fallible and 'down

to earth', more like the characters in an American soap opera than divine beings that are worthy of worship. At the same time, the philosophical ultimate reality that Aristotle postulates is even further removed from a theist conception of God than Plato's Form of the Good. He does postulate a first cause, an Unmoved Mover, but this is more a scientific than religious principle, necessary to explain the universal movement from potency to actuality (Stumpf 1994:94). In my estimate and understanding, then, there is no sense of divine truth in Aristotelian thought.

It does need to be noted, though, that Aristotle clearly recognizes the need for a unified ground of truth. Truth, in his thinking, cannot in any way contradict itself, i.e. truth must be coherent and thus cannot be relative. With some humor he wonders why a man does not get up in the morning and walk, "into a well or over a precipice, if one happens to be in his way" (1984a:1592). He continues:

"Why do we observe him guarding against this, evidently not thinking it alike good and not good? Evidently he judges one thing to be better and another worse. And if this is so, he must judge one thing to be man and another not-man, one thing to be sweet and another to be not-sweet. ... Again, ... we should not say that two and three are equally even, nor is he who thinks four things are five equally wrong with him who thinks they are a thousand. ... obviously one is less wrong and therefore more right. If then that which has more of any quality is nearer to it, there must be some truth to which the more true is nearer ... and we shall have got rid of the unqualified doctrine which would prevent us from determining anything in our thought" (ibid.).

1.3.1.3 The Greek tradition and our popular view of truth

Let us now return briefly to our contemporary understanding of truth and the diagram that captured it. We saw that in our own use, the word 'truth' denotes primarily an attribute of statements that agree with actual reality (factuality), and in a related sense, truth is sometimes attributed to things, persons or situations, when they agree with a certain ideal (genuineness). Secondly, we attribute truth to persons when their beliefs, words or actions agree with each other or with the person's own character (faithfulness)

(locus 1.2). How does this view of truth compare with what we find in the Platonic tradition?

We clearly find in Plato ‘truth’ as agreement between man’s thoughts or words on the one hand and reality on the other, but it would be overly simple to call this connection factuality. There are two significant differences. First, Plato speaks of “true knowledge” as corresponding to the realm of the Ideas, not to empirical reality. This singular focus on the unadulterated ideal is best captured by our sense of truth as genuineness. It is the second difference, however, that brings in the similarity to our factuality sense of truth.

This second point is that Plato deals with ‘truth’ in both an ontological and an epistemological sense, while in our time we tend to look at truth mostly as a quality of our knowing. While the epistemological question of truth asks how we can have true knowledge, the ontological asks how and where truth is grounded in actual existence. Plato sees the solution to the knowledge question in a correspondence between word (knowledge) and ideal reality, and answers the ontological question by looking at the object’s proximity to the highest Forms. Since both these types of agreement stress the need to approach ideal reality as closely as possible, they both have this strong sense of genuineness. But when we look specifically at his epistemological treatment of the truth issue, the link between word and reality, we see the factuality sense emerge. So, Plato sees truth as both factuality and genuineness, but we need to remember that in Plato’s view the latter term is much more prominent and carries a lot more content than it does for us in our time.

What about the view of truth as faithfulness, a personal and moral characteristic? Do we find this anywhere in Plato’s thought? On the one hand, we saw in the *Phaedo* that Platonic truth is morally charged. On the other, however, we must keep in mind that morality in Plato’s time was quite different from how most western thinkers tend to see it now. We inevitably look at moral theory through a Judeo-Christian filter, while the Greek view was much more utilitarian in orientation (Gulley 1962:2). True knowledge simply always led to the good. From the Greek perspective it is natural, then, to deem truth

morally praiseworthy, but since this kind of truth is not necessarily attributed to persons, it is clearly not the same as our current view of faithfulness.

How does Aristotle's notion of truth compare to our own popular view? One passage in his *Metaphysics* has been labeled the classic formulation of the correspondence view of truth. This is the above mentioned definition: "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is and of what is not that it is not, is true" (1984a:1597). These words, which Aristotle precedes by stating his intention to define what is true and false, certainly strongly suggest the view of truth as correspondence between word and reality—in our diagram: factuality. The only difference with our current view might be that Aristotle's notion implies a stronger connection than we would dare to assume, especially where he speaks of the thought being potentially identical in character with the object, and knowledge of the universal being a matter of immediate intuition (1984b:682-83).

The notion of truth as faithfulness is not really found in Aristotle's thought. The brief section on truth in his *Nicomachean ethics* cannot be seen as an instance of faithfulness. Rather, this is an example of the ambiguous term 'truthfulness' discussed above (locus 1.2), and here it is the type of truthfulness that denotes factuality. Aristotle is not primarily referring to giving a true picture of one's inner character or being true to earlier words and deeds. Instead, the truthful man states things 'as they are', no more and no less, and his words are therefore characterized by a correspondence to reality, the real state of affairs.

In sum, in Plato we find truth both in the sense of factuality and genuineness, while truth as faithfulness is not represented. There is no explicit mention of divine truth either, though there is the recognition of the need to ground truth in one eternal source, and his *anamnesis* theory may suggest something like divine illumination as the origin of universal *a priori* knowledge in the human mind. In Aristotle truth mostly means factuality, and we find here even less of a hint of divine truth than was found in Plato, though again the need for a unified source of truth seems evident.

In terms of our diagram, both Plato and Aristotle can be found on the right-hand side, finding a ground for truth somewhere in reality. Both also agree that truth can only properly be anchored in the unchanging. But there is a difference in where they find this unchanging foundation. Plato posits his realm of Ideas to find an unchanging ground for truth and this locates him at the top of the right side in the diagram. But Aristotle attempts to ground truth instead in an unchanging element within changeable empirical reality, namely the form. What we see, therefore, is a subtle shift downward. Let us now move to the next era in philosophy and see how the search for truth further unfolds.

1.3.2.1 The Christian philosophers: Augustine

The notion of truth as it had been viewed in Greek philosophy underwent significant change after the apostle Paul brought Christianity to the Greco-Roman world. In this brief section, the truth views of the two most influential early Christian philosophers will be presented, meaning of course Aurelius Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

Augustine repeatedly asserts that the only things he wants to know are God and the soul of man (e.g., 1948d:277), and in both these field of enquiry the notion of truth turns out to play a central role. In the later part of his work *On the Trinity*, Augustine focuses briefly on the soul. He postulates that it has three major parts, or a ‘trinity’ of capacities: memory, understanding and will (1948c:866-67). Memory plays a key role here, not only in our understanding, but also in our recognition of the objects of sensation (Weinberg 1964:40). In the memory we find all that we know. More than that, it contains all truth, because we even find entirely new truths here that we had never thought of before (Augustine 1948c:866).

Augustine was strongly influenced by the views of Plato and Plotinus, and truth was for him something that is above all intelligible, immaterial and immutable (Gilson 1941:60). His question therefore becomes: Since man himself is clearly mutable, how can he or she have knowledge of immutable truth? Sensation involves both changeable objects and changeable sense organs, so it cannot yield pure and unshakeable truth. Still, man is

somehow possessed of such truth, for when a person makes true judgments about objects he or she uses eternal standards, especially when comparing things (Augustine 1948c:797). Moreover, all judgments of morality and mathematics involve eternal truths (Augustine 1955:110). So, what can be the source of such immutable truth in the memory of mutable man? Plato had answered this question with his theory of *anamnesis*, a view which required the pre-existence of the soul. Plotinus had answered that man is possessed of truth because he or she is a god (Gilson 1941:59). Both these answers went against the Christian scriptures, so for Augustine the truth of the matter clearly had to be sought elsewhere.

In his dialogue *Concerning the teacher* Augustine hints at the answer. We have access to eternal truths because we have an inner teacher, who teaches not through words but “by means of the things themselves which God reveals within the soul” (1948a:391). Eternal truths, then, come to us through God who is eternal. With regard to God’s relationship to man, Augustine stresses the importance of two attributes: beatitude and light, identified by him with the Holy Spirit and Christ. In scripture, Christ is described as the “true light that gives light to every man” (John 1:9).⁴ It is Christ, then, who is the Inner Teacher, and who makes truth known to man. He is the “exact representation of his [God’s] being” (Heb 1:3), and since God is pure being (Ex 3:14) Christ is the model of all that is or can be. Christ thus contains within himself the intelligible patterns, or Ideas, of all that which is capable of existence (Gilson 1972:71).

The process by which Christ, the Light, imparts eternal truth to our finite minds is a kind of illumination or shining upon the objects of our understanding. As Augustine states in his *Soliloquies*, God is “the intelligible Light, in whom and from whom and through whom all things intelligibly shine” (1948d:260). Like Plato, Augustine uses the sun here as a metaphor (cf. Plato 1982:248). Just as the sun illumines physical objects, so the Light shines on the eternal, immutable and necessary within the objects and “makes things to be apprehended” (Augustine 1948d:267). In fact, the mind of man has been designed in such a way that when it is directed to intelligible things it sees them “by a sort of incorporeal light of a unique kind; as the eye of the flesh sees things adjacent to itself in this bodily

light” (1948c:824). Eternal truths, then, are made visible to the human mind by the illuminating activity of Christ (Copleston 1950:63).

It is clear that for Augustine, truth is above all divine truth. Whatever is true, including that which is possible, actually exists in the mind of God, and the forms of created beings are images of, or participate in, these divine Ideas (Gilson 1972:73). Actually, God is not only the source of all truth, but God himself *is* truth, as Augustine repeatedly writes in his *Confessions* (1948b:33,49,165; cf. John 14:6).

The only more mundane definition of truth in Augustine’s metaphysics is found in his *On True Religion*. Here he specifies the exact meaning of the term ‘truth’ as “that which points to what is” (Augustine 1953:258).

Searching for any use of truth in the moral sense, we don’t find in Augustine a well defined system of ethics with a detailed list of specific moral values. For Augustine, to live rightly is above all a matter of the heart, rather than outward conduct. Our inner posture should be one of *caritas* toward God, and this alone should motivate us in all matters of life (Battenhouse 1955:372). In fact, without reference to God no moral trait or action can be good: “virtues which have reference only to themselves ... are to be reckoned vices rather than virtues” (Augustine 1950:707). This being so, it is surprising to find that Augustine wrote two treatises on just one specific virtue, namely truthfulness.⁵ Not only that, he took a uniquely uncompromising stand on the issue of lying: it is never under any circumstances the right thing to do (Griffiths 2004:14). The reason why moral truth is so crucial to Augustine is that God is truth, or more specifically, within the triune God, Christ, who is the Word, is Truth. Thus, since man is created in God’s image, just as the Word reveals the Father, our words should also reveal who we really are. There should be no discrepancy between our speaking and our mind, which is why Augustine defines as a liar a man who has “one thing in his mind and utters another in words” (1956:458).

1.3.2.2 The Christian philosophers: Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas had quite a different view on how true knowledge is acquired. He stated that all knowledge is basically derived from sensation, and before it receives such input the intellect is to be regarded a *tabula rasa* (Aquinas 1952a:415). For the intellect to apprehend a thing and fashion a concept of it, two things have to happen. First, a likeness of the thing is generated in us, which is the form or *species* of the object itself. This likeness, however, is as indistinguishable from the object “as is the action which the seal exerts on wax from the seal itself” (Gilson 1956:229). Secondly, from this form a representation is conceived, which can be expressed in a word and is the concept in our intellect.

The concepts thus formed are fully reliable, but they cannot properly be called true, just as objects are not ‘true’ in the primary sense. What Aquinas is referring to here is that truth implies active involvement of the intellect, which at this stage has not yet taken place. A stone is only called true “because it expresses the nature of a proper stone,” and words are said to be true “so far as they are the signs of truth in the intellect” (1952a:94). But truth proper applies not to things or their concepts, but to the mind’s active knowledge of things. It is only in the activity of knowing that the mind knows truth (Copleston 1976:50). “Truth is principally in the intellect, and secondarily in things according as they are related to the intellect as their principle” (Aquinas 1952a:95).

It follows that truth only enters the stage at the level of making judgments with these concepts, judgments that affirm or negate, ‘join’ or ‘separate’ in Aquinas’ words. In making a judgment that the object perceived “is a tree,” for instance, something new is added to the concept—an affirmation which exists only in the mind. At this stage there are two distinct realities, one being the object and the other the judgment, and only when there are two separate entities does the notion of an agreement between the two make sense. Truth then becomes “the conformity of intellect and thing (*adaequatio rei et intellectus*), and hence to know this conformity is to know truth” (op.cit.:96).

Even though this is the only real sense of truth for Aquinas, he does speak of other ways in which the notion of truth can be used:

“The true is predicated, first of all, of joining and separating by the intellect; second, of the definitions of things in so far as they imply a true or a false judgment. Third, the true may be predicated of things in so far as they are conformed with the divine intellect or in so far as, by their very nature, they can be conformed with human intellects. Fourth, true or false may be predicated of man in so far as he chooses to express truth, or in so far as he gives a true or false impression of himself or of others by his words and actions; for truth can be predicated of words in the same way as it can be predicated of the ideas which they convey” (1952b:9).

In man truth is mutable, because it can change as either the opinion changes or the thing itself changes, but Aquinas also affirms immutable and eternal truth, truth as it exists in the mind of God (1952a:100). Where Augustine posited divine illumination as the means by which man can have eternal truth, Aquinas identified such illumination with the creation in man of the natural light of reason (Gilson 1956:715 n117). At best, we are able to catch “a faint glimmer of the divine rays ... finding in things the trace of the intelligible that was active at the time of their formation” (op.cit.:377). Nevertheless, the truth that is in God is the measure according to which all things are said to be true, and this truth is one (Aquinas 1952a:98). Furthermore, not only is the truth in God, but “the truth of the divine intellect is God himself” and “He is truth itself, and the supreme and first truth” (op.cit.:99,97).

1.3.2.3 The Christian philosophers and our daily view of truth

Just as for Plato, for Augustine the main sense of truth is that of agreement with genuine reality. Man has access to immutable truth, but since sensible reality is constantly changing, this is not where true reality is found. Eternal and immutable reality is found in the Ideas, Ideas that under the influence of Christianity now find a new realm, namely the mind of God. All this reminds us strongly of the Platonic notion of truth as genuineness, both in the ontological sense of a link between empirical and eternal reality, and in the epistemological sense that connected words with reality and thus also leaned toward factuality. So, we clearly find both genuineness and factuality in Augustine.

Does Augustine’s teaching on the virtue of truthfulness also classify him as a proponent of the faithfulness view of truth? To a certain extent, yes. Augustine’s

understanding of truthfulness is not simply another word for factuality, as seemed the case with Aristotle's interpretation. Augustine defines truthfulness as correspondence between our words and our mind, and this gives it a meaning that approaches that of faithfulness more closely. It is in this way that we do find truth as faithfulness in Augustine's thought, though truth as factuality and genuineness are clearly primary.

With the thought of Thomas Aquinas, we come a step closer to our popular western view of truth today. We saw how Aquinas, with characteristic precision and thoroughness, lists the varied uses of the notion of truth and then gives his own well-reasoned commentary. He sees truth above all as intellectual, as an attribute of judgments or statements, and this is for him the primary sense of truth. When we affirm or negate that something exists or that a subject has a certain predicate, our statement will be either true or false. The criterion for it being true is its conformity to reality as we perceive it with the senses—in other words factuality as we understand it today. Moreover, a definition of a thing can be called true in a derived but closely related sense, namely if it implies a true judgment.

In his list of applications of the concept, Aquinas mentions two more senses of truth that are to be distinguished from the primary sense. First, objects can be called true to the extent they conform to intellect, or are intelligible, and supremely so when they conform to the divine Intellect, in other words when they are 'as they should be'. It is here that we find the more Platonian sense of truth as true being or genuineness. Lastly, truth can be attributed to persons in so far as they choose to express truth, or give a true impression of themselves or others by their words and actions. In the first case, the person's thought agrees with his words, an expression of faithfulness. In the second, his words or actions either agree with his character, pointing to faithfulness, or with the facts about another person, signifying factuality. Thus we see in Aquinas all three uses of truth identified, but the primary one for him is without doubt factuality, agreement between word and reality.

In terms of our diagram, both Plato and Augustine centered truth in correspondence with ideal reality, which was how man could have 'genuine' knowledge, while Aristotle and Aquinas focused more on actual changing reality or 'factuality'. Though all these

thinkers located truth clearly on the right side of the diagram, the change from unchanging ideal reality to mostly changeable factual reality is of course a move in a downward direction. True knowledge is still anchored in outside reality, but the view of reality itself has shifted from ideal and unchanging to empirical and changing, with just the unchangeable 'form' in the particular keeping knowledge secure. Though these similarities between the first two eras of philosophical thought are striking, it should of course be remembered that the Christian thinkers see truth as divine truth first of all, while such a notion was not clearly represented in the Greek tradition.

1.3.3.1 The modern tradition: Descartes

The closer we come to our own era, the harder it is to select thinkers that truly represent their time. Few will disagree with the selection of Plato and Aristotle to represent the Greek tradition, or with the choice of Augustine and Aquinas for the Christian thinkers, but the choice of Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant as ambassadors of the modern tradition seems already a bit more arbitrary. Descartes has been chosen here as the prime representative of rationalism, a school of thought that is clearly central to modernity and that inaugurated the turn to human reason and individualism. Kant has possibly been even more influential, but here he has been selected because it is in his thinking that the inevitable logical implication of rationalism starts to emerge, namely the crucial disconnect of human knowledge from reality as it is in itself. These thinkers thus represent the great hope of modernism on the one hand and its gradual demise on the other, and together they pave the way for the relativism and subjectivism of our own time, seen first in existentialists like Søren Kierkegaard and then in the postmodern views of contemporary figures like Richard Rorty. So, let us now turn to the notion of truth in the pivotal work of the French philosopher Rene Descartes.

Truth or how to acquire true knowledge is of course the main concern of Descartes' thought. Convinced after years of study that "there was no learning in the world," and that even in esteemed philosophy "no single thing is to be found ... which is not subject of dispute," he decides to make it his life work to devise a universal and infallible method of

constructing absolutely certain truth (1952a:42-3). Furthermore, “considering ... that of all those who have hitherto sought for truth ... it has been the mathematicians alone who have been able to succeed,” he confidently models his own approach on that of mathematics (op.cit.:47). In fact, he believes that just like Archimedes only needed one fixed point to move all the earth, so he would need “one thing only which is certain and indubitable” to serve as the foundation of all further human knowledge (1952b:77).

Underlying this heroic and vast endeavor was not just a confidence which many of us today might label as naïve, but a sentiment that is less easily dismissed in our time. Bernstein notes that the ‘Cartesian anxiety’ that drives this quest is not just the dread of epistemological skepticism, but that of a terrifying madness and chaos where nothing is fixed. “*Either* there is some support for our being, a fixed foundation for our knowledge, *or* we cannot escape the forces of darkness that envelop us with madness, with intellectual and moral chaos,” writes Descartes (Bernstein 1983:18). Again, his confidence in a solid foundation to all knowledge may seem somewhat simplistic to many of our contemporaries, but the underlying spiritual anxiety clearly still haunts mankind today.

Descartes seeks an indubitable foundation for human knowledge, and he believes he can find it at the very center of his own doubting mind. He reasons that in doubting the truth of all he has ever believed only one thing remains that cannot be doubted. This one thing is the existence of his own mind, for he cannot doubt its existence without affirming it in the process, and thus he arrives at his famous conclusion: *cogito ergo sum* (1952b:78). The next step for Descartes is to study carefully what makes this true and certain proposition different from all other beliefs. Identifying as its only distinguishing mark that he sees its truth very clearly and distinctly, he derives the general rule that “things we conceive very clearly and distinctly are all true” (1952a:52). With this criterion in hand, he now finds several such clear and distinct ideas in his mind, notions that he simply cannot seem to doubt.

Though his method of doubt has now apparently given him a foothold in the mind, it has also driven a wedge between the mind on the one hand and all that exists outside of it, and is as yet unredeemed, on the other. For if the mind cannot be linked to extra-mental

reality, how can we trust our clear and distinct ideas to be true, how can we distinguish them, for instance, from what we believe to be true when we dream? A letter to his friend Marin Mersenne reveals that for Descartes such a connection with the outside world is indeed crucial to the definition of truth: “The word ‘truth’, in its proper signification, denotes the conformity of the thought with the object” (Morris 1971:228).

It is at this apparent impasse that Descartes’ ontological argument for the existence of God comes to the rescue (1952b:93ff.). One of the clear and distinct ideas Descartes finds in his mind is the idea of a perfect being, God. Since this idea implies perfection and thus cannot be the product of an imperfect human mind, it must find its origin in God himself. Our belief that all those ideas that we can conceive of clearly and distinctly are indeed true is now anchored in the existence of God. Since God is the one who has implanted such ideas in us, and since He is perfect and truthful, we can be sure that those ideas of simple natures are indeed true (1952a:54). In other words, we can find within ourselves indubitable, absolute and eternal truths, truths that we could never have derived from mere sense experience.

Descartes hopes in this way not only to provide a basis for the truth of simple ideas, and thus via sound deduction to an extensive structure of human knowledge, but also to gain a reason to believe in an objective, rational order in the outside world. Still, truth as an attribute does not directly apply to outside reality, since “when [truth] is attributed to things which are external to thought, it signifies only that these things can serve as objects of true thoughts” (Morris 1971:228).

Is there any sense of divine truth in Descartes’ thinking? On the surface it seems that his theory does make room for such a notion. We have seen that he believes that the clear and distinct ideas in the mind of man find their origin in God, and in this he seems to follow Augustine’s thinking on divine truth. However, since Descartes makes the idea of God ultimately dependent on the human mind, rather than the other way around, this version of divine truth soon turns out to be powerless and is no longer able to provide a firm anchor for truth.

1.3.3.2 The modern tradition: Kant

The Cartesian solution to the problem of true knowledge certainly did not convince the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, and so the question of how we can ever attain true knowledge also became a major issue for him. The philosophy of Kant's time was divided between Cartesian rationalism, with its increasingly debated connection between mind and matter, and British empiricism, which, with Hume's critique of causality and induction, had taken a decisively skeptical turn. It was clear that neither of these could explain the factual existence of what Kant believed was indeed true human knowledge.

Kant was duly impressed, for instance, by the ability of Newtonian physics to generate apparently true knowledge, and he wondered how such knowledge could be explained. At the same time, he was concerned that the thoroughly mechanistic outlook of natural science would eventually limit all knowledge to the realm of mere sense experience, leaving no room for key metaphysical notions such as freedom or God. That there is such a thing as universal and necessary knowledge (*a priori*) that is also content-filled (synthetic) seemed clear to him, and he found such truths not only in Newtonian physics, but also in Euclidian mathematics, in ethics and in metaphysics. But what puzzled him was how such synthetic *a priori* knowledge could actually have come about.

Like Copernicus, who took a most daring step by replacing the geocentric hypothesis with a heliocentric one, Kant finally decided to try a radically new approach in epistemology. He postulated that in knowledge it is not the mind that is shaped by the object, but that it is rather the object that is shaped by the knowing mind (1934:22). He thus agreed with the empiricist that knowledge does indeed start with experience, but as he made clear "it does not follow that it all arises out of experience" (op.cit.:41). In experience, he explained, the mind processes the object of knowledge according to certain specific categories, such as space and time, and since all experience is processed in a similar manner these categories are universal and necessary. Experience, then, gives such knowledge its content and makes it synthetic, while the process of knowing itself provides its unavoidable form and makes it *a priori*.

With this revolutionary new hypothesis, Kant was able to explain how we can have knowledge that is universal, certain and necessarily true. However, since empirical knowledge was now seen as extensively shaped by the human mind itself, it became severely limited in its reach. We can have knowledge of things as-they-appear-to-us (*phenomena*), but knowledge of things as they actually are in themselves (*noumena*) is permanently inaccessible. This does not mean that Kant did not believe in an actual extra-mental reality. Since the existence of our world of experience is not produced by the mind, he acknowledged there must be a reality external to us that gives rise to experience (Stumpf 1966:315). However, this world is now by definition unknowable, and the truth of any theories about the world can therefore neither be proved nor disproved, just as had already been acknowledged for theories about God and the self (op.cit.:317).

For Kant, this limitation was not just a negative factor. He had wanted to find room for such notions as freedom and God, and his view of an unknowable noumenal world actually provided just that. God, the self, reality and freedom were now seen to be beyond the phenomenal world of experience. The conclusions of science, which threatened to subject all such notions to a mechanistic worldview, no longer had jurisdiction in the moral and religious life (Jones 1969:65). Of course, since these notions necessarily transcend our knowledge, from now on they had to be seen as merely regulatory. But what Kant had accomplished was that to speak of the self or of God was not incoherent with the findings of science, since the territory of science had now been properly limited.

Kant's famous saying was that, "Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe ... the starry heavens above and the moral law within" (1952:360). So, having provided an explanation of how scientific knowledge of the starry heavens can be true, he now focused on his other passion: the moral law. Kant's ethical theory aimed to provide a universal standard for what is morally right: the categorical imperative. In its best known version, it states that "I am never to act otherwise than so that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law," but since this formulation proved troublesome, he later developed another (1956:70). This later version reads, "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity ... never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end" (op.cit.:96), and it is here that he uses the virtue of truthfulness as an

example. The man who makes a false promise clearly uses another “merely as a means,” and he is therefore morally wrong (op.cit.:97). Being faithful and keeping one’s promise is even a so-called perfect duty, meaning there can be no exceptions to this rule, ever.

Though Kant speaks confidently of God, the idea of divine truth, accessible to man, that can function as a standard is now no longer available. Like reality, God becomes a mere regulatory concept and such a God can no longer be the guarantor of knowledge. This job must therefore now fall to the universal categories in the mind of man.

1.3.3.3 The modern tradition and our daily view of truth

In studying Descartes we recognize where in history our own understanding of truth comes into view. It is evident from his letter to Mersenne that Descartes sees truth as factuality, but in this he still mostly follows in the footsteps of those before him. What makes Descartes’ thought so much more like our own is that he rests truth on the human mind alone. The preceding thinkers had seen the need to safeguard true knowledge by resting it on the perceived link between the mind and an outside reality. In Plato and Augustine, the unchangeable reality of the Ideas was clearly accessible to man, while Aristotle and Aquinas stressed the link between truth in human thought and the unchangeable forms embedded in the empirical world. But Descartes foregoes both types of connectedness and endeavors to rest all truth on the mind alone. Since the existence of God is similarly founded on an idea in the mind of man, Descartes’ subsequent effort to reestablish the link by making God the guarantor of truth of such innate ideas is less than successful in the long run.

Most major thinkers before Descartes had recognized that truth cannot be truth if it has no element of changelessness and eternity—a segment that necessarily transcends finite, temporal and changing man and that had often been captured in the genuineness sense of truth. The question as to where exactly this eternal element is found dominated the quest for truth for two millennia. With Descartes this quest is abruptly abandoned. The

question that then arises instead is how we can have any knowledge at all of empirical reality—no matter if this reality is changing or not.

So we see a decisive shift away from the genuineness sense of truth toward factuality alone, a factuality that itself is also weakened by a lack of connection with anything eternal. Descartes' thought further resembles ours in that it does not dwell much on truth as an ethical concept. In fact, Descartes hardly focused on ethics at all, since he believed it to be one of the last branches of knowledge to grow on the 'tree of philosophy' (1966:119). Thus, the systematic investigation of *la morale* can only begin after certainty has been achieved in metaphysics and physics. Though he does make a certain connection between truth and ethics, this does not lead to an understanding of truth as faithfulness. Descartes' principal focus in ethics is the 'good life' as it was understood by the Greeks, a life of mental flourishing, made possible by philosophy and the cultivation of true and sound judgment. As we have seen, true judgments are those that accord with reality. Thus, even truth in an ethical sense is for Descartes again closely related to factuality, and not to the personal characteristic of faithfulness.

In the work of Kant reality becomes noumenal, merely a regulative concept, and since nothing can be known about it, reality as it is has effectively disappeared from the radar screen of human knowledge. What does this mean for Kant's understanding of truth? It is clear that Kant's view has no room for the genuineness sense of truth. Moreover, it can no longer accommodate truth as factuality in the sense of agreement with even just empirical reality. If truth is "the agreement of knowledge with its object" writes Kant, "I can only compare the object with my knowledge by this means, namely, by taking knowledge of it. My knowledge, then, is to be verified by itself, which is far from being sufficient for truth" (2005:45). Still, Kant acknowledges that Newton's laws, for instance, reflect truth. What is left then is truth as agreement between words and reality, but reality is now merely the phenomenal world—not reality *an sich*. Finally, truth in the sense of faithfulness is found to be important in Kant's ethical theory, but it in no way takes the place of the primary truth sense of factuality, or agreement with phenomenal reality.

In sum, both Descartes and Kant move decisively away from genuineness with its linkage to eternal truth. Their primary understanding of truth is factuality, but a factuality that links thought only to empirical reality. At the same time the possibility of a real connection with the empirical world is increasingly undermined. Such a bridge between knowledge and reality becomes already shaky in Descartes and further disintegrates in Kant, and in terms of our diagram both thinkers find themselves eventually isolated in the middle, namely in the finite thoughts of man. Moreover, since Descartes built all knowledge on the ideas of one man—even though he assumed they would be universal—it is his thinking that opens the door for subjectivism and relativism. Kant makes a heroic effort to stem the tide by positing his universal categories, but even this defense will eventually give way. Finally, both thinkers still speak of God, but any sense of divine truth in Descartes is a powerless one, and Kant cannot base any true knowledge on a concept that itself has now become merely regulatory.

1.3.4.1 Contemporary perspectives: Kierkegaard

As we approach our own time, philosophical perspectives seem to multiply and diverge, and this makes selection of thinkers on truth more difficult. Only time will tell which philosophers truly changed the course of human thought, but Kierkegaard and Rorty have been chosen here as they seem key representatives of the existential and postmodern direction in philosophy respectively. It should be noted, though, that next to these two directions that tend to devalue earlier truth views, there are other trends that reconfirm their significance (see e.g., Rorty 1982:9 ff.).

19th century thinker Søren Kierkegaard rejects any type of truth that is understood as being detached from the person seeking truth. Those branches of knowledge which were traditionally seen as generating more certain truth, such as mathematics and science, are completely rejected by him as unimportant. Such objective truth are accidental and in their “degree and scope ... a matter of indifference” (Kierkegaard 1992:197). Though they give certainty, they can all sooner or later be reduced to mere tautologies and are thus entirely insignificant.

What Kierkegaard seeks instead is what he calls ‘essential truth’ or ‘subjectivity’, truth that does not reside in sentences. Such knowledge is uncertain, even paradoxical, but it is essential because it actually “pertains to existence” (ibid.). True knowledge must relate to the knower, and is typically limited to the ethical and ethical-religious realm. It focuses on *how* something is said, rather than on *what* is being said. Kierkegaard further elaborates on this unusual notion of truth:

“Objectively the interest is focused merely on the thought-content, subjectively on the inwardness. At its maximum this inward ‘how’ is the passion of the infinite, and the passion of the infinite is truth. But the passion of the infinite is precisely subjectivity, and thus subjectivity becomes the truth. ... Here is such a definition of truth: *an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness*” (op.cit.:203).

“True truth” is not learned but rather ‘appropriated’, a continual process which makes it part of our very existence, making truth something that we actually live. Objective and subjective truth are mutually exclusive for Kierkegaard, and since it is the latter we should seek, we should avoid the pursuit of objective truth through the use of reasoning. Instead, we must seek and hold on to what is actually repulsive to objective understanding, especially in religion and the Christian faith, “for faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off” (1954:64).

In the ethical realm, the pursuit of subjective truth has some fascinating implications. A person who has faith and has consequently become a true individual is superior to the universal, and thus also to universal ethical rules. Therefore, such a person can suspend ethical rules and still be morally justified (op.cit.:67). Another element in Kierkegaard’s moral philosophy that may have some relevance for truth views is the importance he gives to the unity of the self and his condemnation of any form of double-mindedness (Pattison 2005:100). We will explore this further when we compare Kierkegaard’s understanding of truth with our own (locus 1.3.8).

Finally, Kierkegaard evidently does believe in God and even in his eternal truth, but for the individual this divine truth can only be purely subjective and thus relative. Ultimately, it is only the individual human heart that can determine its own truth.

1.3.4.2 Contemporary perspectives: Rorty

Richard Rorty, our last philosopher in this overview, is a representative of more postmodern views on truth. Rorty critiques what he calls representationalism, the pursuit of truth as an “accurate representation of reality” (1979:10). As a pragmatist in the tradition of Dewey and James, he sees truth rather as “what it is better for us to believe” (ibid.). Philosophy from the time of Plato onward has been searching desperately for eternal and necessary truth, seeing it either as correspondence to an eternal reality beyond space and time, or as representing spatiotemporal reality (Rorty 1982:3). Even when Kant made knowledge contingent on mental processes, he still posited a universal epistemological foundation. And several centuries later, the modern language philosophers were still found engaged in the quest for a foundation to human knowledge—not seeking it in truth or thought this time, but substituting language instead (op.cit.:6).

According to Rorty, the time has now come for philosophy to realize that this search has been wholly misguided, that the universal human aspiration to objective truth has merely been motivated by what Sartre saw as “a common human hope that the burden of choice will pass away” (Rorty 1979:376). From now on philosophy, ‘edifying philosophy’ that is, should aim to “keep the conversation going” rather than to find objective truth, a pursuit which after all has merely resulted in seeing human beings as objects and in “freezing over culture” (op.cit.:377). Instead, philosophy should be therapeutic; it should “break the crust of convention, preventing man from deluding himself that he knows anything, except under optional descriptions” (op.cit.:379).

What is left of the notion of truth in this neo-pragmatic and anti-foundationalist view? Rorty states that his theory allows for several incompatible interpretations of truth at the same time, because truth is simply not the type of notion that has a single referent. There is not one objective reality, and thus no one set of conditions for the one true theory (op.cit.:374). Rather than an eternal, universal, necessary notion, truth is historical, embedded in our language, culture and social context, and thus continually changing. Not only that, there is no common ground or universal reference frame that makes comparison

or communication between truth views possible. Truth is something that is made, not found. Commenting on the generally accepted definition of knowledge as “justified true belief”, he states that since ‘justified’ beliefs are simply those that our epistemic community agrees on, when we say that beliefs are ‘true’ we are merely using an honorific term for those beliefs that we consider “justified to the hilt” (Gutting 1999:798).

Within such a view, there is hardly any need to look for a place for God and for truth as having a divine origin. Actually, Rorty only refers to God when in a side-note he commends secularists on getting rid of God language (1982:2). Moreover, ethical theories are seen as in the same predicament as theories of truth. There is no grounding for moral values outside of our arbitrary commitment to them. However, this does not keep Rorty from presenting his own preference. His ‘liberal ironism’ asserts freedom as its basic value: first, freedom from suffering, and next, freedom to choose one’s own values and live fully in accordance with these (op.cit.:798).

1.3.4.3 Contemporary perspectives and our daily view of truth

In Kierkegaard we clearly see a further movement toward the subjective or personal side of truth. Objective truth, which is of course closer to factuality, does exist for Kierkegaard, but it has no real significance for life. “True truth” is subjective truth, a notion that in everyday terms is maybe better represented by the word ‘meaning’. In our diagram it may reside in the person, or possibly in thought, but correspondence to reality is of no significance in this view.

Does this then mean that we find truth in the more personal and moral sense here, truth as faithfulness? Yes and no. As an existentialist, authenticity is an important concept for Kierkegaard, and being authentic does imply being *true* to one’s own inner desires and principles, a refusal to be molded by external pressures into someone one is not. We already noted Kierkegaard’s focus on the unity of the self and on single-mindedness. This sense of truth, however, seems primarily centered on the self and at most only indirectly related to one’s behavior toward others. Thus, it is strongly personal but not necessarily

moral, while faithfulness clearly has moral implications. If, for instance, a person would make a promise but then genuinely change his mind, his authenticity might, morally speaking, allow him to break the promise, while such an act would be inconsistent with the moral content of faithfulness.

What we do see in Kierkegaard, however, is the genuineness sense of truth, but now as applied to the self rather than outside reality. To reflect Kierkegaard's position in our diagram, what is needed is a shift to the extreme left. Truth is subjective and personal truth, a very individual affair for Kierkegaard, and it thus centers around the person and his inner self. The element of agreement between two entities that has been characterizing all our truth views till now would in Kierkegaard be located in the person himself, signifying authenticity and unity of self.

While Kierkegaard did not deny objective factual truth, but merely considered it insignificant, with Rorty truth as agreement with objective facts seems to have come to the end of the road. Truth is not agreement with objective reality, but rather agreement with the social and historical context of the knower.

Just like Kierkegaard, then, Rorty takes us to the left of the diagram, the personal side, but that is where any similarity between them ends. While in Kierkegaard morality still plays a role, Rorty sees moral values as nothing more than individual preferences, and where Kierkegaard focuses intensely on the person as individual, Rorty sees the person as a much wider entity. Rorty best fits on the 'person' side of the diagram, but with the explicit understanding that a person is not an isolated individual but a product of his social and historical environment. Truth in Rorty's view might then at best be seen as agreement between the person's thoughts, words and actions on the one hand and the person-as-product-of-his-social-background on the other.

In sum, both Kierkegaard and Rorty bring us to the extreme left of the diagram, even further than Descartes and Kant. In the modern tradition there was still an effort to ground truth. There was a looking toward reality, even if not the eternal but only the empirical world. The quest for the unchanging had been given up, but there was still a changing reality to explore. In Kierkegaard this endeavor is finally given up, and even though he

still believes in eternal truth, such notions can only be accessed in subjective and finite experience and thus become finite themselves. The person has become the central concern and the final arbiter of his own truth. Finally, in Rorty the notion of truth in any of the traditional senses is rejected altogether. Genuineness, factuality and faithfulness may still play a role in our everyday view, but they are no longer found in the official postmodern world of thought.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at selected major ways that the term truth has been understood throughout the history of human thought. Even though this survey has had to be brief and many worthy thinkers on the subject had to be ignored, we were still able to recognize certain broad trends in man's thought about truth from the ancients right up to our own time. The tool we used to facilitate comparing truth views was a diagram of how the term is currently used in everyday western conversation. We noted that in popular western usage truth is primarily factuality, and sometimes genuineness or faithfulness.

Comparing the various philosophical views of truth with this diagram, we were able to conclude that truth as genuineness, and thus as unchanging, played an important role in Greek thought. Transcendence of all that is temporal and changing was seen as critical in order to properly ground truth. This singular focus on eternal reality was gradually replaced by an interest in the empirical world, but even then an eternal element embedded in that reality was still regarded as an absolute requirement to make true knowledge possible. In our diagram this development from genuineness to factuality meant a move downward on the right-hand side of the interaction between person and world.

The next change came with the methodological skepticism of Descartes, and his retreat to the questioning mind of man as the foundation of all knowledge. The battle to hold on to an unchanging ingredient in ever-fluctuating sense experience now became the fight to retain even the most fleeting link with the extra-mental world, no matter if it is changing or not. Factuality was still the main use of truth in this era, but its

correspondence with reality became progressively weaker. In our diagram, this therefore meant a shift from the right-hand side to the middle, from empirical reality to the struggling mind of man.

Finally, with Kierkegaard and Rorty, the focus has shifted from human thought in its effort to know to the human person himself, while subjective experience or collective worldview construction has made all knowledge merely relative. This move toward the extreme left of our diagram was seen not to signify a shift from factuality to faithfulness, but rather a mounting disillusionment with the belief itself that reality and truth can be known, and a corresponding retreat to man-alone as she learns to deal with, and sometimes celebrate, this failure of philosophy to deliver an adequate ground of truth.

Roughly parallel to this move away from a robust view of truth, the idea of divine truth also gradually diminished in importance. The main champions of divine truth were of course the Christian philosophers Augustine and, to a lesser extent, Aquinas. The notion of divine truth still played a role in the thinking of Descartes, but since he based the existence of God on the human mind, this view had been emptied of its main significance. Since that time, the notion of divine truth has not played a major role in philosophy, though it must be noted that Christian thought as a whole has made a come-back during the last few decades, and much of what will be presented in the later chapters of this thesis is evidence of that.

We will now turn to an investigation of the notions of truth and divine truth as they occur in the Bible, again comparing this view with society's current popular view of what we mean when we say of a statement or person, thing or event that "it is true."

NOTES

¹ This ideal reality can be seen as either existing outside of the mind (as in Plato) or within the mind, but this difference is not crucial since in both cases the agreement that underlies the term genuineness is that between an entity that is directly perceived (this diamond here) and one that is the ideal version (the perfect ideal diamond—as it exists outside the mind or as a prototype in the mind).

² Plato's concepts of belief and knowledge would fit under the middle section of our diagram.

³ 'Ideas' is of course another word for Forms, and they are used interchangeably in this study.

⁴ Scripture references are from the *New international version*, unless noted otherwise. See bibliography under: Bible.

⁵ *On lying*, written in AD 394 or 395, and *Against lying*, written 25 years later.

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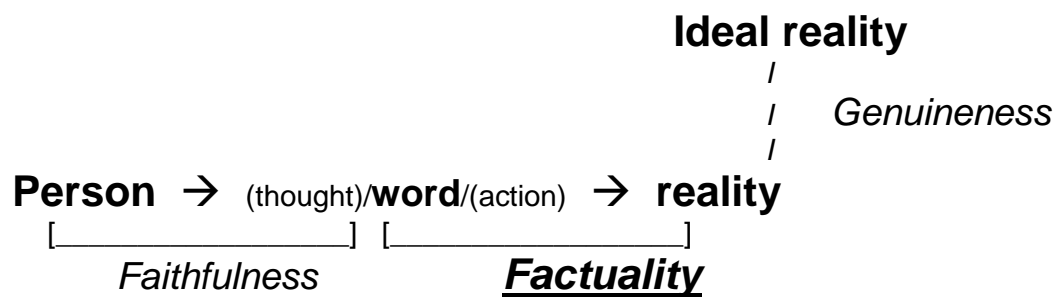
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2 - THE CONCEPT OF TRUTH IN SCRIPTURE

2.1 Introduction

From eternal reality to redundant illusion, from principle of life to lifeless tradition, philosophical views on truth have seemingly run the gamut. But at the root of Western culture lies another source of views on truth, namely the Bible. We saw that philosophy and biblical theology intertwined for a season in the thinking of the Christian philosophers. We now want to explore that very source these philosophers drew upon, and find what the Bible has to say about truth. To get a clearer grasp, we will again compare these notions with our current daily view as pictured in the diagram below.



2.2 Truth in the Old Testament

The Hebrew word for truth, *'emeth*, appears no less than 126 times throughout the Old Testament (Quell 1933:232). It developed from the root word *'mn*, which means firmness or stability (Carver 1956), and it is closely related to the still currently used term 'amen' which concludes and confirms prayer (Baab 1949:130). In the Old Testament, something is true that is firm and won't collapse under pressure. In 2 Kings 18:16¹, for example, the word that is used for the supports or doorposts of the temple is directly related to *'emeth* (Nicole 1983:288). What is true also persists through time, as is seen in Deuteronomy 28:59 where the adjective true is used for prolonged and lingering illnesses (Rimbach 1980:171).

Over time, from this root meaning further uses of truth developed, all of them recognizable to our contemporary understanding and thus fitting our diagram. Interestingly, the most frequently used form reflects the more rare variant of truth in our day. Truth in this sense is always attributed to a person and has a uniquely moral feel to it (Nicole 1983:288). In other words, it is truth as faithfulness.

The second use of *'emeth* represents our contemporary understanding of the term, and is therefore—not surprisingly—often directly translated as ‘truth’. In hundreds of passages *'emeth* is used of statements that conform to reality, and represent the facts as they really are, what we have called factuality. How could the people know, for instance, that a certain message was from God or not? The test was simple: “If what a prophet proclaims ... does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken” (Deut 18:22). Similarly, in Genesis 42:16, Joseph wants to establish if his brothers have told the truth about their younger brother, and he does so by asking them to produce this brother. In other words, he will deem their words true if they are seen to agree with the empirical facts.

Finally, closely related to this second use of *'emeth*, we also find the contemporary variation described in Chapter One as genuineness. In Jeremiah 2:21, for instance, a “corrupt, wild vine” is compared to a true vine, a genuine one, of sound and reliable stock (Quell 1933:234).

The Old Testament *'emeth*, then, incorporates all three senses of truth as faithfulness, genuineness and factuality, and this is further confirmed by the type of words with which it is contrasted. We find morally charged terms like ‘deceit’ and ‘lie’, best explained as a disagreement between a person’s intentions and his words, and thus located on the personal side of the diagram. We also encounter morally neutral words such as ‘error’ and ‘falsehood’, which point to the reality side of the person’s interaction with the world (cf. Nicole 1983:291), while as antonyms for truth in the sense of genuineness we find terms like ‘worthless’, ‘corrupt’ and ‘degenerate’.

When we ask which of these senses of truth are used as an attribute of God, faithfulness presents itself as the most likely candidate, but we also find the other two used

of the divine. *'Emeth* as the faithfulness of God is of course found throughout the Old Testament. Examples are “your faithfulness” in Psalms 30:9, and “I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God” in Zechariah 8:8. Still, there remain two uses of *'emeth* with direct or indirect reference to God that seem to fit the meaning of genuineness or factuality better than faithfulness.

In the first group we find a verse like Jeremiah 10:10 which reads, “The Lord is the true God.” In this case *'emeth* cannot be interpreted as faithful, because the context contrasts the creator God, who is living and eternal, and made the earth by his power, to gods who will perish and can do neither harm nor good. The contrast is not one of moral character, but of genuineness and actual reality. This verse echoes the teaching in the later part of Isaiah where we repeatedly find the phrase, “apart from me there is no God” (45:5) and 2 Chronicles 15:3, which speaks of a terrible and godless time when Israel was “without the true God.”

The second group features references to God’s laws, precepts or commandments, which together are described as God’s truth. An example is Psalm 119:160, “The sum of thy word is truth.”² The sense here is that of factuality, but it is not to God himself that truth is attributed, but to his word. It is interesting to note, though, that in this case the two uses of *'emeth* as faithfulness and factuality seem to converge because the word is so strongly identified as *God’s* word (Nicole 1983:289). And this connection becomes even stronger when instead of an adjective, a noun is used and God’s word is literally identified with truth. As Ramsdell notes, “the truth of God is always his faithfulness, and his faithfulness always connotes the truth” (1951:270). We shall see that this use of truth for God’s word actually develops into a full-fledged divine attribute in the New Testament, where God and his word are even more closely identified with each other.

Still, our overall conclusion must be that when the Old Testament declares God to be true, this attribution is primarily meant in a personal, moral sense, and only secondarily as a confirmation of factuality or genuineness. Again, this seems almost a reversed image of how we in our own time tend to use, and therefore interpret, the term ‘truth’. Aalen explains this discrepancy by noting that the factuality of God was less of a concern in

earlier Judaism because it had not been exposed to later Hellenistic thought and the great variability among religious views in the larger Roman empire (1964:14). Of course, these circumstances were changing by the time the New Testament writers got to work.

The Old Testament teaching on truth can be summarized as follows: truth is characterized by firmness, reliability and by the ability to last through time. When we compare this Old Testament notion with our daily use, we find all three senses of truth represented, but truth as faithfulness is clearly primary. Truth as a noun is also used for the word of God, which suggest a strong convergence of faithfulness and factuality, especially when seen in the light of the later New Testament assertion that God is his word.

When we compare this notion of truth with those we encountered in the history of philosophy, we see a good fit with the thought of both Greek and Medieval thinkers. Even though genuineness and factuality were the primary notions of truth in these traditions and not faithfulness, the unquestioned assumption was always that truth requires an eternal and unchanging ontological ground. As we saw, the Old Testament could not agree more; the very root of its understanding of truth is firmness and permanence and it is in this fact that we find a reflection of the genuineness sense of truth that was more explicit in the early philosophical traditions. With the modern tradition, however, the focus of philosophy shifts from the eternal to temporal and changing realities and from there to the finite mind of man. Finally, in contemporary philosophy we find very little in common with the Old Testament view of truth. Even though we noted a movement toward the personal side of truth in current thought, this move does not bring it in line with the Old Testament notion of faithfulness but rather reflects a rejection of all senses of truth, and of even the possibility of truth itself.

2.3 Truth in the New Testament

In the New Testament, truth is represented by the Greek term *aletheia*, which is derived from the verb *lanthano*, ‘to be hidden’. Together with the privative prefix ‘a’, *aletheia* is therefore best understood as non-concealment, or truth in the sense of “the full

or real state of affairs” (Bultmann 1933:238), a sense that again bears a resemblance to genuineness. In the New Testament *aletheia* is mostly attributed to statements, but when applied to persons, it takes on the alternative sense of truth, meaning truthfulness or faithfulness (Aalen 1964:3; Thiselton 1978:874). Related words are the adjectives *alethes* (true, sincere) and *alethinos*, plus the adverb *alethos* (truly), which was selected to translate the typical use of the Hebrew word ‘amen’, a close relative of *’emeth*, as we saw earlier (locus 2.2).

The use of *aletheia* in the New Testament is by no means evenly spread out. It is found 109 times, but outside of the writings of the apostles John and Paul it occurs only eight times in all, and in none of these instances does it carry a distinctive theological meaning (Thiselton 1978:883). Moreover, the distribution of its cognates shows a similarly skewed picture. To get a better understanding of the New Testament use of the term, we will therefore focus here on New Testament writers John and Paul.

When the apostle Paul uses the noun *aletheia* he usually means the gospel itself, which seems no different from the way the Old Testament refers to God’s word as *’emeth* (Col 1:5, Eph 1:13). He also uses *aletheia* in a wider sense as God’s revelation of his will or his being, as in Romans 1:18 where men are stated to “suppress the truth.” The sense in which the term is used in these cases is primarily that of factuality—God’s revelation is true in that it corresponds with reality. However, truth also stands in contrast to lying, deception or even wickedness in Paul’s writings. Thiselton asserts that Paul’s use of truth reflects an intellectual interest, but also an ethical concern (1978:885). This suggests that Paul’s understanding of *aletheia* indeed encompasses both factuality and faithfulness. The two concerns frequently go hand in hand, for instance, in his second letter to the Corinthians where he writes that he does not use deception or distortion, and tells the truth as it is (4:2). Finally, Paul also uses the term *alethinos* in the sense of a thing being genuine. He writes about “true faith,” and “true righteousness,” and he calls Timothy his “true son in the faith” (1Ti 2:7, Eph 4:24, 1Ti 1:2).

When it comes to attributing truth to God, Paul again uses the term *alethinos*. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9 he speaks of the “living and true God”, using true in the same sense of

genuine, as found earlier in the Old Testament (Jer 10:10, 2Ch 15:3). However, again in line with the Old Testament, Paul does not use the noun *aletheia* as a direct attribute of God.

It is in the Johannine writings that the concept of truth takes center stage and actually moves beyond the Old Testament use. The first time we find ‘truth’ in John is in the very first chapter of his gospel where he speaks of Christ as both “full of grace and truth” and indeed as the one through whom “grace and truth” came into existence (1:14, 17). Most scholars agree that this phrase reflects back to the description of God in Exodus 34:6, “the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,” and since this Old Testament passage explicitly stresses God’s faithfulness, some have argued that truth must here uniquely be understood in the Hebrew manner as faithfulness (Kuyper 1964). Thiselton finds this conclusion unwarranted, and suggests instead that John means that in Christ men can “see God in his genuine actuality and reality” (1978:890).

Similarly debated are John’s understanding of the role of a witness whose testimony is valid, and thus true, and his statement that true believers worship “in Spirit and truth” (John 8:13-18, 4:23). In John 8, God is appealed to as a truthful witness, but is God’s testimony regarding Jesus reliable because of God’s moral nature (faithfulness), or is it so because his knowledge is perfect and therefore more true to reality than ours (factuality)? Similarly, when in John 4 true worshipers are described as those who worship in Spirit and truth, does truth here refer to some sense of genuineness or to the conceptual content of worship as in accord with reality, and thus factuality? However these specific verses are interpreted, further study suggests that throughout John’s gospel and letters the terms *aletheia* and *alethes* are used in all three senses, as factuality but also as faithfulness and genuineness.

An undebated example of the first use is found in Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. When she tells him she has no husband, Jesus asserts that she is telling the truth, because the man she now lives with is indeed not her husband (John 4:18). Truth is here agreement with the facts. Further examples of the use of truth in the sense of factuality are abundant in John’s first letter (1Jo 1:6, 8; 2:21; 4:6). Moreover, the

use of truth as genuineness gets special attention in John's gospel. He repeatedly uses *alethes* in the sense of *alethinos* to contrast something that is more fully real, or genuine, with something that is less so. Examples of this usage are "true light" and "true bread" (1:9, 6:32).

John's use of truth as faithfulness is equally well attested. When in John 7 the Jews are amazed at Jesus' teaching, He explains that the man who works for the honor of someone else rather than his own "is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him" (v. 18). Here truth takes the meaning of integrity or faithfulness, not factuality. Similarly, the person who claims to have fellowship with God yet walks in darkness is one who lacks truth, just as the person who says she knows Jesus but does not do what He commands (1:6, 2:4). Both these examples are a clear case of a person's words not matching her actions, thus what she lacks is faithfulness.

So we see that John, like Paul, uses the noun *aletheia* in both senses of faithfulness and factuality, and that he uses the adjective, in this case *alethes*, to denote genuineness. Moreover, just like Paul, he uses truth to indicate the gospel, God's word or revelation. This is clear when he contrasts Jesus with Moses: "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17), and in John 17:17 where he simply states, "your word is truth."

Where John's use of truth starts to break free from our diagram is when he describes truth, in the sense of God's word or teaching, as having power. For instance, this truth can sanctify a person (John 17:17), or set him free (John 8:32-36), achievements that seem utterly beyond simple faithfulness or factuality. This liberating power of God's truth comes as a result of much more than a mere intellectual grasping of true knowledge (Aalen 1964:9). It involves the whole person, and is the opposite of sin, which is stated by contrast to enslave mankind (John 8:34). Furthermore it should be noted that once that strong connection between the God's word and truth is in place, we can see the fact that this truth has power confirmed throughout the entire scriptures, and not just in the writings of John. For instance, reality is *created* by the speaking of the word, the word *accomplishes* God's will and *achieves* his purpose, God *sustains* all things by his "*powerful* word," the word is

living and active, and it is the *judge* of those who reject Christ (Gen 1, Isa 55:11, John 12:48, Heb 1:3, 4:12). All these verses about God's word speak of a powerful entity indeed.

That truth has power is also confirmed when we look at how John attributes truth to God, specifically when he uses the adjective *alethinos*. John 17:3 speaks of the "only true God" and 1 John 20 of "the true God," and Aalen suggests that such uses of true should be understood specifically as "life-giving" (1964:20). In John 6, for instance, the difference between the true bread (Christ) and what it is contrasted with, the bread given by Moses, is that those who ate manna still died in the end (6:49). Moreover, this life-giving power of truth is confirmed by looking at its antonyms, and John 8:44 is quite illuminating here. He who has no truth in him, Satan, is called a liar and even the father of lies, but he is also called a murderer, one who produces death as opposed to life.

Finally, we have to look at John's understanding of the noun *aletheia*, as a direct attribute of God. John makes it clearer than any other scripture writer: God is truth. John equates the Word with God (1:1), and Christ both with the Word (1:14) and with truth (14:6). Taken together, these statements yield the conclusion that God is truth. The same can be inferred from 1 John 3:19, where "the truth" is personal and where the context indicates that this person is God. Of course, Christ is explicitly identified with the truth in the assertion "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6), and so is the Spirit (1Jo 5:6), so that truth as a property of all the persons of God is firmly established.

In sum, in the New Testament we again find all three popular uses of truth represented, but the clear preference for faithfulness that we saw in the Old Testament now becomes less pronounced. While the root meaning of *'emeth* could be captured in the word firmness, which then developed into all three of our senses of truth, the most basic sense of *aletheia* was uncovering, a word that actually seemed to point most strongly to genuineness. Further comparisons to both the popular and the philosophical senses of truth started to become increasingly difficult when we looked at the notion of truth in John. Here we encountered a truth that is not only strongly linked to the word of God, as it is in the

Old Testament, but also one that is life-giving and incredibly powerful, and that is finally identified with the person of God himself.

2.4 Implications of the scriptural view of truth

In our first chapter we noted significant variations in philosophical views of truth. In terms of our diagram we saw first a movement downward from truth as genuineness to factuality, and then a shift to the left from truth based in reality, be it changing or unchanging, to truth as somehow based in the human mind. Comparing these philosophical ideas of truth with the biblical notion, several facts about scriptural truth stand out, all of which can still be related to the diagram. First, the view of early philosophy that truth, and especially divine truth, must be unchanging and permanent is also strongly represented in the Bible, not only in the root meaning of *'emeth* as firmness but also in the connection of *aletheia* with a sense of genuineness. This means that both in early philosophy and in scripture we see a stronger accent on the top right-hand corner of the diagram than we see in later philosophy and in our daily view.

A second feature of biblical truth that our diagram can still accommodate without any problem was the strong accent on the personal and moral side of truth, namely faithfulness. We saw a similar move to the person-side of the diagram in later philosophy, but on closer inspection these two foci on the personal proved very different. Not only did philosophy's adoption of the personal lack any moral connotation, it also meant a new accent on the human person as the actual ground of truth, a stance that seems contrary to the biblical view that truth needs an eternal and unchanging foundation. Again, the personal dimension of truth in the Bible represents the moral quality of faithfulness, and this sense of truth was actually seen to play a much more important role than it was given in either our daily view or in philosophy.

Moreover, the two truth senses of faithfulness and factuality were also seen to converge in scripture, specifically where God's word was identified with truth (Nicole 1983:289). Some would even say that the factuality of God's words is actually grounded in

his faithfulness, especially when in the New Testament we see the further identification of God with his word (Holmes 1977). The reasoning is that if God is perfectly faithful then—given his perfect knowledge and power—his word will necessarily be perfectly factual. It is interesting to note that this connection resembles the one made by Descartes when he reasoned that our clear and distinct ideas must be true since God is the source of the human faculty of judgment and since a good God will not deceive (1996:37-8).

So, comparing the biblical view of truth with our daily and philosophical views two things could be learned. First, truth in scripture has a strong connotation of permanence, of something that is reliable because it does not change. Secondly, faithfulness is the preferred sense in scripture, and it is sometimes linked with factuality, while genuineness also plays a bigger role than in our daily understanding. However, next to these recognizable points, we found in the scriptural view also traits that completely transcended the diagram in ways that neither the daily nor any of the philosophical views had done. What are these completely new facets of truth that emerge in scripture?

One unusual trait of the scriptural view is that truth can have great power. When in our own time we say “knowledge is power” we mean that true knowledge can be used as a tool to understand and thus manipulate certain patterns and regularities. This type of power is indirect and impersonal, and can be compared with the power of money. The power of biblical truth, however, seems much more direct and personal in nature. We saw that, especially when truth is equated with God’s word, we are dealing with a specific content that apparently has power to create, sustain, give life, sanctify, convict and judge.

A second rather unique facet of truth in scripture is that while truth in everyday use and philosophy is primarily seen as a relationship of agreement between entities, truth in scripture often denotes the entities themselves. This becomes evident when we see the frequent use of the noun ‘truth’ for God’s word—a very concrete set of instructions, explanations, prophecies and principles that are claimed to reflect reality. In terms of our diagram this means that next to labeling the correspondence between person and word (faithfulness), and between word and reality (factuality) as truth, we can also label the word itself as truth.

That truth is primarily seen as a moral concept or as an entity that has power seems strange enough to us, but even more foreign is the idea that truth is somehow imbued with agency and personhood. More than that, truth is directly equated with a personal being. It is here that the biblical understanding truly stretches our contemporary way of thinking. Even if we don't take this statement as one of complete identification, it certainly implies that there can be no inconsistencies between God and truth. We can clarify the implications of the idea that God is truth by trying to fit such divine truth in our diagram and inserting the name of God where this seems warranted by the biblical teaching. Accordingly, we label two of the three entities as God, namely the person of God and his word.

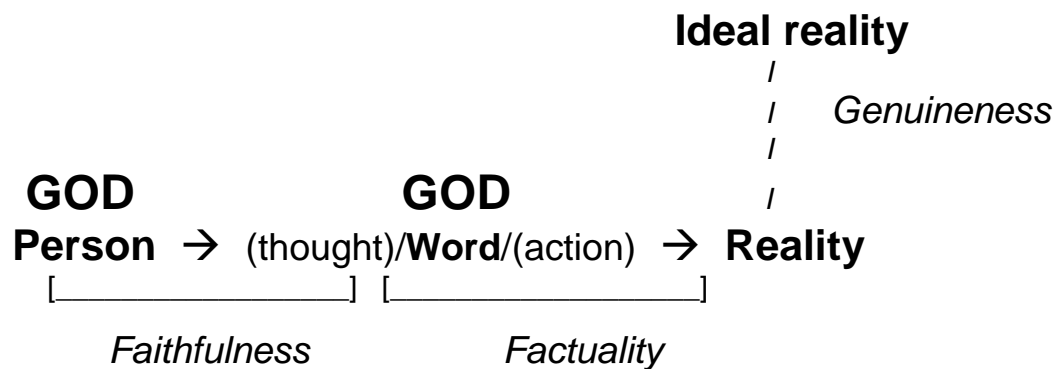


Diagram 2 - The biblical view of truth, as applied to God

Doing this, we immediately note a revolutionary difference between the diagram as we have been applying it to human persons and as it applies to the divine Person. When applied to humans, the diagram's three elements of person, word and reality are naturally distinct. The middle section does not necessarily mirror who the person really is on the one hand, and what reality is like on the other. This means that disagreement can occur on either side, resulting in duplicity where there was faithfulness, and falsehood where there was factuality. But when this diagram is applied to a divine personal being, specifically the God of the Bible, suddenly there can be no such discrepancies.

Let us explore what happens on each side, starting with faithfulness. When God is directly identified with Christ, his word, and Christ with truth, this implies there can be no discrepancy ever between God's revelation and his person. Whatever God reveals of

himself will always match his character and intentions, and thus also his earlier words and deeds. His revelation, both in Christ and in his words, is therefore completely and fully reliable.

A somewhat similar change takes place on the factuality side, with the connection between God's word and reality. Because God's word is truth, his statements must always match the actual state of affairs and thus present true knowledge. The Bible confirms of course that God is "perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16, cf. Ps 147:5, Heb 4:13), and we can also infer this strong link between word and reality from the creation account. God spoke and it was so, or as John says "through him [the Word] all things were made" (Jo 1:3). However, the link between the person of God and his word is stronger than that between his word and reality, since the Word is identified with God, but created reality itself is never so identified, and the Bible even explicitly warns against doing so.³

So, when applied to truth as a divine attribute, the diagram shows us that in God's interaction with the world, He always necessarily portrays himself as He is in word and deed, and He portrays the real state of affairs with complete accuracy. In fact, to do differently would be to contradict his very nature and being. Paul writes that God cannot lie and the letter to the Hebrews states that God's words, in this case his oath and his promise, are "two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false" (Tit 1:2, Heb 6:18). Similarly, for God to be unfaithful would be to deny or "disown himself" (2Ti 2:13).

Finally, the fact that God is truth suggests that all truth is somehow directly related to God, and that truth as faithfulness, genuineness and factuality as we encounter these in our human interaction with reality find their ultimate source in God. Given our contemporary tendency to focus on truth as factuality, the most significant implication here would be that God is the source of all true statements. We saw that scripture states that God is perfect in knowledge (Job 37:16) and if perfection in any area can be said to entail completeness, even apparently insignificant truths (e.g., "I am sitting at my desk") would need to be related to God. Similarly, all faithfulness and genuineness we encounter around us would find its ultimate source in God. In other words, any truth we encounter might in some sense

be divine truth, no matter if it is of a trivial nature or highly significant (see Holmes 1977). Another implication of this connection between divine truth and all truth would be that our findings regarding divine truth would also affect the meaning of truth in general—an implication that we will have to return to at a later stage.

We see, then, that truth in scripture diverges in several important ways from both our daily view and the truth views that emerged through philosophical reflection. In summary, truth as it is found in scripture has the following characteristics:

- (1) it has a strong connotation of reliability and permanence, especially when attributed to God or his word;
- (2) it is primarily used in the sense of faithfulness rather than factuality, and genuineness also plays a more important role than in our daily use;
- (3) when applied to God in its noun form, it carries a strong sense of personhood, of personal agency and power;
- (4) it is not just a relationship of agreement but also an entity in itself. When used in noun form of God or his word, it defies the ‘daily view’ diagram in that the distance between person and word practically collapses, while the link between word and reality becomes markedly stronger.
- (5) when applied to God in noun form, it strongly suggests that God is the source of all faithfulness, genuineness and factuality wherever it is found and no matter how variable or mundane.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we investigated the way the term ‘truth’ is used in biblical revelation. Comparing this notion with our daily use and with philosophical views on the issue, we found that scripture not only tends to put the accent differently when it comes to truth notions, but also that it significantly transcends these other views of truth.

With our exploration of both the biblical and philosophical truth views, we now have a large part of our conceptual framework in place. There is one more knowledge base we can explore, however, and this is an area where philosophy and scripture both have their

say, namely the divine attributes as formulated by classical theism. This means our focus will become more narrow in that we will now zero in on truth as an attribute of God specifically, and thus no longer on truth as a general concept. At the same time, our approach will also broaden in that we will include all the various divine attributes that have been generally agreed upon by theism, and then analyze each attribute's logical connections with the notion of divine truth. In this way, we hope to unearth additional data that can clarify the meaning and implications of truth as an attribute of the God of the Bible.

NOTES

¹ The biblical evidence presented in this study is not exhaustive. Wherever possible and fitting, verses from both the Old and the New Testament are included.

² The Bible translation used here is the New American Standard Version.

³ Romans 1:18-25. In fact, such identification would imply pantheism or panentheism rather than theism.

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3 - THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES AND THE NATURE OF TRUTH

3.1 Introduction

In the last two chapters, we explored the meaning of the word ‘truth’, and more specifically divine truth, in our daily understanding, in the thought of some of the most significant thinkers in the history of philosophy, and in the Christian scriptures. We were able to conclude that while the various philosophical views could still be fruitfully compared and contrasted with the daily view, the scriptural view seemed to transcend human ideas of truth to a significant extent.

In this chapter we will approach divine truth from a different angle, to see if we can further clarify its meaning. We will explore what are known as the divine attributes, a set of biblically based properties of God. Since every true attribute of God needs to be logically consistent with all the others, exploring each of these characteristics in more detail should give us additional information about the attribute of divine truth itself. As Peterson puts it rather directly, “a ‘God’ whose nature can be stated only in contradictions cannot possibly exist, and to suppose that there is such a God as that is nonsense” (Peterson, Hasker, Reichenbach & Basinger 1998:64). For each attribute, therefore, we will first look at scriptural basis, philosophical support and major debates, and then analyze it for any conceptual connections with the notions of truth and divine truth. In this manner, it is hoped that further clarification of the concept of divine truth can eventually be attained.

3.2 The divine attributes: historical background

One of the earliest occurrences of some of the divine attributes is found in Athenagoras’ Plea (Richardson 1953:307). In 176 AD, Athenagoras of Athens made a plea to the two emperors of the time on behalf of the Christians in the empire. He argued for the uniqueness of the Christian God, and thus for the legitimacy of the Christian refusal to

worship the civic deities in addition to their own God. Reading this plea, we get an idea about the divine attributes that were at that early stage of Christianity generally accepted among believers. Athenagoras described the Christian God as the “creator... [who] retains the world in his providence,” “who is above [the world],” and is “uncreated, impassible and indivisible” (ibid.). Somewhat later in the same document he sums up the characteristics Christians believe their God to possess as: “eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable” (op.cit.:308).

Around the same time, Theophilus of Antioch expounded God’s nature thus: “In glory he is incomprehensible, in greatness unfathomable, in height inconceivable, in power incomparable, in wisdom unrivalled, in goodness inimitable, in kindness unutterable. ... he is unchangeable, because he is immortal” (1975:89-90).

Finally, two centuries later, in his *On the Trinity*, Hilary of Poitiers hailed God as eternal, all-powerful and most beautiful, and as “passionless and bodiless. ... Incomprehensibly, ineffably, before time or worlds” (1977-79:41, 62).

From such early beginnings, the Christian philosophers sat down to the task of formulating a systematic and comprehensive set of divine attributes. A particularly fruitful basis for such thought were the arguments developed in defense of God’s existence, the most famous being Anselm of Canterbury’s ontological argument and Thomas Aquinas’ five arguments for the existence of God, known as the ‘Five Ways’.

Anselm’s argument starts with the definition of God as a being “than which nothing greater can be thought” (1962:7). He then reasons that it is greater to exist than not to exist. Therefore, God necessarily exists. What interests us here is not so much the argument itself, but Anselm’s description of God. If God is indeed a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, then there are certain other things that can be said about him, for instance that He must be omnipotent and omniscient. Similarly, in his famous Five Ways, Aquinas—inspired by Aristotle—reasons that God has to be an ‘Uncaused Cause’ and an ‘Unmoved Mover’ (1952:12-13; Aristotle 1984:1694). He then deduces the various divine attributes from these foundational descriptions.

Traditional Christian philosophy, or classical theism, eventually produced a generally agreed upon cluster of divine attributes or properties of God. Among the many characteristics of God that can be gleaned from scripture, the specific term ‘attribute’ was usually reserved for a property of God without which God would not be God (Nash 1983:16). The property of being the creator, for instance, was not labeled an attribute, since it could be argued that God would still be God even if He had not created the universe. Variations in the final set generated by different thinkers were mainly due to a high degree of conceptual overlap between certain of the attributes, so that they could either be described as separate entities or be combined together. The following list of attributes is representative of most major thinkers in classical theism: perfection, infinity, aseity, necessity, incorporeality, immutability, omnipotence, omniscience, perfect goodness and eternity.

With the arrival of modern thought and its renewed accent on human reason as a powerful tool in the quest for true knowledge, the role of biblical revelation gradually waned. However, philosophizing about the nature of God did not thereby come to an end. The notion of a divine being, whether seen as an actually existing entity or as a mere mental concept, continued to intrigue philosophers. It was recognized that further analysis of the God-concept itself, an approach which had originated with Anselm, could provide knowledge about the nature of God without necessarily referring to scripture. Since the divine being must be, above all, worthy of worship and total devotion, other attributes could now be deduced that are necessarily implied by this description. Thus, ‘Perfect Being Theology’ aims to deduce by sound reasoning which characteristics God must have in order to be God, characteristics that—as we saw—must also be consistent with each other and thus form a systematic whole (Peterson 1998:64-65).

It would fall beyond the limits of this study to give a detailed rationale for omitting the more debated attributes from the list given above; as stated, the listed attributes broadly represent classical theism. However, I would like to make one exception, and give reasons here for the omission of probably the most debated among the attributes, namely divine simplicity. Understanding why this attribute is generally not included will help clarify certain issues that emerge later on in this study.

As we saw, the divine attributes are commonly defined as those properties of God that are essential to his nature and without which He would not be God. But this raises a question: what exactly is the ontological status of such attributes? If some attributes depend on God, He is logically prior to their existence, and this suggests they are not essential to his nature—for God can still be God without these properties. But the view that the attributes are logically prior to God is even less acceptable (Nash 1983:91). Some within classical theism, notably Thomas Aquinas, felt that the relationship of God to his own properties needed to be clarified and the attribute of simplicity seemed to fill this need (1952:14-20). This attribute stated that God is absolutely indivisible and one with his attributes. It is only because our limited human minds cannot fathom such an indivisible being that we have to use the language of separate attributes. In fact, we cannot know anything about God's nature. We can only describe God in terms of what He is not (op.cit.:14). Though this solution seemed to provide an acceptable way of going between the horns of the dilemma, it soon became clear that simplicity itself was a problematic notion.

Why is the attribute of simplicity so questionable? First, in this thinking God is one with his attributes, and thus each of the attributes also becomes identical with the others. But to say that perfect goodness, omnipotence and eternity are essentially the same property makes no sense, for a being can have one of these properties without having the other (Moreland & Craig 2003:524). Furthermore, if God's essence (the attributes) is identical to his existence, then everything about him is essential to him and thus necessary, and this includes his knowledge, power and will. This entails that God can only will the necessary, and thus that He does not have free will—an implication which is clearly unbiblical.

Not only that, simplicity entails that God *is* his knowledge, and it therefore makes his knowledge absolutely necessary. But then all that exists becomes necessary, and that includes creation and every event in created reality, leading to absolute determinism and a denial of human free will (op.cit.:525). Finally, as contemporary philosopher Alvin Plantinga has pointed out, Aquinas' view actually reduces God himself to a property and thus an abstract object, rather than the personal God of the Bible. Plantinga concludes that

“the simplicity doctrine seems an utter mistake” (1980:47). In fact, simplicity replaces the personal knowable God of the Bible with a being that more closely resembles the impersonal unknowable ‘One’ of Neo-Platonism (Moreland 2003:524).

In the following section we will look at each of the generally accepted attributes in turn. We will first note their occurrence in scripture, and then see how they have been understood by classical theism and which debates these views have triggered in contemporary philosophy. Lastly we will explore if and how each attribute can possibly shed light on the question of the nature of divine truth.

3.3 The divine attributes and their relation to the concept of truth

As we have seen, a divine attribute in the narrow sense typically has to denote a quality that God cannot lack and still be God, but opinions may vary on where exactly to draw the line. Accordingly, theologians and philosophers have not always agreed on whether truth qualifies as a divine attribute in this narrow sense, though both Augustine and Aquinas affirmed it as such (Augustine 1948:33, Aquinas 1952:98).¹

Even though truth is not universally seen as a divine attribute, scripture strongly confirms God’s truth, to the extent even of attributing this notion to him in noun form (locus 2.3)—something that is restricted to only a handful of other predicates, namely ‘spirit’, ‘light’, ‘love’, ‘way’ and ‘life’ (Jo 4:24, 1:5, 1 Jo 4:8, Jo 14:6). Another reason to consider truth as one of the divine attributes is that the scriptural view of truth puts so much stress on moral truth or faithfulness. Being faithful would of course be one of the expressions of perfect goodness, and since the latter is not debated as an essential property of God, it seems plausible to assign truth the same status. But leaving the question of truth’s attribute status aside, our actual goal in this study is to find out as much as we can about divine truth itself. So, let us now turn to each of the divine attributes listed above and see what they can possibly teach us about the notion of truth.

3.3.1 Perfection and infinity

The attribute of perfection declares, of course, that God is perfect in every way. Since a being that has a certain attribute to the measure of perfection, also has this attribute to an infinite extent, the terms perfection and infinity are often used interchangeably. We will follow this practice with just one side-note. Purely logically speaking infinity can also be applied to less praiseworthy characteristics, like weakness, ugliness or evil. However, such properties have traditionally been seen as privations, and thus as incapable of augmentation to infinity. More importantly, such characteristics would clearly contradict key doctrines of scripture, such as the perfect goodness of God, so that perfection and infinity as applied to God seem close enough in meaning to be treated together.

The 17th century theologian Francis Turretin affirms this close connection by deducing infinity from perfection. He writes, “For since he [God] has every perfection which can be possessed, it is evident that nothing can be conceived better and more perfect. Thus he must necessarily be infinite because an infinite good is better than a finite [one]” (1992:195). Interestingly, William Shedd, systematic theologian of the 19th century, reasoned from infinity to perfection: “Since limitation implies imperfection, the infinity of God implies that he is perfect in every respect in which he is infinite” (1903:339).

The term ‘infinite’ is seldom found in scripture,² but we find the following verses that speak of God’s perfection: “His works are perfect, and all his ways are just,” “as for God, his way is perfect,” and “be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Deut 32:4, 2 Sam 22:31, Mat 5:48).

That divine perfection is an attribute of God has also been the outcome of rational thought. Anselm’s ontological argument makes this attribute the unquestionable assumption, and the very first assertion of Perfect Being Theology must of course be that God is perfect (Peterson 1998:64-65). Centuries later, we encounter a variation of Anselm’s ontological argument in Rene Descartes’ thought about God. Descartes reasoned that we all find in our mind the clear and distinct idea of a perfect being, or God. However, this idea of a perfect being cannot have been generated by our own mind, because the human mind is imperfect and finite. Reasoning further that “something cannot arise from

nothing, and also that what is more perfect ... cannot arise from what is less perfect,” Descartes concludes that our idea of God can only come from God himself, and thus that “it must be concluded that God necessarily exists” (1996:28,31). What makes these arguments interesting for the present discussion is that they all confirm that this necessarily existing God must have the attribute of perfection, and even today this notion seems central to the idea of God as a being who above all is “worthy of worship” (Peterson 1998:64).

In general, then, philosophy seems to agree with scripture as far as divine perfection is concerned, and any debates concerning this attribute mostly center around the correct interpretation of perfection. Does his perfection entail, for instance, that God is immutable, absolutely unchangeable in his being? Most ancient and medieval thinkers would answer affirmatively, reasoning that any change in a perfect being would mean a loss of perfection,³ but in our time many scholars regard absolute immutability difficult to rhyme with his perfect knowledge of changing reality and his real relationship to changeable creatures (e.g. Nicholas Wolterstorff). That God is perfect, then, is not contested, but which other attributes are entailed by this perfection is indeed a matter of debate, and these issues are better discussed under the particular attributes involved.

Before we go on to the next attribute, we need to determine if the attribute of perfection is in any way conceptually connected to that of truth. If God is perfect, He is so in every aspect of his being. This means that He possesses each of his properties perfectly and to an infinite extent. Consequently, if God possesses the property of truth, He does so to the extent of perfection. For our understanding of truth this means there can then be no shade of doubt about the faithfulness of God, the true factuality of his words and his genuine reality. If He is true in terms of his words matching his person on the one hand and reality on the other, He must be so perfectly. He cannot portray himself differently than He is or break his promises, a type of truth that seems closely connected to the attribute of God’s perfect goodness. He also cannot deceive or be mistaken about the real state of affairs, and here we see a connection with the attribute of omniscience.

3.3.2 Aseity and necessity

Like perfection and infinity, the attributes of aseity and necessity are closely related, though maybe not fully interchangeable. The attribute of aseity claims that God exists completely self-sufficiently. We humans have existence, but only in a derived sense. We exist merely temporarily, are dependent on other people to begin our existence, and on food, water and protection from harmful influences in order to sustain it. Aseity implies that this state of affairs does not apply to God. God has existence in the fullest sense of the term, an existence that depends on nothing outside of him, but only on himself (*a se*). As such, God can exist with or without the universe and his creation of the world is simply a free choice. Clearly, divine aseity implies divine necessity, since that which exists fully self-sufficiently also exists necessarily.

Scriptural support may be found in verses that confirm that God exists independently, and that He exists before and thus independent of anything else. The apostle Paul reflects this insight when he states, “he is not served by human hands as if he needed anything” (Acts 17:25). Moreover, Psalm 90:2 states that God was God “before ... [He] brought forth the earth and the world,” and in John’s gospel Christ prays “glorify me ... with the glory I had with you before the world began” (Jo 17:5, see also Jo 17:24, Eph 1:4, 1Pe 1:20).

The idea that God gives existence to all other beings is of course found in Genesis 1:1, “God created the heavens and the earth,” in Romans 11:36, “God ... from whom all things came,” and Hebrews 2:10, “God ... through whom everything exists.” John 1:3 makes this distinction between God and all other beings even more explicit: “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (Bible NASB). Finally, the divine self-description in Exodus 3:14 “I AM WHO I AM” —confirmed by Christ in John 8:58—strongly suggests that God’s existence is essential to his nature, and thus necessary and *a se*.

Aseity and necessity follow logically from perfection. It seems clear that God is more perfect if He depends on nothing outside himself rather than being so dependent. In Anselm’s famous argument, necessity is also directly derived from perfection. Anselm

reasons that once we really understand what is meant by the term God or “that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought,” we know that He must necessarily exist, since necessary existence is greater than contingent existence (1962:8). Whether God’s actual existence can be validly deduced from this reasoning remains a question for debate, but most would agree at least that *if* God exists He does so in a necessary manner, meaning that it is impossible that He ever began or will cease to exist.

Divine aseity and necessity also follow from other lines of argumentation for God’s existence. Aquinas’ conclusion that God is the Uncaused Cause of all that exists clearly implies, first, that God has no cause for his existence and thus exists independently, and secondly that He existed before, or at the very least causally prior to, all other existence (1952:13). In his third way, moreover, Aquinas reasoned from the apparent existence of contingent beings to the existence of a necessary being (*ibid.*). Anselm had used the same reasoning to assert the existence of one self-existent entity. As he put it, “since, then, all things that are exist through this one being, doubtless this one being exists through itself” (1962:42). Finally, in Turretin we find a similar argument from the contingency of creation to a necessary and self-existent God:

“Nature proves the being of God since she proclaims that she not only is, but is from another. For if it is certain and indubitable that out of nothing, nothing is made and that nothing can be the cause of itself (for then it would be before and after itself), it is also certain that we must grant some first and unproduced being from which all things are, but who is himself from no one” (1992:170).

Aseity has been challenged by two schools of thought, namely panentheism and various forms of Platonism. Panentheism sees creation as a part of God, and creatures as actually partially sharing in God’s ontology (Cooper 2006:330). However, as we saw, John 1:3 clearly stresses the radical difference in existence between God and creation that forms the basis of Christian ontological dualism: “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” God thus exists *a se* and all other things that exist do so only *ab alio*, or through another, namely Christ.

Platonism of course believes in a plurality of things that exist *a se*, for instance abstract entities like numbers, properties, propositions, and the laws of logic and

mathematics. We saw above (locus 3.2) that a Platonic solution to the question of the ontological status of the attributes themselves had to be rejected as unbiblical. We can now see why. It is because divine aseity stipulates that only God exist *a se*. Since a Platonic view of the status of abstract objects is clearly unacceptable, modified forms of Platonism have proposed that such objects are still created by God but in a timeless manner (Moreland 2003:504). However, since these created entities exist necessarily, this solution implies that God was not really free in creating them—a view that violates the fundamental doctrine that God is absolutely free to create or not create whatever He chooses. Classical theism has therefore mostly affirmed a conceptual view like that of Augustine who regarded such entities as Ideas in the mind of Christ (see locus 1.3.3).

In current thought on divine necessity the debate centers on the issue if necessity should be understood as either a factual or a logical notion. The former can be said to claim that God *exists necessarily*, while the latter would argue that He *necessarily exists* and that it is a logical contradiction to state that He doesn't exist. Anselm's ontological argument had of course aimed to prove the latter and stronger claim, but with the thinking of Immanuel Kant many started to doubt Anselm's conclusion. According to Kant, any proposition that merely states that something exists can be denied without contradiction, and such a proposition is therefore never logically necessary. Consequently, "God is" is not a necessarily true statement, and thus God does not necessarily exist (Kant 1934:349-350). Thinkers who follow Kant's reasoning, such as J.N. Findlay and Thomas Morris, therefore assert that if God exists, He exists necessarily, but the 'if' remains an 'if' (Findlay 1955; Morris 1991).

Several contemporary thinkers, such as Alvin Plantinga and John Hick, have recently come to Anselm's defense (Plantinga 1974; Hick & McGill 1967). The development of Possible World Semantics, or modal logic, has been especially fruitful in formulating a viable response to the Kantian critique (Moreland 2003:502). According to modal logic, to say that God is a logically necessary being is to say that God exists in every possible world. Of course, this also means that the existential proposition "God exists" is true in every possible world, including ours. Moreover, modal logic distinguishes between strict and broad logical necessity. Broad logical necessity asks the question if the proposition is

really actualizable. According to this modified view of necessity the fact that “God does not exist” is not logically contradictory, does not entail that “God exists” is not broadly necessary (op.cit.:503).

There is another sense of necessity that has sometimes been attributed to God, which leads to a clearly unbiblical view, a sense that often goes hand-in-hand with the questionable attribute of divine simplicity we rejected earlier. In his argumentation against miracles, 17th century Jewish philosopher Baruch de Spinoza asserted, for instance, that every aspect of God, including his will and knowledge, are absolutely necessary (1989). In other words, God could not know or will anything different than what He knows or wills. Of course this stance again denies that God has free will, and creates tension with the doctrine of the personhood of God. Spinoza’s view was firmly rejected by Christian theists and is generally seen as closer to pantheism than theism (Craig 2008:264).

What can divine aseity and necessity teach us about divine truth? First of all, we saw that the divine attributes themselves must be grounded in God himself, and this means that any attributes that are strongly connected with divine truth may clarify how truth itself is grounded. Furthermore, aseity can give us more insight on truth as factuality. We saw that if God is uniquely self-existent, then any necessary entities or truths must be somehow grounded in God, otherwise we could end up affirming an unbiblical Platonic pluralism. But could aseity point to more than the grounding of necessary truths? If all created things only exist “through Christ” (Jo 1:3), would it not follow that truths about the created world, contingent truths, are also grounded in him? We will have to see if our further study of the attributes and their implications will help us answer such questions.

Faithfulness in its turn would seem to find its ontological ground in God, since it constitutes a moral value and thus a moral truth. Finally, we can see a connection between aseity and genuineness. The genuineness sense of truth pointed to an ideal reality, a higher level of truth and being, and this clearly resonates with the idea of a God who alone exists *a se* and who himself discloses his name to be “I AM WHO I AM.” Again, we will have to see how what we learn about the other attributes may bring all these associations more clearly into focus.

3.3.3 Incorporeality and omnipresence

According to this attribute, God is pure spirit, in no way corporeal or composed of matter, and therefore not extended in space. His omnipresence, sometimes taken as a separate attribute, follows directly from this incorporeality together with his infinity. Though God is aware of and causally active at every point in the universe, He is not so in a spatial sense because this would still be a limitation. Martin Luther warned against such a view of omnipresence as a kind of infinite extension:

“We deny that God is such an extended, long, broad, thick, high, low Being. We rather contend that God is a supernatural, unfathomable Being, who at one and the same time is in every kernel of grain and also in and above and outside all creatures” (quoted in Geisler 2003:75).⁴

Scriptural evidence comes from verses that directly state God’s immateriality or spiritual nature, and from those that affirm God as creator and as existing beyond the universe, since a being that is beyond the spatial universe and actually created it cannot itself be spatial. That God is immaterial is simply stated by John, “God is spirit” (Jo 4:24). It is further confirmed in innumerable verses where God the Father, Christ and the Holy Spirit are designated as ‘Spirit’. God is also called “the Father of our spirits,” which indicates He must be an immaterial spiritual being himself (Heb 12:9).

God as creator beyond creation appears in the following verses: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” “even the highest heaven cannot contain you,” and “can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens” (Gen 1:1, 1Ki 8:27, Job 11:7-8). Finally, his omnipresence is asserted in Psalm 139, “Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there” (v. 7-8).

An argument for immateriality from divine perfection comes from the 17th century Puritan theologian Stephen Charnock: “If we grant that God is, we must necessarily grant that he cannot be corporeal, because a body is of an imperfect nature” (1979:181). Incorporeality is also entailed by divine immutability. Any change in God would of course

deny his immutability, but a spatial being changes constantly, even if only in relation to other spatial and changeable beings. Therefore, if we accept immutability as an essential property of God, then so is incorporeality.

That God is incorporeal and thus transcends space can also be argued without derivation from other attributes. There are two main views of the nature of space, the substantival and the relational view. The substantival view sees space as a thing or substance that exists apart from material reality. If this view is correct then space is an entity and therefore it has been created by God, even if this took place before the rest of creation (cf. Jo 1:3). On the other hand, if space is relational then it is dependent on the existence of certain other entities that are spatially related to each other. In other words, it only exists as a by-product of physical reality. In both cases, then, space is created by God and without creation God exists spacelessly (Moreland 2003:510).

Does the fact that God is incorporeal and omnipresent shed further light on our understanding of truth? It seems that omnipresence might facilitate divine truth in the sense of his perfect knowledge. If knowledge of an event is gained by perception of that event, then omniscience would require some type of omnipresence. However, even if we would grant the debatable assumption that *human* knowledge can only be acquired by perception, such a view of *divine* cognition would seem very limited and not easily compatible with divine perfection.

3.3.4 Immutability

Classical theism's attribute of immutability asserts that God is both changeless and unchangeable, He does not and cannot change. Attributes like perfection, aseity and eternity seem to confirm the need for God to be immutable. But this attribute raises some issues when combined with other scriptural information about God, namely creation and sustaining the created order, incarnation, his responsive relationship with temporal human beings, and his perfect knowledge or omniscience. Let us first look at scriptural support for immutability and then address these issues in turn.

Some Old Testament verses that confirm divine immutability or changelessness are, “He...does not lie or change his mind,” “You remain the same,” and “I the Lord do not change” (1Sa 15:29, Ps 102:27, Mal 3:6). In the New Testament we find, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” and “the Father ... who does not change like shifting shadows” (Heb 13:8, Jas 1:17). These verses clearly testify of God’s reliability and his unchanging character, but they do not necessarily imply a level of immutability that views God as a completely static and isolated being.

The attribute of perfection, however, may necessitate interpreting such verses as indeed pointing to a radical or ‘strong’ immutability. We saw that both scripture and philosophy agree that God must above all be a perfect being, a being worthy of worship. Turretin reasoned, for example, that God “can neither be changed for the better (for he is the best) nor for the worse (because he would cease to be the most perfect)” (1992:205). The reasoning is that any change would imply imperfection either before or after the change. But is this necessarily so? It has been argued that a change in God’s knowledge in accordance with changing reality would be one example of a “horizontal” change, one that is neither a change for the better nor for the worse. Rather, it maintains God’s perfection with regards to his knowledge of changeable facts (Moreland 2003:527). So, divine perfection alone does not necessarily imply radical immutability.

Aseity also does not seem to necessitate radical immutability. Aseity defines the ontological status of God as independent of any other being, but it does not preclude him from creating and being related to creation in a manner that might involve change. As long as it is clear that such an event would be the result of a divine free will decision, it need not compromise the divine existence itself as *a se*.

Does divine eternity then imply strong immutability? Augustine asserted that divine eternity implies the impossibility of changes in God, for “no mutable thing is eternal; but our God is eternal” (1948b:212). Anselm also argued for a strong connection between divine immutability and eternity: “It is evident that this supreme Substance is without beginning and without end; that it has neither past, nor future, nor the temporal, that is, transient present in which we live; since its age, or eternity, which is *nothing else than*

itself, is immutable and *without parts*” (1962:83, italics mine). Anselm seems to attribute immutability to God here, based on his immutable and indivisible eternity. Apart from the question if there is any circularity involved here, the italicized words in Anselm’s argument suggest that his reasoning rests heavily on simplicity, the attribute we rejected earlier. In fact, this tends to happen in some of the argumentation of classical theism and it is something we must watch out for. So, the question remains: Does eternity all by itself really imply radical immutability?

Moreover, if it does, how can God be said to remain immutable while orchestrating such events in time as the creation and incarnation? Turretin proposes a solution to this problem:

“When God became the Creator, he was not changed Himself (for nothing new happened to Him, for from eternity he had the efficacious will of creating the world in time), but only in order to the creature (because a new relation took place with it)” (1992:205).

Turretin further adds, “The Word (*logos*) was made flesh, not by a conversion of the Word (*tou logou*) into flesh, but by an assumption of the flesh to the hypostasis of the Word” (ibid.). His reasoning here is that creation did not change God intrinsically but only extrinsically, or as he says “in order to the creature.” In a similar vein, in the incarnation Christ was not intrinsically changed but the flesh was added to the “hypostasis of the Word.” Intrinsic change alters the being itself, while an extrinsic one merely changes an entity to whom the being is related, thereby changing the relationship. If my son is now taller than I am, this is not due to an intrinsic change in me, but rather to an extrinsic one. Strong immutability would entail the impossibility of both types of change, but if we interpret immutability as only referring to intrinsic change, it may not preclude God having a relationship with mutable entities like us humans, in terms of creation, incarnation or even responsiveness. Such immutability is often called weak immutability.

However, even if God is only weakly immutable, and thus extrinsically mutable, can He then still be deemed eternal in the classical sense? Moreover, the option of weak immutability may possibly solve the problem of God’s relationship with his creatures, but it may not go far enough with regards to divine omniscience. As we already saw when we

looked at perfection, having true knowledge of every event arguably includes knowledge of time-related facts, such as “today is the first day of spring.” But tomorrow this bit of knowledge is no longer true, and thus God’s knowledge will have changed—a change that seems more radical than just an extrinsic one. What is intriguing here is that it is again God’s relationship to time that seems to play a key role in clarifying the correct view regarding divine immutability.

So, a sound understanding of divine immutability is somehow tied up with the right interpretation of God’s eternity. In other words, only a further exploration of God’s relationship to time would seem able to clear up these issues, and this topic will be addressed in the coming chapters. In the meantime, we need to determine if immutability—be it strong or weak or mere constancy of character—has potential to help us clarify the notion of divine truth.

As we have seen, truth in a biblical sense is rooted in words like firmness and reliability, terms that suggest strength in a physical sense but also the ability to remain the same through time. We even saw this notion that truth must necessarily be unchanging in much of the history of philosophy where it was connected with the genuineness sense of truth. Immutability and truth, then, would seem at face value to fit perfectly together.

However, a closer look yields possible inconsistencies. If we look at truth as factuality, that God’s thoughts or words correspond with what happens in changeable reality, and we combine it with divine immutability, we soon run into the above mentioned issues with divine omniscience. How can God have perfect knowledge, including knowledge of a reality that changes through time, if his knowledge cannot change? It looks like divine immutability has definite potential to enlighten us regarding divine truth, but again it seems that it cannot do so adequately without further exploration of the issue of God’s relationship to time.

Combining immutability with truth in the sense of faithfulness leads to similar tensions. Being faithful involves keeping one’s promises, and since many of God’s promises are contingent upon man’s attitude, God must be able to respond to man. And the Bible clearly teaches that He does. But this seems to imply that God can change. More

than that, such an interaction with a temporal world suggests that the responder may somehow be temporally located and not eternal. So again we seem to end up with the question how exactly God is related to time.

We conclude, then, that divine immutability has great potential for clarifying the notion of divine truth, but it can only do so after further study of the question of God and time will have clarified how immutability should exactly be understood.

3.3.5 Omnipotence

God is omnipotent, all-powerful or almighty, and scripture amply confirms this, both in direct statements about his great power as well as in numerous descriptions of divine acts that imply such power. First, one of the biblical names of God is *El-Shaddai*, God Almighty, and the term ‘almighty’ is used 345 times of God throughout scripture (Goodrick 1999). Secondly, the statements “nothing is too hard for you,” “he does whatever pleases him,” and “with God all things are possible” certainly describe seemingly unlimited power (Jer 32:17, Ps 115:3, Mt 19:26). Thirdly, Jesus’ incarnation, his miracles—specifically his raising Lazarus from the dead—and his resurrection, imply a level of power that is already staggering to our finite mind, but creation of the universe out of nothing seems to go far beyond all these. As 19th century American theologian John Miley explains: “The concentration of all finite forces into a single point of energy would be infinitely insufficient for the creation of a single atom” (1989:213).

Again, perfection and infinity seem to entails omnipotence. If we could even conceive of a more powerful being than God, that more powerful being would be more perfect in our estimation and thus become God. In terms of infinity: if God is infinite, He is infinite in his power and thus omnipotent. Aquinas reasons very simply from infinity, “the divine Being is infinite: and hence it is clear that his might or active power is infinite” (1932:11-12).

Finally, the attribute of aseity points to God's great power, simply because all other beings are dependent upon and thus less powerful than God. As 17th century theologian Jacobus Arminius wrote:

“The Power or Capability of God is infinite because it can do not only all things possible ... but likewise because nothing can resist it. For all created things depend upon the Divine Power, as upon their efficient Principle ... both in their being and in their preservation; whence OMNIPOTENCE is deservedly attributed to him” (1956:353).

Even so, the great majority of thinkers have also acknowledged that God's power cannot be simply limitless without any qualification. Two types of limitation to divine omnipotence have been commonly accepted. First, God cannot do the logically impossible or violate the law of non-contradiction. As Aquinas' explained, “What implies contradiction does not come within the scope of divine omnipotence... It is more appropriate to say that such things cannot be done, than that God cannot do them” (1952:137). The reasoning here is that if God could bring about two states of affairs that are contradictory then the logically impossible would become reality, resulting in something that cannot possibly exist. So, the fact that God cannot cause such a ‘thing’ implies in no way a defect in his power.

One thinker who famously disagreed with this first limitation was Rene Descartes. We saw earlier that Platonic views tend to threaten God's unique aseity, and maybe it was with this in mind that Descartes asserted that God freely decreed the logical and mathematical truths that apply in this world, but that He could just as well have created a world in which these laws were false. But such an unconventional view of omnipotence has vast implications, not the least of which is that it makes God completely unknowable and unintelligible. Can such a divine being still be the God of the Bible?

The second generally agreed-upon limitation is of a moral nature. If God's power is only limited by logic, He can logically still do things that would be morally reprehensible, but at the same time this would be utterly unthinkable. Anselm struggled with this question and asked, “if Thou canst not be corrupted, and canst not lie ... how art Thou capable of all things?” (1962:12). But can God still be God if his character is not defined by perfect

goodness? Again, most scholars would agree that God's omnipotence is not only restricted by logic but also by his own moral nature.

From the above it appears that omnipotence does have certain conceptual connections with the notion of truth. For both limitations to omnipotence here discussed are really ways to preserve divine truth. If we believe, with Descartes, that God can cause that which is contradictory, then divine truth may well become an empty concept. As Ronald Nash graphically describes it,

“If God can do self-contradictory acts, then there is no inconsistency in His promising eternal life to all who trust in Christ but actually condemning to everlasting damnation all who trust in Christ. Such duplicity (inconsistency) would be entirely in character for a God not bound by the law of noncontradiction since, in a world where the law does not apply, there is no difference between eternal life and eternal damnation” (1983:40-41).

We see here that both truth as factuality and as faithfulness become meaningless concepts. Factuality no longer means anything since the distinction between two contradictory states of affairs is no longer applicable, and the same happens to faithfulness since the same word (or promise) can lead to both states of affairs equally.

On the other hand, a correct view of omnipotence may also bolster truth. We saw that divine truth in the Bible is often seen as having power, and the attribute of omnipotence clearly confirms this notion. A similar confirmation results for truth as factuality, faithfulness and genuineness. Omnipotence confirms that God is fully able to speak and know all truths, be absolutely faithful in every aspect of his being and sustain himself in existence as He is.

3.3.6 Omniscience

The divine attribute of omniscience claims that God knows every true proposition (Audi 1995:240). Such knowledge includes true beliefs about past and present events but also of the future. Not only that, scripture teaches that God also foreknows those future events that involve free will decisions of man and that are therefore contingent and humanly speaking unpredictable, events that are known as future contingents. Let us look

at scripture again for evidence of both unlimited knowledge and knowledge of future events.

First, that God does not only possess great knowledge, but that his knowledge is unlimited can be seen from the following verses, “him who is perfect in knowledge”, “his understanding has no limit”, “everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account”, and “nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight” (Job 37: 16, Ps 147:5, Heb 4:13).

Secondly, God’s perfect knowledge of the future is affirmed by, “new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you” (Is 42:9). Similarly, when Peter preaches on Pentecost he asserts that Jesus was “handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23). Foreknowledge of specifically future contingents is found again in Psalm 139, “Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely” (v. 4), while actual instances of such foreknowledge are “these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods,” “one of you will betray me--one who is eating with me,” and “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times” (Deut 31:16, Mark 14:18, Mat 26:34).

In addition to these examples, the fact of divine foreknowledge is seen to be an essential part of biblical doctrine. World history is described as directed by God, both in the past and in the future, in accordance with his plan and purpose (Isa 46:9-10, Eph 3:9-11). Moreover, prophecy, or divine foreknowledge revealed through man (2Pe 1:21), plays a central role in scripture, not only in the Old Testament but also in the New (Deut 18:22, Mat 24). In fact, the sayings of the prophets, based in divine foreknowledge, reveal an underlying pattern and unity between the books of the Bible as well as in human history. Finally, the Bible presents true knowledge of the future as the distinguishing mark of real divinity, as opposed to the defective knowledge that false gods produce (Is 41:21-24).

Divine omniscience follows of course from the attribute of perfection or infinity, which necessarily implies that *all* true propositions are known by God, including those about future choices of man and the myriads of events that depend upon such decisions. As 18th century theologian Jonathan Edwards explained “If God does not know the future

volitions of moral agents, then neither can he certainly foreknow those events which are consequent and dependent on these volitions” (1974:239). He continued that in this case God “must have little else to do but to mend broken links as well as he can, and be rectifying his disjointed frame and disordered movements in the best manner the case will allow” (op.cit.:254). Without such foreknowledge, our view of God’s omniscience may indeed become quite impoverished and no longer satisfy the demands of divine perfection or fit with such scriptural evidence as Paul’s exclamation: “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom 11:33).

Purely philosophically speaking, however, deduction from divine perfection alone may not be enough to guarantee that foreknowledge is part and parcel of divine omniscience. For, while acknowledging that omniscience requires knowledge of all true propositions, some contemporary scholars have instead questioned if propositions about future events can really be called ‘true’ (Helm 1974, Hasker 1994). The underlying issue here is that of the ontological status of the future. Does the future already exist, even though it is not accessible to us, or is it as yet non-existent? If the future does not exist, then propositions about future events could possibly be seen as having no truth value, in which case they would not be true propositions and thus not be a necessary ingredient in divine omniscience.

In fact, it seems that the current existence of the future may simply have been assumed by some of the major classical theists, and this explains why they had no great difficulty with the notion of divine foreknowledge (Craig 1985). Since they also saw God as absolutely timeless, divine foreknowledge could be compared to what we today would call a bird’s eye view of the physical environment. In Aquinas’ words, “he who sees the whole road from a height sees at once all those traveling on it” (1952:88). Moreover, such a view solves another problematic aspect of divine foreknowledge, namely its seeming tension with the notion of human free will. If God is timeless then He does not actually have *fore*-knowledge but simply knows the future in the same way we know the present, because all times are equally present to him (Peterson, Hasker, Reichenbach & Basinger 1998:79). But it is not at all clear that such views of both time and eternity can be firmly defended, especially from a biblical perspective. Therefore, just as with the attribute of

immutability, a correct understanding of omniscience seems to require a more thorough understanding of the concepts of time and eternity.

But the debate about divine foreknowledge is not the only one in omniscience. There is also the issue of the changing character of knowledge which we already touched upon when we looked at immutability. Physical reality is constantly changing, and it seems that knowledge of this reality must therefore also continually change. But this means that God's knowledge is in flux. Since change always assumes temporality, knowledge of our changing reality may imply that God is temporal. Again, we see that the notion of eternity plays a key role if we want to get a clear view of divine omniscience.

Finally, let us look at how profitable a solid understanding of omniscience may be in shedding light on our main topic, divine truth. And here it comes as no surprise that the connections between omniscience and divine truth are indeed abundant. First of all, since divine knowledge is absolutely perfect, it is virtually synonymous with truth—truth as factuality that is. This link has promising implications. It means, for instance, that a further clarification of the ontological status of the attributes, the question that led to Aquinas' adoption of divine simplicity, may also help us understand the ontological status of divine truth itself. It also suggests that a sound solution to the issue of foreknowledge may help us clarify the nature of truth, and the same goes for a plausible scenario of how God can know changing reality.

The connection of omniscience with truth as faithfulness or genuineness does not appear that fruitful. As far as faithfulness is concerned, we seem to be dealing here with a simple confirmation again, such as we already encountered when exploring God's perfection. His complete knowledge of all events, including those in the future, gives us simply an extra guarantee that God will be faithful, since there will be no unforeseen human decisions causing events that might force him to change his plans or go against his promises.

3.3.7 Perfect goodness

God is omnibenevolent or perfectly good. He possesses all the moral virtues, such as justice, mercy, righteousness and love, and He does so essentially and to the maximum degree. Traditionally, God has been deemed the source of all varieties of perfect goodness, whether moral or not, but our focus here will be on the moral understanding of perfect goodness.

God's perfect goodness is of course amply attested in scripture. In the Old Testament we especially find this attribute with great frequency in the psalms. Examples are, "your abundant goodness," and "how great is your goodness" (145:7, 31:19). How closely linked perfect goodness is with God himself is seen when God promises to show himself to Moses in the desert by stating, "I will cause all *my goodness* to pass in front of you" (Ex 33:19, italics mine). In the New Testament we find verses like: "no one is good but God alone," and "him, who called us by his ... goodness" (Mark 10:18, 2Pe 1:3). In addition, there are countless verses that attribute to God more specific types of goodness, such as those mentioned above.

God's perfect goodness again follows quite naturally from his perfection: a perfect God must be perfectly good. By definition God is a being worthy of worship, and only a being that is the source of all goodness, or moral value, is really worthy of worship. As we saw earlier, both Anselm and Aquinas also argued for God's perfect goodness from the occurrence of different degrees of goodness in people and things around us. In order for us to recognize that one person has a certain degree of goodness, but another person has more, there must be a perfect standard of perfect goodness, and this is God.

One debate regarding perfect goodness that goes back to the very beginning of philosophy is the so-called *Euthyphro* dilemma. In his dialogue called *Euthyphro*, Plato asked if something is good because God approves it, or whether God approves it because it is good. Both horns of the dilemma lead to problematic consequences. The first option seems to imply that if God's approval makes a thing good then perfect goodness is not essential to God's nature and whatever He happens to approve is merely an arbitrary choice. The second horn leads to the unacceptable view that perfect goodness exists as an abstract entity independently from God. This dilemma is of course the same one that

already emerged in our discussion on the ontological status of the attributes. If perfect goodness is truly a divine attribute then this trait is essential to God and cannot be dependent on him. But if perfect goodness exists independently from God then we must deny divine aseity. The question to ask here is of course if Plato's dilemma actually allows for a third option. Several solutions have been forthcoming, the most promising being Divine Command Theory. It presents a viable scenario by grounding perfect goodness in the very nature of God and thus preserving perfect goodness as an essential attribute without compromising God's aseity (Helm 1981, Quinn 1978).

Though perfect goodness does feature prominently in most lists of divine attributes within classical theism, it is also often distinguished from the other attributes, for instance by calling it a moral attribute, as opposed to a natural one (Erickson 1983:267). And the fact that this attribute is a moral one has an interesting implication for our topic. The classical list of attributes has been criticized in our time by those who find that most of the attributes seem to point to an impersonal divine power, something resembling more closely the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle, rather than the Christian God (Pinnock, Rice, Sanders, Hasker & Basinger 1994). But omnibenevolence must clearly be exempted from such criticism—the crucial difference being that moral goodness can only be ascribed to a *personal* being. So, perfect goodness implies that God has personhood.

Of course, that God is a person is emphatically assumed and confirmed all throughout scripture (Erickson 1983:268-271). God is never referred to as “it” but always as “He”. In fact, that God has personhood is to most theists such a pivotal point that “if God were not personal, their entire idea of the religious life would collapse” (Peterson et al. 1998:69).

Divine personhood also follows logically from the attribute of perfect goodness, when combined with the existence of evil. That both good and evil exist in this world is undeniable. But if God is an impersonal force then He (it) would necessarily be the *direct* cause of all things in the world, i.e. of both good and evil. All of it would automatically follow from this being's existence, and the divine itself would thus have to be both good and evil, rather than all-good. Of course such a view simply reduces to pantheism and

denies what lies at the very core of theism: the belief in a personal creator God (Schaeffer 1990:293).

Apart from deduction from perfect goodness, there are other philosophical arguments for affirming the personhood of God. First, unless we embrace strict physicalism,⁵ we can affirm two types of causation, namely impersonal scientific causation and causation by personal agents. Since scientific explanations depend on an existing universe, they cannot explain the origin of such a universe. Therefore, if the world had a beginning, it can only have been caused by a personal cause (or causes). Secondly, a cause is always at least as complex as its effect. The cause of personal human beings therefore also has to be at least as complex as they are, and this means that human persons can only be caused by a being (or beings) with personhood.

But if the personhood of God is such an undeniable doctrine, questions can arise about the nature of divine immutability and eternity. The stronger forms of immutability may preclude that God is related in any way to his creatures. For instance, can a strongly immutable God be personal, and specifically, can He respond to his creatures' changing attitudes and prayers as scripture teaches? Secondly, can a personal God be timelessly eternal? Many personhood characteristics—think of remembering, intending, planning or forgiving—seem to imply a certain level of temporality, and some find it counterintuitive to speak of an absolutely timeless God as personal (e.g. Lucas 1989). Again, we see the same connection with eternity emerge here that was already noted earlier in our discussion of immutability and omniscience.

Finally, we need to ask again if perfect goodness and its implication of divine personhood can possibly shed any light on the nature of divine truth. The answer is clearly affirmative. If God is perfectly good then He is perfectly faithful, and faithfulness is the primary meaning of truth in scripture. Just as omniscience safeguards the factuality of God's words, perfect goodness guarantees the faithfulness of his character. Moreover, we saw that factuality could possibly even be rooted in faithfulness, a view we will have to explore further later on. So, perfect goodness promises to be quite helpful for our understanding of truth, and as was the case with omniscience, if the ontological status of

perfect goodness can be clarified this will also help us understand the status of divine truth. As for divine personhood, further exploration of this implied attribute may also be profitable, since we found in Chapter Two that one of the characteristics of divine truth is that it is closely connected with the notion of personhood and even identified with the living and acting person of God.

3.3.8 Eternity

This much debated divine attribute traditionally claims that God exists above and beyond time, in a timeless eternal present. Such an eternal existence is not to be understood as everlastingness without beginning or end. Rather, it is non-temporal, and God thus exists wholly outside of time. Both Augustine and Boethius have given classic descriptions of this view of divine eternity. Augustine wrote:

“Nor dost Thou by time precede time; else wouldest Thou not precede all times. But in the excellency of an ever-present eternity, Thou precedest all times past, and survivest all future times, because they are future, and when they have come, they will be past; but “Thou art the same, and Thy years shall have no end.” Thy years neither go nor come; but ours both go and come, that all may come. All Thy years stand at once since they do stand; nor were they when departing excluded by coming years, because they pass not away; but all these of ours shall be when all shall cease to be. Thy years are one day, and Thy day is not daily, but to-day; because Thy to-day yields not with to-morrow, for neither doth it follow yesterday. Thy to-day is eternity ... Thou hast made all time; and before all times Thou art, nor in any time was there not time” (1948b:190-91).

The same view is expressed by Boethius’ famous description of divine eternity as “the complete simultaneous and perfect possession of everlasting life...” (1999:132).

Scriptural support for God’s eternity is abundant. The prophet Isaiah proclaims God as “the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity,” and the writer of Hebrews explains, “In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, ... But you remain the same, and your years will never end” (Is 57:15, ESV; Heb 1:10-11). We see here that God exists without beginning or end: He never comes into or goes out of existence. But does this imply that

God's existence is beyond time? The following verses strongly suggest a beginning of time and thus that divine eternity is indeed timeless: "A wisdom that ... God destined for our glory before time began," "this grace was given us in Christ before the beginning of time," "the hope ... which God ... promised before the beginning of time" and "to the only God...be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever" (1Cor 2:7, 2Ti 1:9, Ti 1:2, Jude 25). Some scholars also refer again to God's crucial self-description as "I AM" (Ex 3:14, cf. Jo 8:58). They view this expression as signifying not only God's independent existence, but also that there is no beginning or end to his being (e.g. Bray 1998:39). Charnock, for instance, reasons "I Am is his proper name. This description being in the present tense, shows that his essence knows no past, nor future ... *I Am*; I am the only being ... he is therefore, at the greatest distance from not being, and that is eternal" (1979:278).

Can we deduce this type of timeless eternity from any of the other attributes? Aquinas believed so. He wrote, "the notion of eternity follows immutability" (1952:42). This implication has come under attack, however, since it is argued that the fact that change requires temporality does not necessarily imply that being immutable makes one timeless (Wierenga 2003:173; cf. Shoemaker 1969). Two factors seem to complicate this issue. First, Aquinas' reasoning apparently assumed a specific view of time that not all might agree with (Craig 1985), and secondly his view of immutability was intertwined with the debatable doctrine of divine simplicity.

The influence of divine simplicity was also seen to play a role in Anselm's understanding of immutability and eternity (locus 3.3.4); and we find the same tendency in Turretin's thought. Turretin explains that God's eternity simply cannot be the same as endless time, because the latter involves succession, and succession means change, but it is again simplicity that seems to play a key role:

"The eternity of God cannot have succession because his essence ... admits none. ... it is perfectly simple and immutable (and therefore rejects the change of former into latter, of past into present, of present into future, which succession involves)" (1992:203).

So, if the argument from immutability seems questionable, are there other attributes that support timeless eternity? We saw that a scriptural view of omniscience expressly included foreknowledge (locus 3.3.6), and if God is timeless this would seem to facilitate his knowledge of future events, in the sense that all events might then be equally present to him. But again, this understanding was seen to assume a specific view of time, a view that some might contest as unscriptural or even false. So, just like immutability, omniscience cannot be seen to simply support timeless eternity.

Other promising attributes in support of timelessness are divine aseity or necessity and perfection or infinity. First, if God exists necessarily and *a se*, it is impossible that He would not exist; therefore He can never go out of or come into being and this was exactly the generally accepted description of eternity. Divine perfection also seems to fit well with timeless eternity. Perfection requires completeness in all aspects, and seems therefore hardly compatible with the incompleteness of a life lived in time, where both past and future are out of reach and all that is real is the fleeting present. Finally, Turretin deduces eternity from infinity: “after the infinity of God with respect to essence, the same is to be considered with respect to place and time by which he is conceived as uncircumscribed by any limits (*aperigraptos*) of place or time the latter [is called] eternity” (1992:196-97). But can we be entirely sure that these attributes require divine eternity to be absolutely timeless? Could an everlasting and thus temporal eternity also meet these requirements?

If so, is there scriptural evidence for such a temporal interpretation? In fact, if we look at the Bible, we find many more verses that speak of God as everlasting and temporal than as existing beyond time (Padgett 1992). Examples are “from everlasting to everlasting you are God,” and “God Almighty, who was and is and is to come” (Ps 90:2, Rev 4:8). One thing is clear, solving this question, and the related question of the exact nature of time, clearly has great potential for a better understanding of many of the other attributes.

A temporal understanding of divine eternity also seems to accord quite well with several of the other attributes, so let us take a look at some of the arguments that have been presented.

Interestingly enough, though omniscience seemed to support timelessness because of the foreknowledge issue, it can also be called upon to support infinite temporality. For if God is completely timeless, the question again emerges how He can have knowledge of our ever-changing temporal reality. More specifically, can He have knowledge of propositions that express so-called ‘tensed facts’? Tensed propositions are those that have a built in time-factor, such as “I had two sandwiches for lunch today.” A timeless God would know the content of this proposition, but would his timelessness allow him to know if this event is currently past, present or future? A helpful example is that of a film producer, who knows a movie as it lies in the can. She may know the whole story-line by heart, but she has no idea what is at this moment being projected on the screen (Moreland 2003:513). However, scripture teaches that God does know if certain events are past, present or future since He responds accordingly. Examples from both testaments are, “*I have seen the misery of my people ... So I have come down to rescue them,*” and “*Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord ...’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you ...’*” (Ex 3:7-8, Mat 7:22-23, italics mine). The question thus becomes, how must we understand divine eternity in view of God’s apparent knowledge of tensed facts?

Secondly, if God is timeless how can He stand in any relationship with temporal and changeable creatures? How can He be the creator and sustainer of a temporal universe with temporal human beings, respond to the actions and prayers of such beings, and intervene in the history of mankind? That the God of the Bible does all these things is abundantly attested. God’s creation of the heavens and the earth, his response to Abraham’s plea for his nephew Lot, and the dividing of the waters so Israel could escape the Egyptian army are three Old Testament examples among many (Gen 1:1, 18:22-33, Ex 14:15-31). In the New Testament, we find instances of direct divine intervention like Paul’s conversion and responses to prayer like Peter’s miraculous escape from prison (Acts 12). As we saw, such scriptural evidence seems to confirm the implied attribute of personhood, but it makes a strong interpretation of immutability difficult to understand and divine timelessness therefore fares no better.

To sum up, we have found the following connections between eternity, either timeless or temporal, and the other attributes. Timelessness seemed to find support in

immutability, but the classic understanding of this attribute is so intertwined with specific views on the nature of time and with the doctrine of simplicity that it could not be used as a supporting argument. Omniscience fared no better. It seemed to point to timelessness as far as foreknowledge was concerned, but the question of tensed knowledge made it into a possible argument for the opposite view. Necessity and perfection looked like strong supports for timelessness, but we first have to make absolutely sure that they demand timelessness rather than everlastingness.

In support of temporal eternity we found again the tensed knowledge issue and the question of how a timeless God can act and respond in time, as well as the fact of the personhood of God, which seems at first sight incongruous with timelessness. Attributes that seemed to have no direct connection with either view of eternity were perfect goodness, except via its implied doctrine of divine personhood, plus the properties of omnipotence and incorporeality.

Finally, as with all the other attributes, we want to briefly look at conceptual connections between eternity and divine truth. Since eternity is so closely intertwined with immutability, omniscience and personhood, it comes as no surprise that its connections with truth also cannot be described without appealing to these attributes. Let us therefore look at the two views of eternity and see how each of them might possibly affect divine truth via the three attributes mentioned.

If eternity is best interpreted as truly atemporal timelessness, how will this affect our view of divine truth in terms of factuality, genuineness or faithfulness? If eternity is timeless, this will affirm the attribute of immutability, and changelessness was seen as an important characteristic of truth in scripture as well as in much of philosophical thought. Moreover, a timeless view of eternity may strengthen factuality in terms of divine future knowledge, even though it might weaken factuality when it comes to knowledge of tensed facts. A similar picture emerges with regards to faithfulness. Faithfulness may be strengthened by enabling reliability and permanence, but weakened by hindering responsive relatedness to temporal creation.

On the other hand, if eternity is temporal in nature, this seems to affirm the attribute of personhood, and the effects on factuality and faithfulness are the reverse of the above. Factuality may be strengthened by enabling divine knowledge of tensed facts, but weakened by the problem of future knowledge. Similarly, faithfulness may be bolstered because responsive relatedness to temporal creation is facilitated, but it may also be threatened by a possible lack of reliability and permanence, for if even God does not know the future, can He then really be relied upon to keep his promises?

This is how the connections seem to lie right now, but a revision of our concept of divine eternity may of course change our current view of immutability, omniscience and personhood, and if that happens we will also see changes in the expected effects on the notion of divine truth.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter we have briefly looked at those predicates that in classical theism are generally regarded as divine attributes. We have surveyed the scriptural evidence and philosophical arguments for each of these, and have tried to determine if and how each is conceptually related to the divine attribute of truth. In terms of connections between each of the attributes and truth, we were able to conclude the following.

Divine perfection and infinity were mostly seen to provide strong confirmation of divine truth. This attribute assured that there can be no shade of doubt and no exception to the faithfulness of God, the true factuality of his words and his genuine reality.

Aseity stressed the need to solve the issue of the ontological status of the attributes, and thus of divine truth. God alone exists *a se*, but since his attributes must be essential to him they must also exist eternally. How can these two facts be reconciled? Since the factuality sense of truth was seen to be represented by omniscience, and faithfulness by perfect goodness, solutions to this question will also shed light on divine truth itself. Aseity also resonated with the genuineness sense of truth as it was found in scripture and early philosophy. The attribute of divine necessity, in its turn, alerted us to the fact that not

all divine knowledge should be deemed necessary, since this would lead to an unacceptable denial of divine free will.

Incorporeality and omnipresence did not appear strongly connected to divine truth. One possible link might be that God's being present at every event would facilitate divine knowledge. However, such a perceptual and mediate view of divine cognition would seem incongruent with divine perfection.

Immutability, on the other hand, provided many rich links with divine truth, though it also became clear that this attribute might need to be revised before these connections can be further hammered out. At first sight, immutability seemed a perfect match for the sense of firmness and reliability that is basic to the biblical notion of truth. God's perfect knowledge, however—the factuality side of divine truth—may actually require a certain amount of change in order to reflect changing temporal reality, and divine free will confirms this requirement. Moreover, divine faithfulness might well demand relatedness to temporal beings and the ability to respond to their choices. Immutability clearly does have great potential for a deeper understanding of divine truth, but this attribute will first itself need to be revised.

Omnipotence, and especially the need to define this attribute carefully, alerted us again to the issue of the ontological status of divine truth. For if divine power is defined as above logic, both factuality and faithfulness become empty concepts; but if logic and other truths exist independently from God we again run the risk of denying aseity. If omnipotence is correctly defined, however, it can be seen to confirm divine truth in all its various uses.

Omniscience was again a rich source of connections with truth—not surprising of course, since perfect knowledge and factuality are so closely connected. This means that if the two main issues in omniscience, i.e. knowledge of the future and knowledge of tensed facts, can be given plausible solutions, then these answers will also bring greater clarity to the notion of divine truth itself. Omniscience, like perfection and omnipotence, was also seen to affirm truth as faithfulness.

Perfect goodness of course includes faithfulness, and it is therefore this attribute that represents this specific moral meaning of truth, just as omniscience represents factuality. Faithfulness also took precedence over factuality in scripture and we will have to see what this means for the attribute of truth. Together with perfection, omniscience, and omnipotence, perfect goodness also provided clear affirmation of divine truth. Moreover, moral goodness implies personhood, and since truth in scripture was identified with the person of God, this implied attribute can function as a strong confirmation of this personal aspect of divine truth.

Finally, eternity was seen to be bound up with divine truth in all kinds of ways, most of them involving three other attributes, namely omniscience, immutability and personhood. It is now clear that if we can bring clarity to the main debate in divine eternity, that of timelessness versus temporality, we may also be able to clear up some important issues in these three attributes, and thus in the attribute of truth itself.

To clarify divine eternity is therefore the next main task we have to turn to. However, we have also seen that views of eternity themselves make assumptions about the exact nature of time. Before we set out on our investigation of divine eternity, therefore, it will be profitable to have a sound understanding of time itself, and this is what we will do in the next chapter.

NOTES

¹ Iranaeus confirms the same when he states, "...God is life, and incorruption, and truth. And these and such like attributes..." (1975:375).

² Of the most used Bible translations, the New International Version has no instances of the English word 'infinite' as applied to God, while the King James and New American Standard have one, Ps 147:5, where God's understanding is called infinite.

³ Turretin reasoned, for example, that God "can neither be changed for the better (for he is the best) nor for the worse (because he would cease to be the most perfect)" (1992:205).

⁴ John Miley also warns that interpreting infinity as infinite extension may lead to pantheism (1989:218).

⁵ So-called nonreductive physicalism falls under physicalism in this respect, because it sees mental phenomena as mere epiphenomena of physical states, and thus as causally impotent.

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4 – THE NATURE OF TIME

4.1 Introduction

In our quest to uncover the nature of divine truth, we have in the preceding chapters laid a conceptual foundation, consisting of three parts: truth in philosophy, in scripture and in Classical Theism. Our philosophical investigation in Chapter One started off with a brief analysis of the notion of truth in its everyday usage. We found that in daily conversation in our own time the term ‘truth’ primarily denotes factuality, with faithfulness and genuineness coming as distant seconds. With this daily conception in hand, we then noted that major views in Greek and Medieval philosophy put the accent quite differently. It was the genuineness sense of truth that played a major role here, truth as grounded in an unchanging ideal reality, and even when views tended to favor factuality instead, it was factuality as grounded in an unchanging element within empirical reality.

With the arrival of modern philosophical thought, we moved closer to our daily view of truth, with factuality firmly overtaking genuineness in first place. This new truth sense, however, was increasingly seen as dependent on man’s own ability to know, while the connection with extra-mental reality came under mounting tension. This new accent on the human knower was taken even further by contemporary thought, where the person has now moved into the central position—a development that might at first be seen as favoring the faithfulness sense of truth, but on closer investigation is something quite different. Rather, this move toward the left of our diagram seems to represent an all-out retreat in the battle for truth, as this notion is now increasingly regarded as a useless and empty concept.

In Chapter Two we moved from the philosophical to the scriptural notion of truth, and this exploration yielded even greater differences with regard to the daily understanding. Not only did both the faithfulness and genuineness sense of truth emerge here as more important than factuality, but truth was also seen to have strong connotations of personhood and power. In comparing the scriptural truth notion with that in philosophy we found that scripture put the same accent on unchangingness as did early philosophy, with later philosophical views clearly moving away from the biblical stance.

Finally, in Chapter Three we looked at the divine attributes as formulated by Classical Theism, exploring conceptual connections between each of the attributes on the one hand and the concept of truth on the other. Four of the attributes showed potential for clarifying divine truth, namely eternity, immutability, the personhood that is implied by divine goodness, and omniscience. We also saw that among these four, divine eternity seemed fundamental to an understanding of the other three. It is for this reason that we will turn our efforts to the further analysis of divine eternity, and since eternity cannot be defined without clarifying the concept of time itself, the current chapter will explore both the philosophical and biblical evidence concerning the nature of time.

Based on the insights gained here, in Chapter Five we will then explore the nature of divine eternity, which in turn should help us clarify how the divine attributes of immutability, personhood and omniscience should be understood. Finally, all this should equip us to return to divine truth with a better understanding of what it entails and how the various theories on time and divine eternity have affected views, not only on divine truth, but also on the notion of truth in general.

4.2 Major debates in philosophy of time

The nature of time has engaged thinking minds from the very beginning of Western philosophy. Five hundred years BC, the Greek philosopher Parmenides already declared that true reality is imperishable and unchanging, and all temporal becoming thus no more than a deceptive illusion (Audi 1995:646). However, his contemporary Heraclites disagreed. He saw reality instead as in continual flux, as dynamic and ephemeral (op.cit.:376).¹ His famous example was that no person could ever step into the same river twice, since everything about the river would have changed the second time.

In our day, an evolved version of this debate is known under the less imaginative nomenclature of that between the A-theory and B-theory of time, terms that are based on a ground-breaking article written about a century ago by philosopher of time John Ellis McTaggart (1908).

Though the A- or B-theory debate has been central to contemporary thought about the nature of time, another important question has been if time is finite or infinite in duration. In Western philosophy this question goes right back to Aristotle who argued that time must necessarily be infinite, a position that centuries later was strongly contested by theist philosophers. There are, moreover, two further issues in the philosophy of time that are closely related to the finite-infinite debate. First, there is the question if time is linear or not, and second, if it is best understood as a type of substratum in which events take place, the substantival view, or that it is nothing more than the relations between events, the relational view.

Taking the two main debates as our guideline, our objective in following sections will be to discuss the concept of time from these two perspectives:

- Time as a dynamic process or as a static event (4.3)
- Time as finite or infinite (4.4).

4.3 Is time dynamic or static?

In his article *The Unreality of Time* (1908) McTaggart suggested that in daily use positions in time are distinguished in two ways. We either designate a moment in time by relating it to the ‘now’, using the terms *past*, *present* or *future*, or we relate it to any other moment, in which case we use the designations *earlier than*, *simultaneous with* or *later than*. McTaggart called the first group of moments in time the A-series, and noted that the distinctions in this series continually change as the ‘now’ itself changes, since an event in time that is future now may be present tomorrow and past the day after. The second category was named the B-series, and its distinctions were seen to be permanent, since an event X that is earlier than event Y will continue to be so even as the days, months and years pass.

McTaggart also argued that the dynamic A-series was absolutely fundamental to time, and that its distinctions of past, present and future could not be ignored as actual parts of reality. However, since he also understood the A-series to lead to obvious logical contradictions, he deemed the conclusion unavoidable that time is simply unreal. This two-

step argument is still known as McTaggart's Paradox, and even though the paradox itself is currently regarded by many as solved, his distinction between the two ways of designating moments in time has been immortalized in the continued use of the terms A-theory and B-theory of time.

The A-theory is now also known as the dynamic theory of time, since in its view time is constantly changing. A-theorists believe that the passage of time is a very real and irreducible feature of reality. Another concept that belongs in the A-theory camp is 'tense', a term that indicates that they see the past, present and future tenses that are used in language as reliable reflections of what is happening in reality. A-theorists are often also presentists, meaning that they believe that only the present exists, while the past and the future are currently non-existent.

By contrast, B-theorists believe that reality is essentially static. An event does not itself change from being future to present to past, but this seeming change is merely a feature of how our mind perceives the world. When I say that the year 2000 is *past*, for instance, all I really mean is that 2000 is *earlier than* the moment when I am writing this sentence, and it will always remain that way. In this view time does not really pass, and any appearance to the contrary is merely phenomenological, a mind-dependent perspective. Accordingly, language that uses tense merely reflects this illusion, and B-theorists are therefore also called adherents of the 'tenseless' theory of time. Many B-theorists also call themselves eternalists, adherents of the view that objects and events in the past and future exist just as much as those in the present.

The B-theory has enjoyed increased popularity since the general acceptance in physics of the Special Theory of Relativity (STR). This theory developed by Albert Einstein at the beginning of the 20th century implies the impossibility of absolute simultaneity. This means that two events can be simultaneous for one observer, but occur at different times for another observer. Of course, if this is so, the present-ness or past-ness of a certain event is not an objective fact, but rather a feature that is relative to a certain observer and thus merely subjective. All objects and events have equal ontological status, no matter if they are perceived as past, present or future, and this results in a static picture

of reality that is also known as the block universe. In this view, the passage of time is not an objective reality, nothing really changes, and the static view of time is correct.

In the following sections, we will first look at the two most important arguments for and against the dynamic or A-theory of time. Next, we will look at the static or B-theory and again explore the two major lines of argument supporting and opposing this view. These eight lines of reasoning will then allow us to conclude which of these two is the most plausible view of the nature of time.

4.3.1 The case for dynamic time

As we saw earlier, the dynamic view of time is also called the ‘tensed’ view, since it believes that the tenses we find in human language are actually reflective of true reality. Even though there are languages that do not use tensed verbs, every known language allows its users to distinguish between past, present and future events, and this strongly suggests that tense is not just a linguistic feature but a hard ontological fact. The view that tensed language points to a tensed reality is also defended by such philosophers as Richard Gale and Quentin Smith (Gale 1968, Smith 1993). In response, proponents of static time first argued that sentences that use tense can be reduced to tenseless ones without a change in meaning. It soon became clear, however, that tensed sentences do provide information that their tenseless counterparts lack and vice versa, and this position is therefore no longer seen as tenable (Perry 1977:474-77). There have been more recent attempts to disconnect tensed language from tensed facts, but none have been able to show decisively that tensed facts are completely dispensable (Mellor 1981, 1998; Craig 2001a:126). The belief that tense in language is indeed a reflection of tense in reality thus continues to be a plausible position.

A second argument for dynamic time is based on the undeniable strength and universality of our human experience of time as passing. This experience is so fundamental that it qualifies as a ‘properly basic’ belief, which can be accepted *prima facie*, unless and until a strong enough defeater to this belief is presented. A prime example of such a *prima facie* justified belief is, for instance, that of the existence of the outside

world—a belief so strong and universal that it is virtually impossible for it to ever encounter a proper defeater. However, we do not only experience that there is a world outside of our mind, but also that this world is in a continual process of becoming. In fact, even if we subject ourselves to prolonged sensory deprivation, we still experience change in the inner life of the mind, with thoughts and feelings following one after the other.

The experience of change then, or of reality as becoming, is uncommonly strong. In fact, because change is also a universal feature of man's mental experience, it can even be argued that the belief in change is more basic than that in the existence of the outside world. Thus, if our phenomenological belief in the outside world is *prima facie* justified, then our belief in temporal becoming can be deemed equally justified or even more so. Finding an adequate defeater for such a strongly justified belief could border on the impossible.

Two other aspects of this phenomenological argument deserve highlighting. First, it is clear that we strongly experience certain events as now or present and others as not so, and this in itself points to the reality of tense. In response, Mellor has argued that what we experience as a present event is in reality a mere tenseless fact; we just tend to experience it as present (1981). However, since such reasoning involves the process of rational inference and is thus non-basic, it has little power to serve as defeater of a properly basic belief of the kind described above. Furthermore, even if we take the position that the presentness of our current reality, c. q. of typing this sentence, is not a feature of reality, it is still undeniable that the *mental* experience of typing this sentence has presentness and is therefore a tensed event.

A second feature of the phenomenological argument for dynamic time that is worth noting is that we tend to have markedly different attitudes to events depending on their being past, present or future (Prior 1959, 2003). Even the same event, for instance a painful medical procedure, may first be dreaded when it lies in the near future, and later fill us with relief when it is past. On the static view, however, such attitude changes cannot be explained, and even though they are a universal feature of human experience they must be labeled as irrational, since events really are not past, present or future; they just are.

In the face of these considerable arguments in favour of the dynamic view of time, what are the main objections that have been raised against this view? As we saw earlier, it was McTaggart's article on time that provided the terminology for the debate on whether time is in its very nature dynamic or static. McTaggart's own view actually provides a measure of support for both camps in the debate, since he argued on the one hand that time must necessarily be dynamic, but on the other that dynamic time implies unacceptable contradictions. As we saw, his conclusion was therefore that time must be unreal. In our current quest for arguments in favor of the static or B-theory, we will focus here on the reasoning that led him to conclude that the concept of time is contradictory. For if McTaggart is right, this allegation will constitute a rejoinder that is indeed powerful enough to defeat the *prima facie* argument for the reality of temporal becoming.

McTaggart argues that each event in the A-series has a temporal characteristic, namely that it is past, present or future. He explains that this characteristic can be a relation or a quality, but in either case contradictions will inevitably result, because the temporal characteristic of the event changes. Thus, event A, say the Second World War, is an event in the series that changes from being future to being present and then past. But World War II cannot be both past and not-past, present and not-present, future and not-future because these are "incompatible determinations" (McTaggart 1908:467). Still, all three incompatible terms—being past, present and future—are predicable of each event in the series. His conclusion is therefore simply that each event in the series has contradictory attributes and thus this series cannot exist.

However, on deeper analysis, McTaggart is not really describing a dynamic view of time with his A-series (Broad 1976, Prior 1970). A truly dynamic view sees only *present* events as actually existing. World War II is in existence from 1939 till 1945, but it does not exist before or after that time and consequently also has no temporal characteristics, namely being past or future, that are incompatible with its being *present*. Since the contradictions McTaggart finds do not apply to the true dynamic view of time, it appears that his argument here is inconsequential.

A more serious objection to the dynamic view is that its literal conception of the flow of time is actually incoherent. It is argued that two questions in particular reveal it to

be so. First, if time really passes, we should be able to answer the question how fast it passes. But this is an unanswerable question because speed can only be defined in terms of time, and so we end up with a tautology, e.g., it takes one hour for an hour to pass. Since there is no coherent answer to this question we must conclude that time does not pass. How does the dynamic view answer this objection?

Actually, we are dealing here again with a misunderstanding of the dynamic view. The misunderstanding is that those who support the dynamic view believe that future events literally *become* present and then past. Logician and philosopher Arthur Prior explained that the idea of time passing is merely a metaphor, and that it indicates neither motion nor change (2003). The concept of change requires that an object or event already exists before the change takes place. But dynamic time does not state that future events change into present ones but rather something much more radical, namely that present events come into existence and then go out of existence. Future and past events do not exist. In this light, the question how fast time flows is not applicable and the fact that the dynamic view cannot answer this question therefore does not prove it to be incoherent.

The second question the dynamic view is presented with is that of the extent of the present. Though this question is not necessarily unanswerable it is certainly a thorny one and it has kept the best minds occupied since the very beginning of philosophical thought. The question is this: If indeed only the present exists, how long can this existence be said to last? Any duration, no matter how minute, would imply a possible division of that duration into past, present and future, and thus deny presentism. But if the present has mere zero duration, then how can it be said to ‘pass’? And how can the next zero-duration instant ever come into existence, since between the first and second instant there would always be an infinite series of similar zero-duration instants?

Several solutions to this conundrum have been suggested. One popular view is the belief in the existence of minimal indivisible time intervals or ‘chronons’, but this solution has been shown to lead to some puzzling questions in its own right (Whitehead, 1978). Another promising route has seemed to be the introduction of a higher time dimension which sustains our own time. Even McTaggart entertained this solution, but soon concluded that it proved to be a dead end. Since such a ‘hyper-time’ would not be

qualitatively different from original time it would simply lead to the same problems at a higher level. Thus, such hyper-time itself would require an even higher level to sustain it, which itself would need a higher level and so on. Only a qualitatively different time dimension would be able to adequately sustain our own time and thus prevent a vicious infinite regress.

A third solution, entertained by Henri Bergson among others, has been to see real duration as ontologically prior to any type of measureable concept of the present (1965). The present simply 'is', and this fact is irreducible; the question of its measurable extent is a secondary construction. Prior was also a proponent of this view. He argued that the notion of being present is simply equivalent to existing, making the present such a primitive notion that it is literally pre-metrical (Prior 1970). Of course, whether or not this solution can really hold the questions at bay has again been a matter of debate. It does suggest, however, that the concept of the present is not incoherent *per se*.

Nevertheless, from a purely philosophical perspective, the question of the extent of the present has not been fully solved and this can be said to stand as an argument against the dynamic view of time. Of course, to put this one remaining problem in perspective, the static view faces some thorny questions of its own. An example of these is the issue of the asymmetry of time. If time is static, and all moments exist tenselessly, why does time have such an undeniably one-way direction? The dynamic theory can explain this direction as part of the process of temporal becoming, but the proponent of static time can only take it as an unexplainable fact.² The reality of such unanswered questions in the static view thus diminishes the force of the question of the extent of the present as an argument against dynamic time.

4.3.2 The case for static time

The main argument that the static view has on its side is its compatibility with relativity theory, at least the most popular interpretation of it as proposed early on by mathematician Hermann Minkowski. Though Einstein's original formulation of the Special Theory of Relativity (STR) presupposed dynamic time, it was Minkowski who

introduced the idea of the four dimensional space-time universe, which sees time as static and as an enduring fourth dimension next to the familiar three dimensions of space. Moreover, this space-time view proved superior to the original Einsteinian interpretation in several ways; so much so, in fact, that Einstein himself soon adopted it.

One reason why the space-time view became preferred is that in the original STR with its dynamic view of time there are no objective time facts, since such facts are dependent on observer position or his 'inertial frame'. This means that the simultaneous occurrence of two events is relative, not absolute, and this has far reaching implications. For instance, reality is no longer one common unified world in which all persons live, objects exist and events happen; instead, reality becomes fragmented. According to Einstein's original interpretation, an event which is present to one observer might be simultaneous with another event present to another observer, while the reverse would not be true. So, say I am eating lunch on a plane from Canada to South Africa and my friend in South Africa is eating dinner at home. According to the original Einsteinian interpretation of STR my lunch can happen simultaneously with my friend's dinner, while her dinner does not occur simultaneously with my lunch. This in itself seems curious to say the least, but its logical implications are downright disturbing. According to Craig the Einsteinian view actually entails that two such events are not sharing the same reality (2001a:43). Moreover, this scenario is not a rare exception for it presents itself for every observer who is in motion relative to someone or something else, which is virtually everyone (*ibid.*). We are faced, then, with a great plurality of disconnected realities, each of them bound to a different inertial frame. Minkowski's interpretation avoids this fragmentation since reality consists not just of events in the present, but of events in past, present and future, and all have equal ontological status. Nothing comes into or goes out of existence due to motion in the observer, because reality is more than just the present.

Another difficulty with the original view of STR is its relative understanding of physical objects. Objects have properties such as shape and duration, but these properties are merely relative to certain inertial frames, and therefore change with motion. An object's length might be two meters long relative to one inertial frame and one-and-a-half relative to another and so literally change its length when in motion. Similarly, temporal

duration becomes relative, so that a clock is noted to actually slow down with motion. If such changes can be shown to have causal explanations, to result from causes intrinsic to the overall system, then we have an adequate theory, but since they merely result from relative motion—motion with regards to something else—such causal explanations cannot be given (op.cit.:172). By contrast, Minkowski's interpretation has a simple answer. It simply attributes these physical distortions to the fact that we as three-dimensional beings cannot sense what four dimensional space-time objects really look like. The objects do not literally grow or shrink or the clocks slow down, it is just our sense experience that is inadequate.

Of course, if the Minkowskian view is superior as a theory, and it is based on a static view of time, then—unless we are ready to reject relativity theory altogether—we have here a strong argument for static time. However, there is a third interpretation of relativity that is also compatible with dynamic time but does not run into the difficulties described above. Another contemporary of Einstein, Dutch physicist Hendrik Lorentz, developed a theory of relativity that did allow for absolute time, absolute simultaneity and absolute measurements of space and time. This theory is generally acknowledged to be empirically equivalent to both interpretations of STR, and even though it implies the same strange effects of shrinking rods and clocks that slow down, the theory provides clear causal explanations for these phenomena (ibid.).

Moreover, it can even be argued to be superior to the Minkowskian view with its tendency to unify space and time into one continuum and practically reduce time to a spatial concept. One argument against Minkowski's reductionist view of time is, for instance, that it tends to either ignore mental events or deem them somehow unreal—a tendency that fits well with a 'spatial' view of time, since mental events are themselves not bound to space. However, mental events do seem subject to time, at least in humans, and this strongly suggest that time can indeed exist apart from any spatial characteristics and transcend the boundaries of a space-time continuum (op.cit.:180). Moreover, recent developments in quantum physics may make the Lorentzian view the preferred paradigm.³ It is certainly beyond the topic of this study to explore the exact reasons why. But for us the most important factor in this debate is that since Lorentzian relativity represents on all

counts a viable alternative to the Minkowskian take on STR, the latter can no longer function as a decisive argument in favor of static time.

This leaves just one more argument for static time that needs to be examined, namely the alleged mind-dependence of becoming. As we saw earlier, this argument states that temporal becoming is necessarily dependent on the existence of minds and mental states, and that it is not an attribute of events in extra-mental reality (Mellor 1981, Grünbaum 1967). Thus, when we perceive events in the world around us we tend to mentally *add* temporality, but physical reality itself is not subject to becoming. I believe that this view cannot only be proven wrong, but also incoherent. If so, rather than providing an argument in favour of static time, it actually yields additional proof of the truth of the dynamic view. So let us explore this argument in some detail.

We all mentally *experience* events—be they physical or mental—as subject to temporal becoming, and even those thinkers who argue for the mind-dependence of becoming clearly acknowledge this fact in their choice of words. Their main point is that we tend to add temporal becoming to those of our mental events that reflect the outside world, in other words to perception-events. However, if this is true, our first rejoinder can be that mental reality is more than just perception. We also experience purely mental events like creating a poem, constructing a logical argument or just thinking of one thing now and then another—what has been termed our “stream of consciousness.” Such pure mental events are equally subject to a sense of becoming as are perception-events, since the thoughts I have right now are not identical to the ones I had yesterday and the latter may even be based upon or expand on those of the former. However, the temporal becoming of such pure mental events cannot be labeled as illusory on grounds that they do not accurately reflect physical events, because they exist separate from physical reality. In other words, such non-perception mental events seem to be *undeniably* subject to temporal becoming, and temporal becoming is thus real for a certain part of reality, namely the mental realm.

If the temporal becoming of non-perception events cannot be denied, and the static proponent insists on keeping physical reality free from temporal becoming, she may be forced to deny the reality of the mental realm altogether—a radical step that will involve

her in countless difficulties. To avoid this she must postulate some kind of dualism, but that stance is also fraught with difficulties, as the Descartes chapter in the history of philosophy reminds us. If Descartes' dualism already floundered on questions of the interaction between a non-spatial mind on the one hand and a spatial body on the other, this new dualism would be even more perplexing, because it would imply a *temporal* non-spatial mind directing a *non-temporal* spatial body. For instance, my mind may want to lift my right foot, but how could it ever initiate such a movement when the lifted foot would already statically exist in past, present and future (Capek 1976)? It seems that any physical states that are directly connected with the mind would also be 'infected with' temporal becoming, and once this division between mind and body has been bridged, the rest of the physical universe might soon follow.

Another puzzling question that needs explaining is why I experience the writing of this sentence as now, but the eating of lunch as past. If both events are totally devoid of becoming in outside reality, how and why do I mentally experience only one of them as present? Equally mysterious, why do I not experience events in a totally random order, where at one moment I am 25 years old, the next only five and then 55, and why am I apparently no exception in my orderly experience of time? It seems that only true temporality in the outside world can account for such phenomena. However, even if all these dualistic puzzles can be adequately solved, it needs to be remembered that dualism does nothing to render questionable the conclusion that temporal becoming for the mental realm is an undeniable fact.

Maybe the static time theorist can maintain that the mental realm is real enough and so is our experience of becoming, but still discredit the temporal becoming we experience as mind-dependent in a higher sense. On this view, all my mental events, and thus *also my experience of their now-ness*, are equally real, so my now-awareness of eating yesterday's dinner is just as real as my now-awareness of writing this paragraph. But in order to account for the fact that I do not experience these two now-awarenesses as equally present, I now need another mental source. If the feeling of temporality does not originate in my own mind, then a higher mental reality—a hyper-mind—is needed to ground this

distinction. But then the question can be asked where the temporality in this hyper-mind comes from and of course this road leads again to an infinite regress.

Finally, a last option is to take the term ‘mind-dependent’ to simply mean unreal and illusory. However, even this maneuver does not provide a way of escape. The problem is that even if all temporal becoming is completely illusory, an illusion is itself a mental experience, and as such it is again subject to temporal becoming. If I experience the illusion of the temporal becoming of a mental event, I am having a mental event that itself is experienced as passing and changing—and with that the temporal becoming of mental events still stands. So, whatever I try to do to get rid of temporal becoming in the mental realm, what we see here is that it is simply impossible. Unless I flatly deny the reality of all that is non-physical, the reality of becoming seems an undeniable fact. The argument of the static time theorist that temporal becoming is mind-dependent can thus be turned into additional proof that temporal becoming is real, just as the dynamic view has been asserting all along.

The static time view has already been shown to be in considerable trouble, but are there further arguments that can be brought against it? One allegation has been that static time theorists are making time into something that is simply too similar to space. We have seen this already in the tensions that result when the static theory is confronted with mental reality—a reality that is by definition not spatial. It also surfaces in their attempt to accept the reality of time on the one hand, while trying to deny the reality of becoming or tense on the other. Static time proponents argue that just as our human experience of space as ‘here’ and ‘not-here’ does not affect the ontological status of the not-here, so our experience of time as ‘present’ and ‘not-present’ does not imply that the not-present is somehow less real. More specifically, the static view would like to affirm temporal relations between events, such as ‘earlier than’ and ‘later than’, without committing to actual temporal becoming. To see if such a stance is tenable we will revisit McTaggart’s Paradox and this time we will focus on the first part of his two-fold argument, the part where he states that time must be dynamic in nature.

McTaggart first reasons that time always involves change even if such change is not immediately obvious:

“A particular thing, indeed, may exist unchanged through any amount of time. But when we ask what we mean by saying that there were different moments of time ... through which the thing was the same, ... we mean that it remained the same while other things were changing” (1908:458).

Next, he argues that a B-series of events—one that runs from ‘earlier than’ to ‘later than’ without designating any event as past, present or future—can itself never involve change. The reason is that change necessarily implies the ceasing to be of an event and no event ever ceases to be in a permanently existing B-series. He concludes that there can be no B-series without an A-series, so no ‘earlier than’ and ‘later than’ without actual temporal becoming. Any attempt to disconnect the B-series from the actual temporal becoming inherent in the A-series only yields a C-series, an ordered series of events that is devoid of all temporality, like for instance the letters of the alphabet or of the natural numbers below one hundred (op.cit.:461).

One attempt to preserve the temporal relations between events without having to accept the reality of becoming or tense is Mellor’s proposal to anchor such relations in causation. Because there is often a causal order between our perceptions of events, e.g., I hit my head and then feel pain, we perceive events as ‘earlier than’ and ‘later than’. In other words, it is the direction of causation that gives us the direction of time (Mellor 1981). In response to Mellor, however, we can argue that if all events in time are equally real, as the static view demands, we may not have a basis for the one-way directionality of causation either. In other words, can such a view truly exclude the possibility that causation proceeds backwards? In fact, static time seems to allow for a McTaggart-style C-series, but it provides no grounds for a one-way direction in such a series. As McTaggart himself remarks,

“If we keep to the series of natural numbers, we cannot put 17 between 21 and 26, but we keep to the series, whether we go from 17, through 21, to 26, or whether we go from 26, through 21, to 17. ... We equally keep to the series in counting backward” (1908:461).

If this is so, then ‘earlier than’ could just as well be ‘later than’ and vice versa and the true temporality of these relations is therefore lost.

But arguably the most critical line of reasoning against the static view comes with its implications for the reality of consciousness and personal identity. This implication surfaces when we ask the millennia-old question of how an entity can maintain its identity while also undergoing change. Say, for instance, that I drop my coffee cup and as it hits the floor the handle breaks off. The cup has now undergone change, but it clearly retains the identity of being my coffee cup. Objects go through such changes continually, and the same is true of people, say for the person John who chooses to shave his moustache. But how can we say the cup or the person have retained their identity even though they underwent change? How can the entity be the same if the change-event has changed its set of properties, for instance from being a coffee cup with a handle to one without a handle, or a person with a moustache to one without? Doesn't this lead to the same entity possessing contradictory properties—an implication that would suggest that our understanding of identity must be false?

There are two main views on how an entity may keep its identity through such changes, known as Endurance and Perdurantism (see Blackburn 2005:115). The endurantist sees time as dynamic and thus for him only the present entity exists, while the past or future version are not now in existence. The entity persists through time by existing at several successive times. This means that the changed entity never acquires seemingly contradictory properties, since such properties do not exist at the same time. For the static time theorist, however, change becomes problematic. She believes that the past, present and future versions of the object or person all have equal ontological status and this clearly leads to the entity possessing contradictory properties.

To solve this problem the static theorist needs to opt for perdurantism. According to this view, my cup-plus-handle and cup-minus-handle are two parts of a four-dimensional space-time coffee cup, just as John-plus-moustache and John-minus-moustache are two parts of the same four-dimensional space-time John. Because our perception is necessarily limited to three dimensions, we see only one slice of the real entity or one temporal part at a time, but this is merely a distortion due to our limited perception. In this way perdurantism solves the problem of the same entity possessing seemingly contradictory properties and it thus enables the retention of identity through change. But perdurantism,

or the belief in temporal parts, has far-reaching implications for the nature of personal consciousness. Coffee cups and even John's moustache are merely physical, but John himself is more than just his physical body. What does this theory do to the so deeply engrained sense in each of us that we are an enduring self, a person with thoughts and emotions, with a "stream of consciousness," with memories of the past and anticipations of the future?

On the perdurantist view, I myself and other persons I know are not self-conscious personal agents, but rather stages of persons or mere temporal parts of a four-dimensional person. The four-dimensional space-time John is simply a temporally extended entity without any consciousness. Now, as long as we are talking about John having a moustache or not this fact is not that earth-shattering. But we run into problems when we speak about anything involving consciousness, for instance about people having certain beliefs and maintaining or rejecting these later on. Thus, to use Peter Geach's example, we cannot say that John (McTaggart) believed in Hegel's views in 1901 and then later changed his mind, since John McTaggart is a merely a four-dimensional space-time object without any beliefs or thoughts (Geach 1972:310). We could argue that this consequence is not that detrimental, since my *temporal parts* at least have consciousness, so personhood is still preserved (Lewis 1983). But now another problem surfaces. The temporal parts which can still have personhood are each completely distinct from each other. So, the I that existed when I wrote the first word in this sentence is different from the I that writes the last word in it. In other words, I am reduced to a series of unconnected temporal person-parts, each with their own distinct personhood.

Though the endurantist certainly cannot claim that his view is problem-free—as the issue of the extent of the present has shown—the implications of perdurantism seem to deny what is arguably the most primitive universal belief of humankind, the belief that I am a person with an enduring self and consciousness. Again, though proofs for the truth of such basic beliefs may be lacking, they are *prima facie* justified and can be accepted as true until a proper defeater is found. And perdurantism with its elaborate structure of rational inference certainly does not make a likely candidate for such a momentous defeater.

4.4 Is time finite or infinite?

The second question that may shed light on our understanding of divine eternity is if time itself should be seen as finite or infinite. In his *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1955:93ff.), Thomas Aquinas masterfully reviewed the then existing arguments concerning this question, with the infinitude of time mostly being defended by Aristotle and its finitude championed by Christian philosophers such as Bonaventure and Augustine, as well as by Islamic thinkers in the *Kalam* tradition.⁴ Aquinas himself regarded the question unanswerable by human reason. But, as we shall see, some of the early arguments reviewed by him are still playing a role in today's debate.

Before we get into the debate itself, however, the question might be asked if today's scientific evidence for a beginning of the universe does not simply make the whole philosophical issue redundant. After all, contemporary Big Bang cosmology clearly points to an absolute beginning, and as physicist Paul Davies puts it, "Most cosmologists think of the initial singularity as the beginning of the universe. On this view the big bang represents ... the creation of ... spacetime itself" (1978). Seeing this general consensus among scientists for a beginning of time and thus its finitude, can we still speak of a debate? Is science able to settle the matter decisively?

I believe not. Modern science deals uniquely with physical reality. To view the debate as settled by scientific evidence is therefore to assume that time is limited to the physical universe and thus cannot exist beyond it. But in the section on dynamic and static time above we saw that time can be argued to also exist in the absence of the physical, namely in the mental realm. If so, then it is not incoherent to think of mental events, and thus time, as existing 'before' the Big Bang. In fact, even Newton, as a theist scientist, firmly endorsed such a view. He saw time as emanating directly from God's existence, and since God is infinite, time also had to be infinite in his view (1999). Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the finite-infinite debate is intertwined with still unresolved questions about time's topology (linear or not) and essential nature (substantial or relational). Consequently, the question regarding the finitude of time has not been decisively answered, and in the following sections we will therefore explore some of the fundamental arguments for both finite and infinite time.

4.4.1 The case for infinite time

As we saw, Aristotle argued for the infinitude of time and his reasoning has been defended by contemporary philosophers such as Richard Swinburne and J.R. Lucas (1981, 1973). Aristotle argues,

“Since time cannot exist and is unthinkable apart from the now, and the now is a kind of middle-point, uniting as it does in itself both a beginning and an end, a beginning of future time and an ending of past time, it follows that there must always be time Therefore, since the now is both a beginning and an end, there must always be time on both sides of it” (1984b:420).

The argument here is that every instant of time necessarily implies an earlier and later instant and thus time must be infinite. Elsewhere the philosopher reasons that time cannot come into being or cease to be for “there could not be a before or an after if time did not exist” (1984a:1693). In other words, once you have an instant of time you are committed to an instant before it and after it and this *ad infinitum*. Swinburne defends Aristotle’s reasoning by arguing that for every time *T* there must be a time *after T* since it is true that “there will be swans somewhere subsequent to a period *T*, or there will not. In either case there must be a period subsequent to *T*, during which there will or will not be swans” (1981:172). Swinburne here uses the Law of Excluded Middle to argue that as soon as the presumed last instant of time arrives, we are confronted with certain statements regarding what comes *after* that time and such statements are necessarily true—i.e. “There will be swans or there will not.” But if something is true *after* time then a certain state of affairs exists *after* time and this means we still find ourselves in time.

But is this a necessary conclusion? As the founder of temporal or tense logic, Prior convincingly argues that it is not. He writes,

“It is sometimes suggested that the idea that time will come to an end is essentially incoherent; and so it would be if we had to express this supposition by saying that at all times *after* a certain time there will be no time at all. We do not, however, have to put it in this way” (1968:98, italics mine).

Applying tense logic to Swinburne’s statement “It is the case that (there will be swans or there will not be swans),” it can then be translated to read “Either it is the case that (swans will exist) or it is not the case that (swans will exist).”⁵ Swinburne’s

formulation may indeed entail the existence of future time since it requires a certain future event (that there will or will not be swans), but Prior's proposal limits the future event to only one term of a disjunction (that it is the case that swans will exist). As with all disjunctions, this one term can be denied while the disjunction itself remains true. This makes the existence of time no longer a necessary presupposition and thus finite time at least logically possible. Prior's proposal seems to show that finite time is not in itself an incoherent notion, so are there other arguments for time's infinity?

We saw earlier that Newton was a firm believer in infinite time, so let us take a moment to explore his reasons. Newton distinguished between two senses of time, namely absolute and relative time. "Absolute time" he wrote "flows equably without relation to anything external, and by another name is called duration," while he described relative time as a "sensible and external measure of duration" (1999:408). In other words, absolute time exists independently of the events that occur in time, and can thus be seen as a type of empty container that continues to exist no matter if there are any objects or events to occupy it. Though time in this view is directly related to God, it is not related to events or change and is therefore most often classified as a substantival view of time. Newton defended this view against his contemporary the philosopher Gottfried Leibniz, who saw all time as reducible to temporal relations between events and thus as relational.

The assumption that undergirded Newton's defense of the substantival position seems to be that anything that has 'being' must necessarily be in time, just as it would have to be in space (Craig 2001a:77). For Newton, as a theist, this in turn meant that since God's existence is infinite, absolute time is also infinite. Unfortunately, Newton nowhere provides explicit reasoning to support his basic assumption that all being must be temporal, and thus we also find in his thinking no clear argument for the infinity of time (Craig 2001b:258). However, his thinking does provide us with the distinction between relational and substantival time, a distinction that in itself may shed some further light on the finite-infinite time question. For if time is substantival, it can exist independently from any objects or events. Such a view is clearly more conducive to the infinite stance in the finite-infinite debate. Even in the face of evidence for a beginning of the universe, the substantivalist can continue to support the view that time is infinite. By contrast, the

relationist who believes that the universe had a beginning will tend to support the finitude of time, unless, of course, she explicitly acknowledges the existence of non-physical events.

Next to the substantival-relational controversy, another question that plays a role in the finite-infinite debate is the question of the structure of time, or time's topology. The common sense answer here seems to be that time is linear, and should thus be represented by a continuous straight line. But could it be true that there are multiple time lines, or that the line of time could be branched, or could even form a closed loop and thus be circular? In all the linear scenarios mentioned here, we could be dealing with either an infinite or a finite line. But if the structure of time forms a closed loop or circle, time would necessarily be infinite. What we see here, then, is that both the substantivalist stance and the circular view of time create room for the view that time is infinite. Their opposites, the relational view and the idea that time is linear, especially when combined with the notion of a finite physical universe, tend to support an understanding of time as finite.

4.4.2 The case for finite time

We saw that the arguments for the infinity of time were in no way conclusive. Let us therefore explore the reasons that have been presented to support the finitude of time. The most famous of these find their origin in theist thought, of both the Christian and the Islamic variety. The *Kalam* cosmological argument for the existence of God, for instance, argues that if the universe had a beginning it must have had a cause (see Zalta 2008). In support of the premise that the universe began to exist it is then argued that there cannot have been an infinite regress of past events because such a series would represent an actual infinite, and an actual infinite cannot exist. The problem with the idea of an actual infinite is that it leads to logical absurdities, e. g. the conclusion that a whole is not always greater than its part.⁶ But if an actually infinite number of things cannot exist, then an infinite series of events in time cannot exist, and this leads us to the conclusion that time must be finite.

The main criticism of this argument has been that the absurdities that accompany transfinite calculations simply are defining characteristics of infinite sets. However, the question must be asked if purely theoretical entities that entail logical absurdities can ever be taken as representative of actual reality. Infinite set theory may be strictly logically consistent, but that does not imply its broad logical possibility or that infinite sets can exist in the real world (see locus 3.3.2). It is interesting to note, for instance, that transfinite mathematics must prohibit subtraction or division in order to maintain its consistency, while an actual infinite existing in the real world could not simply avoid such actions in order to guard reality against absurdity.

A related line of argumentation for time's finitude is that if time is infinite it becomes impossible to explain why it currently is now, why the current moment is occurring presently and not five days or two centuries ago. If time is infinite, an infinite amount of time has already elapsed today. But that would suggest that today has already come and gone—yet it hasn't. In order to explain why the current moment has only arrived now, what seems to be needed is a firmly anchored first moment in time and thus a finite past rather than an infinite one. In fact, if time were infinite, would it even be possible for the present day to exist? Kant, who with Aquinas believed the finite-infinite issue to be one that cannot be determined by human reason, explained in his first antinomy,

“If we assume that the world has no beginning in time, then up to every given moment an eternity has elapsed, and there has passed away in that world an infinite series of successive states of things. Now the infinity of a series consists in the fact that it can never be completed through successive synthesis. It thus follows that it is impossible for an infinite world-series to have passed away and that a beginning of the world is therefore a necessary condition of the world's existence” (1933:397).

A final argument in favour of finite time is again based on a theist conception of the world. If God created the world a finite time ago, but time itself is infinite, then an infinite amount of time had passed before the moment of creation. But this position creates some difficult questions. First, we are again confronted with the question how a certain moment could ever arrive, in this case, how could the moment of creation ever come to be if infinite time preceded it? Secondly, it becomes unexplainable why God would choose one

moment in infinite time over another in order to create the world—an issue that the philosopher Leibniz raised in his correspondence with Samuel Clarke (1956:27).

As Brian Leftow explains, a perfectly rational God needs a sufficient reason to choose moment *t* for creation rather than any other moment (1991:157). However, in infinite time before creation, moment *t* is no different from any other moment. Leftow's own solution is that God's reason for delaying creation to moment *t* is his joyful anticipation, a pleasure which at a certain point starts to wane and then provides a reason for creating right at that moment. But this solution solves nothing. Since the period of anticipatory joy is linked to nothing else but the problematic moment *t*, the question simply resurfaces with different wording, namely why did God's anticipation peak at moment *t*? (Craig 2001b:264). Thus the view that time is infinite entails some real tough questions to which no satisfactory answers have been given.

In the preceding sections we have seen that the dynamic conception of time has some strong arguments on its side, while the static time view was seen to run into considerable problems. We also have seen no decisive arguments in favor of infinite time, and several considerations that point in the direction of time being finite. With these philosophical reflections in place, let us now explore the biblical view of the nature of time.

4.5 The nature of time in the Bible

As is the case with most philosophical questions, the Bible does not present an explicit answer regarding the correct view of the nature of time. Rather, such a view is assumed or implied by other biblical doctrines. One of these biblical doctrines, and one that counts among the most basic, is the belief that God created all that exists and that He did so *ex nihilo*, or out of nothing. The Bible begins with the words “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). This verse strongly suggests that nothing physical pre-existed physical creation, and the uniqueness of this act is further accentuated by the use of the term *bara'* (creating), which is only used with God as its subject and differs from *yasar* (making) “in that *yasar* primarily emphasizes the shaping of an object

while *bara'* emphasizes the initiation of an object" (Harris, Laird, Archer & Waltke 1980:127).

Moreover, that the later biblical writers understood creation to be comprehensive, *ex nihilo* and caused by God alone, is amply confirmed. For instance, the Old Testament declares "I, the Lord, am the maker of all things ... by myself," "before You gave birth to the earth, even from everlasting to everlasting You are God" (Isa 44:24, Ps 90:2), while in the New Testament we find, "All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being," "Who calls into being that which does not exist," and "From Him and through Him ... are all things" (John 1:3, Rom 4:17, 11:36). All this implies that the universe had a clear temporal beginning, that it stands in causal relation to God and that God existed before or rather *without* the universe.⁷

Now, the point here is that the universe's actual coming into existence is hard to combine with a static or B-theory view of time. Again, in the static view the past, present and future all have equal ontological status, just as the spatial locations of *here* and *there* are equally real, even though one of these may seem more real to the perceiver. All temporal becoming is seen as merely mind-dependent, not an objective feature of the physical world. This means that, according to the B-theory of time, there is in the actual physical world no state of affairs of God existing before or without the universe. If there is a God, then the universe as a whole timelessly co-exists with Him, but there is no room in such a view for the universe actually coming into being or God existing on his own before or without creation.

What static time theorists *can* confirm is that the universe is ontologically dependent on God, that He continually sustains it in existence. Such sustaining activity is indeed explicitly taught in scripture (Col 1:17, Heb 1:3). But the verses that speak of God bringing the world into existence in the past outnumber these 'sustaining' passages at a rate of at least 200 to one.⁸ After studying the scriptural data, systematic theologian George Hendry concluded that, "Creation in the language of the Bible unquestioningly connotes origination ..., the bringing into existence of something that did not previously exist" (1972:420). It seems clear, therefore, that the biblical view of time favors the dynamic or A-theory of time.

The same doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* points strongly in the direction of finite time. In fact, Aquinas, who as we saw believed that none of the rational proofs for or against the finitude of the past were decisive, stated that this is nevertheless what the Christian must believe “by faith alone” since the doctrine is clearly scriptural (1952a:253). This is not to say that time was necessarily created when the physical universe was created, but if “All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being,” time was created at some point, and thus finite (John 1:3).⁹

The two other facets of time we have considered in our discussion of the finite-infinite debate seem to lend additional support to the finite time position. The Bible does not explicitly point to time as either substantival or relational, but there are several reasons to regard the relational view as more fitting. First, biblical scholars point to the Hebrew sense of time as content-oriented and clearly linked to events (e.g., Jenni:1962). Secondly, if time is substantival, like an empty container that exists independently from any objects or events, then it is an eternally existing entity. But if it is eternal we run into all the problems discussed in the previous chapter, namely those connected with Platonic thought and its incompatibility with divine aseity (locus 3.3.2). Therefore, a view of time as dependent on the existence of other entities, and thus relational, is clearly more compatible with the biblical view.

The issue of time’s topology is more explicitly addressed in the Bible. Though the contrast between so-called Greek cyclical time and Hebrew linear time may have been overstated by some¹⁰, it is clear that the Bible as a whole portrays time as linear (Cullmann 1964:23). From Genesis’ “In the beginning” to Revelation’s “Come, Lord Jesus” the message is that of a historical progression from creation and fall, through Jesus’ ministry, to the Day of Judgment and eternal life. On the way to this end point, we also find ample historical narratives and genealogies, helping people not to lose sight of the inevitable progression to the fulfillment of God’s plan. Moreover, events occur at a specific point in time, when “the time has been fulfilled” (e.g., Mark 1:15, Gal 4:4, Eph 1:10), and the crucial events of this history also happen “once and for all” (Heb 10:12, Jude 3). Finally, a cyclical view of time would create significant tension with the doctrine of free will and

moral responsibility, since events would tend to be predetermined rather than affected by human decisions.

4.6 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have looked at the most important philosophical and scriptural arguments regarding the nature of time, focusing specifically on two questions: whether time is dynamic or static, and whether it is finite or infinite.

Support for the dynamic view was found in the linguistic argument, with its reference to tense as a universal and irreducible trait of human language, as well as the phenomenological argument that points to our experience of becoming as so extremely basic that the view that tense is a real becomes *prima facie* justified. Two lines of reasoning opposing the dynamic view were the serious allegations that it implies contradictions, and that the concept of becoming is somehow incoherent. However, the former objection was found to rest on a wrong interpretation of the dynamic view, and the same turned out to be true for part of the latter one. The problem that did remain on the table was the age-old question of the extent of the present. It remained unanswered, though not necessarily unanswerable and thus leading to incoherence.

We then focused on the static or B-theory of time and found strong support in the theory of relativity as formulated by Einstein and interpreted by Minkowski, since Minkowskian relativity clearly implies that time is static. It was noted, however, that the Lorentzian interpretation of relativity actually works with a dynamic view of time. Since this view is empirically equivalent and even preferred by some for resisting the temptation to “spatialize” time and practically ignore mental reality, the argument for static time from STR stands defeated. A second line of reasoning for static time was the idea that becoming is necessarily mind-dependent. It was shown that no matter how we interpret this allegation, qualifying it as mind-dependent does nothing to deny the actual reality of becoming. Indeed, we saw that temporality stands as an undeniable fact in mental reality, and that this fact makes it highly probable that time also exists in physical reality.

Mental reality thus emerged as the stumbling stone for the static or B-theory of time, and this finding was confirmed in the final two arguments explored in this section. First, there was the allegation that the static view “spatializes” time, reducing time to a necessarily physical concept and thus again practically denying the reality of the mental realm. Occam’s Razor demands the preference of the more simple theory as true, but such a pragmatic principle should not hold sway when there are good arguments to the contrary. Secondly, it was shown that static time must deny the one crucial part of mental reality that arguably forms an even more basic human experience than that of the passage of time, namely that we human beings have an enduring consciousness or self. In a static view of time, personhood cannot be anchored in the true four-dimensional space-time object but can possibly be relegated to the temporal slices of the object. But this leads to the counterintuitive notion that our consciousness does not endure through change but is a mere series of consciousness-instants without any interconnectedness. Such a view flies directly in the face of one of the most basic universal beliefs of mankind—a belief that again can only be defeated by an even more basic belief to the contrary or by allegations of incoherence. Until such a solid defeater is found, the dynamic view of time seems to stand as philosophically the most plausible of the two theories on the nature of time.

We then looked at the question if time is finite or infinite and saw no decisive philosophical arguments for the infinity of time and several considerations against this view. The infinite time view implies the notion of an actual infinite, a notion that may possess strict logical consistency but that seems to be metaphysically impossible. In addition, this view of time is also confronted with the need to answer Leibniz’ question why God did not create the world sooner than He did.

These same two debates in the philosophy of time were then explored from the biblical perspective and here we found our philosophical intimations strongly confirmed. The doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* demands that time be understood as dynamic and thus that becoming and change are real features of extra-mental reality. Moreover, the verses that confirm this doctrine also teach that all that is not God is created and thus finite, at least in the sense of having a beginning. Finally, we saw the relational view of time lend further support to this position, as did time’s linear topology as taught in Scripture. We

conclude, then, that we have solid reasons to think that time is both dynamic and finite, and our further exploration of divine truth will therefore be based on this particular view of time. The next step in our investigation will be to explore what dynamic and finite time exactly entails for a correct understanding of divine time and eternity.

NOTES

¹ Audi mentions that Heraclites himself may have been less radical in his view of reality, but that Plato and Aristotle were influenced in their understanding of Heraclites' thought by the more extreme Heracliteanism of Cratylus of Athens (Audi 1995:376).

² Proponents of static time have tried to ground time's asymmetry in physical processes. For a critique of such attempts, see Lawrence Sklar, *Space, Time and Space-Time*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976:403-404.

³ In his *Quantum Theory and the Schism in Physics* (1982) well-known philosopher of science Karl Popper remarks, "If we now have theoretical reasons from quantum theory for introducing absolute simultaneity, then we would have to go back to Lorentz's interpretation" (p. 59). Moreover, John Kennedy, in his paper delivered at the 1997 meeting of the American Philosophical Association, speaks of a "sea change" in the attitude among physicists toward Lorentzian relativity (quoted in Craig 2001a:54n).

⁴ Islamic philosophical theology.

⁵ Brackets added by me for clarity.

⁶ An example is the infinite series of integers (both odd and even), and the infinite series of integers that are even. For every member of the latter there would be two of the former, but still the latter would not be a 'part' of the 'whole' of the former.

⁷ Philosophically speaking it is of course debatable if anything can exist 'before' time, since the term 'before' locates the existence in time. However, the biblical authors used ordinary language rather than philosophical terminology. The term 'before' can be replaced by 'without' to avoid unwarranted philosophical complications.

⁸ Counting only the occurrence of "Creator," "created," "creating," "made the world" and "Maker" in the NIV Bible.

⁹ On a relational view of time it can be argued that the term 'thing' in this verse does not apply to time, since time is a mere abstract relation. However, if time is merely relational it would be dependent on the existence of 'things' and events and thus again be finite.

¹⁰ See James Barr 1969:143ff.

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5 – THE NATURE OF DIVINE ETERNITY

5.1 Introduction

We ended the previous chapter with the conclusion that time is dynamic and finite. Not only is this the scriptural understanding, but philosophically speaking it also seems the most plausible position to take. In this chapter we will explore the implications of this view of time for our understanding of the divine attribute of eternity. We saw in Chapter Three that there are two main interpretations of divine eternity, namely the view of classical theism that eternity is atemporal timelessness, and the view that eternity must be temporal or everlasting. Both views were seen to have scriptural and philosophical support, though both also ran into significant problems.

First, the atemporal view of divine eternity was confronted with three puzzling questions, namely: (1) how can a timeless God be related to temporal beings, (2) how can such a God be truly omniscient, and (3) how can He have real personhood? The interpretation of divine eternity as temporal ran into another set of problems, namely: (1) how can He be perfect and (2) how can such a God have necessary existence?

Our task in this chapter will be to explore if our newly gained understanding of time can help us progress toward solving these difficulties. Before we do so, however, we need to make sure that the two views of eternity mentioned so far are the only possible options. Some of the proposed solutions to the problems mentioned above assume the viability of a middle position between a-temporal timelessness and temporal eternity. We therefore need to address the question: Could such a middle position be a valid third option?

Probably the most well-known effort in this direction is that by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann. In their article *Eternity* they defend the position that the classical view of eternity was in fact that of ‘atemporal *duration*.’ Taking Boethius’ classic definition of eternity as “the complete possession all at once of illimitable life” (Stewart, Rand & Tester 1973), Stump and Kretzmann simply posit that the most natural understanding of the phrase here translated as “illimitable life” is that of infinite duration

(1981:432). They further support this stance by appealing to other passages in Boethius and to “the weight of tradition both before and after Boethius” (ibid.). Based on this durational view of eternity, they then attempt to craft a way for an atemporally enduring God to be related to temporal creatures, a relationship which they call: eternal-temporal simultaneity, or ET-simultaneity for short.

Brian Leftow, though one of the few who agree with the assessment of the classical notion of eternity put forward by Stump and Kretzmann, does not support ET-simultaneity and instead offers his own rather unusual account of divine timelessness. He believes that, next to their time-bound mode of existence, temporal beings also exist in eternity and as such they actually share God’s mode of existence. He first argues that, based on God’s omnipresence, the distance between Him and everything in space is zero. Next, he posits that all temporal beings exist in space, and since for spatial beings all change is spatial change, it follows that all temporal beings in fact exist changelessly and thus timelessly relative to God (1991b).

Both proposals for a durational interpretation of timelessness have been widely criticized. To begin with Stump and Kretzmann’s view, not only is their definition of ET-simultaneity deemed unclear and even circular (Davis 1983:20; Leftow 1991b:173), their reinterpretation of the classical view of eternity has also been vigorously contested. In his extensive study of time and eternity in Neo-Platonic and early Christian thought, Richard Sorabji, for instance, concludes that Boethius, like his Neo-Platonic forbears, saw eternity as a timeless state which excludes duration (2006:120). Katherine Rogers also critiques both Stump and Kretzmann’s as well as Leftow’s interpretation of the *loci classici* for timelessness in Plato, Plotinus, Boethius, Augustine and Aquinas. She writes, “It is unlikely that Boethius and his intellectual confreres accepted the concept of an *extended* eternity” (1994:6, italics mine).

But even if we allow the “unlikely” and accept that classical theism’s concept of divine eternity was indeed durational, the question remains if such a concept of atemporal duration can even be a coherent one. Does it render a middle position between timeless and temporal eternity a viable option? I tend to agree with Rogers when she writes, “Since

‘duration’ ordinarily means ‘extension in time’, a ‘timeless duration’ is, *prima facie*, quite a puzzling notion” (1994:7).

In response to the various critiques of their work, and hoping to clarify their puzzling view, Stump and Kretzmann have offered the following analogy. Imagine two parallel lines, one for time, the other for eternity. On the temporal line, the present moment is like a continually moving point of light, while on the eternal line the present is represented by the whole line being lighted up in its entirety (1987:219). This method of picturing atemporal duration seems simple enough. But as Rogers points out, when we look more closely, all that the analogy of the two lines accomplishes is that it further exposes the impossibility of atemporal duration. For if the two lines are truly parallel, then each point ***Tn*** on the ‘time line’ is equidistant from a certain point ***En*** on the ‘eternity line’. Moreover, the distance between ***Tn*** and any non-corresponding point on the eternity-line, say ***En+1***, will be greater than that between ***Tn*** and ***En***. This being so, ***En*** is closest to ***Tn***, “while ***Tn+1***, if not temporarily ‘later’ than ***Tn*** with respect to ***En***, must nonetheless be ‘farther’ in some sense” (1994:8). However, this conclusion directly denies Stump and Kretzmann’s assurance that “an eternal entity or event cannot be earlier or later than... any temporal entity or event” (1981:435). Rogers concludes, “Eternity as duration can be described without contradiction only so long as ‘duration’ is stripped of any meaning by which to distinguish duration from the lack of it” (1994:12).

What about Leftow’s account of atemporal duration? Does his proposal succeed? Leftow’s basic premise was that the distance between an omnipresent God and everything in space is zero. This statement seems wrongheaded right from the start since it simply reduces God to a spatial being. If God were indeed spatial, due to his omnipresence, the distance between him and everything else in space would of course be zero. But God is spirit and thus emphatically not physical or spatial. What we mean when we say that God is omnipresent and there is no distance between God and creatures is that the term ‘distance’ in itself is just not applicable. I therefore agree with William Craig when he states that Leftow’s first premise is based on a category mistake (2000:211).

In addition, Leftow further rests his argument on the questionable assumptions that all temporal beings exist in space, and that all change is spatial change. Concerning the former, we saw in Chapter Four that time is not necessarily limited to space, and if the biblical account is correct there are indeed non-spatial creatures, such as angels, who may very well be subject to temporality. Similar objections arise concerning the view that all change is spatial change. Granted that spatial beings are indeed subject to continual spatial change, it still seems highly unlikely that our mental changes, for instance to suddenly remember one's 8th birthday, can be exhaustively described in spatial terms. Leftow would first need to present extensive proof for these unsupported and implausible positions before his actual argument can proceed. Based on these objections, we need go no further to see that Leftow's hybrid account of eternity is also flawed.

So far, no viable middle position between divine temporality and timelessness has been found, and Rogers' apt critique of Stump and Kretzmann's proposal strongly suggests that temporality and timelessness are actually mutually exclusive. This being so, let us now proceed to explore if our newly gained understanding of the nature of time can solve some of the issues that we saw existed with each of the two main interpretations of divine eternity.

5.2 Divine eternity as atemporal timelessness

As we have seen, the classical view of eternity is that God is atemporal and thus that He completely transcends time. Philosopher Thomas Morris aptly expresses this utter transcendence when he writes:

“There is a conception of timeless or atemporal fullness of being. According to them, God does not in any way exist in time. There is no temporal location or duration in the life of God. He undergoes no temporal succession whatsoever. There is no past, present or future in God's own unique form of existence or within the divine experience. On this picture, God does not exist throughout the eternity of time; he exists wholly outside of time. The whole temporal realm is a creation of God and does not contain him as a part. As he transcends space, he also transcends time” (1991:120).

Let us now see if we can understand how God, if He is indeed timeless, can stand in any relationship to temporal beings, how He can be truly omniscient and how He can have the personhood that is such an essential characteristic of the God of the Bible.

5.2.1 Can God be related to temporal beings if He is timeless?

That God is related to temporal beings is beyond dispute. The Bible teaches that He is the creator and sustainer of temporal creation, that He acts in time and responds to the attitudes and prayers of humankind and even that He became human and lived among us. The question that remains, however, is if his interaction with temporal creation necessarily implies that He himself is temporal.

Let us look at these different ways in which God is related to the world in turn. First, do his acts—his creating and sustaining the universe and his acts in human history—necessarily imply that He is temporal? It seems so, for even if we view God as timeless without creation, as soon as He creates the world He changes, and change always implies temporality. How exactly does the act of creation change God? As Craig explains, God now “stands in a relation in which he did not stand before,” namely the relation of “sustaining the universe or, at the very least, of co-existing with the universe” (2001a:87).

It is often argued that Aquinas has offered an effective solution to the problem of how God could remain timeless even as creator and sustainer of the universe. Aquinas argued that God could *timelessly* will his effects (creation, sustaining, guiding) as well as the times at which those effects appear in a temporal sequence (1955:102-104). In modern words, he could “pre-program” the temporal unfolding of events as part and parcel of the creative act itself. This solution seems effective in that it prevents God needing to act in a temporal sequence and thus becoming temporal. However, it does not answer the charge that God now stands in a new relationship, and thus changes as a result of acquiring that relationship. In order to circumvent this specific kind of change Aquinas actually posits that God does not stand in any relationship whatsoever. Aquinas of course advocated the divine attribute of simplicity, as well as the view that God’s essence is his existence

(1952a:16-17). Consequently, no accidental properties can be attributed to God, and this rule includes the accident of relation. In Aquinas' metaphysics, relations can inhere in both of the *relata*, but also in only one *relatum*, and God's relation to the world is of the latter kind. Therefore, "while the temporal world does have the relation of *being sustained by God*, God does not have a real relation of *sustaining the temporal world*. This latter relation... signifies only a conceptual relation" (Craig 1998b:225). This of course implies that God can remain utterly unchanged by the temporal world and thus that He can remain timeless.

Is this account of God and creation credible? I tend to agree with Craig that it is not (1998b:228). If the relation of a certain cause (God) to its effect (the world) is conceptual only, with the ontological accident of relation inhering only in the effect, then the cause has no ontologically based relation to its effect. And if that is so, then it simply cannot be the cause of that effect. Since the God of the Bible did in fact cause the world, this view is unacceptable, and we have therefore not been able to counter the conclusion that God must indeed be temporal.

A possibly even greater enigma is the question of the incarnation: Given that God is timeless, how could He enter time and be born into this temporal world without thereby becoming temporal himself? It is for this reason that Kierkegaard called the Incarnation the "Absolute Paradox", the mystery of how God can enter the space-time world without ceasing to be eternal (1985). Aquinas would of course have the same answer here as to the question of creation. If God sustains no real relation to creatures, then the human nature of Christ is related to the second person of the Trinity, but not vice versa. But this construction seems just as unconvincing and unbiblical as that of the creator who is not really related to his creation—this time even bringing into question the divine identity of Christ. For those who do not want to accept the extensive metaphysical system that undergirds Aquinas' solutions, the temporality of God again comes into view as a conclusion that seems hard to avoid.

A third way in which God interacts with temporal creation is by responding to the prayers, acts and attitudes of human beings. Such responsive acts seem somewhat different

from other divine acts in that their rationale is more closely connected with the specific human actions to which they are a response. God spares Nineveh *because* the city repents and He destroys Sodom and Gomorrah *because* they do not. Philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff states it this way: “Some of God’s actions must be understood as a response to the free actions of human beings I think it follows, given that all human actions are temporal, that those actions of God which are ‘response’ actions are temporal as well” (1975:197). Based on this distinction between responses and other divine acts, Wolterstorff then argues for divine temporality as follows:

“... every case of knowing about some temporal event that is occurring itself either begins or ends (or both). Hence the act of knowing about *e* that is occurring is infected by the temporality of *e*. So also, the act of knowing about *e* that it was occurring, and the act of knowing about *e* that it will be occurring, are infected by the temporality of *e*” (1996:125).

The argument here is that in order for God to *respond* to a human action He must know when it is taking place. In other words, God must literally know what time it is, and in order to know that He must be in time. The question of responsive action seems therefore intricately connected with the question of divine knowledge, and since the very next section deals extensively with the issue of God’s knowledge, or omniscience, we will defer its further exploration till that time.

What we have seen so far is that the concept of a timeless God who is related to temporal beings in very real ways seems to lead to serious problems. The acts of creating and sustaining the universe, and being born as a temporal being¹ into a temporal world already seem to define God as temporal, while the deferred question of divine responses to human actions can only add further strength to the case for temporality. Let us now see if the conclusions we reached in Chapter Four regarding the true nature of time can offer us a possible solution.

Our conclusions about the nature of time were that the dynamic view or A-theory of time is the correct one and that time is finite. Time being finite does not seem to directly affect God’s ability to relate to temporal beings. However, our conclusion that time is dynamic does. In fact, embracing the static or B-theory of time would significantly

diminish our problems, while the dynamic view only strengthens the case against the timelessness of God! If time is static then the world simply exists timelessly together with a timeless God. The universe does not come to be, so God cannot be its creator in the common sense understanding of the word. He is only its creator in the sense that the world depends on God for its existence. This means that God does not acquire a new relationship by creating and He can thus remain unchanged and timeless. The same goes for God's sustaining action. Since every event is equally real no matter if we call it past, present or future, God can be conceived of as sustaining it without any problem. Even the Incarnation becomes less of a mystery, at least as far as the time-factor is concerned. However, the static view brings us to the position of reducing creation *ex nihilo* to a mere ontological dependence of the universe on God, a stance we decisively rejected in Chapter Four (locus 4.5).

Another way in which the static view would seem helpful is by alleviating the difficulty of how God can know tensed facts. For if time is static there are no tensed facts. Tense is only a subjective feature of language, while reality itself is static and tenseless. So the question of how a timeless God can know tensed facts is simply beside the point. In short, the dynamic view affords possible answers to the stated problems, but to those who believe the arguments against static time are decisive, none of these solutions are available. It seems then, that we have to conclude with even more conviction that if God is really related to the world, as the Bible confirms, He must also really be temporal.

5.2.2 Can God really be omniscient if He is timeless?

Another thorny question concerns a timeless being's ability to be truly omniscient. Are there certain types of knowledge that would be unattainable for God if He is wholly outside of time? As we saw in Chapter Three (locus 3.3.6), one specific kind of knowledge, namely foreknowledge or knowledge of future contingents, might actually be facilitated if the knower is outside of time. The circle analogy found repeatedly in classic theism illustrates this point (e.g. Boethius 1999:105, Aquinas 1955:219).² If we picture the time-line of temporal beings as a circle, and God's timeless eternity as its center-point—a

mathematical point without extension—we see how a timeless being could have cognitive access to events that to us still lie in the future. Since the point is related to all temporal events on the circumference of the circle in exactly the same way, for such a being there would seem to be no difference between events in the past, the present or the future.

However, the type of knowledge that was specifically seen as problematic for a timeless view of eternity was time-bound or ‘tensed’ knowledge, and this brings us back to the deferred question of Wolterstorff: Can God, if He is timeless, really know what time it is now? Stephen Davis is among those who agree with Wolterstorff in denying this possibility. He argues, “Since a timeless being can never know at what temporal stage the world is (all time is ‘simultaneously present’ to such a being), a timeless being cannot be omniscient” (1983:29). Craig agrees. He first explains that tensed propositions convey not only tenseless facts but also tensed ones. While tenseless facts describe the content of an event, tensed facts are facts about “how far from the present” an event is, for instance tensed verbs or words like ‘yesterday’ and ‘next week’ (2001a:99). Of course, since the present is continually changing, the body of tensed facts is also in continual flux. If, as we saw in Chapter Three, omniscience is defined as knowing all true propositions, the implication is of course that God’s knowledge would be changing, and since change requires temporality, God cannot be timeless.

But is this necessarily so? If God is timeless and knows everything about all states of affairs, does it not follow that He also knows at what time they take place? Since God knows the content of our minds, of course He knows what the date and time is according to human calendars and watches (Ps 139:2). But could He not also know how much time has elapsed since the beginning of the universe? According to the Bible the physical universe is finite; it came to be at a certain point in time and will come to an end at another point in time and between its origin and its end the universe continually changes. At point *t*, for instance, one galaxy will be in existence but another not yet. Since God knows every single fact about an event, He also knows which galaxies are in existence during that event, and based on this knowledge He would truly know what time it is, even in ‘galactic’ terms.³

Actually, what Craig is referring to lies deeper than such minutely detailed but tenseless knowledge of what the state of the universe is at every moment. He writes, “A being which only knew all tenseless facts about the world, including which events *occur* at any date and time, would still be in the dark concerning tensed facts He would have no idea which events are past and which are future” (2001a:99). The problem is that a timeless being would know what time it is, but he would know this *for every possible instant in time*. In other words, he would have no way to distinguish the real now from the vast multitude of other nows; every instant in time is known by such a being in the exact same way. And if this is so, such a being “cannot be timeless, for his knowledge must be in constant flux, as the tensed facts known by him change” (ibid.). In other words, if God is essentially atemporally timeless, He cannot be omniscient!

This is a serious set-back to the view of God as timeless, and some have therefore suggested that the definition of omniscience itself should be revised (e.g., Wierenga 2003). However, such revisions imply that normal human beings know an incalculable multitude of true propositions of which a timeless omniscient being would be ignorant. Temporal persons know that World War II is over, but a timeless being has no idea whether it has even occurred yet or not. But if God’s knowledge is by definition so much more excellent and extensive than ours, this seems a rather questionable view. Not only that, such a restricted view of God’s knowledge fails to explain how God can actually respond to the attitudes, choices and prayers of his creatures. That God does respond to our actions is biblically well attested. So, it seems then that Wolterstorff’s objection to divine timelessness still stands.

We have not considered yet, however, if and how this view might be affected by what we learned in the previous chapter about the true nature of time as being dynamic and finite. Do these conclusions offer any solutions to the above problem? Again, just as with the question of God’s relatedness to creation, we see that time’s finitude does not directly affect the issue, but time’s being dynamic does have an effect. And just as with relatedness, we must concede that it is the static view of time and not the dynamic one that would have resulted in fewer complications. Since the static view grants past, present and future all equal ontological status, there really are no tensed facts that cannot be translated

into tenseless ones. So, it is again the dynamic view we have adopted that actually causes the problem to emerge.

How do our conclusions about the nature of time affect the other issue with divine omniscience, namely, how God can know future contingents? We saw (locus 3.3.6) that the classical view of timeless eternity actually seemed to facilitate divine foreknowledge, but we also cautioned that the classical understanding was based on a very specific view of time. Classical theism mostly held to a perceptualist model of divine cognition, or *scientia visionis* as Aquinas called it, whereby God knows events by means of some form of perception comparable to our own physical sense of vision (1952a:83). But this suggests that all events that God knows must already be in existence, and thus future and past must have the same ontological status as the present (Craig 1988:116 ff). So, the perceptualist model actually goes hand-in-hand with a static view of time.

Now, if we have good reason to reject the static conception, then the classical solution to the problem of God's foreknowledge is also lost. How do we now explain the scriptural position that God does have knowledge of future contingents, even if He would be timeless? Craig brings up an interesting point in this regard, namely that the whole perceptual model of divine cognition is questionable to begin with. It suggests that God, like us, can only acquire knowledge in a mediate manner. By contrast, on a conceptualist model God's knowledge is "more like a mind's knowledge of innate ideas" (ibid.). God does not acquire knowledge, but as an omniscient being simply has the property of knowing all truths, including truths about future events. Clearly, such a view of divine cognition could not only be argued to be more perfect than the rather anthropomorphic notion of perceptual cognition, but it also makes divine foreknowledge much less problematic, even if we adhere to a dynamic view of time.

In sum, to the question whether God can be omniscient if He is timeless, we have given a negative answer, just as we did with the question of God's relatedness to the temporal world. While divine foreknowledge continues to be plausible from a timeless perspective, the question of tensed knowledge seems to point inevitably in the direction of

divine temporality. Let us now turn to our third and final problem with divine timelessness, the question of divine personhood.

5.2.3 Can God be a person if He is timeless?

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is clearly a person with a mental life, and not an impersonal force, power or principle. But can a being with personhood really be timeless? Atemporal personhood seems a difficult concept to grasp, possibly so because the only persons we can appeal to as examples are all very much temporal. In human persons, thinking, imagining, verbalizing and other mental acts seem to require a process, and since processes imply temporal succession, such events take place in time. Richard Swinburne has argued that a timeless God would be lifeless, and J.R. Lucas writes, “If we are to characterize God at all, we must say that He is personal, and if personal then temporal, and if temporal then in some sense in time, not outside of it” (Swinburne 1977; Lucas 1989:213). So, can a being really have personhood without being in time? Our answer to this question will depend on how we define personhood. Which characteristics are essential to an entity we call a person?

The first characteristics of personhood that come to mind are cognitive: consciousness and rationality. Philosopher of mind Daniel Dennett confirms this notion. He has identified six views of personhood in philosophical thought that all center around these two characteristics (1976). Furthermore, that God is a conscious and rational being is clearly a biblical fact (e.g., Isa 1:18). But do these aspects of personhood make him temporal? This question gains clarity when we consider God’s mental life in the absence of a created world. Since God was always free to create or not create, as the Bible clearly teaches and the attribute of aseity confirms, the existence of creation is not a necessary reality. But, if God had chosen not to create, his mental life would be changeless rather than discursive and therefore, given a relational view of time, it would also be timeless (Craig 1998a:111). It seems therefore possible to conceive of the scenario of God without creation simply being conscious of or knowing tenseless truths such as “2+2=4” and “all triangles have three sides.” This argument gains strength from the realization that even for

temporal beings the act of knowing—as opposed to ‘getting to know’ or ‘learning’—does not necessarily require time (Pike 1970:124). I believe we have no good reason, then, to stipulate that consciousness and rationality are only possible for a temporal being.

Some thinkers have proposed that the ability to relate to other persons is also essential to personhood (Pike 1970:128). As we saw above, responsive inter-personal relations with human beings may require knowledge of what time it is and thus, plausibly, temporality. But what about the scenario of God-without-creation described above; how would such timelessness affect his ability to relate to persons? From the fact that God-with-creation indeed does relate to created persons we can deduce that God-without-creation would still be able to do so, even though He would not actually be relating to us. Could it be argued that a being who never actually relates to another cannot be a person? I think this is extremely doubtful, but even if so, this situation in no way applies to the God of the Bible, who, though one in essence, exists in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, these three persons indwell one another, and enjoy loving communion with each other, also without creation (John 14-17). We will thus have to conclude that this further characteristic of personhood is also present in God, even if He would be timeless.

One last major characteristic of personhood is of course free will, so we need to ask if a truly free person can be timeless (Yates 1990:169-171). Our earlier arguments have shown that for God to act and to know in a timeless manner is not impossible, so why would the act of willing be different? One suggestion has been that free will involves desires and purposefulness, and since these traits tend to be future-oriented they are only possible for a temporal being. As William Kneale puts it, “To act purposefully is to act with thought of what will come about after the beginning of the action” (1961:99). But is it necessarily so that what a person wills is always in the future? Craig gives some believable counter-examples that apply even to temporal beings: “A man dangling from a cliff wills to hold on as tightly as he can; ... a sunbather desires the feeling of relaxation he presently enjoys” (1998a:118). So, with the objects of the human will not necessarily being located in the future, we have no compelling reason to assume that future-directedness is an essential feature of a divine will either. Thus we can conclude that God can indeed will

that which He wills in a timeless manner. Moreover, the God-without-creation scenario again clearly confirms this conclusion. God freely created and could therefore just as freely have refrained from creating. If He had done so, He would have been free even though timeless.

Does our view of time as dynamic and finite affect our conclusions regarding timeless personhood in any way? Well, as long as the notion of a timeless personal God itself does not lead to significant problems, then time's exact nature and its finitude or infinitude do not add any relevant information. Our conclusion for this section can therefore be that the fact that God has personhood does not in any way preclude his being timeless.

Our review of the arguments against divine timelessness has shown that plausible solutions can be found to some of the objections. However, two significant problems remain, namely how a timeless being can really be related to a temporal world, and how he can have tensed knowledge. In other words, we must conclude that God must be temporal in some sense of the term. Let us now turn to the arguments against divine temporality and see if plausible solutions can be found on that side of the divine eternity issue.

5.3 Divine eternity as temporal everlastingness

Those who have found the objections to divine timelessness insurmountable believe that eternity must be understood as inherently temporal. Morris describes this view as follows:

“By the claim that God is eternal, many theists mean that God is *everlasting*: He always has existed as God and always will ... It is a *temporal* notion, a conception of God's eternity in terms of time: God's existence is temporally infinite in duration, unbounded in the past and future. On this conception, there is in the life of God a past, present and future, as in the life of his creatures. But unlike any of his creatures, God is everlasting, and necessarily so” (1991:120).

The most commonly cited objections to this view are two-fold, namely that such a view cannot be combined with God's perfection and with his necessary existence. Let us

again look at each in turn and see if the conclusions we arrived at in Chapter Three about the nature of time can help clarify these issues.

5.3.1 Can God be perfect if He is temporal?

We saw that divine timelessness is a well-established tenet of classical theism and there are several ways in which this view of divine eternity is connected with the doctrine of divine perfection. The idea is that temporality implies limitations, and limitations do not fit with a perfect God. Augustine, for instance, wrote in his *Confessions*:

“...Thou Thyself art being and life in the highest? Thou art the highest, Thou changest not, neither in Thee dost this present day come to an end, though it doth end in Thee, since in Thee all such things are; for they would have no way of passing away unless Thou sustainedst them. And since Thy years shall have no end (Ps 102:27), Thy years are an ever present day” (1948b:7).

A limitation of all temporal existence is that it entails succession or sequence. For a temporal being only the present moment is within reach—and even that is arguable—while both past and future are mostly inaccessible. This type of existence is clearly quite restricted and therefore not compatible with “being and life in the highest” as mentioned here by Augustine. God’s life must be free from such limitations.

The same point is of course found in Boethius’ formulation of eternity as “that which embraces and possesses simultaneously the whole fullness of everlasting life, which lacks nothing of the future and has lost nothing of the past” (1999:133). So, divine perfection prescribes perfect fullness of life, a life without the restrictions that temporal succession seems to imply.

We all know the experience of loss when we contemplate the past, the years of our childhood or maybe our children’s childhood that are now only a fading memory. The Dutch have a term for such a feeling of loss, which comes in handy for our discussion: *heimwee*.⁴ Now, for a timeless being things would be different. Living all his life “at once”, and having no past or future, such a being would also know no *heimwee*. However, the question we need to ask is if timelessness is the only solution to the incompleteness of

temporal life. Grace Jantzen has suggested an interesting alternative (1984). She starts with the notion of the specious present, our subjective human awareness of what constitutes the current moment. Even though in reality the present consists of a potentially infinite series of very brief time-events, to our consciousness it constitutes only one time-event: now. She then suggests that God could also have a specious present, but that his divine 'now' could encompass all of time. If so, God could be temporal while suffering none of the fleetingness of life we experience.

In his analysis of this proposal, Craig argues that such a construct will not do. He explains that our experience of a specious present is actually due to a physical limitation, namely the finite speed of neural transmissions from our sense receptors to the brain (1997:167). It is this limitation that necessitates the gathering of a multitude of minute time-events into one experienced interval which we call 'now'. Needless to say, if the specious present is indeed a limitation it would not fit a perfect being, especially since divine perfection includes maximum cognitive excellence. Another problem with Jantzen's model is that if God's specious present would encompass all of time, He would only experience his 'now' at the very end of that time-interval, which in his case would be at the literal end of time. This would suggest that He has no awareness whatsoever until the end of time, which is of course even less compatible with the biblical view of God.

Craig then proposes to interpret God's specious-present model as merely analogous to ours, so that these physical limitations no longer apply. But even the analogous view does not allow for a temporal God without *heimwee*. The problem Craig identifies here is a familiar one. If God has at every moment in time a specious present that encompasses all time, He can be said to have the same 'now' every moment of time. This means that He cannot distinguish between times and thus cannot know what time it is, a scenario that we have already seen to raise serious problems for divine omniscience (locus 5.2.2).

It seems therefore, that the *heimwee* argument continues to stand against a temporal interpretation of divine eternity. Of course, God's temporality would be a lot different from ours, since his access to past and future would be much less limited. But, the

limitation entailed would still seem serious enough to create tension with the doctrine of divine perfection.

Another way in which perfection may necessitate divine timelessness is proposed by Leftow. He states that unlimited duration is a perfection, and therefore God must have the least limited duration. He then reasons that infinite duration is more limited than timelessness, since infinite duration *can* have a beginning or end if time itself is finite, but timelessness can have neither beginning nor end (1991b:201-202). In other words, the accepted definition of eternity as existence ‘without beginning or end’ can still be met by both infinite duration and timelessness, but the latter is just that little bit more perfect than the former. But the question here is if we can really compare these two interpretations of eternity. If timelessness is literally the opposite of temporality (even if unlimited), then there seems to be no common ground that allows us to compare the two notions. I must therefore again agree with Craig when he calls this move by Leftow a category mistake (2001a:11). Therefore, if the timelessness view cannot claim to fit better with divine perfection, and eternity merely stipulates that the entity exists without beginning or end, both interpretations of eternity seem compatible with divine perfection.

However, even if Leftow’s argument fails, because of the *heimwee* argument we must still concede that divine perfection does seem to favor timelessness. But how is this possible? In our section on God’s relations with the world (locus 5.2.1) we concluded that God must be temporal, because as creator He acquires relatedness to creation and thus undergoes change. This argument for divine temporality was strengthened by our conclusion in the omniscience section (locus 5.2.3) that true omniscience also requires the knower to be temporal. But now the *heimwee* argument seems to point us in the direction of divine timelessness. It seems we have a dilemma here, and our first task will be again to focus on our conclusion that time is both dynamic and finite and see if this view can ease the tension that has now emerged.

When we consider the dynamic nature of time, the opposite view would again seem more promising in solving the problems. The *heimwee* issue, for instance, would seem less acute—at least theoretically—for if the past actually still exists then we don’t need to

regret its passing. In reality, however, the experience of loss is not tempered in the least by the past being as real as the present, because we still have no direct access to that past. The famous story of Einstein comforting the relatives of his deceased friend by telling them that “the distinction between past, present and future is only an illusion” illustrates this point well (quoted in Craig 2001a:69). The relatives were not comforted; and *heimwee* remains, even if time is believed to be static. Of course, access to past and future might be much more extensive for a divine being, but divine temporality would seem to preclude such access to be equal to that of the present.

What about time’s finitude, how does this aspect of time affect the compatibility of divine perfection with temporality? This time we see that the finitude of time is actually a factor of great significance. For if time is finite, then a temporal God is necessarily limited in terms of time. But divine perfection does not allow for any such limitations. As Turretin reminds us, God should be deemed “uncircumscribed by any limits (*aperigraptos*) of place or time” (1992:196-97). So, time being finite necessitates God being somehow beyond time, and that simply implies He is timeless. In fact, we already saw this strong connection between divine perfection and finite time when in Chapter Four we looked at Leibniz’ question why God did not create the world sooner. The reasoning was that God is cognitively perfect and therefore has sound reasons for all He does, be it creating or delaying creation. But if God exists in infinite time it is impossible for him to have a sound reason for delaying creation. Thus, divine perfection demands time to be finite and, consequently, God to be timeless.

In sum, our conclusion that time is dynamic and finite has shown that there are decisive reasons to believe that a perfect God simply cannot be temporal, and this means that our dilemma does not only remain unresolved but becomes increasingly inescapable. Before we return to this matter, toward the end of the chapter, we will first have to see if the attribute of divine necessity can be combined with temporality or if it will make the problem we have now encountered even more severe.

5.3.2 Can God be a necessary being if He is temporal?

If God is a necessary being his non-existence is impossible, meaning He cannot come into or go out of existence, and this clearly implies He is eternal. But is this eternity necessarily timeless? Even if divine necessity is interpreted in the strong sense of Anselm's ontological argument, it still seems possible for a necessary being to be temporal, as long as the duration of that temporality is infinite. So, the attribute of necessity just by itself may not give us sufficient reason to believe that God could not be temporal.

It is again Leftow who disagrees with this conclusion. He first postulates the assumption that time is contingent (1991b:36). He then reasons from the necessity of God to his timelessness as follows: If a necessary God would be temporal He would be necessarily temporal, and since this would make time itself necessary rather than contingent, God cannot be temporal (Craig 2001b:12). It seems to me that we again have some questionable premises here. First, is time necessarily contingent? Such a view cannot be blindly accepted, since Newton, for instance, regarded time as an absolutely necessary requirement for any being to exist (locus 4.4.1). We may disagree with Newton on biblical grounds, but if Leftow wants to dismiss this position on philosophical grounds he will have to provide sound reasoning. Second, does a necessary being's temporality imply that this temporality must be *necessary*? This second assertion is reminiscent of the extreme interpretation of necessity of Spinoza which we warned against in Chapter Three.

Craig takes on this second premise by asking why a God who exists necessarily could not be *contingently* temporal. He appeals to the basic doctrine of the Christian faith that God has free will and that the event of creation was therefore contingent and not necessary. If this is so, then—using possible world semantics—there are possible worlds where God would exist alone without creation. Given a relational view of time, in such a world an unchanging God would be timeless, and this possibility refutes the claim that a necessary being, if temporal, must also be necessarily so. Of course, without this premise there is no ground to argue that God's temporality would lead to the conclusion that to Leftow is so unacceptable, namely that time itself is necessary. In other words, divine necessity by itself does not necessarily imply that God must be timeless.

However, we have not yet looked at this conclusion in the light of our findings that time is dynamic and finite. Does our view of the nature of time affect our result? Yes it does, and by now we see a familiar pattern emerge. Time being static or dynamic does not significantly affect matters, but the decisive difference comes again with our view of time as finite. A necessary being can only be temporal as long as time is infinite. But if time is finite the possibility is introduced of such a being ceasing to exist. Thus, it is again the finitude of time that leads us to the conclusion that if God is a necessary being He must somehow be timeless.

5.4 Solving the dilemma: William Craig's theory of divine eternity

In the previous sections we have reviewed objections to the timeless and temporal views of eternity in the light of our earlier conclusions that time is both dynamic and finite. That review has now revealed an apparent stalemate, for neither view of divine eternity can actually apply to the God of the Bible. On the one hand, since time had a beginning and God did not have a beginning, God must transcend time and thus He evidently cannot be temporal. On the other, as creator of a temporally finite universe God undergoes at least one change, and as all-knowing and responding to his creatures He must know what time it is, and these two requirements stipulate that He cannot be timeless. This is our dilemma, but is there no way that God can be both beyond time and still causally related to and fully omniscient of temporal creation?

We already rejected theories that try to accommodate a timeless God's relation to the universe by interpreting divine eternity as atemporal duration. Such theories make changes to the commonly accepted notion of divine timelessness in the hope of resolving the issue, but yield no real solutions, and the idea of atemporal duration itself was found to be problematic. However, if a reinterpretation of the concept of timelessness is not the answer, maybe a reexamination of our interpretation of divine temporality is needed. Can divine eternity be seen as fully temporal, but in such a way that God's time has no beginning and is thus radically different from time as we humans know it? This is the solution suggested by Alan Padgett, among others.

Padgett proposes a view of time that is able to withstand the philosophical arguments against the finitude of time that we presented in Chapter Four. The crucial element in his theory is that he, like Newton before him, distinguishes between two types of time (1992). On the one hand there is time itself, which he sees as everlasting duration, and on the other there is metric time, time as we measure it with clocks and calendars. He argues that while God is in time, He is not in any measured or divisible time. In fact, God's time is indivisible, non-metric and thus amorphous; it is what Padgett calls 'relative timelessness' (1989). The significance here is that such amorphous time is not divisible into intervals, while the arguments for the finitude of time only proved that *divisible* time cannot be infinite. Padgett argues that the way we measure time is purely conventional; it is not intrinsic to time. And since there are no measures in God's time, there are also no objective facts about the respective lengths of distinct time intervals. As Padgett's colleague Richard Swinburne asserts, such amorphous time is beginningless without being infinite—or finite for that matter (1993a:218-19).

If this proposal is sound, then God's time, time itself, can be beginningless even though our time, divisible time, is finite. But does it work? Unfortunately it doesn't; the problem being that such amorphous time would still be linear in topology, and that fact necessarily entails certain truths. One such truth is that even though distinct intervals in amorphous time cannot be compared to each other in terms of length, an interval that is a proper part of another interval must still be deemed shorter than the encompassing interval (Craig 2001a:269). Now, as long as this basic comparison between the part and the whole can still be made, God before creation can be seen as having existed through a beginningless and thus *infinite series* of longer and longer intervals—a conclusion that re-opens the door for all our familiar arguments against infinite time (*ibid.*).

So we are back at square one, with both the temporal and the timeless view of divine eternity presenting an impossible scenario. Is there another way in which divine eternity can be both temporal and timeless, and, if so, can such a view be maintained without presenting us with logical contradictions? Amazingly, we actually have one really solid piece of evidence that such a hybrid solution is not impossible. As we saw, the God of the Bible is above all a person, and one of the most basic characteristics of personality is free

will. It is indisputable that scripture teaches that God is a free-willing agent and that creation was the result of his free sovereign choice. This means that creation itself is a contingent event and if this event entails that God is temporal, such divine temporality is clearly not a necessary attribute of God. Simply put, God would still be God if He had chosen not to create. Thus, being eternal may itself be an essential attribute of God, but the exact form that this eternity takes is not, and in this sense God can coherently be held to be both temporally and timelessly eternal.

This basic insight leads us to the solution to our conundrum that William Craig has proposed. In view of all the evidence we have looked at, I believe his theory to be the most plausible interpretation of divine eternity so far. Craig's view allows for an understanding of God as transcending finite time on the one hand and as truly related to and knowledgeable about his temporal creation on the other, and as such it certainly seems closest to the biblical portrayal of God. Not only that. His view also allows for a reinstatement of the notions of absolute time and absolute simultaneity, which have come under such tension with the general acceptance of the Minkowskian take on Relativity Theory. So, let's see how Craig defends this hybrid view of eternity.

Craig sees God as truly timeless without creation and truly temporal or everlasting from creation onward (2001a:269-280). Acknowledging that time could well have been created before physical creation, for simplicity's sake he assumes that time began with the universe. So, without creation God exists timelessly, but as soon as He creates the universe, time begins, and God becomes temporal in virtue of his real relations with the created world. In this view God's timelessness is not the amorphous-but-linear time of Padgett and Swinburne, but a state that is truly atemporal. This timelessness is the form that divine eternity takes before or without creation. So what happens once God creates the world? Let us look at two aspects of the theory more closely, namely the link Craig proposes between the two modes of eternity, and the exact nature of God's relation to time after He has become creator of the universe.

First, how should we conceive of the connection between divine timelessness and divine temporality? At face value, Craig's view seems to imply that God's life has two

phases, a timeless one and a temporal one, with the former somehow preceding the latter. But to *precede* something in itself implies temporality, so how can timelessness precede temporality without there being time? Brian Leftow has formulated this objection as follows:

“If God is timeless, there is no before or after in his life. No phase of his life is earlier or later than any other phase... So, if God is timeless and a world of time exists there is no phase of his life during which he is without a world or time or has not yet decided to create them, even if the world had a beginning. For a life without phases cannot have one phase that is without the world or time and another phase that is with it. The whole of God’s life is identical with the ‘phase’ of it during which the universe or time exists...” (1991b:290-91).

Leftow argues here that if God is timeless and does indeed necessarily become temporal by creating, then his entire life must be temporal; it cannot have another phase that is timeless. In response, Craig explains that we may be tempted to visualize the two phases of God’s life as two segments of a line, joined at the moment of creation. But on a dynamic theory of time, such a view is simply false. We need to realize that God without creation is entirely alone, without any temporality whatsoever, not even in what might be thought of as his ‘future’.

“There is no before, no after, no temporal passage, no future phase of his life. There is just God, changeless and solitary. Now the only possible reason we could have for calling such a static state temporal is that temporal states of affairs obtain after it. But insofar as the state of the affairs of God existing sans the universe obtains, there are, of course, no temporal states of affairs, not in the future or anywhere else” (2001b:271).

The picture Craig is conveying here becomes even clearer when he invites us to think of God as changeless and alone, existing in a possible world *W* where creation and time will never exist. It is evident that in such a world we would understand God to be timeless. But this scenario describes exactly the timeless phase of God. The temporal phase that may or may not obtain through a free willed act of God cannot affect this timeless phase in any way. To let it do so would be “to posit some sort of backward causation,” which on a dynamic view of time is utterly impossible since the future does not exist and thus cannot cause anything (*ibid.*). Of the two phases of God’s life, then, only one is temporal, and the phases are not related to each other as earlier and later than. As

such, God's atemporal phase is not temporally prior to his temporal phase. Instead, suggests Craig, we could perhaps envision the timeless state as "a boundary of time, which is causally, but not temporally, prior to the origin of the universe" (op.cit.:272).

But now Leftow raises another objection. How can a timeless God create anything, including time, without time being in existence first? Craig responds that time is in fact logically posterior to any event coming into existence, while God's acting is explanatorily prior (2001b:21). For some this may seem backward, but on a relational view of time it is fully coherent: While God acts and creates events, time is generated as a consequence. It comes into existence with the event that is created. Moreover, in current philosophical thought on causality, it is generally acknowledged that cause and effect can be simultaneous, and a case can even be made that this is indeed always the case (2001b:276). It seems that the notion of two phases of God's life, one temporal and the other non-temporal has not been proven to be incoherent. Let us therefore turn our attention now to God's being in time with creation. How are we to picture this phase of divine eternity?

As soon as God creates the world, the first event, time comes into being and God now endures throughout time from that moment on. But wait, we defined divine eternity as existence without beginning or end; in other words, God never comes into or goes out of being and his existence is permanent. But if God has a first moment of existence can He then still be eternal? Yes, He can, because God's having a first moment of existence does not entail that He came into existence. It just means He came into time. Even Leftow agrees with Craig on this point:

"Even if he [God]... had a first moment of existence, one could still call God's existence unlimited were it understood he would have existed even if time did not. For as long as this is true, we cannot infer from God's having a first moment of existence that God *came into* existence or would not have existed save if time did" (1991b:269).

So, we can continue to affirm God's eternity even after He enters time, but what does this divine temporality exactly look like?

The time that God enters is not our human clock-and-calendar type of time. In fact, at this stage Craig asserts something very similar to what Newton (and Padgett) had in

mind. Like Newton, Craig distinguishes between real time and measured time (locus 4.4.1), but then applies this distinction only to the temporal phase of God's life and thus not to *all* of divine eternity. The temporal phase of God's life brings God in time, but this time is 'real time' and it is absolute. "From God's perspective in real, A-series time, there is an absolute present in which He is now conscious of what is happening in the universe, and He is now sustaining the events in the universe" (1990:342). But this scenario will only work if this absolute time properly connects with our down-to-earth human time. In other words, is there a *measured* time that can be said to correspond with God's *real* time? Can we humans in some sense really know what time it is now? Craig amazingly answers 'yes'.

For those who firmly believe in Einstein's Relativity Theory as it was interpreted by Minkowski, this is where Craig's theory must derail. For, as we saw in Chapter Four, the commonly accepted version of the Special Theory of Relativity (STR) does not allow for absolute simultaneity. Events which are present for an observer in one inertial frame may very well be past or future for an observer in another frame. Observers in relatively moving frames therefore experience different 'nows' and none of these perspectives is preferred or can claim to be the true now. Therefore, if God's time is absolute, how can it ever be connected with our relative time as understood by STR? For God's time to correspond in any way to ours, his time would have to be associated with one single inertial frame, a situation which would restrict Him to the same extent that we humans are restricted and thus make him less than God. Alternatively, his time could be said to correspond with the 'now' of every possible inertial frame in the universe, but this would yield a vast plurality of time perspectives, most of which would also contradict each other. Clearly, if we adhere to the most popular version of STR, we see no way to make God's time connect to ours and thus to make His relatedness to the universe comprehensible.

However, as explained earlier, the Lorentzian interpretation of relativity allows for a preferred reference frame with absolute simultaneity. We also saw that this view is not only deemed empirically equivalent to STR but it also seems to fit better with certain new findings in quantum physics. Taking a neo-Lorentzian approach to Relativity Theory as his basis, Craig now suggests that there is a preferred reference frame within the universe that

can be said to coincide with the series of events as they are present in God's time. In fact, he even points to a likely candidate for this universal time, namely the 'cosmic time' of the General Theory of Relativity, the reference frame of the steady expansion of the universe itself. "It is my contention" he writes, "that the moments of God's real, A-series time, while not perhaps identical with the moments of measured, cosmic time, are nonetheless coincident with them" (1990:343). Thus, in God's time the universe has 'now' a certain density, temperature etc. and in our measured cosmic time it has the exact same properties. Our 'now' in terms of cosmic time actually coincides with God's now, and God's sustaining the universe and even responding to his creatures now become understandable notions. To sum up the above,

"Real time is the A-series time in which God thinks and acts and in which things come into being; the moments of this time coincide since the beginning of the universe with the moments of cosmic time determined by ideal clocks stationary with respect to the expansion of space itself" (1990:346).

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at the main objections that have been raised to both the timeless and temporal interpretations of divine eternity. We had hoped that our exploration of the nature of time in the previous chapter would provide us with the insights needed to solve some of these problems and so select the most plausible view of divine eternity. However, this was not to be. Instead, we found both eternity views to be incompatible with the God of the Bible. On the one hand, if God is causally related to creation, if He responsively intervenes in the affairs of men and is fully cognizant of everything that happens *as it happens* in time, then He must necessarily be temporal. On the other, the nature of time as dynamic and finite clearly entails that the God of the Bible must be timeless.

After rejecting several solutions to this predicament that were based on a view of timelessness as atemporal duration—a notion we concluded was incoherent—we found that Craig's hybrid theory of divine eternity presents an amazingly plausible view that allows for full divine relatedness and omniscience, while continuing to affirm divine

perfection and necessity. This view of eternity required the Minkowskian interpretation of STR to be replaced by the Lorentzian view of relativity, but such a switch did not seem to encounter insurmountable objections.

Our next task will be to take the findings of this chapter and explore their implications for those divine attributes that are conceptually connected to the notion of divine truth, namely: immutability, omniscience, divine personhood, perfection and necessity.

NOTES

¹ The accepted doctrine states that Christ was both fully God and fully man, and thus temporal in his human nature.

² Aquinas uses both the watchtower analogy we referred to in Chapter Three (locus 3.3.6) and the circle analogy.

³ This idea that knowledge of how much time has elapsed since creation would solve the problem of tensed knowledge has been my own position, which is why a reference to other philosophers of time is missing here. Only recently did I understand Craig's argument in its full force, and I now agree with his position.

⁴ *Heimwee* is often translated into English as 'homesickness' (and may even have that restricted meaning in the original German), but its meaning in Dutch is much deeper and clearly encompasses the loss of the past.

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6 – CRAIG’S ETERNITY VIEW AND THE QUESTION OF DIVINE TRUTH

6.1 Introduction

In order to gain deeper insight into the notion of divine truth, we looked in Chapter Three at the divine attributes as they have been formulated by classical theism. We were able to identify five attributes that showed specific potential to help us clarify divine truth, namely perfection or infinity, necessity or aseity, immutability, omniscience, and the personhood implied by divine goodness. We also found, however, that every one of these properties of God was conceptually connected with the question of God’s relationship to time—a question that has been the subject of intense debate in contemporary philosophy. It seemed therefore expedient to first explore the main interpretations of divine eternity and their underlying views of time, before returning to these other attributes and their potential to enlighten us concerning truth.

This task has now been accomplished. We were able to conclude in Chapter Four that on both philosophical and scriptural grounds time can best be understood as dynamic and finite, relational and linear. Chapter Five led us to conclude that the two major interpretations of eternity, namely as essentially temporal or timeless, were both inadequate. In an effort to avoid the serious problems entailed by either of these views, several thinkers have presented a type of hybrid view, most notably Stump and Kretzmann, and Brian Leftow. We felt compelled to reject these views, however, due to their reliance on the apparently incoherent notion of atemporal duration. We found another type of hybrid view, namely Craig’s view of eternity, that not only avoided this faulty notion but also offered plausible solutions to many of the philosophical questions while still remaining true to the biblical account of God’s nature. This theory defines God’s relationship to time as both timeless and temporal—thus avoiding the problems connected with *essential* timelessness and temporality—but manages to combine these two modes of eternity without generating internal contradictions.

In the current chapter our task will be twofold. First, we will take Craig's view of eternity and explore its implications for the divine attributes, and especially for those that were seen to be time-related. The attribute of immutability, for instance, was seen to be intricately connected with certain views of time and eternity, and we can therefore expect Craig's eternity approach to have definite implications for our understanding of divine immutability. Secondly, once the attributes have thus been clarified, we will return to the main topic of this study, namely divine truth. We will look at the full set of divine attributes again and see what they can now tell us about the nature of divine truth. Armed with this information, we will then revisit the biblical conclusions reached in Chapter Two, and from these two sources we hope to construct a coherent view of the divine attribute of truth. Finally, we will end this chapter by returning to the history of human thought as reviewed in Chapter One and see what the insights we have gained mean for man's ongoing quest to answer the question of the nature of truth.

6.2 Craig's eternity view and the time-related attributes

The attributes of perfection and infinity, necessity and aseity, immutability, omniscience and personhood have been identified as conceptually intertwined with views of time and eternity. We will now revisit these divine properties and see how each of them can be elucidated when considered from our proposed new view of eternity. We will begin with the three properties that would seem least affected by changes in the interpretation of eternity, namely perfection, necessity and personhood, and then spend some more time on the two that are affected more profoundly, namely immutability and omniscience.

6.2.1 Implications for divine perfection and necessity

The two divine attributes that seemed to argue most decisively for a timeless interpretation of eternity were perfection (infinity) and necessity (aseity). On further analysis, however, we found that we can continue to affirm both attributes, even if eternity is seen as temporal. All that was needed was the assurance that such temporality be infinite

in duration, since on such an account of God's relationship to time God does not come into or go out of existence and can thus still be regarded as truly eternal.

However, it was exactly the infinity of time that had been decisively rejected in Chapter Four. It became quite clear on both philosophical and biblical grounds that time as we know it cannot be regarded other than finite. This fact brought us back to the conclusion that eternity must be timeless. Since finite time entails a limited duration to all temporality, it would also make temporal eternity finite, and thus preclude a view of God as the true creator *ex nihilo* of the universe, and as having the type of existence prescribed by the biblically non-negotiable attributes of perfection and necessity. In other words, if time is finite, eternity simply cannot be temporal in any sense of the word—at least not essentially so.

As we have seen, Craig's view of eternity stipulates both a timeless and a temporal phase to divine eternity. But how can we affirm any such temporal element in divine eternity if there are such strong arguments against it? Craig's solution involved a sharp distinction between two senses of time, namely absolute time and our own familiar measured time. While our time is undeniably finite, absolute time or 'God's time', was understood as having no beginning, at least not in the temporal sense. The timeless phase was seen not to precede the temporal one, but rather to form a type of 'boundary' to time, comparable to the spacetime singularity as proposed by Big Bang cosmology (2001b:272). The temporal phase of God's life was therefore understood as without beginning or end, and that meant that both attributes of perfection and necessity could again be affirmed.

From this new view of eternity, divine perfection is not limited in any temporal sense, either in the timeless or the temporal phase of God's life. One type of limitation that remains unsolved, however, is that of the inaccessibility of the past and future. If God in his temporal phase lives in the actual present of absolute time, then his past and future are not available to him in exactly the same direct manner as is the present. It must be understood though that this inability to directly experience the past or future may be quite different from our own temporal limitations and the accompanying experience of *heimwee*. Divine cognition being absolutely excellent, God remembers the past completely and

knows the future perfectly. Moreover, it should be remembered that God is omnipresent, and thus in no way separated from the people He loves. Finally, a consideration Craig alerts us to is that human beings live on after death and that those who have died are thus never truly absent to God, as they are for us. If our *heimwee*, even of certain events, is mostly generated by our feelings about people, then this experience would also be much less acute for God (2001a:73).

What about divine necessity? We already saw that if the temporal aspect of God's life is indeed beginningless, we can continue to affirm this attribute just as strongly as if God were completely timeless. Unlike perfection, then, necessity does not generate any points of tension with Craig's view of eternity. The same can be affirmed for the closely related attribute of aseity. God's manner of existence must be *a se*, but this aspect is not contrary to the temporality of one of the phases of eternity. If God would have been deemed essentially temporal, this could possibly have led to inconsistencies. But God is only contingently temporal, since his temporality is only the result of his own free choice and thus not inherent to his nature.

6.2.2 Implications for divine personhood

What can we conclude regarding the personhood of God if divine eternity has both a temporal and a timeless phase? In fact, our view of divine personhood is not deeply affected by this new understanding of eternity, since neither temporality nor timelessness were found incompatible with personhood (see locus 5.2.3). All we need to do in this section, therefore, is formulate clearly what we now know about the personhood of God and how this attribute applies in both his temporal and his timeless phase.

As we saw in Chapter Five the characteristics we commonly associate with personhood fall into three categories, namely rationality and consciousness, interpersonal relationships and free will or intentionality; traits that seem closely associated with the more common terms of knowledge, love and will. Let us therefore look at these three marks of personhood for both phases of divine eternity.

In his timeless phase there is no problem with God being fully rational and conscious. Since all truths are simply changeless and tenseless at this point, God knows all truths in a timeless manner, without any hint of process or sequence. He is also related to other persons who nevertheless do not exist outside himself, as He is not only Father, but also Son and Holy Spirit. These persons within the Godhead relate to each other in mutual unchanging love. Finally, God is fully free and his will or intentionality exists in an unchanging manner, not directed to any future state, since there simply is no future state in timelessness. At this stage of God's existence then, his conscious life—his knowledge, love and will—simply are, without change, while his character also remains changeless in its perfect goodness.

In his temporal phase, God is fully aware of and connected with what is happening in the actual present moment—the absolute present—at every single point in the universe. This means that the content of the divine consciousness can now change. His rationality and consciousness hold not only all that is tenselessly knowable, but also a constantly changing set of past, present and future-tense truths. However, such changes clearly do not entail changes in his rationality *per se*.

Concerning the second characteristic of personhood, interpersonal relatedness or love, God's love toward the persons in the Godhead simply continues to exist timelessly, but it is now joined by his love for creation and for the temporal human beings He has made. Based on his direct knowledge of the present, God interacts with his creatures and lovingly responds to their actions, attitudes and prayers in the actual now. Again, such responses do not affect the essential love that defines his character.

Finally, the divine will is also unchanged regarding all that is timeless, but it is now joined by his specific will for all of creation and for every human person currently living on earth. Though his will remains unchanged in that it is always directed toward what is good, righteous and just, his specific will can change in response to man's free will decisions and behavior.

We anticipated in Chapter Three (locus 3.3.7) that divine personhood might not be fully compatible with the divine attributes of immutability and eternity. We can now see

how any such tensions are actually fully resolvable even for God's temporal phase. By replacing the radical immutability of classical theism with changelessness, God's conscious life can be understood as changeable, even though neither his character nor any of the other divine attributes actually change. Thus, as we shall see below (locus 6.2.3), even in his temporal phase God remains unchanged in his perfection and infinity, aseity and necessity, omnipotence, incorporeality, omniscience, goodness and eternity .

Regarding possible tensions with the attribute of divine eternity, we have concluded that the objection that a timeless God cannot be personal was groundless. Not only that, the personhood of God is in fact the very bedrock on which our hybrid view of eternity has been established. For a being with personhood must have free will. God's act to create temporal reality is therefore affirmed as a free will decision. This fact makes the result of that decision, namely creation, necessarily contingent, changing and temporal, and the same therefore applies to God's conscious life as it refers to this changing reality.

In sum, God is fully personal in his timeless phase even though He is changeless in every way, including in the content of his conscious life. In his temporal phase his personhood continues to be evidenced in timeless ways, but this is now joined by his specific knowledge, love and will for the temporal world and its denizens.

6.2.3 Implications for divine immutability

How does our new understanding of eternity affect our view of divine immutability? In Chapter Three we identified several issues that surround divine immutability, namely those posed by creation and sustaining the created order, incarnation, his responsive relationship with temporal human beings, and his perfect knowledge or omniscience. Due to our findings on the nature of divine eternity, these issues can now be identified as representing two of the three objections that are commonly raised against divine timelessness, namely that a timeless being cannot relate and respond to a temporal world, and that such a being cannot be omniscient because He does not know what time it is now.

Since both issues only emerge in the context of an actually existing temporal world, they both are solved by appealing to the nature of divine eternity in the temporal phase. Accordingly, since God is temporal He *can* be the creator and direct ontological cause of the temporal universe and He *can* sustain this world in existence at every single moment in time. Indeed, since the future simply does not yet exist, God can now be understood to be fully present in the now and to create each new moment that comes into existence. In the same way, He is fully *able* to respond to the decisions and petitions of temporal men. Moreover, such human decisions can now be recognized as truly free, while our prayers become really able to affect God's will and the future He will create. Even the incarnation becomes more understandable. God can take on temporal humanity and enter human history because He is not 'locked out', somehow isolated in a hermetically sealed timeless eternity. Finally, since God really knows what time it is now He also *can* have all the continually changing tensed knowledge required to guarantee his perfect omniscience from one moment to the next.

Of course, Craig's two-phase solution does have major implications for our understanding of divine immutability. God's timeless phase naturally poses no problem, since on a relational view of time timelessness and changelessness go perfectly hand in hand. But if God has a temporal phase in which He relates to continually changing creatures and has changing knowledge of tensed propositions, then the radical or strong immutability of classical theism can no longer be maintained. Strong immutability required God to be unchanging and unchangeable, and to be so both extrinsically and intrinsically. But if God becomes temporal with creation, then even though He is unchanging in his timeless phase He is clearly not unchange-*able*. Moreover, as we saw in Chapter Five, if He is related to temporal creation as creator and sustainer, it is clear that at the very least He undergoes extrinsic change (locus 5.2.1), and if He has direct knowledge of tensed facts and of what time it is now, then his knowledge is in continual flux—a change that can no longer be seen as merely extrinsic (locus 5.2.2). In fact, Craig concedes that God's relatedness to temporal creation brings not only changes to divine knowledge, but also to the other areas of his conscious life, such as his will and his love. He writes,

“If God had not chosen to create a universe at all, He would surely have a different will than that which He has (for He would not will to create the universe);... He would not love the same creatures He actually loves (since no creatures would exist)” (2001a:89).

Using Possible World Semantics again, it becomes clear that in any possible world we can imagine the content of God’s will, knowledge and love would differ, depending on the creatures He would have created and—provided they have free will—their particular free-will attitudes and decisions.

It is evident, then, that radical immutability must be abandoned, but does this mean that God is as changeable as we humans? By no means! As the Bible confirms: “God is not a man that he should change his mind” (Num 23:19). Craig makes clear that his view implies that the content of the divine consciousness changes, but that God’s character remains unchanging in its perfect goodness (Moreland 2003:527).

Moreover, divine immutability in the sense of changelessness can also be confirmed as it applies to all the other attributes of God. God remains changeless, Craig writes, in his “existence (necessity, aseity, eternity) and his being omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent” (ibid.). This listing of attributes corresponds closely to our own list in Chapter Three, with two exceptions: perfection and goodness. Perfection has been omitted because Craig formulates the attributes using perfection—or Perfect Being Theology—as his basis rather than as one of the attributes (op.cit.:501), while divine goodness has of course already been addressed above when we affirmed the changelessness of God’s character.

How can we say that God remains immutable in his eternity, and believe at the same time that He becomes temporal with creation? These two beliefs are not incompatible, because God indeed remains eternal, even though the mode of this eternity is timelessness without creation and temporality with it. Similarly, God’s omniscience remains intact, even though at the moment of creation the content of his knowledge starts changing. As Craig writes,

“He is immutable with respect to his omniscience because he always knows only and all true propositions; but precisely because he is omniscient the content of what he knows is constantly changing as tensed truths change. So, his conscious life is not immutable, even though it is changeless in the atemporal ‘phase’” (2011).

When we first looked at divine immutability in Chapter Three (locus 3.3.4), we saw that two attributes in particular seemed to make radical immutability a necessary attribute of God, namely perfection and eternity. We have now been able to establish that eternity does not imply radical immutability, but neither does perfection. In our new understanding of immutability, divine perfection is safeguarded because God remains changeless with regards to all the essential attributes, including the goodness of his character, and because the changes that do occur in certain aspects of his life in no way imply a move away from perfection. Even though perfection entails that God be unlimited in every way, when such limitations are the result of a voluntary divine choice they fail to diminish his perfection. In fact, they rather accentuate the perfection of his character. As Craig writes, “God could have remained changeless had he wished to; the fact that he did not is testimony to both his love and his freedom” (2003:527). In short, this revised view of immutability affirms God’s perfection, without “freezing him into immobility” (2011).

Even though the question if a changeable God can still be perfect has now satisfactorily been addressed, I do want to respond here to a deeper, maybe Platonic connection that some perceive between perfection and immutability. Isn’t it intuitively clear that what is absolutely and exhaustively immutable just has to be greater than that which is partially changeable, just like what is necessary outranks the contingent? This certainly seems to be the case in mathematics and logic, in fact in any study that has the impersonal as its subject. Even in philosophy many thinkers love the order that comes with unchangeability and necessity. But where we study the personal this rigid type of order no longer applies. Just as psychological theories that tend to reduce man to an impersonal object simply miss the mark, so do philosophical theories about a personal God that reduce the divine to the impersonal. Within the realm of the impersonal, immutability and necessity mean greater perfection, but in the realm of persons we have to account for

something even greater, namely free will. It is always the personal that is greater than the impersonal, and in its wake inevitably follow both contingency and change.

Divine eternity also does not necessitate radical immutability. Eternity in the sense of classical theism meant exclusively atemporal eternity. On a relational view of time, such eternity does indeed imply changelessness, but on closer inspection it does not necessitate unchangeability. As long as there is no *de facto* change, timelessness does not require immutability (2001b:278). Moreover, with our revised understanding of eternity as having a timeless and a temporal phase, a certain level of change can be accommodated, and a more life-like view of the God of the Bible now emerges: a changeless personal being, who freely chooses to engage with the changeable world He freely choose to create.

In sum, our new understanding of divine eternity informs our view of divine immutability as follows. God is *de facto* changeless but not unchangeable in his timeless phase. In his temporal phase, He retains most of this changelessness, but He does change in two ways. He changes extrinsically due to his real relatedness to creation, and intrinsically, due to changes in his conscious life, namely the specific content of his knowledge, will and love. In both phases God's character and other attributes remain utterly unchanged.

6.2.4 Implications for divine omniscience

Divine omniscience was seen to be connected with views on eternity in two ways. On the one hand, eternity as timelessness was believed to facilitate knowledge of future events, while on the other hand a temporal interpretation of eternity seemed to enable knowledge of tensed facts. The first idea, however, that timelessness would enable future knowledge, was later recognized to be based on a faulty view of time and a overly anthropomorphic perceptualist understanding of divine cognition (locus 5.2.2). This means that the issue of divine foreknowledge is still in need of an explanation, even if we now have a view of eternity that accomodates both a timeless and a temporal phase. The second issue, however, seems adequately solvable by the temporal aspect of Craig's theory.

In particular, our proposed new view of eternity affects our understanding of the following three issues in current debates concerning omniscience:

- (1) How can God know tensed facts or what time it is now?
- (2) How can He have knowledge of future contingents without this leading to fatalism?
- (3) How can a temporal God have knowledge of events in the past and future?

We will now look at answers to these questions for both the timeless and the temporal phase of divine eternity, while keeping in mind, however, that these issues are intricately connected with each other and therefore tend to overlap here and there.

In God's timeless phase, his existence without creation, all three questions are easily answered, since at this stage there simply are no tensed facts or future contingents to know (questions 1 and 2) and God is not restricted to the present moment because He is not in time (question 3). There are only tenseless truths, all of which are fully known by God, guaranteeing his absolute omniscience. Regarding the second question one might be tempted to think that creation and temporality would be a future event for God, thus possibly generating the need for future contingent knowledge; but, again, this would be to misunderstand Craig's view. As we saw in Chapter Five (locus 5.4) the two phases of God's life should not be visualized as two segments of a line, joined at the event of creation. Rather, as far as the timeless phase of divine eternity is concerned "There is no before, no after, no temporal passage, no future phase of his [God's] life" (2001b:271).

It is of course for God's temporal phase that our questions require more detailed discussion. To start with our first question: How can God in his temporal phase know tensed facts or know what time it is now? For many thinkers in the field of divine eternity, the commonly accepted Minkowskian version of relativity theory (STR) has become a mainstay of reasoning for the timelessness of God. For according to STR there is no unique absolute time and no worldwide 'now'; each observer experiences his own now from the viewpoint of his own inertial frame and all frames are relative. So the question becomes, if God is in time, whose time is He in (Craig 2001a:43)? Any inertial frame we might select to be God's frame would lead to a serious limitation of God's knowledge, leaving him

ignorant of what is going on in any other frame. From the viewpoint of omniscience, this is clearly unacceptable. But the alternative is no better. We can assert that God must exist in the time of every one of the infinitely many inertial frames, but this would lead to a total fragmentation of the divine consciousness. Thus, if God is temporal, it is impossible that He should know what time it is now, first because there simply is no unique universal now, and secondly because temporality would make him subject to all the limitations entailed by STR.

Craig's answer to this reasoning is twofold. First, we need to carefully distinguish our time, measured time, from God's time or real time. God is in an absolute present in which He now knows all that is happening in the universe, but this answer will only help us understand how God can know tensed facts if his absolute time somehow connects with our own time. There must be one preferred reference frame that can be associated with the succession of events in God's time, but how can there be any such preferred frame if all frames are relative according to STR?

Graig's theory solves this second predicament by championing a Lorentzian interpretation of relativity theory, a model that allows for absolute time and simultaneity and proves to be empirically equivalent, if not preferable to STR. Thus God's absolute time is connected with our time and there is one absolute present rather than an infinite number of relative nows. In this way it becomes clear how God can truly know what time it is and thus know the tensed fact that I am *now* writing this sentence, and not three days ago or three thousand years from now.

The second item in our threefold list was how God can know future contingent truths without this leading to the position of fatalism. The doctrine of human free will is central to biblical truth,¹ and if divine knowledge of future contingents truly entails its denial this would pose a serious threat to a strong view of divine omniscience. No wonder then that some philosophers have chosen instead for a revision of the definition of omniscience. William Hasker, for instance, has suggested that divine omniscience should be limited to those truths which are such that it is "logically possible" for God to know them (1994:104). He then asserts that future contingents are simply impossible for God to know, and thus

divine omniscience can be saved.² We have seen, however, that such a watered-down view of God's knowledge belies the biblical teaching. So, does a strong view of omniscience really entail fatalism?

Craig's response to this issue is insightful. He formulates the argument for fatalism as follows:

1. *Necessarily*, if God foreknows event *X* then *X* will happen
2. God foreknows *X*
3. Therefore, *X* will *necessarily* happen (2001a:256-57, italics mine).

Since this conclusion states that "*X* will necessarily happen" it is not a contingent event, and fatalism has been vindicated. But wait, this argument constitutes a logical fallacy. In any logically sound argument the conclusion follows necessarily from the premises, but that simple fact does not make the conclusion itself necessary. As Craig explains, "The fatalist illicitly transfers the necessity of the *inference* to the conclusion *itself*" (op.cit.:257). The correct conclusion should be: "Therefore, *X* will happen," and this result is in no way incompatible with *X* being freely done. Indeed, logically speaking, *X* could fail to happen, but God knows it will not. Therefore, we can be sure that *X* will occur, but it will still happen contingently.

One response to this insight has been to revise the argument by adding "necessarily" to the second premise, so that: *necessarily*, God foreknows *X*. This seems, at face value at least, to make the deduction valid, but premise 2 now denies another biblical doctrine, namely that of divine freedom. If God *necessarily* foreknows event *X* then this world, with event *X* in it, is the only one He could have created, and He would thus no longer be free to create a world without event *X* or to not create at all (op.cit.:259).³ However, fatalists believe their 'necessity' is of a different kind, namely *temporal necessity*. Of course, since the necessity used in premise (1) is logical necessity, this results in an argument featuring two different types of necessity, making its validity rather doubtful. But worse, how do we know that this particular type of necessity is incompatible with subject *S* performing *X*? In fact, it is plausible that so long as *S*'s choice is causally undetermined, it is a free choice,

even if *S* is unable to choose otherwise. Craig gives the following example of such a causally undetermined, and thus free choice that still only allows for one outcome:

“Imagine a man with electrodes secretly implanted in his brain who is presented with the choice of doing either *A* or *B*. The electrodes are inactive so long as the man chooses *A*; but if he were going to choose *B*, then the electrodes would switch on and force him to choose *A*. If the electrodes fire, causing him to choose *A*, his choice of *A* is clearly not a free choice. But suppose that the man really wants to do *A* and chooses it of his own volition. In that case his choosing *A* is entirely free, even though the man is literally unable to choose *B*, since the electrodes do not function at all and so have no effect on his choice of *A*. What makes his choice free is the absence of any causally determined factors of his choosing *A*” (op.cit.:261).

According to Craig, temporal necessity remains a vague notion, and any attempts to clarify it have shown it to be simply reducible to “either the unalterability or the causal closedness of the past,” neither of which imply fatalism (op.cit.:262). Moreover, “On analyses of temporal necessity which are not so reducible God’s past beliefs always turn out *not* to be temporally necessary” (op.cit.:263). Therefore, the argument for fatalism seems unsound and it thus provides no valid objection to a strong view of divine omniscience which includes knowledge of future contingents.

If the most popular argument against divine foreknowledge has thus been removed, it still needs to be explained how a temporal God can foreknow the future, especially if time is dynamic and the past and future thus do not have equal ontological status with the present. And that, of course, constitutes the third question we had set out to answer in this section. There are two facets of this question that need to be addressed, namely the temporal nature of divine eternity and the dynamic nature of time.

First, if God is temporal and time dynamic, God exists now in the present, but even though He *has existed* at every moment in the past, He does not now exist in the past; and even though He *will exist* at every moment in the future, He does not now exist in the future. But if God is not now present in the future how then can He now have knowledge of future events? This part of our question has already been answered by Craig’s distinction between a perceptualist model of divine cognition and a conceptualist one (locus 5.2.2). If divine knowledge is conceptual, like a mind’s knowledge of innate ideas,

then God's current presence in the future is not a necessary requirement for foreknowledge.

Secondly, since on a dynamic view the future does not exist, there simply is no future state of affairs for God to be present at anyway. This fact of the future's non-existence has opened up another line of reasoning against divine foreknowledge, namely that since the future does not exist, there also can be no true (or false) propositions about future events. The idea is that a proposition is true if it corresponds to what exists, but if future events do not exist, then there is nothing for any future-tense proposition to correspond to. On closer inspection, however, this view misrepresents the concept of truth as correspondence. Correspondence theory stipulates that a statement is true if what it states to be the case really is the case. For present-tense propositions this translates into a presently-existing event. But for future-tense propositions this means only that the corresponding event must exist in the future. In other words, the fact that the event does not exist now provides no basis to argue that the corresponding future-tense proposition cannot have any truth value (op.cit.:253).

It looks like there are no good reasons to deny the possibility of divine foreknowledge, but can we somehow explain where God in his temporal phase would actually 'get' this knowledge? Craig suggests that there are two plausible answers to this question. The first is that God simply has omniscience as an essential attribute. He does not in any way acquire his knowledge; it is simply an essential part of his nature to know all truth. The second plausible answer is the view of divine knowledge known as Molinism, after the 16th century theologian Luis de Molina (Moreland 2003:521).

Very briefly, this view distinguishes between natural and middle knowledge. Natural knowledge is knowledge of everything that *could* happen, while middle knowledge is knowledge of all that *would* happen given certain circumstances. In other words, by middle knowledge God knows what every free creature would freely do in any circumstances God might place him in. Based on these truths and on knowledge of the decree of his own will to create certain circumstances and place certain creatures in them, God then knows everything that will happen.⁴

In sum, in his timeless phase God is omniscient in that He knows all tenseless truths. In his temporal phase, his omniscience is preserved due to his knowledge of all truths, both tenseless and tensed. Though the set of tensed truths constantly changes due to the temporality of creation, this does not in any way diminish God's perfect omniscience—in fact, it facilitates it. Tensed truths include those that are future-tensed without this leading to a denial of human free will. Finally, there are plausible theories that can explain how God, even while temporal, can possess such foreknowledge.

6.3 What the attributes can now tell us about divine truth

Our new understanding of divine eternity has enabled us to clear up much of the confusion surrounding several of the other attributes. The time has now come to return to the complete set of attributes and see what they can teach us about divine truth. Let us look, as usual, at each in turn, starting this time with those attributes that were seen to be most strongly associated with divine truth, then considering the less affected ones, and finally ending the section again with what our proposed new view of eternity itself can tell us about the nature of divine truth.

6.3.1 Immutability and divine truth

The classical understanding of divine eternity as atemporal timelessness had encouraged a view of God as absolutely immutable, a being so transcendent that any real relation with the temporal world became utterly impossible. This view of God made it very hard to see how He could be the true cause and creator of the universe, personally involved with and responding to his creatures, and knowledgeable about the actual present moment in time. Our new understanding of divine eternity opened the way to solve each of these issues and led us to replace classical immutability with a view of God as changeless with regards to his character and attributes, but undergoing change within the content of his conscious life. What does this new view of immutability—or better: changelessness—teach us about the notion of divine truth?

The first implication is of course, that truth itself is not as strongly immutable as it would have been in classical theism. But how can truth be truth if it is allowed to change? We learned that the very root of the term truth in scripture was firmness and permanence, and thus changelessness. Even in philosophy, the idea that truth must be changeless has been assumed by many of the best minds in history. The answer seems to lie in the fact that truths come in different varieties, namely those that are timelessly eternal and those that are connected with time. If it could be shown, first, that these two truth types are vitally related, and second, that this relatedness does not undermine the permanence of timeless truth, the problem of truth and change seems solvable. And the first step in showing how the changelessness of truth can be preserved while still allowing a certain level of change is to have a closer look at two of our main uses of truth: factuality and faithfulness.

The attributes themselves are essential to God's nature, and we have seen that even with our new understanding of divine eternity we can continue to confirm their basic changelessness. Omniscience and perfect goodness are two of these attributes, and they are therefore also essentially changeless. Looking now at factuality and faithfulness, we recognize that omniscience is closely linked to the factuality aspect of truth and that perfect goodness includes the meaning of faithfulness. It seems then, that the general changelessness of these two facets of truth can already theoretically be affirmed, though a more detailed account of how such changelessness can be maintained in relation to changing reality will have to wait for our sections on omniscience and goodness below.

Furthermore, if we agree that factuality and faithfulness are embedded in omniscience and perfect goodness, what can this tell us about the kinds of true propositions held by each of these attributes? Since omniscience has to do with divine rationality and knowledge, it would seem that the timeless truths it guarantees include primarily those of logic and mathematics—next to the spiritual truths found in the Bible of course. In short, this would mean that omniscience guarantees divine truth as factuality, and that this truth comprises both timelessly true propositions, such as those of scripture, logic and mathematics, as well as changeable propositions about temporal events.

Similarly, perfect goodness was linked to truth as faithfulness. This attribute gives assurance of God's moral character and will, and it can therefore be understood as somehow grounding all changeless moral truths as well as the changeable outworking of the divine will in response to the actions of temporal creatures. We will have to see if these connections can be hammered out in more detail, but this is best done when we look at how omniscience and perfect goodness on the one hand, and eternity on the other, relate to divine truth. For now we can conclude that our revised understanding of immutability is still able to provide the firmness and reliability that must characterize truth if it is to line up with scripture.

6.3.2 Aseity and necessity, and divine truth

Divine aseity and necessity singularly stressed the difference in existence between God and his creation. God's existence is uncaused, independent, *a se* and necessary, and none of these terms can ever apply to creatures; He alone is the great I AM of Exodus 3:14. However, as we saw in Chapter Three, the philosophical problem that this assertion evoked was that of the ontological status of the attributes, including omniscience and perfect goodness (locus 3.3.2). Following the idea suggested above that these two attributes form part of divine truth, aseity requires that these properties and the truths contained in them do not share the same level of existence that can be ascribed to God. In other words, omniscience and perfect goodness are then not really timeless and necessary, and they can no longer guarantee the changelessness of spiritual, logical and moral truth.

Moreover, if omniscience and goodness do not share God's supreme level of existence then these attributes become dependent upon God, and this implies that God is somehow supra-logical and supra-moral, that He exists above all the truths of logic and morality, making these types of truth merely arbitrary. God could simply have decreed that "a part is always at least as great as the whole" and it would have been true. He could also have chosen to make the killing of innocent people a morally praiseworthy act, and thus make this into a moral truth. Even worse, in this scenario the divine existence and nature

themselves become arbitrary, so that both existence and non-existence, good and evil, omniscience and ignorance, and so on, can be ascribed to him.

Such an interpretation is clearly unacceptable. But so is its apparent alternative, the denial of God's unique mode of existence. If the truths of logic and morality are timeless but *not* dependent on God, then it seems to follow that they exist in their own right, and God's unique aseity is then shared with a virtually infinite number of timeless and necessary abstract entities, including numbers, propositions and properties.⁵ To resolve this dilemma, it is clear that a third solution had to be found, and classical theism therefore mostly affirmed a conceptual view like that of Augustine, who regarded such entities as *rationes aeternae*, or Ideas in the mind of Christ (Nash 1983:96). Augustine's solution stated that timeless truths are neither dependent upon God nor independent from him, but that they "subsist" in God, and thus that "If God did not exist, they would not exist" (ibid.).

A contemporary version of a conceptual view of timeless and necessary truths has been suggested by Plantinga. In his lecture *Does God Have a Nature*, he explains how divine aseity can be fully compatible with the existence of such abstract entities (1980:140-146). He starts by explaining that since God is omniscient He believes every true proposition, be it a necessary one or not. In other words, if God believes proposition *A*, then *A* is true. But it is also the case that if *A* is true, then God believes *A*. This means that *A* and God believing *A* are in fact equivalent. Now, in the case of necessary truths, Plantinga goes a step further. For each necessary proposition the property of believing *A* is actually part of God's very own nature. The necessary proposition *A* thus depends on God "even though necessary truths about these objects are not within his control" (op.cit.:146).

Both Augustine and Plantinga thus argue that necessary truths are somehow grounded in God's very nature. In this way we can assert God's truth, both moral (faithfulness) and logical (factuality), without this leading to either horn of the dilemma described above. Moreover, the fact that coherent forms of conceptualism have been formulated implies that the changelessness of timeless truths can indeed be maintained by grounding them in God himself. And this means that our third sense of truth, genuineness, now also seems assured. God's aseity confirms his ontological primacy, and if truth is

grounded in him then we have a guarantee of the genuineness of moral and logical truth. A key question is of course, if our proposed new view of divine eternity, which sees God's existence as partly temporal, can continue to safeguard truth as it is grounded in God—an issue we will address further on in this chapter. Let us first look a little more closely at the two attributes of omniscience and perfect goodness.

6.3.3 Omniscience and divine truth

It seems at this point that omniscience and the timeless truths it entails can be securely grounded in God. But omniscience entails divine knowledge of *all* true propositions, and many true propositions are not timelessly eternal. Let us investigate what different types of truth can be distinguished and how these types relate to each other within the divine knowledge.

First, what types of truths does God know in his timeless phase? Here another form of conceptualism can provide us with more details, namely Molinism, a view we briefly touched upon earlier (locus 6.2.4). According to this view, before creation, and thus in his timeless phase, God possesses three types of knowledge, namely natural, middle and free knowledge. The first category consists of truths about everything that *could* happen, and this means knowledge of all possible worlds He could create (Moreland 2003:521). Such worlds might include, for instance, one in which Mrs. Jones wins a prize of ten thousand dollars and freely gives it all to charity, and another one in which she freely spends it on a luxury cruise.

The second type of divine knowledge, middle knowledge, consists of all contingently true propositions, or counterfactuals, including propositions about future contingents. Counterfactuals state what *would* happen under certain circumstances, for instance that “*If* Jones wins a prize of ten thousand dollars, she will spend it on a luxury cruise.” Of course, this second group of truths delimits the first one, in this case by the free choice of Jones on how she wants to spend her money. Based on both types of knowledge, God creates certain free creatures in certain circumstances, and because He knows all about this world He

creates, He also has free knowledge, or what we would call foreknowledge of everything that will happen.

Next to providing a plausible explanation of how divine foreknowledge is possible and how it need not be incompatible with human free will, this view provides one possible scenario of how God's knowledge can consist of both timeless and temporal truths. In his timeless phase all God's knowledge is changeless, but once God creates the universe change is introduced and temporal knowledge is added. However, even though this is an intrinsic change in God, the timeless truths safeguarded by his omniscience are not affected, and omniscience itself is actually affirmed by the addition of corresponding temporal truths. How we can be sure that the temporality and change inherent in tensed truths do not 'infect' timeless truths with their temporality must be further explored under our treatment of the attribute of eternity (locus 6.3.8).

6.3.4 Perfect goodness and divine truth

Just as omniscience can be linked with the factuality sense of truth, so perfect goodness with the meaning of truth as faithfulness, though there also seem to be other aspects to divine goodness such as justice, love, compassion etc. We saw that conceptualism provided a coherent scenario of how rational truths can be grounded in God himself, so that these truths can be regarded as eternal without this creating tension with divine aseity. Is there also a plausible description of how perfect goodness and the moral truths it entails can be grounded in God? One view that provides such an explanation is Divine Command Theory (Moreland 2003:531).

According to this theory, moral truths are grounded in God's commands, so that if God commands *A*, then *A* is good. But this suggests that these moral truths are dependent on God, and that God himself is therefore not bound by these truths—a conclusion that would result in God's goodness being essentially arbitrary. Divine Command Theory also stipulates, however, that God's commands are a direct reflection of his character. This means that his commands are defined by who He is, and thus not arbitrary. Moreover, God

himself always acts in accordance with perfect goodness, not because He obeys a rule, but because it is his nature to be good. God is *essentially* compassionate and just, kind and faithful. All morality and moral truth is thus simply a reflection of who He is.

If omniscience is uniquely concerned with God's rational knowledge, perfect goodness seems more focused on the divine will. Accordingly, just as God knows all that is true and nothing that is false, so He wills all that is good and nothing that is evil. However, creation of the temporal changeable world brings certain additions, and thus changes in God's will, for He now also wills certain events in response to the actions, attitudes and prayers of his changeable creatures. When Moses teaches the Israelites God's way, for instance, he says "I command you today to love the Lord your God ... then you will live and increase But if your heart turns away ... you will certainly be destroyed" (Deut 30:16-17). Such destruction in response to man's actions may apparently be used by God to bring about what is good. The prophet Isaiah confirms this when he writes, "I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things" (Is 45:7).

The same responsiveness to changeable man explains those Bible passages that some have taken as proof that divine omniscience is limited (Pinnock et al. 1994). When God saw how evil man had become He was "grieved that he had made them," and decided to bring the flood and start human history over again with Noah (Gen 6:7). In the story of Jonah we see a similar change. When Jonah was sent to Nineveh it was to deliver a message of divine destruction, but when the Ninevites repented God "had compassion on them and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened" (Jon 3:10). In these examples, we see no changes in what God wills to be brought about, namely that which is good. We only see changes in how this end goal will eventually be accomplished, in response to free human actions and decisions.

Finally, such 'changes' in God's will can also be the result of prayer. Scripture teaches us to pray and promises that God hears and responds to our petitions. It is helpful to keep in mind here that by our prayers we are not really 'changing God's mind' so that He will now change an already existing future reality. On our proposed new view of

eternity the future simply does not exist and it is thus not changed by our attitudes and prayers. Instead, our current actions, attitudes and words are ‘added’ to God’s counsel as He decrees what future to create.

Do such responsive wills decisions change the fact of God’s perfect goodness in any way? It seems not. In fact, just as with omniscience, the responsive element in God’s will actually facilitates and confirms his perfect goodness. We know, for instance, that God’s goodness includes absolute justice. But would it have been just if God had allowed Nineveh to still be destroyed after its people had genuinely repented? So, we can affirm that divine perfect goodness and the timeless moral truths it entails remain in essence unchanged, even though in his temporal phase there are also changes in God’s conscious life, resulting from his genuine relatedness to the temporal world.

6.3.5 Personhood and divine truth

We have seen so far that among the attributes, omniscience and perfect goodness are closely related to divine truth, representing the factuality and faithfulness sense respectively, while aseity seems connected to genuineness. When we now look at the attribute of personhood we see another part of the picture emerge.

Our study of scripture made clear that the two senses of truth as faithfulness and factuality somehow converge, and this becomes undeniable when both God’s word and God himself are described with the noun form of truth, and in John’s gospel are directly identified with each other (Ps 119:160, Jo 14:6, Jo 1:1). It also became evident that personhood plays a very central role in the biblical notion of truth, and this finding was further confirmed by the fact that faithfulness, the personal sense of truth, is found much more often than the factuality sense, which has mostly dominated extra-biblical views on truth.

Seeing this close connection between the two notions, and the clear precedence of the personal sense of divine truth, could it be that factuality is somehow grounded in faithfulness? One contemporary philosopher who confirms this view is Arthur Holmes. He

explains that the Old Testament's *'emeth* is "first a matter of inner character and only derivatively a quality of words and deeds" (1977:34). In the New Testament this understanding is still prevalent, an example being Matthew 22:16 where the Pharisees precede their attempt to trap Jesus with the words, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth" (ibid.). We see here that the factuality of Christ's words is based in the moral quality of his character. Hebrews 6:18 shows the same reasoning, by stating that we can be absolutely certain of eternal life, because it is impossible for God to go against his own promise, and his faithfulness thus grounds his words.

Since in scripture God is emphatically a person and truth is inherently personal, the factuality of God's word seems guaranteed not primarily by correspondence to reality, but by divine faithfulness, which signifies agreement between every aspect of his being, a fundamental oneness or integrity. The factuality of God's word is thus in essence his personal *veracity*, here a moral quality that is included in the attribute of perfect goodness. God cannot lie, not primarily because He is omniscient and his knowledge is completely factual, but above all because He is faithful and to not be so would be to disown himself (2Ti 2:13). It seems plausible therefore to see faithfulness as not only taking precedence over factuality, but as forming its actual ground.

Could the fact that truth is such a personal notion in the Bible take us even further? We saw that divine aseity seemed to reflect the genuineness sense of truth, the idea that truth requires an ontological foundation that is stronger than empirical reality. If truth is essentially personal and God is truth, it seems that God as a person is the actual ontological ground of all truth. In other words, just as the faithfulness sense of truth seems to form the ground for factuality, the genuineness sense may actually ground both faithfulness and factuality. This means that factual truth is not only rooted in divine faithfulness, but also that this grounding in the person of God is absolute—there simply is no other ground beyond him.

We see evidence for this position in John 8, where the Pharisees discount Jesus' words as not valid because He is "appearing as his own witness" (8:13). Jesus responds

that they judge by human standards, but that his words are true because they are based in those of the Father who is his witness (Jo 8:15-18). God's promise to Abraham mentioned in Hebrews 6 also points in this direction. This passage speaks not only of faithfulness, but also seems to affirm God as the only ultimate ground of truth: "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself" (6:13). Later in the chapter this promise to Abraham is then compared with the hope of the believer, which is "as a sure and steadfast anchor" because it is grounded in "the inner place behind the curtain" or God himself (Heb 6:18-19).⁶ Finally, the familiar name of God "I AM WHO I AM" also seems to confirm such a notion of the person of God as the absolute ultimate ground.

6.3.6 Omnipotence and divine truth

What can the attribute of omnipotence add to the picture of divine truth that is gradually unfolding here? First, the obvious. Omnipotence guarantees truth as factuality, faithfulness and genuineness. It confirms that God is fully able to speak and know all truths, be faithful in every aspect of his being, actions and words, and sustain himself—and thus Truth itself—in existence. But we also saw that omnipotence touches upon another issue, namely the ontological status of divine truth.

If omnipotence is wrongly understood to include power to do the impossible we run into absurdities. Questions provoked by such a view are: Can God go against the laws of logic and morality? Can He create a square circle or a stone He cannot lift, or can He choose to sin? ⁷ We saw that such a broad view of omnipotence leads to truth being emptied of its content (locus 3.3.5). The very distinctions between truth and falsehood on the one hand and good and evil on the other inevitably fall away, and the picture of the divine that results may fit well with pantheism but in no way resembles the God of the Bible.

Our answer to such questions must therefore always be: No, God cannot go against the law of non-contradiction, and He cannot choose to sin. Not because He is actually

subject to the laws of logic or morality, but because these truths are grounded in his very own nature—a coherent notion, as conceptualism and Divine Command Theory confirmed. Just as moral truths are rooted in the character of God so that his moral commands are direct expressions of his nature, so the divine mind and knowledge operate only in accordance with logical truths.

6.3.7 Perfection and incorporeality, and divine truth

Before we come to the final attribute in our list, divine eternity, let us look briefly at divine perfection and incorporeality. These two attributes do not seem to add significant insights to our developing concept of divine truth. Perfection simply confirms again that divine truth in all its senses will be absolutely flawless. Incorporeality and omnipresence can provide confirmation that God is really present. From our proposed new view of eternity, omnipresence actually seems to become a stronger notion. For He is not only in attendance at all places, but also eminently present in the current moment, since this moment is also the actual present for him. The implication for divine truth is that God is in no way out-of-touch (factuality) or irresponsive (faithfulness) but continually aware of and causally active in the present moment. Does this limit his knowledge to the present? No, because He does not ‘acquire’ his knowledge by perception, as a corporeal being might have to do, but He simply knows all truths because omniscience is part of his nature.

6.3.8 Eternity and divine truth

In the sections above we have seen some of the indirect effects that our new eternity view has on the notion of divine truth. But how does eternity itself now affect our understanding? Throughout our investigation two issues have come to the fore repeatedly and we can now see these two as indeed pivotal: first, the uses of truth as factuality, faithfulness and genuineness, and secondly the notion that truth, as a biblical notion at least, must in essence be unchanging.

Truth as factuality, faithfulness and genuineness all seemed to be compromised in different ways by the two main views of eternity. The timelessness view seemed deficient because it weakened truth as factuality by hindering tensed knowledge, truth as faithfulness by impeding responsiveness, and truth as genuineness by compromising on creatorship *ex nihilo*. But the temporal view had its own problems. It seemed to weaken factuality by questioning foreknowledge, truth as faithfulness by precluding permanency, and truth as genuineness by taking divine perfection and sovereignty too lightly.

Regarding the question of genuine truth requiring permanence, the impact of the two views was more straightforward. Overall, the timeless view of eternity was better able to ensure such changelessness, even though it seemed to entail a view of God as so transcendent that it was virtually impossible to envision any relatedness to his creation and to present reality. Everlastingness, on the other hand, enabled a view of God as deeply involved with reality and with the personal lives of men, but in deeming God fully temporal his existence and nature became subject to change to such an extent that truth might well be compromised.

These issues with both eternity views had been known for centuries. For instance, even though classical theism always championed the timeless view, some scholars within this tradition, such as Duns Scotus, argued for a less detached view of God (Craig 2001a:77). Only in the 20th century, however, when views of the nature of time started changing did the question of eternity become truly controversial. It was the general acceptance of Einstein's relativity theory that turned the issue into a stark dilemma. We saw that Newton believed in absolute time, a view that still allowed for an understanding of eternity as not completely detached from our own temporal world. But by its complete denial of absolute time and simultaneity, relativity theory forced the two views apart and created a seemingly unbridgeable chasm.

The problem that emerged was that without absolute time or simultaneity, a temporal divine being is either confined to one single reference frame, and thus knows no more truth than an ordinary human being, or to a plurality of frames, implying a complete fragmentation of consciousness. And the implications of the timeless alternative also

changed. This view now entailed an understanding of God as hermetically sealed in timeless eternity, absolutely isolated and out-of-touch, a divine being who had no longer any relevance for the world of men and their temporal day-to-day reality of life.

For divine truth the new view of time meant that the temporal interpretation of eternity did not only make truth subject to change, for that issue was nothing new, but that truth also became relative. Contradictory statements could from now on be seen as true ‘at the same time’,⁸ simply depending on the reference frame of the speaker. As Craig explains,

“Einstein’s theory tells us to substitute for absolute space an infinite number of different spaces, each associated with a different inertial frame, and for absolute time an infinite number of different times, each associated with a different inertial frame. Reality thus is radically fragmented on Einstein’s view ... It is, I think, no exaggeration to say that on Einstein’s theory relatively moving observers literally inhabit *different worlds* which may intersect only at a point” (2001a:43, italics mine).

Clearly, if STR really implies an infinite number of different worlds, then in this view of reality truth as a universal notion is also compromised. Truth is only what is true in my specific inertial frame, and that simply reduces truth to that which is “true for me.”

Of course, these implications only follow for the temporal view of eternity, and the timeless view should thus still be able to provide a firm basis for truth. But the timeless view was also affected by the new understanding of time, because it now implied utter transcendence and complete detachment from the temporal world. Any relationship between timelessness and temporality had become impossible. As such, timelessness could no longer provide the underlying stability required to keep temporal reality from fragmentation. And with no way out of the eternity dilemma, truth also seemed reduced to these two irreconcilable, mutually exclusive alternatives.

So, how does Craig’s eternity view solve these issues and thus reconfirm the notion of divine truth? First, this view restores absolute time and simultaneity via Lorentzian relativity theory, and with that change the relativity of temporal truth no longer follows. Though temporal truths are still changeable, they are all related to one and the same universal reference frame, namely God’s absolute or real time.

Secondly, even though Craig's view confirms the essential nature of eternity itself, it understands both the timelessness and the temporality of God as non-essential properties. God's temporality is not essential to his nature because it is based in the divine free will decision to create a temporal world. In this way, the changelessness of God's character (perfect goodness) as well as his nature (perfection, necessity, incorporeality, omnipotence, omniscience and eternity) is assured, while still allowing temporality and change in those aspects of the divine consciousness that are necessarily related to the temporal world. In other words, temporal reality can now be ultimately grounded in timelessness, and temporal knowledge in timeless truth.

Finally, Craig's view also solves the problems that both temporal and timeless eternity brought to our three truth-senses of factuality, faithfulness and genuineness. Divine factuality or omniscience now features both future knowledge as well as tensed knowledge, faithfulness or perfect goodness guarantees both responsiveness and permanence, and the genuineness of God is assured in ascribing to him all due aseity and sovereignty while at the same time showing him to be the creator and very present sustainer of all that is. We see, then, that our revised view of eternity is key in restoring a biblical view of divine truth.

6.4 What, then, is divine truth?

Craig's eternity view has enriched our understanding of the divine attributes and this in turn has led to several new insights into the notion of divine truth. We now want to return to the conclusions we reached in Chapter Two, and see if the biblical view of truth agrees with these new insights and if it can help us add some more pieces to the puzzle.

We summarized what the Bible says about truth in a 5-point list which we repeat below. We found that the term truth as it is used in scripture has the following characteristics:

- (1) it has a strong connotation of reliability and permanence, especially when attributed to God or his word

- (2) it is primarily used in the sense of faithfulness rather than factuality, and genuineness also plays a more important role than in our daily use
- (3) when applied to God in its noun form, it carries a strong sense of personhood, of personal agency and power
- (4) it is not just a relationship of agreement but also an entity in itself. When used in noun form of God or his word, it defies the 'daily view' diagram in that the distance between person and word practically collapses, while the link between word and reality becomes markedly stronger.
- (5) when applied to God in noun form, it strongly suggests that God is the source of all faithfulness, genuineness and factuality wherever it is found and no matter how variable or mundane.

As this list shows, the first thing we discovered about truth in scripture was its strong focus on firmness or permanence, and this ties in, of course, with the whole issue of truth and change. Radical immutability was classical theism's way of safeguarding this permanence, but this led to a view of God as totally isolated and out-of-touch with his own creation, especially after the acceptance of Einstein's new view of time. Craig's theory of eternity was able to resolve this tension by accommodating both timelessness and temporality—and thus changelessness and change. Since temporality was found not to be an essential property of God, it did not generate an unacceptably restrictive view of his nature. Accordingly, we found that the level of permanence that truth requires was adequately guaranteed by the changelessness of both God's character (perfect goodness) and his nature (the other divine attributes). Moreover, by replacing Einstein's relativity theory with that of Lorentz the temporal and thus changeable aspects of God's conscious life no longer led to relativism, because true statements connected with varying reference frames ultimately all found their universal reference point in the absolute time of God.

Scripture was also clear in its preference of the faithfulness sense of truth over that of factuality. In terms of the divine attributes, this suggested that perfect goodness could be regarded as the ground for divine omniscience. The truth of God's words is thus seen to be primarily due to their origin in the divine, and it is this fact that guarantees their correspondence with reality. Secondly, the unusual importance of genuineness in scripture,

as evidenced for instance by the root meaning of *aletheia*, seemed to resonate with the attribute of aseity and its crucial role in providing an ultimate ontological ground for all truth, both changeless and changing, timeless and temporal. So, we see that the attributes confirm what our study of scripture already seemed to suggest regarding the three senses of truth.

Our third discovery was that divine truth in scripture was seen to be deeply personal and powerful. This undeniable fact of the personhood of God became increasingly clear when we explored the nature of God via his attributes, and we can now see that it plays a crucial role in our understanding of divine truth. Rather than necessitating a temporal view of eternity, divine personhood opened the way for a view of eternity as both timeless and temporal without generating contradictions. For it is the fact that God is a person that helps us see that radical immutability and timelessness are not properties that God absolutely must have in order to be God. If God were an impersonal entity, immutability and timelessness might have been essential, but as an eminently personal being God is rather characterized by free will, and it is only his free will acts that have resulted in a reality that features time and change. Personhood thus allows for non-essential temporality in divine eternity and non-essential change in God's conscious life, without this forming any threat to his perfection, infinity, necessity and aseity.

The next characteristic of truth we found in scripture was that it often denotes a specific entity or content rather than a mere relationship of correspondence, and this of course is especially true when God and his word are described with the noun-form of truth. We encountered this same point briefly in our study of the attribute of omnipotence. When omnipotence is interpreted as absolutely unlimited it first leads to contradictions and finally to a concept of God that is contentless and empty. Instead, God in all his omnipotence does not go beyond the boundaries of logic and morality, not because He cannot, but because truth is his very nature and is grounded in him.

The attribute of personhood also argued against such an overly mystical view, since a person always has a character and can be described as possessing certain traits and consequently not possessing their opposites. For instance, the Bible calls God slow to

anger and impartial, and we therefore also know that He is not quickly angered and partial (Ex 34:6, 2Ch 19:7). More importantly, the primary name of God is “I AM WHO I AM,” indicating that He ‘is not who He is not’ and that He therefore does not unite in himself any contradictory traits—an insight further confirmed by the truth sense represented by divine aseity.

The last point in our list, that all truth is God’s truth can now also be confirmed. God is truth and He alone exists *a se* and is the ground of all that is true. Since eternity can be understood as both timeless and temporal, the person of God is not only the ground for eternal truths, but also for changing and temporal truths. With morally charged truth this insight is not that controversial. If “none is good but God alone,” as Luke 18:19 has it, then any faithfulness or genuineness finds its ultimate source in God. But the same can now be said of factual truth, no matter how trivial. In our new understanding of omniscience, even a simple temporal truth like “Today it is Tuesday” is ultimately rooted in the person of God, enabling him to know all that is happening at each moment and to respond literally right now in the universal present.

In sum, the notion of divine truth as it emerged from our revised understanding of the attributes helped us significantly deepen our understanding of the notion of truth in scripture. I believe this shows that Craig’s view of eternity plays a crucial role in a more correct understanding of divine truth and of God himself. By providing a coherent scenario of how God can be both timeless and temporal, this theory allowed us to develop a view of divine truth as deeply rooted in the person of God, without this leading to a loss of divine transcendence and of the absoluteness of truth without which it can no longer be truth.

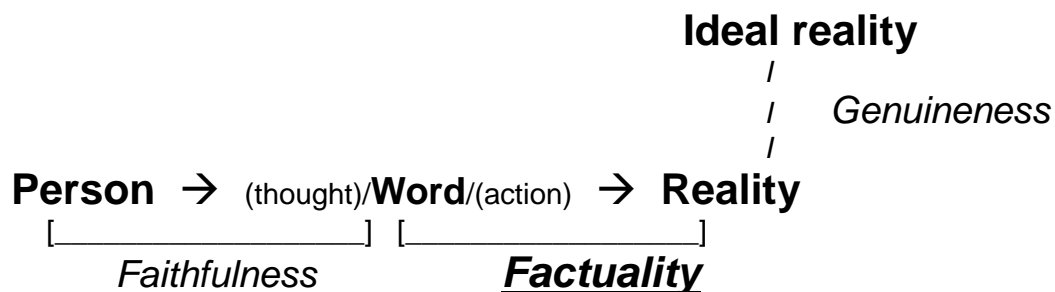
If we attempt to visualize how the new understanding of divine truth would change our ‘daily view’ diagram, we need to make some major adjustments. First, because God is truth and all truth is grounded in his person, the diagram needs to be rotated 90 degrees, with the Person (God) now taking the place of the Ideal reality of early philosophy. Secondly, the distance between Person and Word becomes practically non-existent, making genuineness and faithfulness also closer in meaning as facets of the essential truth of God. Finally, the distance between Word and empirical Reality clearly still exists, but

since all temporal truth is ultimately rooted in God this link can now also be seen as fundamentally reliable.

6.5 What our findings mean for truth in general

We started out this study with a review of the understanding of truth throughout the history of philosophy, and I would like to return to that starting point in this final section. If from a biblical perspective all truth is indeed rooted in God, as the last point on our 5-point list suggested, then all truth is ultimately ‘divine truth’. For those who accept the biblical notion of truth, then, this means that our findings also apply to the philosophical quest to understand truth in general. So, how would such a biblical view see the various theories of truth that have been developed throughout philosophy’s history?

In Chapter One we kept track of the various views on truth by means of our ‘daily use’ diagram, and what we saw happening through the centuries could thus be visualized as first a move downward and then a move from the right toward the left:



In Plato, truth was closely linked to the notion of being, a kind of ‘being’ moreover that was more full and permanent than mere empirical reality. Truth needed to be grounded in an eternal reality, and Plato’s primary understanding of truth was therefore one of genuineness. In Plato’s contemporary Aristotle we already saw the first steps downward toward locating truth in empirical reality. His sense of truth thus replaced genuineness with factuality, though he still sought to anchor truth in unchanging elements within the temporal world.

Augustine and Aquinas were seen to stay close to the positions of their earlier counterparts, though these were now understood from a Christian perspective. For those first two millenia of philosophical thought, therefore, the search for truth continued to stay firmly on the right-hand side of our diagram.

During this earlier segment of its history, philosophy's quest to elucidate the notion of truth stayed firmly focused on solving the one problem of how truth can be properly grounded and still accommodate change. Approaching this problem from the perspective of Craig's understanding of time and eternity, we have seen in this study that absolute immutability is not a necessary requirement for truth. Truths can be both changeless and changing, timeless and temporal, as long as the connections between these types of truth are firmly established and the temporal is ultimately grounded in the timeless.

Having said this, it is still clear that the picture of truth that has emerged from our investigation is closer to that of Plato and especially Augustine than to Aristotle and Aquinas' views. If temporal reality is purely contingent upon a free will act of God then timeless reality is primary. And since without temporal creation God is the only entity in existence, God himself is the ultimate reality that grounds every other existence and truth.

Descartes' new way of thinking brought more drastic change than maybe even he himself had fathomed. The new location of the realm of ideas now became the mind of man—a humble abode that soon proved unsuited to the task. The shift meant a sudden move toward the left in our diagram, where truth was in danger of becoming purely subjective and even relative—as the following centuries bore out. Descartes' attempt to build a bridge from the mind of man to reality via the idea of God was less than successful, since God's existence was made dependent on being found a clear and distinct idea in the mind of individual man. It was simply too easy for other thinkers to deny the lack of such an idea in their own mind. With Descartes, therefore, the question of change and truth that had characterized philosophy till now was promptly replaced by the more urgent matter of restoring the failing connection between man's mind and material reality.

Kant managed to remedy one weakness in Descartes' 'house of cards,'⁹ namely the threat of subjectivism, by postulating universal mental categories. But the price to be paid

was a further move away from reality, while it did not take long for subjectivism to make a come-back in thought about truth. It is clear that with modernity, the quest to ground truth had been permanently dislodged from the right side of our diagram, with no way to retrieve the link with reality and the assurance of the past.

Even though truth in the modern tradition thus moved toward the personal side of the diagram, this did not mean a shift toward faithfulness. Modern thought simply increasingly lost its grip on factuality and thus moved away from reality to the only place left to go: the mind of man. Whereas truth in scripture could find a real anchor in personhood, because the person in question is supra-human and exists *a se*, philosophy had only the individual human mind to fall back on, by definition too weak a ground to carry the weight of truth.

The same can be said of the focus on authenticity and genuineness of existential thinkers like Kierkegaard. When genuineness can only be applied to human persons it loses most of its power. It can only signify a personal authenticity that—as we have seen—is not even strong enough to guarantee faithfulness in our dealings with others, let alone being capable of grounding truth. Of course, to be fair, existentialism never sought such a lofty role for authenticity, having resigned itself fully to the idea that objective truth is simply a myth.

Arriving at our day and age, postmodern thought is merely reaping the harvest of what was sown in modernity. Truth needed a firm ontological anchor, and not finding it in an impersonal ideal reality, in unchangeable elements in the empirical world, or in the mind of man, philosophy has finally run out of options. As such it has simply, and sometimes happily, given up the fight. Relativity theory, moreover, made sure such an anchor could not be retrieved by further widening the chasm between divine timelessness and temporality, changelessness and change, bringing with it all the consequences we discussed above.

With no further options to explore, man's quest for truth is faced with two alternatives: either simply give up, or look to the past for answers. The former will be the end of philosophy, unless poetry or other forms of mere verbal expression can qualify as such. But those who wish to continue the search seem to have no alternative but to retrace

their steps. One thing is certain, if we have been correct about our findings in this study, then truth can only be founded in a personal ultimate reality that is voluntarily bound by its own nature and that does not share its ontology with man but exists *a se*.

Moreover, for such truth to be both a guiding principle for temporal man and really related to us, the Einsteinian theory of relativity and Minkowskian block universe must be replaced by a view of relativity that allows for absolute simultaneity and a dynamic theory of time. As we saw, it is Einstein's theory that implies that "relatively moving observers literally inhabit different worlds which may intersect only at a point," as Craig put it (2001a:43). But if we humans most of the time inhabit infinite different realities, then truth would indeed seem different for each of us, and if there is no absolute simultaneity then my truth is simply no longer translatable into yours, and relativism reigns. What we can conclude then at the end of this chapter is that the factor of time has indeed proven to play a crucial role in providing a deeper understanding of divine truth and of truth in general.

6.6 Conclusion

Since the attribute of eternity was seen to be intricately connected with several of the other properties of God, our new approach to eternity enabled us to solve some of the thorny issues that have plagued these attributes also. The five attributes that showed relatedness to time and eternity were: perfection, necessity, immutability, omniscience and the personhood implied by divine goodness, and we started out this chapter by looking at each of these from the viewpoint of our proposed new view of the nature of eternity.

After clarifying the divine attributes in this way, we returned to our main concern, namely the question of divine truth. We first explored what each of the attributes can now tell us about truth, and found that with our proposed new understanding of time and eternity they became rich sources of new understanding concerning divine truth. With these findings in hand we then returned to our conclusions regarding the notion of truth in scripture. These conclusions had stipulated truth to be reliable, content-filled and above all

personal, with the truth senses of faithfulness and genuineness both playing a more prominent role than they do in the factuality-dominated view of our own time.

From these two sources we then attempted to construct a coherent view of the divine attribute of truth. Recognizing the three truth senses of genuineness, faithfulness and factuality in the attributes of aseity, goodness and omniscience, we were able to apply our philosophical understanding of these attributes to the biblical truth findings. In addition, the revision of the attribute of immutability and the pivotal role of personhood were instrumental in showing how divine truth can be both grounded in the eternal and still relevant for the temporal everyday life of man. We were also able to conclude that both the Bible and the divine attributes agree that all truth, no matter where it is found, is rooted in God and can thus, in the final analysis, be called divine truth.

Finally, based on that last conclusion, we revisited the various notions of truth that philosophy has proposed throughout the centuries and noted that, from the biblical perspective on truth, the only way forward seems to lead back to the insights of earlier centuries, this time under the guidance of a view of time and eternity such as the one proposed by Craig.

NOTES

¹ Without human free will there is no responsibility and thus no sin. Such a view therefore makes redundant the very core message of the Bible: salvation from sin and its consequences through Christ.

² This position then leads Hasker and his colleagues to the position known as “Open Theism” (Pinnock et al. 1994).

³ Such an understanding of divine knowledge as necessary leads to a view of God as impersonal and thus to pantheism, as we saw earlier when discussing Spinoza’s view (locus 3.3.2).

⁴ A more detailed description of this account of divine foreknowledge will follow in section 6.4.

⁵ The list of eternal entities would be endless, since all integers alone already constitute an infinite amount.

⁶ The “inner place behind the curtain” signifies the holy of holies in the temple, the place where God himself dwells.

⁷ The second question (Can God create a stone He cannot lift?) is actually reducible to the simple logical impossibility of the first (Can God create a square circle?). See George Mavrodes’ *Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence*.

⁸ Only as a matter of speaking, of course, since in STR there is no absolute simultaneity to begin with.

⁹ No pun intended, of course...

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7 – CONCLUSION

7.1 The past as the future of the quest for truth

Until very recently, the quest for truth has been a central concern in philosophical enquiry. The nature of truth is also an issue that is fiercely debated in our time, as Western society seems to be transitioning from a modern to a postmodern worldview. For the Christian philosopher, however, the fact that truth is one of the descriptors of God provides direction in the quest for a philosophically sound answer. The general aim of this study has been to contribute to the enquiry into the nature of truth by a further clarification of the notion of truth as one of the attributes of the God of the Bible. And since there was reason to believe that current debates in this field were affected by new views of time, our investigation expressly included a section on the philosophy of time and its implications for views of divine eternity.

To lay a solid foundation of traditional and current thought on truth, we started out with three chapters that each explored a different source of knowledge for our topic, namely the history of Western philosophy, the Christian scriptures, and classical theism's thought regarding the divine attributes. In order to facilitate comparison of the various truth views emerging from these sources we also looked briefly at how the term 'truth' is currently used in daily conversation. In this respect we found that the term's main three uses were factuality, genuineness and faithfulness, with each of these representing a correspondence to a different ground for truth namely empirical reality, ideal reality and the human self. We also saw that factuality, or correspondence with empirical reality, is the clear favorite in our own time.

Our survey of Western philosophical thought on truth in Chapter One revealed that the first two millennia were dominated by the question how truth can be reliable if empirical reality is in constant flux. Many thinkers asserted that truth itself must be grounded in something unchanging, either an unchanging ideal reality or an unchanging element within empirical reality, and it was therefore the truth sense of genuineness that tended to occupy center stage, with factuality as a close second.

This focus on reality changed radically with Descartes' skeptical approach to knowledge and his retreat to the only thing he felt he could really trust, namely the existence of his own mind. With this shift, the truth sense of factuality finally won out over genuineness, though at the same time belief in the actual feasibility of factual knowledge started to wane. With the thought of Kant the universality of knowledge was briefly retrieved, but the confidence in factual truth eroded further, and with it the prominence of the factuality sense of truth.

In contemporary philosophy, represented by Kierkegaard's existentialism and Rorty's postmodern approach, we noted that the effort to retrieve the link with reality was officially abandoned. Kierkegaard's view celebrated subjective truth instead, and with Rorty and his confreres truth has become relative, while the idea of foundational truth is now seen as a mere myth and even as a means of suppressing society's disenfranchised. Even though factuality is still the primary meaning of truth in daily life, philosophy has largely moved away from a focus on reality as the ground of truth and toward man himself as the actual creator of truth. We also noted that this focus on the person did not mean a replacement of factuality with the more personal faithfulness sense of truth, but that the search for truth has simply come to an end and is now generally regarded as a misguided endeavor from the very beginning.

Chapter Two focused on the Bible, our second source for the notion of truth. We found that in the Old Testament the faithfulness sense of truth was seen to be primary—a striking contrast with what we had encountered in terms of philosophical views. However, the realisation of early philosophy that truth needs an unchanging ground was also found here, namely in the fact that the root meaning of *'emeth*, the Hebrew word for truth, is firmness or reliability.

In the New Testament this genuineness sense of truth was further accentuated by the root of *'emeth's* Greek counterpart. *Aletheia* meant above all non-concealment or uncovering, a meaning that seemed to imply the revealing of a full state of affairs. However, further comparisons with either the daily or philosophical notions of truth became increasingly difficult as the full meaning of *aletheia* unfolded. Truth in the New Testament was found to carry a strong sense of personhood and power, and often to denote

an entity or specific content-filled substance rather than a mere formal relation between entities. These features applied most strongly when truth was attributed in noun form to God and his word.

Our conclusions concerning truth in the Bible were summed up in a 5-point list, which stressed the following characteristics: (1) firmness and reliability, (2) the prominence of faithfulness and relative importance of genuineness, next to factuality, (3) personhood and personal agency, (4) denotation of a content-filled entity as well as a relation, and (5) when used in noun form of the divine, the fact that it calls forth a strong sense that all truth finds its ultimate source in God.

Our third source of insight into the nature of truth was classical theism and its thorough application of philosophical method to biblical concepts, particularly in the area of the attributes of God. Eight attributes were explored in Chapter Three, namely perfection or infinity, aseity or necessity, incorporeality, immutability, omnipotence, omniscience, goodness and eternity. Our aim was to identify those properties that seemed promising sources of insight because of their conceptual links with truth. It was noted, however, that several of these truth-related attributes were subject to debate, and that these disputes often centered around specific views of time and eternity. This was especially the case for the attributes of omniscience, immutability and the personhood implied by divine goodness. It became clear that in order to gain a distinct understanding of these properties and their relation to truth, clarification of the attribute of eternity would be key.

With this aim in mind, we first explored the foundational concept of time in Chapter Four. Investigating both philosophical and scriptural arguments concerning the nature of time, we specifically focused on two questions, namely whether time is dynamic or static, and whether it is finite or infinite. We found good philosophical evidence that time is most plausibly regarded as both dynamic and finite.

One of the main arguments for static time was that Einstein's theory of relativity presupposes time to be static, and this theory is almost unanimously accepted as true. However, the fact that Lorentz' rival theory was found to be empirically equivalent while allowing for a view of time as dynamic rather than static left this argument less than

effective. A second line of reasoning for the static view, that 'becoming' is merely mind-dependent, was seen to potentially argue against static time rather than for it, since it confirms that temporality is an undeniable fact of at least one part of reality, namely mental reality. Finally, static time was seen to necessitate a view of the self as merely a series of totally disconnected consciousness-instants. Denial of the most basic human experience of having an enduring self thus yielded a *prima facie* argument that seemed impossible to defeat.

When we looked at the issue of time as finite or infinite we found no firm arguments for infinity and strong evidence for time's finitude. The notion of an actual infinite seemed clearly problematic, while Leibniz' question why, if time is infinite, a cognitively perfect God would not have created the world sooner remained simply unanswerable.

But would the biblical view agree with these findings? Here we found that the foundational doctrine that God created the world *ex nihilo* provided firm support of our philosophical conclusions. On the static view past, present and future are all equally real, and there is thus no actual state of affairs of God existing before or without the universe. Thus He cannot be the creator in the full biblical sense. Scripture therefore points strongly in the direction of time as we know it actually passing and having a very real beginning, in other words as dynamic and finite. With our philosophical conclusions about time thus confirmed by biblical thought, we returned to our investigation of the attributes of God and our aim to get a clear picture of divine eternity.

Chapter Five engaged us in a thorough analysis of the two main views of eternity, namely atemporal timelessness and temporal everlastingness. And here our conclusion that time is dynamic and finite seemed to lead to a difficult dilemma. For if time is finite then temporal everlastingness is no longer an option. Everlastingness was feasible as long as time could be seen as infinite, but finite time would make a temporal divine being finite and that would be unacceptable in view of divine perfection and necessity. However, the alternative view of eternity as atemporal timelessness also led to seemingly insurmountable problems. How can God be timeless if the causal relation to the universe that creation *ex nihilo* requires necessarily draws him into time? How can such a being be deemed

omniscient if He has no knowledge of tensed facts, and how can He really respond to the prayers and free will decisions of his temporal human creatures?

It is here that we found Craig's view of eternity as timeless without creation and everlasting from creation onward to provide an eminently plausible scenario, with answers to most of the problems so far encountered. Ironically, divine personhood, which has often been understood to favor an essentially temporal view of eternity, was seen to provide foundational evidence for Craig's hybrid position. If God is a person, which is biblically undeniable, then He is a being with free will and his decision to create the universe becomes a contingent fact. Therefore, even though the act of creation necessarily draws God into time, his temporality is not an essential attribute as the proponents of everlastingness often argue. This is an important point, for if divine temporality is regarded as a an essential attribute, it implies a view of God as fully subject to time and thus limited in knowledge and power, i.e. Open Theism. But if divine free will guarantees that divine temporality is not essential, then such a limited view of God no longer follows.

But if divine temporality is not essential then neither is divine timelessness, taking the wind out of the sails of those who argued that a timeless God is utterly transcendent, unrelated to creation and human life, and therefore basically irrelevant. Thus, on Craig's view, there is an alternative to both these extremes, but is his theory coherent? Two points are crucial in answering this question: the relation between the timeless and the temporal phase in the divine life, and within the temporal phase itself, the relation between our own human time and God's real time.

Concerning the first relation, we must resist the temptation to see the phases of God's life as one phase preceding the other. God's timeless phase is not temporally prior to his temporal phase. Instead, we can envision the timeless state as "a boundary of time, which is causally, but not temporally, prior to the origin of the universe" (Craig 2001b:272). When God creates the universe, time comes into existence and God enters time, but this does not mean that He is temporally finite, because without creation He exists timelessly.

The second relation, between God's time and ours, is solved with Craig's proposal that relativity theory does not necessarily imply the loss of absolute simultaneity, and

Lorentz' alternative theory is proof of this fact. But if there is absolute time and simultaneity then as humans we no longer "inhabit different worlds" as Craig put it, but our varying perspectives all become related to one common reality (Craig 2001a:43). We concluded therefore, that Craig's approach to eternity seems coherent and that it is able to solve most of the conundrums that have plagued the eternity debate so far.

With our new eternity view in hand, in Chapter Six we revisited the divine attributes and were able to propose solutions to several of the problems we had noted in Chapter Three. It was seen that immutability and omniscience benefited most from our detour into time. Immutability could now be understood to accommodate a limited amount of change in God, allowing him to be really related to creation and to mankind, without this becoming a threat to his perfection or necessity. The revision of omniscience meant it could now be seen to coherently accommodate changing knowledge next to eternal truths, while also providing a plausible explanation of God's apparent knowledge of future contingents. Finally, divine personhood was found to be fully compatible with both timelessness and temporality, and thus in no way to imply a view of God as essentially temporal.

With these properties redefined, the full set of attributes, including divine eternity, was now ready to divulge its insights into the notion of divine truth and to speak to the two issues that had emerged as pivotal, namely the three senses of truth as factuality, faithfulness and genuineness, and the question of how truth is grounded. Concerning the first issue, some of the attributes were seen to closely reflect the three senses of truth, with aseity appearing to express genuineness, omniscience factuality, and goodness encompassing faithfulness. Regarding the question of how truth can be grounded if the world is always changing, it was specifically our new view of immutability that was eye-opening. For if God is both timeless and temporal, truth can come in different kinds, some changing and others not, and these types can now be meaningfully related because timelessness and temporality are coherently related in the person of God. In terms of the attributes, this meant that while omniscience and goodness sometimes imply changing truths, these attributes are unchanging in themselves and are ultimately grounded in the

absolutely unchanging and unchangeable attribute of aseity, which reflects both *that* God is (existence) and *who* He is (character).

Moreover, these insights resonated well with the first two of the five characteristics of the biblical notion of truth we had encountered in Chapter Two. We had seen there that the biblical notion requires firmness and reliability, and this aspect seemed now guaranteed in the unchanging attribute of aseity. We also saw that both faithfulness and genuineness were more strongly represented in scripture than they are in our own time. In the attributes this was reflected in a hierarchical structure in which omniscience (factuality) seemed to depend on the attributes of goodness (faithfulness) and aseity (genuineness), two properties that were seen to closely converge in the primary reality of the person of God.

The attributes of personhood and omnipotence also contributed significantly to our further understanding. We already noted above that divine personhood played a key role in showing Craig's hybrid view of eternity to be coherent. It is personhood that not only allows for but even prescribes contingency and time in God, because being a person means having free will. Of course this same personhood aspect was explicitly confirmed in the third of our five conclusions regarding biblical truth, just as its importance was already noted in the preference of faithfulness and genuineness over factuality. Omnipotence was important in stressing the fact of God being a content-filled entity, and thus not somehow reducible to a synthesis of contradictories as pantheism would have it. And again, this insight was found to correspond with our conclusions regarding truth in scripture, in this case with point four of our 5-point list.

Finally, the revised attribute of eternity itself was investigated for its potential to elucidate truth. Of course, what we learned here was that it is the connectedness between the different time levels and with timelessness itself that makes truth secure and accessible to man. For with this new eternity view we were actually able to provide a workable solution to the ubiquitous question of truth and change. If God is both timeless and temporal, then changelessness and change can coexist in the person of God and thus in divine truth, and Molinism proved that such a view can indeed be coherent. The second threat to truth, relativism, had emerged only recently under the influence of STR and its denial of absolute simultaneity. But here also Craig's theory proved very beneficial by

giving a coherent account of how absolute simultaneity can be combined with the findings of physics—via Lorentz’ theory—and then meaningfully relating God’s absolute time with our own measured time.

The revision of the attributes had thus led us back to the notion of truth in the Bible, confirming four of the five conclusions we had reached in Chapter Two, namely that truth must be firm, that faithfulness and genuineness play a bigger role than they do in our daily view, that truth can be personal and that it can denote a definite content-filled entity. What about the fifth conclusion, that all truth finds its source in God? It became clear that this conclusion was now also reinforced. Divine aseity affirmed that all existing things are created by God and exist only in dependence upon him. Moreover, this attribute had been found to ground the other senses of truth. This allowed us to take our findings regarding divine truth and apply them to truth in general. We noted that if philosophy wants to continue its quest for truth, the only way forward seems to be a return to the past and to some of the views that may have been discarded too hastily.

Views that merit reconsideration are a grounding of truth in something unchanging that can guarantee reliability, while still allowing enough change to be applicable to our daily lives in a changing world. Moreover, to allow for both changelessness and change such a ground should have personhood rather than be an impersonal entity, but to avoid subjectivism this personal ground should also be supra-human. The great merit of Craig’s view of eternity is that it opens the way for such seemingly incompatible characteristics as changelessness and change, personhood and supra-humanity to be reconciled. It has thus proven to be an eminently fertile ground for progress in the quest for a sound understanding of truth.

7.2 The way forward

Coming to the end of this project I realize that we have only barely touched upon the possibilities that are opened up by Craig’s eternity view. The Christian worldview prescribes a strong dualism between God and creation, between existence *a se* and our own fragile and dependent type of life. Such dualism has often led to apparently unsolvable

conundrums. But if Craig's approach is sound a lot of these problems could be resolved after all—and this without compromising the crucial doctrine of creator-creation dualism. Further research can therefore be done into each of the divine attributes, with especially immutability, omniscience and personhood meriting a lot more attention. Such work could possibly address issues in areas like determinism and human free will, the exact nature of the divine knowledge, and the existence and nature of the human self. Concerning the attribute of truth itself, our research has really only been able to sketch some dim contours of how this property of God should be understood. One area that needs further analysis is, for instance, the exact relationship between aseity or genuineness on the one hand and perfect goodness or faithfulness on the other.

Within the philosophy of time itself more questions can now be addressed also, for instance regarding the exact implications of time being dynamic and finite. One question that emerges from this understanding of time is how we should view God's creative activity. Was creation a one-time finished act or does God continue to create the future right now in the present moment? Another time issue I would love to take on if "time were not an issue," is the unanswered question of the extent of the present. As we saw in Chapter Four, the idea of minimal indivisible time intervals or 'chronons' is not without problems, while the positing of a higher time dimension tends to lead to an infinite regress (locus 4.3.1). However, if a higher time dimension could be posited that is truly qualitatively different, such an infinite regress might be avoided, and here divine eternity might provide some interesting answers. Scripture certainly points in this direction with its verses on God's continual sustaining activity: "The Son is... sustaining all things by his powerful word," and "... in him [Christ] all things hold together" (Heb 1:3, Col 1:16).

Finally, the eternity view we have explored could open up new perspectives in the area of theology. Theology has seen a recent surge in popularity of two views of God that are at least partly dependent on views of time, namely Process Theology and a great variety of mystical views of the divine. Process Theology sees development and thus temporality as essential to God, while mystical views regard God or the 'ultimate reality' as so utterly transcendent that He is completely detached from the temporal and thus more easily dismissed as irrelevant. Neither alternative seems to reflect the biblical notion of

God as all-knowing and transcendent on the one hand, and deeply involved and responsive to our actions and prayers on the other. Craig's hybrid view of eternity may show the way forward in dealing in a scripturally sound manner with the legitimate issues that lie at the basis of both views.

It has become clear, then, that our understanding of time and eternity has far reaching implications, both for theology and philosophy; both for our understanding of who God is and what that means for the way we should live our lives, and for our insight into one of the most basic questions on the minds of philosophers throughout the centuries, namely "what is truth?"

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