Analogy, Being, and Time: Hart, Jenson and the Question of Impassibility

by

Matthew Andrew


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Abstract
This thesis examines whether the doctrine of divine impassibility is necessary in order to give a satisfactory account of God’s relationship to the world’s violence. I evaluate this question as an evangelical, using the tools of systematic and analytic theology. I draw upon, and evaluate the work of, both David Bentley Hart and Robert Jenson. Hart and Jenson offer radically different accounts of God’s impassibility, and I find that while both thinkers offer important insights, their systems as a whole are problematic. Using the fruits of this evaluation, I then enter a constructive phase, arguing for the viability of a qualified passibility. To test this construction’s potential to articulate God’s relation to the world’s violence, I engage the work of Emmanuel Levinas. I find that a qualified possibility can overcome the objections raised against it, and offer a cogent account of God’s relationship to the world’s violence.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background to the Question

The horror and scope of violence in the twentieth century, and the Nietzschean strand of those reflecting on this violence, raise crucial questions for Christian theology. Does God’s relationship to a suffering world cosmically amplify the violence of our world by somehow making it constitutive of his being? Or is he removed from violence by a moral gap that makes a mockery of a notion of a ‘God with us?’ In short, what is the nature of the God we trust? Such questions cut to the very heart of the Church’s founding message. They are unanswerable without addressing the contemporary debate on impassibility.

Two recent and influential proposals regarding God’s impassibility have been offered by David Bentley Hart and Robert Jenson.¹ Hart is one of the most prominent and articulate defenders of impassibility and Jenson of a tertium quid between passibility and impassibility. Yet both accounts, as will be demonstrated below, suffer potentially insurmountable difficulties and some critical lacunae.

The existing literature on impassibility, however, does not bring Hart and Jenson into conversation in any sustained fashion, while both Hart and Jenson generally neglect the tools and questions offered by analytic philosophy. This opens up the

¹See: Hart, Beauty; Jenson, “Ipse Pater”. 
space for a theologically and philosophically constructive contribution to an important and ongoing theological debate.

1.2 The Question

In the course of this PhD I will be offering a constructive theological and philosophical appraisal of the work of David Bentley Hart and Robert Jenson on divine impassibility. Following this I will evaluate the potential of the resulting construction to offer a response to ‘post-phenomenological ontologies of violence,’ drawing on the work of Emmanuel Levinas. The fundamental question—which this thesis seeks to answer from the vantage point of the debate on impassibility—is whether Christianity can speak from a position of hope to a public realm sensitised to the question of violence.

In this introduction I will begin with some brief discussion of what is meant by impassibility, and some methodological reflection. I will then evaluate more fully the above claims, and the potential for answering this question in space of a 100,000 word thesis.

1.3 A Definition of Impassibility

The debate on impassibility should not be mistaken for a merely modern concern. Jerome, for example, makes fun of impassibility, noting that it is “a state in which the mind ceases to be agitated and—to speak simply—becomes either a stone or a God.”

Augustine notes that “if that is to be called apathy, where the mind is subject of no emotions, then who would not consider this insensibility to be worse than all vices?” Nonetheless the rejection of the doctrine has taken a particularly acute form in the last century or so, for the reasons I have outlined in section 1.2.

[3] Though earlier he writes “if it be taken to mean an impassibility of spirit and not of body, or, in other words, a freedom from those emotions which are contrary to reason and disturb the mind, then it is obviously a good and most desirable quality.” Augustine, City of God, 410.
This rich history has meant that impassibility has no unanimous definition. In order to understand what we are talking about when we say that Hart and Jenson argue for or against impassibility we need to carefully define what we are talking about.

Richard Creel has done any discussion of impassibility a great service by identifying a number of ways impassibility is used by ancient and contemporary sources. He identifies 8 of these:

1. God lacks all emotion (except bliss)
2. God’s “being in a state of mind which is entirely unperturbable and motionless.”
3. God’s being “insusceptible to distraction or resolve.”
4. God’s will is entirely self-determined.
5. God “cannot be affected by an outside force.”
6. God cannot be prevented from achieving his purpose (omnipotence).
7. God lacks all negative emotions.
8. God can be changed by neither internal nor external force.

Creel argues that statements (2), (3), (4), (6), and (7) are corollaries of (5). In other words statement (3)—God’s being “insusceptible to distraction or resolve”—is a subset of statement (5) whereby God cannot be affected by an outside force.

To preserve the distinction between impassibility and immutability he holds that (5) is subsumed under (8). The core of impassibility is represented in (5)—God cannot be causally influenced by outside factors—while the doctrine of immutability (8) adds to this the prohibition of change via internal force. Therefore impassibility means that God cannot be affected by an external force, while immutability means that God cannot be changed by either external or internal force.

This is the key and perhaps most vulnerable part of Creel’s critique. Taking a variety of statements and generalising from their commonality does not automatically yield

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⁴The following is condensed from chapter 1 of: Creel, Divine Impassibility.
⁵See chapter 1 of: ibid.
a convincing definition. The Church Fathers often understood impassibility to mean that God's suffering in the incarnation was undertaken voluntarily, unlike our own experience of suffering.\(^6\) I will, therefore, use ‘impassibilist’ to denote the hard view articulated by Creel and ‘qualified-impassibilist’ to refer to any view which allows for some degree of causality to run from the world to God whilst seeking to affirm some of tenants of (1)–(8) above.

Finally Creel argues that impassibility can be predicated of various aspects of God's being: his nature, will, knowledge, or feelings.\(^7\) Any assertion about God's full or qualified impassibility can be read as a collection of assertions of impassibility and passibility across each of these four domains.\(^8\)

This is a helpful schema. It offers clarity with regard to exactly what must be decided upon when articulating a doctrine of impassibility. It may be seen in the following investigation that this is somewhat artificial, or that other areas of God's being that need to be qualified should be added. Nonetheless, this is a helpful starting point.

Drawing on this definition the central task at hand becomes clearer: to offer an evangelical articulation of the (im)passibility of God's will, nature, knowledge and feelings, that will draw on, and meet the criticism of, the work of Hart, Jenson and Levinas.

### 1.4 Methodological Considerations

The sheer complexity of the task at hand—and indeed the theological task in general—means that every effort should be made to achieve clarity about how this inquiry will proceed. Given that methodology is deeply influenced by epistemology, a general epistemic framework will be briefly outlined before turning to method itself.

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\(^6\) See chapter 2 of: Gavrilyuk, *Impassible God*.

\(^7\) Creel, *Divine Impassibility*, 11.

\(^8\) Of interest is the fact that Creel, while generally sympathetic to classical theism, affirms God as impassible in nature, will, and feelings, but not in knowledge. ibid.
1.4.1 A Non-Foundationalist Theory of Theorising

Foundationalism has been an important epistemology for the theological enterprise. To draw on some well-known examples across confessional divides, Charles Hodge, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Ernst Troeltsch were all foundationalist. Yet the project of ‘classical foundationalism’ has been shown to suffer difficulties that appear to be insurmountable. In the wake of such difficulties, an alternative must be identified.

The self-referential incoherence of relativism should give any thinker pause before embracing this as an alternative. For a Christian who seeks to take seriously the ontological reality of the claims of Jesus Christ, and so understands salvation as inextricably linked to the reality of the actions of God in human history, the difficulties of relativism are compounded. What must, then, be sought is a theory that is epistemically and ontologically realist while also avoiding the pitfalls of classical foundationalism.

The proponents of so-called ‘reformed epistemology’—theorists who have been instrumental in highlighting the difficulties of classical foundationalism—seek to offer such a mediating view. While reformed epistemologists are generally seen as advocating a modified foundationalism (which may, in part, be due to the prominence of the work of Alvin Plantinga), Nicholas Wolterstorff offers an articulation of a non-foundationalist epistemology. It is Wolterstorff who will be followed here, as his theory has several advantages over the modified foundationalist strand of reformed epistemology.

As a consequence of navigating a position between relativism and absolutism, Wolter-

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10Clark, *Return to Reason*; Plantinga, “Reason and Belief”; Sloane, *The Academy*; Wolterstorff, *Bounds of Religion*, “Can Belief”. The difficulties are present both in terms of the possibility of a certain foundation, and in terms of the ability for certainty to be transferred from such a foundation to other beliefs. For detailed discussion of these difficulties, see:
14On this, see: ibid., 205-214.
storff advocates a rationality that is “person specific and situation specific.” Wolterstorff argues that “we have an obligation to govern our assent with the goal in mind of getting more amply in touch with reality.” Meeting such an obligation “as well as can rightly be demanded” results in rational belief. Yet such rational beliefs do not “constitute knowledge,” they are defeasible.

Wolterstorff’s realism comes from his belief in God: “God exists: he has created us with the capacity to come to know the world.” Furthermore, due to God’s goodness, we are able to trust that “while sin has distorted our noetic faculties, if we are humble and open to correction, we can trust that God will enable us to recognise these effects and compensate for them to the best of our ability.” In other words, while sometimes marred, our belief-forming mechanisms give us access to the world.

There is, therefore, no need to consider the beliefs delivered to us by our belief-forming mechanisms irrational, unless we possess some other warrant for disbelieving. That is, we should not consider our beliefs ‘guilty-until-proven-innocent.’ A belief becomes irrational only in the face of a reason to cease believing, they are ‘innocent-until-proven-guilty.’

The justification for a particular belief—whether immediate or mediate—is determined by the particular belief’s relation to the “individual’s network of beliefs.”

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⁰Wolterstorff, “Can Belief”, 145. Though it should be noted that the extent and specifics of our noetic obligation—like the obligation to investigate a specific belief—are determined by our praxis. Indeed, the general obligation to truth might in very rare instances be over-ridden by a higher obligation, such as the (imaginary) situation of God requiring us to do something irrational. Sloane, *The Academy*, 104.
⁰Ibid., 109.
²⁰It should be noted that Sloane develops the importance of noetic effects of the fall in relation to Wolterstorff’s theory. ibid., 109; 89–95.
²¹Wolterstorff draws heavily on Thomas Reid for outlining some of these mechanisms or dispositions. Wolterstorff, “Can Belief”, 149–166. See the discussion in: Sloane, *The Academy*, 199.
²²Wolterstorff, “Can Belief”, 163.
²³Immediate beliefs form the foundation of foundationalist epistemologies and thus in such systems require no justification by other beliefs. It is important here to note that Wolterstorff’s continued ad-
the context of theorising, Wolterstorff outlines this relation of beliefs by introducing the categories of data beliefs, data background beliefs, and control beliefs.²⁵ These categories are of great importance and worth defining carefully:

(1) **Data beliefs** are those beliefs with which a theory is required to be consistent.²⁶

In other words, data beliefs are the beliefs held about the entities in the scope of the theory without which it would be impossible to assess or propose the theory to begin with. To draw on Wolterstorff’s own example, if I propose the theory that my study chair was made in China, I have certain beliefs about my study, the chair, and China without which proposing the theory would be impossible. I believe, for example, both that I have a study and that there is a chair in it.²⁷

(2) **Data background beliefs** are a “set of beliefs such that one’s holding them is a condition of one’s accepting of data that which one does.”²⁸

This is the web of beliefs that determine what counts as data for the one theorising. If an empirical theory were being assessed this might, for example, include belief in the reliability of one’s perceptual apparatus. What is critical to note about data background beliefs is that, when weighing the theory where they determine what counts as data, they are “taken as unproblematic.” In other words, the theories that yield the beliefs taken as data are “not subjected to weighing.”²⁹

(3) **Control Beliefs** are “beliefs as to what constitutes an acceptable sort of theory on the matter under consideration.”³⁰

Control beliefs “include beliefs about the requisite logical or aesthetic structure of a theory, beliefs about the entities to whose existence a theory may correctly commit

²⁶Ibid., 65.
²⁷Ibid., 65–66. These are not to be taken as unimpeachable facts, a decision to take such beliefs as data is required: Sloane, *The Academy*, 129.
²⁹Ibid., 67.
³⁰Ibid., 67.
us, and the like."³¹ Such beliefs therefore function in a two-fold manner: causing those holding them to reject theories contradicting such beliefs, and to devise theories in accord with such beliefs. All theorists bring such control beliefs to bear on the task of theorising.

It is important to note two things having made these definitions. Firstly, Wolterstorff is making a purely functional distinction here, not an ontological one.³² In different contexts the same belief might function in any of the above categories. Secondly, Wolterstorff understands beliefs as not simply arising from our voluntary control, but argues that “they are generally the product of belief-dispositions which ineluctably produce beliefs in the appropriate circumstances.”³³ Changing one’s beliefs is not simply the result of a voluntary decision, but is a much more complex process.³⁴

This structure provides a means of assessing whether the holding of a belief can be said to be rational by outlining the noetic structure it must be in accord with. Yet given the contextually-dependent nature of rationality, the presence of different control beliefs in different theories cannot simply be dismissed by an appeal to universal rationality. How then can this framework result in a method? How can one seek to bring one’s beliefs into line with reality?

### 1.4.2 A Non-Foundationalist Method

Non-foundationalism is often accused of being a form of fideism. A non-foundationalist must, I would argue, give some idea of how a person can move towards the ontological and epistemic realism it affirms. In other words it demands the articulation of a method. What emerges are two important and related processes.

One is the need for dialogical pluralism. It is to be expected that those coming from a different belief-tradition will have insights and challenges for other belief

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³³Though, as above, one has some control over what one takes as data when theorising. Sloane, *The Academy*, 216.
³⁴Ibid., 216.
traditions—challenges that those in the other belief-traditions might otherwise overlook. Consider the case of Christian and non-Christian theorists. Non-Christian theorists—whatever the logical possibility of Christians theorists discovering them—often uncover aspects of the world that a Christian is blind to because of their control beliefs.³⁵ A critical part of bringing one’s beliefs into line with reality is the close and sympathetic reading of other perspectives.

The second, related, process is that of the internal and external critique of a theory.³⁶ A theory should be assessed according to its own control beliefs, and from the perspective of other belief traditions.³⁷ A theory which is internally coherent is one which those from that belief tradition are entitled to accept. Yet such a theory may still be found to be wanting when evaluated from another belief tradition. This kind of clarity: clearly articulating a theory’s control beliefs, internal coherence, and the reason why that theory should be accepted or rejected given one’s own control beliefs, is the ideal procedure for theory weighing. Once one presupposes the goodness of God, these processes offer the possibility of the genuine discovery of truth, an iterative movement towards reality in one’s beliefs.

1.4.3 Implications for Theology

This chastened rationality affects how the task of the systematic theologian is understood as a whole. When making claims about the world one can expect some error in the project (a failure to which one will often be blind), a problem compounded when claims are being made about God.³⁸ Nonetheless, the realist element of this epistemology means that such a project can still be expected to provide value to the community of God. The theologian must, therefore, consciously submit their work to both the community and to God for judgement. Naturally the final determina-

³⁵See chapter 14 where Wolterstorff gives the example of behaviourism in psychology offering truths about the human that probably would not have arisen from Christian theorising: Wolterstorff, Bounds of Religion.
³⁶See the discussion in: Sloane, The Academy, 248-50. Note also that this general approach is advocated beyond those reliant on the work of Wolterstorff: Mittwede, “Research Paradigms”, 31.
³⁸1 Cor. 13:12.
tion of the truth entailed in our speech about God is eschatological.\(^{39}\) Theology is valuable but provisional in that its final truth is reliant on whether such speech is counted by God as faithful speech.

Furthermore, the context-dependence of rationality suggests the possibility of better background beliefs against which to make theological judgements, and when considering the theological task this highlights the need for personal holiness and prayer.\(^{40}\) The task of any theologian should therefore be approached in prayerful belief, in the community of the church.\(^{41}\)

Clarity and beauty should also be sought as a part of the theological task. The theologian should attempt to give the greatest possible clarity to his or her ideas, precisely in order that they might be accurately evaluated by, and of service to, the community of readers to which their discourse is aimed. Furthermore, insofar as theological discourse can presume the goodness and beauty of God, seeking to display that beauty in the very prose seeking to describe God should be considered a virtue. There is truth in the Eastern Orthodox insight that theology begins in *philokalia*.\(^{42}\)

Finally, it will be noted that by placing epistemology in a controlling place in the construal of theological method a theological judgement has already been exercised. Two things should be taken into account here. Firstly, the epistemology outlined above is taken to be in accord with important scriptural themes.\(^{43}\) Secondly, given the crucial importance of epistemic considerations there seems to be only two options: grappling with how such issues affect theology, or ignoring them. Those who ignore such concerns run the risk of becoming prisoners of their own silence, inarticulate about the extent of their dependence on their own philosophical mi-

\(^{39}\)1 Cor. 13:12. See the discussion in: Grenz, “Christian Belief-Mosaic”, 135–6. It will become obvious that this claim intersects with Jenson’s theological project in some ways.


\(^{41}\)See chapter 6 of: Pazmino, *Doing Theological Research: An Introductory Guide for Survival in Theological Education*.

\(^{42}\)Obviously, recognising the virtue of beauty and having the talent to so write are—lamentably—distinct. Hart, *Beauty*, 30.

\(^{43}\)Again, see: Sloane, *The Academy*, 89–95.
### 1.4.4 A Puzzle

As a result of the above reflections, a question immediately confronts the theological task—and particularly the task at hand—that could cripple it. What happens when a data belief is bounded by mystery? Take the Trinity. Despite prolonged attention the logical problem of the Trinity has never been satisfactorily resolved. Can a belief, the logical coherence of which is not immediately apparent, serve as a foundation upon which subsequent argument—relying, often, on logic—is built?

Thomas Weinandy, taking a distinction from Marcel and Maritain, distinguishes between a problem and a mystery. A problem is approached “as if one were … examining some detached state of affairs which could be coldly dissected and systematically analysed so as to produce complete and comprehensive knowledge.” Mysteries, on the other hand, do not have a “comprehensive, complete, and final answer.” One can make progress in understanding a mystery, and find new light shed upon it, but the mystery is never fully dispelled.

Weinandy then outlines three ways in which areas like the doctrine of the Trinity can be approached: The first is considering it a problem to be solved: two or more truths are taken to be incompatible, and the ‘solution’ is a denial of a critical truth. The second is a dialectical approach that merely asserts the truth of two contradictories. Weinandy argues this second approach continues the assumption from the first that the area under consideration is a problem but refrains from seeking to solve it. The third is the true ‘mystery’ approach: This seeks “to clarify why two or more seemingly incompatible truths are not incompatible, and why they actually comple-

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44 One of the deep ironies of the disavowal of philosophy by theologians is how such a disavowal is often philosophically situated. For instance, Hankey highlights how some postmodern theologians assert the independence of theology from philosophy by recourse to Heidegger’s concept of onto-theology. See: Hankey, “Theoria Versus Poesis”, 337-8.
46 Weinandy, Does God Suffer?, 30-1.
48 Ibid., 31.
49 Ibid., 30-36.
ment one another.”⁵⁰ Weinandy specifically connects this with Augustine’s notion of faith seeking understanding.⁵¹

These categories offer a helpful framework. One can take a stance towards a data belief like the Trinity which presumes that it is not a simple logical contradiction, but a mystery that faith presents. If such a mystery is functioning as a data belief or control belief then a decision can be taken to treat such a belief as innocent until proven guilty: that it can be employed as a data belief or control belief without undermining the logical foundations of the project as a whole. This, no doubt, limits the universality with which the conclusion of such work will be accepted. But this is not an unsettling conclusion for a non-foundationalist.

The mystery card must be played very carefully, however. The twin dangers that beset anyone seeking to play it are on the one hand the elision of a genuine difficulty and on the other idolatry. For example, I take philosophical reflection to be useful as a tool to bring us closer to reality. Yet a judgement must sometimes be exercised not to allow an unanswerable object to dislodge our control beliefs. This judgement will always have difficulty avoiding ruin on one or other of these rocks.

Given the human propensity to self-deception so ruthlessly unmasked by the likes of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, perhaps the decision as to whether these two dangers have been avoided ultimately falls to the community of readers.⁵²

1.4.5 Approach to Scripture and other Sources of Authority in Systematics

In light of the above framework, those engaged in the project of theology should be as explicit as possible about the control-beliefs they bring to the theological task. This will now be attempted in part.

As an evangelical, my conviction is that “theology be nourished and governed at all

⁵⁰Weinandy, Does God Suffer?, 37.
⁵¹Ibid., 28.
⁵²For a good discussion of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche and the service they can do for Christian theology see: Westphal, Suspicion and Faith. Jenson’s concerns with the work are, however, well worth reflecting on: Jenson, “Suspicion and Faith”.

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points by Holy Scripture.” Yet tradition bequeaths us not only the very canon of our scriptures, but also certain normative theological judgements that defined the church from that point on: in particular the Trinitarian and Christological decisions of the early councils. If one is to posit any genuine historical continuity of the church qua church after these critical documents, they must be regarded as adequate. Indeed, on the basis of the above epistemology, the tradition of the Church must be read as offering a chance to be challenged to move towards a better comprehension of scripture.

The Biblical narrative should therefore shape the schema within which the topic under discussion is understood, and the systematic implications of this shape be considered in conversation with other attempts at systematisation. Careful Biblical-theological reflection entails both making sure that concepts taken from scripture reflect their actual biblical use, and that the concerns of Scripture itself are heard.

The method of interpreting scripture itself is heavily contested. The hegemony of the historical–critical methodology was parasitic on the mythic possibility of ‘objectivity’ in interpretation and, often, by literary imperialism in questions of how Biblical texts should cohere. In the wake of its fall from its position of dominance, a plethora of hermeneutical approaches have appeared.

In light of the epistemology outlined above, I approach scripture explicitly as a medium of ‘divine discourse,’ and give the majority of attention to the final form of the scriptures. Thus my hermeneutical methodology can best be described in

53McGrath, “Engaging the Great Tradition”, 139.
54Though, as Graham Cole points out, the determining of the canon of scripture should be understood as a recognition of a pre-existing authority. Cole, God Who Became Human.
55See the discussion in chapter two of: Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1.
56Allowing the subject matter to shape the inquiry coheres with good practise of theory-construction in general. For a discussion related specifically to systematics, see: Webster, “Introduction: Systematic Theology”, 14.
57Kennard, Theological Method, 281–3.
59See the statements of a modern practitioner of historical–criticism: Barton, Nature of Biblical Criticism, 124, 173, 175; 42.
60To use Wolterstorff’s idiom: Wolterstorff, Divine Discourse. I do, however, seek to prescind the truth claim (rather than truth value) of a text when interpreting it. See the discussion in: Long, “Art of Biblical History”, 300–1.
Ricoeurlean terms⁶¹ as a ‘post-critical naïveté’ that takes seriously the literary insights of the last half-century of Biblical scholarship.⁶²

Here a significant difficulty confronts one engaged in analytic theology: how does one economically apportion attention to the various traditions and tools needed to perform the project such that reasonable fidelity is shown to biblical interpretation, systematics, and philosophy? In this project the question, method, and the material has shaped the question such that the systematic and philosophical are given more overt attention than biblical interpretation, despite the foundational importance I place on biblical interpretation for theological judgements.

Whilst the scope for prolonged biblical reflection is limited, the above conviction is present throughout my work. Not only will the above remain data and control beliefs as I make theological judgements, but I take the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity and Christology—which will play an important role in this work—as extensions of this scriptural commitment.⁶³ In addition, I will engage the tools of philosophy in the task of systematic theology (in the manner of what has become known as the work of analytic theology), while seeking to be true to my evangelical convictions, in conformity to what I take to be the claims of Scripture.

### 1.5 Personal Position Relating to God’s Passibility

In line with method and commitments I have just outlined it is important for me to draw attention to my control beliefs regarding God’s impassibility. On the strength of my interpretation of Scripture I come to this thesis with the belief that God should be considered in some way passible. Apart from the reasons already outlined—and others reasons which will be explored below—Hart and Jenson have

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⁶¹Though, contra Ricoeur, I employ the category of authorial intention: Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*. See the defence of authorial intention in the chapter entitled ‘contra Ricoeur’ in: Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*.

⁶²For a helpful outline of some of these issues, see: Goldingay, *Models*; Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*; Thiselton, *Two Horizons*.

⁶³As argued directly above. One avenue for further research will be more explicitly outlining some of the exegetical and biblical-theological foundations for conclusions I have drawn where space did not permit this work.
been selected as interlocutors so that I can test this stance against other confessional and theological positions. By the end of this thesis I will either have defended a version of passibilism or found myself compelled to alter my understanding of God’s passibility.

Let us turn, then, to see the structure in which this will be done.

1.6 Structure

The thesis will be structured in the following way: In the first major section the work of Robert Jenson as it pertains to the question of impassibility will be evaluated by first engaging in an internal critique and then engaging in an external critique. In the second section I will evaluate the work of David Bentley Hart in the same fashion.

In the course of these two analyses relevant biblical-theological themes, key elements of Christology, and relevant aspects of ontology will be examined. This will allow a set of data beliefs and control beliefs to be built up, which will be brought to bear in the third section. In this section the work of Emmanuel Levinas will be examined and a construal of the doctrine of impassibility will be attempted and tested against the key challenges and insights of all three thinkers.

At this point it is important I explain my choice of Emmanuel Levinas as conversation partner in this last, constructive task. Levinas is an important thinker in the strand of postmodernism Hart—following Milbank—identifies as articulating an ontology of violence. This stream of thought, Hart suggests, can only be answered by his impassible God. Moreover Levinas is an ethicist who wrestles with the question of violence—having, as a Jew, been deeply affected by Nazism—and articulates a particular understanding of the world’s violence and transcendence.

These two features make Levinas an ideal interlocutor. He will allow me to test whether my construction of God’s relationship with the world meets the concerns of the so-called ‘post-phenomenological ontologies of violence,’ whilst avoiding the weaknesses of this stream of thought.
It is important to note that in this third section I will not be systematically constructing an evangelical doctrine of impassibility. There has been a large volume of such work already done, which I will rely upon at key points. I will instead be offering a constructive presentation of the doctrine to the extent required to meet the challenges of the work done by Hart, Jenson, and Levinas.

Finally, I will draw an overall conclusion.

Jenson and Hart are both prolific and complex thinkers, and so discussion of their work will inevitably be complex. So, as a guide and aid to understanding the argument that follows, I will now provide a summary of the thought of both Hart and Jenson in relation to impassibility. While doing so I will offer some evaluation of their projects so that the reader can see the ways in which they will prove fruitful conversation partners.

1.7 Summary of Jenson’s Thought

Jenson’s theology is guided by a trinitarian and revisionary-metaphysical concern, which is heavily influenced by Barth, but grounded in his own reading of Scripture. Jenson grants narrative a substantival status whereby he can claim that God is ontologically word and the biblical narrative is “the final truth of God’s own reality.”

For Jenson, it is the fully historical Jesus Christ who needs to be identified with the second person of the Trinity. There is no logos asarkos. The Logos is preexistent only as the Father’s eternal decision of election. He thus rejects any abstraction between the economic and immanent Trinity.

He consequently argues that impassibility is an alien pagan “theological” notion that

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[65] Ibid., 103, 140.
[66] Jenson first allows talk of the logos asarkos as a counter-factual possibility introduced to allow that God could have still been the God he is without creation. He later rejects this. Ibid., 141.
[67] Ibid., 139–40.
[68] Ibid., 108.
does not belong to Christian theology. Indeed it is the origin (or at least main engine) of the trinitarian and Christological controversies of the early church. Yet Jenson also rejects any straightforward description of God as passible.

This *via media* is achieved in the following way: God is to be conceived of in temporal terms: God is past, present and future, but the future is the ontologically determinative reality. God’s unity is the paradoxical unity of death and resurrection, conceived of as the dramatic coherence of God’s story: God, as we have seen, is ontologically word.

God’s transcendence is, therefore, guarded in three ways: by his futurity (the Spirit), by making God always the subject of history, and by—at least up until his post-Systematics work—an appeal to voluntarism: God could have been other than he chosen to be. God, therefore, genuinely suffers the events of the biblical narratives, but as his future is ontologically determinative, God is not to be called simply ‘passible’ either. Jenson’s construal of impassibility hangs, therefore, on the coherence of bold theological moves.

The greatest difficulty facing Jenson’s system is an internal one: it appears to suffer from self-referential incoherence. There is a fundamental ontology present at every critical moment of his thought—from his very understanding of ‘religion,’ through to his understanding of Jesus’ death and resurrection—that distorts the very biblical narrative where he purports to begin. Given his starting-point—seeking to avoid the distorting effects of western philosophy by developing his theology and metaphysics from God’s revelation—this looks serious indeed. If this analysis

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69Despite the otherwise “remarkable” evangelising of the early Church’s “antecedent Hellenism.” Note that Jenson identifies what is normally called ancient Greek ‘philosophy’ as ‘theology.’ Jenson, *Systematic Theology vol. 1*, 90.

70Ibid., 103–132.

71See: Jenson, “Ipse Pater”.


74See: ibid., 65; 159–61; Jenson, *Visible words*, 54.

75See: Jenson, “Ipse Pater”.

76See the critique below for the justification of this claim.

77See, again below. For an example of his thought on death and resurrection see: Jenson, *On Thinking the Human*, 13.

78For Jenson’s starting point, see: Jenson, *Systematic Theology vol. 1*, 9; 21.
is correct, by simultaneously laying bare the contradiction within his own system, and calling attention to the lack of fidelity to scripture at important junctures, the internal warrant for his system is jeopardised.

There are also several lines of external critique to follow. As a theologian seeking to be faithful to the Church, Jenson needs not only to justify his proposal in terms of scripture but also in terms of the church’s tradition—particularly its creeds.⁷⁹ What he must do is therefore trace a narrative of the genesis and then distortion of Trinitarian and Christological thought, a distortion from which he is recovering. This is just what he does.⁸⁰

Yet this narrative—particularly his interpretation of Cyril of Alexandria and Maximus the confessor—is a contentious one. Consequently these readings and the implications of any major oversights must be considered.

There are also questions about his Trinitarian positions: the relationship between God and world, the nature of being, the nature of time, and the necessity of death for the sealing of personal identity. Each of these poses difficulties given my control beliefs, and make following his proposal on impassibility deeply problematic.

Jenson’s proposal will, therefore, be shown to be problematic as it stands. His thesis cannot simply be taken as resolving the question of God’s impassibility but rather as suggesting both inadequate directions and avenues for further constructive work.

We turn now to a summary of Hart’s thought.

1.8 Summary of Hart’s Thought

Hart defines God’s impassability as the infinite fullness of the trinitarian movement of donation and reception (God’s love as act), rather than in terms of the abstract remoteness often associated with the doctrine.⁸¹ Hart offers three related arguments

⁷⁹ See: Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 35–41; Jenson, Canon and Creed, 81.
⁸⁰ See, particularly: Jenson, Triune Identity.
⁸¹ This encompasses “impassability, immutability, and nonsuccessive eternity.” Hart, Beauty, 166–67.
for the necessity of impassibility: one ontological, one ethical and one soteriological.

Ontologically he takes Anselm’s id quo maius cogitari nequil as a kind of litmus test for discerning when we are talking about the “transcendent source of all being” and when we are “fabricating for ourselves a metaphysical fable.” If God’s “possibility exceeds his actuality,” which passibility would imply, then he fails this test and thus would not be the God of Christian theology.

Morally, Hart argues that if one tries to assert that God finds himself in Jesus tout court then “in specifying this one historical object God must also specify the entire web of historical and cosmic contingencies in which this object subsists.” Every historical actuality in the world, even the most horrific, would become necessary for God to be the God he is. Thus any theologian (like say, Moltmann) who tries to reduce the “moral distance” between God and creation by importing passibility into God’s being through Jesus Christ will succeed only in “describing a God who is the metaphysical ground of Auschwitz.”

Finally, it is the logic of salvation itself to which Hart appeals, suggesting that impassibility is vital to the hope offered by the Christian evangel. The incarnation achieves a miracle of transformation: while the Logos has suffered through his human nature, the apatheia of the divine nature was preserved, and it was precisely through this fact that he was able to bear the sufferings of Easter “as an act of saving love.” Sin and death are slain and we are brought into the “radiant shelter of his divine peace, his apatheia.” This is the good news of theosis.

Hart maintains a systematic coherence for this position by relying upon an understanding of God’s being as simple. Additionally he makes several other relevant moves: he adopts the particular form of analogy analogia entis articulated by Erich Przywara, ‘participation’ is seen as the ground of being, a commitment is made to the

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82Hart, “No Shadow”, 189; See also: Hart, “Impassibility as Transcendence”.
84Ibid., 191.
8585Ibid., 204.
8686Ibid., 203.
real distinction, God’s infinity is seen as God’s being boundless (having overcome all intervals), and salvation is understood as universal.⁸⁹

Hart’s system has no obvious internal flaw which threatens the integrity of his system. Nonetheless there are some internal questions which arise. Most of these are driven by Hart’s habit of omitting argumentation for some of the finer details of his argument (in one case pointing interested parties to a selection of other resources). This often means that when difficulties arise one is forced to guess both what position Hart takes and what his response might be. This is seen in his understanding of analogy, participation, and the real distinction.

In terms of external critique I reject both divine simplicity and Hart’s universalism. Divine simplicity is found to be fraught with difficulties that outweigh any benefit of adopting it, while Hart’s articulation of universalism and the philosophical and theological impetus towards it is found to offer no defeater for my present beliefs.

Hart’s proposal is, therefore, inadequate as it stands. His thesis cannot simply be taken as resolving the question of God’s impassibility but rather as suggesting avenues for further constructive work.⁹⁰

Now that we have seen a summary of Jenson and Hart’s thought, we can turn to a summary of the overall project.

1.9 Summary of Wider Project

Hart and Jenson both rely on certain understandings of how scripture speaks of God’s relationship with the world, on the implications of the early church’s creedal decisions, and on particular philosophical ontologies in their construals of God’s relationship with the world. These three areas, then, form critical areas to be investigated. The results of these investigations will form the data and control beliefs

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⁸⁹Hart, “God, Creation, Evil”.
⁹⁰Hart’s work is, furthermore, seeing wider currency than the purely academic community. A podcast was recently brought to my attention wherein a reader wrote to William Lane Craig with issues that he was struggling with arising from, in part, Hart’s work. By interacting with Hart’s work I will be able to speak to this broader readership. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUZWLZ9mO8o
which will be necessary both to engage in the external critique of Hart and Jenson’s projects and for the subsequent constructive work on impassibility.

A brief statement of how the last two of these areas of exploration will be approached is appropriate.\(^9^1\) The exploration of the philosophical issues necessary for understanding and evaluating the ontological decisions each thinker makes will use the tools of analytic philosophy, a resource often neglected in this debate.\(^9^2\) The survey of the early church’s creedal decisions will be made in conversation with key thinkers in the Church’s past. Given that both thinkers devote particular attention to Cyril of Alexandria and Maximus the Confessor, these figures will feature prominently.

In each of these lines of inquiry the relevant issues will be engaged \textit{only} inasmuch as and to the extent that their loci bear on the question of divine impassibility and assessment of the thought of Hart and Jenson. With these results the internal and external critique of each thinker can be completed, followed by the constructive work on impassibility.

The final part of the thesis is then possible: interaction with the critiques offered to theology by post-phenomenological ontologies of violence. It is the question of violence that gives Hart’s main work its shape,\(^9^3\) yet insofar as his answer depends on the cohesion of his system \textit{his answer} cannot be regarded as adequate.\(^9^4\) While John Milbank’s own attempts to answer such narratives offer important insights,\(^9^5\) he ultimately suffers similar difficulties with fidelity to the biblical narrative in his work.\(^9^6\) So too René Girard.\(^9^7\)

\(^9^1\)I have already offered comment on my method of approaching biblical texts above. The current biblical scholarship that will serve as a model for this exploration can be seen in works such as: Cole, \textit{God the Peacemaker}, \textit{God Who Became Human}; O’Donovan, \textit{Resurrection and Moral Order}; Vanhoozer, \textit{Remythologising Theology}; Wright, \textit{New Testament and the People of God}. For a short general survey of some contemporary works on impassibility see: Keating and White, “Introduction”.

\(^9^2\)The analytic philosophers who will be particularly helpful here are Nicholas Wolterstorff, Alvin Plantinga, William Vallicella, and Barry Miller. See, for example: Miller, \textit{Fullness of Being}; Plantinga, \textit{Does God Have a Nature?}; Vallicella, \textit{Paradigm Theory}; Wolterstorff, “Divine Simplicity”.

\(^9^3\)Hart, \textit{Beauty}, 1-3.

\(^9^4\)For the reasons given above.

\(^9^5\)See, for example: Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given?”, \textit{Theology and Social Theory}.

\(^9^6\)See the critique in: Horton, \textit{Covenant and Salvation}.

\(^9^7\)Though not classifying himself as a theologian, his work on the inseparable link between violence and the sacred explicitly appeals to Jesus’s crucifixion as a subversion of the normal sacrificial order: Girard, \textit{Job, Like Lightning, Scapegoat}; Girard, Oughourlian, and Lefort, \textit{Hidden}. For a more general
There has been work done in relation to this question with far more attention to the biblical narrative by Hans Boersma in his *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross*. What he does not do, however, is engage the work of either Hart or Jenson, nor address the question of *apatheia* and the central questions that are raised by it.⁹⁸

There is, therefore, room for contribution to this part of the debate. Indeed the general shape of this project, especially in bringing Hart and Jenson together in conversation with each other, while also employing the resources of analytic philosophy is unique in the literature.⁹⁹ The resulting construction will contribute to the important and ongoing conversation between theology and the modern world on the question of violence in a way that addresses some of the gaps of the existing literature.

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⁹⁸His discussion instead approaches the issue from the angle of election. See chapters 2 and 3 in: Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality*. See also, another recent evangelical work on the trinity and suffering that addresses neither Hart nor Jenson: McCall, *Forsaken*.

⁹⁹As far as I have been able to discern.
Chapter 2

Robert Jenson

Robert Jenson is an extraordinarily creative American Lutheran theologian. One of the pillars of his thought is an ‘anti-religious’ critique which eschews all metaphysical thought not baptised by the Gospel. The result is what Jenson calls ‘revisionary metaphysics.’¹ Time, being, history, space—amongst others—are all baptised, such that the only point of connection between God and the world is the man Jesus Christ who is the eternal Son.²

To put it somewhat differently, the heart of this metaphysical lustration is an understanding of the Trinity developed with a Lutheran-Cyrillian Christology and Barth’s doctrine of election.³ The result is a system which is deeply original.⁴

Jenson is an important conversation partner, both for the role of the evangel in his methodology and his ensuing articulation of impassibility. It is also worth noting that Jenson’s work is growing in prominence, and is seen as an important position to interrogate, particularly around issues of the relationship between time and eternity and Christology. Fifteen years ago Wolfhart Pannenberg expressed shock that

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¹See, for a good introduction to this: Wright, “Introduction”.
²See, among many others: Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 71–86.
³The concepts so far touched upon will become clear below. The nature of the anti-religious critique will be developed from section 1.1.2.1 until the end of 1.1. Jenson’s doctrine of the Trinity will be touched upon in the development of section 1.1 and examined in detail in section 1.2.1. His Christology will be examined in 1.2.2. See, for a good summary: Wright, Dogmatic Aesthetics, 14.
⁴For just this reason the reader should not be fooled by the beguiling simplicity of Jenson’s prose—his uniqueness means that the familiar has often become alien.
Jenson was not at the centre of the American academic establishment.⁵ The last ten years have seen a growing number of books and articles interacting with his work, and the last few years have seen two monographs published.⁶ Despite this growing body of literature, Robert Jenson has been oft criticised and has had few champions. This has begun to change in the last few years, and it has opened the door to a richer interaction with Jenson’s work.⁷

While I am often critical of Jenson’s work I am grateful for the way that both he and his defenders have forced me to think and rethink what it means to do theology. My own theology has become far more shaped by Jenson—either positively or negatively—than I would have ever suspected. In accordance with the methodology outlined above, let us then move on to my engagement with Jenson’s work, starting with my internal critique.

### 2.1 Internal Critique

Jenson begins his theology with a rejection of all attempts to offer a pre-theological justification for theology. Philosophy and natural theology as possible starting points for theology are rejected. Indeed, ‘philosophy’ is, for Jenson, simply a form a theology.⁸ The theologian must, therefore, work from God’s self-revelation.⁹ From this starting point Jenson maintains that he is inexorably led to the conclusions of his theological project. It is this claim that is to be evaluated here.

The first major outline of Jenson’s theological system is seen in his third major work, *God After God*, published in 1969.¹⁰ Jenson describes it as his “weirdest” work, though one with which he is still mostly in agreement.¹¹ This work, while early, is

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⁵Pannenberg, “Trinitarian Synthesis”, 49.
⁷This is particularly true in the case of Stephen J. Wright who finds very little to criticise in Jenson’s work. Wright, *Dogmatic Aesthetics*, “Introduction”.
⁹Ibid., 9.
¹⁰Jenson, *After God*.
¹¹See the preface to: Jenson, *After God*. See also section 2.1.9.1 for textual support for this in Jenson’s mature work.
one in which some of the most critical and characteristic aspects of Jenson’s thought are already present. It is also in this work that a major structural weakness in Jenson’s thought becomes manifest.

This internal critique will, therefore, have the following order. I will begin by outlining Jenson’s argument in God After God (drawing on other work where necessary). This will be followed by a demonstration of this structural weakness, before evaluating whether this weakness is one that can be said to be present in his more recent work. To this we now turn.

2.1.1 Jenson’s Starting Point: Barth’s Project

In God After God Jenson begins from and works beyond Barth’s project.¹² In it Jenson argues that the God posited by Western ‘philosophy’—a God of pure presence arrived at by the negation of time—is fundamentally incompatible with Christianity.¹³ In Greek religious thought it is the changeless and therefore past-determined reality in beings by which things are.¹⁴ The Greek religious God is that insight writ large.¹⁵

It is important to understand what is meant by religion here. It is not the “fundamental directness to a purpose beyond our present grasp, which is the essential reality of man [sic].”¹⁶ It is rather the “the phenomena which occur as we enact that directedness, which …will inevitably be one or another attempt to evade the realities of time, a quest for eternity which must be a false eternity just because it is posited as the escape from time.”¹⁷ Religion, and the various Gods that it posits are, in other words, a result of the enacting of “human self-transcendence.”¹⁸

Yet in Christianity and Judaism, the primary category of security is (trust in) the

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¹²Jenson’s doctoral thesis was on Barth, which was revised and published as: Jenson, Alpha and Omega.
¹³Jenson, After God, 10-31.
¹⁴Here he is obviously thinking of Platonic Forms and Aristotelean primary substances. ibid., 10-13.
¹⁵Ibid., 10-13.
¹⁶Ibid., 7.
¹⁷Ibid., 7-8.
¹⁸Ibid., 8.
promise of redemption given by God: God’s future new thing as offering freedom from the past.¹⁹ This requires God to have a future, to be able to be other than he presently is.

Furthermore the realm of daemons, the bridge between God’s frozen eternity and our temporality in Platonic religion, is demythologised.²⁰ The ontological space between God and creation became a genuine gap. In the early church this alienation from time—projecting God as changeless existence—was admixed with a religion entreating trust in the promise of a new thing and closing off the daemonic bridge. This led to an intolerable situation reaching its simultaneous zenith and destruction in Barth’s second commentary on Romans.²¹

Jenson understands the second commentary on Romans (hereafter Romans II) in the following way.²² Its main engine is the Kierkegaardian ‘infinite qualitative difference’ between time and eternity.²³ Yet the eternal religious God is understood as the justifier of the ungodly, where justification is an historical action requiring that people are not understood as “being–what–one–was” but rather as being “what one is not yet.”²⁴ In the ensuing dialectics the religious possibility is completely foreclosed, with God’s justification of the ungodly taking place in eternal history and thus unable to be experienced in our history.²⁵

There is no religious bridge to God: “Alienated, past-bound, man can be free for the future only in death—and then it is too late. Only the success of death, only resurrection, can be the act of life from the future free from and for the past.”²⁶ Yet faith is also foreclosed, as the divide between time and eternity means that the context of this overcoming of death is eternal history and is therefore unable to be narrated: humanity can only hear the ‘No’ of God’s negation of time. All Barth can

¹⁹Jenson, After God, 16–19.
²⁰Ibid., 15.
²¹Ibid., 29–31.
²²Note that the following comments on Barth are summaries of Jenson’s understanding of Barth. The fidelity of his reading of Barth is explored in Appendix A.
²³Jenson, After God, 8.
²⁴Ibid., 16.
²⁵Ibid., 30–8.
²⁶Ibid., 18.
do is summon people to hear behind the ‘No’ an inaudible ‘Yes’ of justification.²⁷
Hope for an unnarratable future is the Commentary on Roman’s kerygma.

Barth eventually finds a way beyond this impasse in his later work. It is his ‘trinitarian reversal’ which does this work. Barth replaced the eternity of the Romans II with a narratable eternity: the events of Jesus’ life, his history.²⁸ The events of Jesus Christ’s history, itself the determining event of the life of God, become the determination of everything else that happens: it is the basis of all other history, the determination of humanity, of all things.²⁹ This gives Barth what he needs to attack religion. Religion is the attempt to reach God over a fictitious void: all life is already dependent on Christ.³⁰

Jenson, however, departs from Barth’s position in significant way. We now turn to discover why and how this happens.

2.1.2 Jenson’s Problem with Barth’s Project: Transcendence

After lauding Barth’s fundamental position, Jenson focuses his attention on the issue of transcendence. If Jesus’ history is the eternal event of God’s being, what prevents the distinction between the man Jesus and God collapsing? Were this distinction to collapse then Barth’s whole trinitarian thesis is thwarted as “talk of God is really superfluous.”³¹ Similarly if all history is what happens in Christ’s history, is anything really distinct from God?³² Barth must secure God’s transcendence.³³

Barth secures this transcendence by postulating “a reality of God in himself distinct from God-for-us,” and by joining these two realities by analogy.³⁴ While he rejects the ‘analogy of being’ Barth instead posits the ‘analogy of faith.’³⁵ To understand

²⁷Jenson, After God, 30-8.
²⁸Ibid., 69.
²⁹Ibid., 68-9.
³⁰Ibid., 71.
³¹Ibid., 73-4.
³²Ibid., 73-4.
³³Jenson, After God, 153.
³⁴Ibid., 85.
³⁵The issue of God’s transcendence becomes very important in Jenson’s own theology, I give it particular attention in section 2.2.1.2.
³⁶Jenson, After God, 153.
³⁷Ibid., 85.
how this ‘analogy of faith’ works we must gain some understanding about Barth’s concept of time.

Barth makes a distinction between three ‘times’ in eternity: the pretemporal, the supratemporal and the posttemporal. In supratemporality eternity is simultaneously present to all times. Thus God’s eternity is not cut off from time: it includes it. Election happens pretemporally, and is “only as such also supertemporal and posttemporal.” Yet because God’s eternity is all three ‘times’ God’s decision is not consigned to the past, but is what God lives, is always immediate, can never be gotten ‘behind.’

God’s eternal choice means that “the whole complex of history between God and man is real therein.” It is so in the eternal existence of Jesus Christ in the act of predestination, which is the ‘No’ and ‘Yes’ of Calvary. Humanity is therefore justified and sanctified already—indeed the very possibility of humanity’s existence just is this event of election in which God joins sinful humanity to himself in Christ. Yet, since just this choice is also part of God’s super and post-temporality Barth does not imagine a self-contained, eternal, salvation history. Jesus is the mirror of the eternal decree, but the very mirroring is itself part of the eternal decree. Jesus, both eternal Son and man, is the “sign and reproduction” of the eternal decree. It is Jesus Christ that joins time to eternity, who functions as the perfect analogy of God’s life, the revelation of the hidden God.

Jenson argues that there are two problems with this articulation of transcendence. The first is Barth’s fundamental step of positing a “God-in-himself” as prototype of “God-in-his-revelation.” This leaves Barth with either an empty statement, or “some sort of comparison between God’s own characteristics and his temporal characteristics” which “can only be between timeless and time …a timeless deepest

36 Jenson uses ‘supertemporal’ rather than supratemporal, but given the dominance of the latter in the discussion of Barth’s thought I will ‘supratemporal.’ Jenson, *Alpha and Omega*, 73.
37 Ibid., 73.
38 Ibid., 82.
39 Ibid., 82.
40 Ibid., 90.
41 Ibid., 86-94.
The second is that analogy does nothing to secure the meaning of this split. Analogy, Jenson argues, is another way of referring to ambiguity. This ambiguity is characteristic of Barth’s system.⁴⁴ The reliance on analogy to make the connection between time and eternity is what makes Barth’s theology so “shifting.” By using analogy to preserve God’s transcendence the possibility—against Barth’s own intention—of reading “timeless eternity” into Barth’s theology is present.⁴⁵ The whole history of salvation (and thus our history) can seem to take place in an eternity separated from our time.⁴⁶

Barth, then, points the way for Jenson’s project. But Barth has found no way of maintaining God’s transcendence from the events of revelation in a temporal fashion. The spectre of Hellenistic timeless eternity still haunts his work.

Jenson has mis-read Barth’s project in important ways here. He has taken Barth to understand time and eternity as antithesis by understanding both this relationship—and analogy itself—as ultimately dialectical. He has misconstrued the nature of Barth’s Christological link by reading it from the perspective of a strong version of the communicatio idiomatum. He has also not convincingly exegeted Barth’s version of analogy. Nonetheless, it is clear from the overall direction of Jenson’s project that he almost certainly would have differed from Barth on these points, even if they were read with fidelity.⁴⁷

Jenson’s project can be seen—on his reading of Barth—as the completion of Barth’s rejection of the God of religion. Indeed the guiding principle for Jenson in making an identification of God is: “does it sustain the polemic against religion?”⁴⁸ So then,

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⁴³Jenson, After God, 154.
⁴⁴Ibid., 154.
⁴⁵Ibid., 154.
⁴⁶Jenson’s understanding of analogy will be examined more closely in section 2.2.3.
⁴⁷I have argued for these points in detail in Appendix A and see, for example, the introduction to: Hunsinger, Read Karl Barth. Further references to be found in the appendix.
⁴⁸Indeed, Jenson argues that the “theological task” set by the Commentary on Roman’s deconstruction of Christian religion has four sub-questions (the presence of these questions—and implied answers—at this early stage of his work demonstrates a remarkable continuity in Jenson’s theology): 1. “What is the relation of the one whom believers call ‘God’ to the timeless God of religion? This is the problem of ‘natural theology,’ and the critical question throughout Barth’s subsequent work.” 2.
how does Jenson’s articulate his understanding of transcendence?

2.1.3 Jenson’s Construal of Transcendence

Jenson’s proposal to avoid the problems he has highlighted with Barth’s work is as beguilingly simple as it ends up being radical. Jenson has rejected a timeless reality of God as a means of preserving God’s transcendence. He thus conceived God’s eternity “within the terms of time itself. …as a certain pattern of that temporality itself.” God’s transcendence must be his “futurity to what he already is with and for us.” God’s futurity is the ground of his freedom.

God is a certain pattern of temporality. This pattern is to be understood as each member of the Trinity constituting one of the poles of time. The continuity, or oneness, of “the three modes of God …these temporal separations,” is to be understood in the category “communication, utterance, language.” God is a “hermeneutic event …a Word.”

There is no gap between God and his revelation, for God is himself the communication that forms his self-revelation, but God’s freedom is preserved in his futurity. Jenson writes in a manner that shows both the tightness of the identification of God with his revelation, and the transcendence that Jenson argues God can still find in the poles of time: God’s futurity is transcendence “to what he already is with and for

“The philosophically fundamental problem is: How does believing language using ‘God’ work as a language? This is not so much the problem of what ‘God’ means as the problem of how it means whatever it means—if anything.” 3. “At the centre of the present study is the question of the identity of God. Which being do we mean by ‘God’? The relation of this question to the polemic against the God of religion is obvious: If not the constant Presence, then what?” 4. “We can, moreover, identify God only by using descriptions, by saying things like ‘God is the one who …’: e.g. ‘God is the one who never changes,’ or ‘God is the one who made everything.’ To identify God, we have to decide what logical sort of clauses to use in these descriptions. Therefore the question of God’s identity leads straight to the question of his being, to the question of what sort of entity God is: a thing? an idea? a happening? This question and the second question can only be answered together.” Jenson, After God, 47–48.

49Ibid., 155.
50Ibid., 155, italics original.
51Ibid., 155, italics original.
52Ibid., 155.
53Ibid., 155, italics original.
To put it as he does in his later work: “God is not eternal in that he adamantly remains as he began, but in that he always creatively opens to what he will be; not in that he hangs on, but in that he gives and receives; not in that he perfectly persists, but in that he perfectly anticipates.”⁵⁵ We have arrived at the key theses of Jenson’s theological project. They are present in, and developed throughout, his corpus.⁵⁶

Having identified these theses we will now ask where Jenson derives the authority for holding them from.

### 2.1.4 Jenson’s Exegetical Justification

At this critical point in *God After God* Jenson engages in an exegesis of Jesus’ resurrection appearances in order to show the scriptural warrant for his conception of God’s futurity. Jenson begins with the Gospel accounts and once again with an affirmation of Barth: the resurrection is “the temporal event of God” and Jesus’ appearances “are the centre of God’s self-revelation, their time the time taken from our time to be God’s eternity. ‘He is risen’ was—and is—the gospel.”⁵⁷ In other words, studying these accounts is definitive for discovering how to understand God.

Jenson’s summary of what these accounts show is worth listening to at length:

> If we look at the tradition of Jesus’ resurrection-appearances, we do not get the impression of a pure, perfectly fulfilled present without past or fu-

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⁵⁴Jenson, *After God*, 155, italics mine.
⁵⁵Jenson, *Systematic Theology vol. 1*, 217.
⁵⁶Looking at his main written works, the reader will be able to see these theses, as already noted, present in: Jenson, *After God, Alpha and Omega*. It underlies his development of theological speech in: Jenson, *Knowledge of Things*. The Trinity is developed along exactly these lines in: Jenson, *Triune Identity*. The implications undergird his thought in: Jenson, *Story and Promise*. It is, naturally, what Jenson reads as the similarity of Edwards’ project to his own at these precise points which receives approbation in (see, for example, the chapter entitled ‘Recovery of the Word’): Jenson, *America’s Theologian*. The failure to recognise these fundamental truths is the ‘basic flaw’ in ecumenical theology in: Jenson, *Unbaptized God*. These features are omnipresent in his most mature work: Jenson, *Systematic Theology vol. 1*, *Systematic Theology vol. 2*. The many articles and book chapters he has written are often developed from or explications of these basic theological themes, which will be seen as my argument develops.

ture. We may finally come to say that Jesus’ risen presence is the present of God, at the union of his future and his past. But the appearances themselves—and so also God’s present—do not have the temporal structure of a moment possessing its future itself.

On the contrary, the impression given by tradition is rather that of events wholly elusive in their present, occurring only as pointers to their own future. …The risen reality of Jesus is attested and described exactly as a series of appearances, not as a series of experiences of a reality generally available in the present. …The accounts make it quite clear that the risen Jesus is transcendent to his present givenness because he is not yet what he is as the risen one: ‘Do not touch me for I have not yet risen to the Father.’ The risen Jesus is elusive because he is not present but future: his appearances are appearances of what is not yet.⁵⁸

In terms of attention to the text, Jenson argues that before the resurrection Jesus proclaimed the kingdom, after the resurrection “he proclaims himself in that he proclaims the kingdom.”⁵⁹ Jesus proclaims that the fullness of divine rule has been given to him. The disciples confess that Jesus confirms their hopes.⁶⁰ Yet “the Kingdom does not thereby lose its futurity; there is no suggestion that now is the Kingdom. Rather Jesus himself, now personally identified with the Kingdom, has become future.”⁶¹

Jesus’ appearances are therefore not “pure fulfilment” but “pure promise.”⁶² The risen Jesus’ proclamations are “wholly a matter of imperatives and promises for what is to be …commissions, sendings. And they were promises of the final fulfilment, a fulfilment now characterised as fulfilment precisely of the resurrection: ‘And see, I am with you through the days left before the end of the age.’”⁶³

This is seen, finally, in the two “central accounts” in Matthew and Luke which are

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⁵⁹Ibid., 158.
⁶⁰Ibid., 158.
⁶¹Ibid., 158.
⁶²Ibid., 158.
⁶³Ibid., 158.
⁶⁴Matt. 28:20. ibid., 158.
“closely parallel in function and structure” and have at their heart a “mission com-
misson.”\textsuperscript{64} Jenson notes that they end with two verbally parallel sayings: “And, see, I will …” Jenson then observes that Luke puts—in the place of Matthew’s promise of “Jesus’ own presence with the disciples”—the “promise of the Father.” Thus “we are not over-interpreting if we recognise that the presence of the risen Lord and the promise of the Father play the same role in the two parallel sayings, that the risen Jesus’ presence is a promise.”\textsuperscript{65}

Jenson concludes that “promise is the ontological category for the reality of the risen Lord. Jesus appeared to the witnesses of the Resurrection as what he was not yet, but would be: the Lord of the End.”\textsuperscript{66}

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\textsuperscript{64}Matthew 28:16–20; Luke 24:46–49
\textsuperscript{65}Jenson, \textit{After God}, 159.
\textsuperscript{66}ibid., 158–9. In terms of what Jenson is doing with Jesus’ futurity and presence, the following argument—developed without reference to any scriptures—from a work two years previous to \textit{God After God} might offer some clarification.

In terms of Jesus’ presence to the church “Protestants evoke him by talking about him,” while “Catholics have more typically located the supernatural Jesus as the imperceptible substance on the altar, hidden behind the perceptible characteristics of bread and wine.” Both are unacceptable: the root problem is that “we no longer apprehend supernatural beings, and so not the supernatural Jesus of traditional worship.” Protestant worship “disintegrates to moralism” as what is left is “talk about the past Jesus of Nazareth on the one hand and one or other sort of existential address to the worshippers on the other.” Catholic worship “turns to superstition.”

The solution: “If it is not a ghostly extra entity that unites Jesus’ past and our present and so is his presence to us, then it must be that this union occurs as the action of worship itself. What \textit{we do} and suffer together around Jesus’ story is itself his presence and posits the determination of our destinies by his.” His presence occurs in action and proclamation. We enact Jesus’ story and the acting “accompanies the telling of the Gospel.” In proclamation the enacted past event is “freed from the past into the future and present.”

This proclamation must not be mythic (it is always inappropriate, but especially so in secular culture which “can be defined as one in which mythic assertions are bound to seem either false or pointless”). What would it look like? “It would be to narrate the past story of Jesus and to proclaim this as the future without any attempt to meditate the presence of the past and future Jesus by \textit{what} is said; rather, only by the present \textit{sayings} of it. The pattern of language which is to be avoided is of the sort: ‘Jesus as Jesus came to his disciples of old and as he will come to at the end of days, so now he comes into our hearts,’ or ‘…onto the altar.’ Or again, ‘Jesus who forgave the dying thief and who one day will judge us all, will forgive you too if you will only come to him in prayer,’ or ‘…in confession.’ We must learn to leave off the last member of such series—for what is in the present is not an entity whose current characteristics we can describe, can talk about. What we can talk \textit{about}, without assuming supernatural entities, is what has happened and will happen; what happens now is this \textit{talking}. …We talk about Jesus’ past and future; what is now is the deed of telling that story and enacting it as we tell it.”

The presence of Jesus “the historical person who is also the coming lord—which presence makes it possible to address him—is not in a supernatural being who embraces both historical person and
At this point we must step outside the purely internal parameters of this critique to demonstrate—briefly—how eccentric this exegesis is.\(^{67}\) Hans Conzelmann wrote his *Theology of Luke* from the perspective of critical scholarship in mid-twentieth century Germany. Conzelmann writes that in Luke’s theology, with the resurrected Christ the disciples had Jesus’ “real presence.”\(^{68}\) After the ascension, the Spirit is sent as a substitute for this presence: the Father’s promise is the Spirit and not Jesus.\(^{69}\) Jesus does not begin his reign until the ascension, but at that point he is understood to be both future judge and to be exercising his power in the present (though, Conzelmann argues, in a subordinationist fashion).\(^{70}\) The resurrection both vindicates Jesus and is proof that there is a “general resurrection and a judgement” for us.\(^{71}\)

Joel Green is on the left-wing of evangelicalism. He notes—in comment upon the resurrection narrative Jenson is dealing with (Luke 24)—that “Jesus is now represented as alive beyond the grave as an embodied person. Jesus’ affirmation is emphatic—‘It is I myself!’ ‘It is really me!’—intimating continuity between these phases of Jesus’ life, before crucifixion and after resurrection.”\(^{72}\) Furthermore he notes the pervasive emphasis on *fulfilment* in Jesus’ address to the disciples and that his death and resurrection are spoken of in such terms: “The point of Jesus’ words is …that the truth to which all of Scripture points has now been realised!”\(^{73}\) The ‘promise of the Father’ is the Holy Spirit.\(^{74}\)

David Jeffrey writes for the ‘Brazos Theological Commentary’ series, a series which emphasises theological interpretation and interaction with the Church Fathers. Drawing upon such interaction, he emphasises the physicality of the resurrection body, coming lord; that presence is exactly the present occurrence of the word about him and our enacting of that word.” Jenson, *Religion Against Itself*, 49–60.

\(^{67}\) This demonstration will be restricted to Luke simply to limit scope, and because Luke is where Jenson ultimately draws the conclusion that the risen Jesus is to be construed as ontological promise. The following commentaries were chosen to reflect the perspectives of different methodological lines. Jenson’s eccentricity in the use of scripture will be shown again in the external critique in section 2.2.1.2.


\(^{69}\) Ibid., 204.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 177–8.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 205.


\(^{73}\) Ibid., 856, italics mine.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 859.
with its concomitant newness: the narrative demonstrates “the real presence of Christ in his world.”²⁵ He emphasises the fulfilment motif, and makes the connection that what the disciples are to witness to is “all that has happened and of its meaning.”²⁶ The promise of the Father is again understood to be the Spirit.²⁷

In none of these commentaries is there anything approaching Jenson’s understanding of Jesus’ presence as pure promise, and a fortiori, there is nothing close to the conclusion that the correct ontological category for understanding Jesus’ presence is promise. The only way to account for this eccentricity of interpretation is to conclude that there is a controlling category through which Jenson is interpreting the text: there is a control belief at work here. Let us how this judgement can be used in our internal critique of Jenson’s thought.

2.1.5 Jenson on Scripture

Having briefly stepped outside the internal critique the insight gained must be brought inside for internal use. David Bentley Hart cites a conversation with Jenson regarding his understanding of scripture which is important. Jenson understands his own argument as arising from his reading of scripture:

> It is extremely easy to read Jenson merely as a representative of the German idealist tendency in modern dogmatics, and specifically as a disciple of the greatest of the German idealists, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, in his early phase. But Jenson actually, it seems, takes his arguments from his own reading of Scripture; I have it on good authority (Jenson himself, to be exact) that Schelling’s thought has had no appreciable direct influence on Jenson’s at all.²⁸

In other words Jenson understands his use of scripture to be both foundational to and—by implication—in no way incompatible with his own project. The bridge by which this critique can be given internal warrant is by asking whether Jenson’s

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²⁶Ibid., 288.
²⁷Ibid., 289.
understanding of scripture gives his system internal warrant for the eccentricity of his reading. In other words, is there a control belief that has internal warrant to so shape his reading of scripture, which is itself meant to serve as the foundation?

Within the text of *God After God* itself Jenson does not address his understanding of scripture. In his discussion of Barth, however, he makes clear that Barth’s own self-understanding is that his doctrine of the Trinity must be consonant with church tradition.⁷⁹ That Jenson agrees with this fundamental assertion is implicit here and explicit by the time of *The Triune Identity*.⁸⁰ Jenson is seeking to be faithful to church tradition, even in critically engaging with it.

It can, furthermore, be inferred that Jenson is not consciously seeking to distort scripture. Insofar as he follows Barth in positioning scripture as the starting point for his theology, this is done precisely because any other method is distorting. This is explicit in his systematics:

> “Internal biblical proof of the system that follows can therefore only be the system itself as it presents itself in the role of a general hermeneutical principle for Scripture taken as a single complex text, that is, as it marshals the structured whole of the Bible to its own systematic and argumentative purposes and just thereby displays or fails to display the coherent sense that the Bible itself is antecedently presumed to make.”⁸¹

Later on in the same text Jenson writes:

> “All texts need a true community as interpreter; in the church, Scripture has just such a defender. … Every proposal of dogma, like every proposal of theology generally, must be tested against Scripture and existing dogma.”⁸²

A more equivocal witness appears, however, in his later *Canon and Creed*. In what I take to be the fundamental thesis of the work Jenson argues that: “The community positioned to perceive what a scriptural text is truly up to is the church, and the

⁸⁰ Jenson, *Triune Identity*.
⁸¹ Jenson, *Systematic Theology* vol. 1, 33.
⁸² Ibid., 40.
creed is the set of instructions for discerning this agenda. The needed suspicious eye is the eye trained in the church to distrust all human religiosity, also as it may appear in Scripture. At this late stage in Jenson’s career, he asserts that the controlling categories for interpreting scripture are creeds (which he interprets as anti-religious), the church’s interpretation of scripture, and an anti-religious agenda.

As a Lutheran theologian, it is possible that the anti-religious agenda is being consciously used by Jenson to determine the ‘canon within the canon.’ What is clear from the wording above is that the anti-religious agenda is granted control over what is to be accepted from the scriptural text itself. Here is a control belief that governs Jenson’s reading of scripture which fits the pattern of Jenson’s reading we evaluated above.

Given the 41 year gap between God After God and Canon and Creed we cannot simply read this statement as representing Jenson’s views in the former work. What is clear, however, is that the anti-religious agenda is already operative as a control belief in God After God. Does this, then, give Jenson internal warrant for his distorted reading of the Gospel accounts outlined above?

If we recall the shape of Jenson’s theology then we should see that the trinitarian structure of Jesus’ death and resurrection is the anti-religious centre of the scriptural narrative: ‘He is risen’ is the Gospel. By the logic of Jenson’s own system, therefore, the warrant for his anti-religious control belief must come from the narrative of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

It is clear, moreover, that Jenson is seeking to read this text without distortion: “we are not over-interpreting” he says. Indeed he uses fidelity to Scripture to evaluate other theological proposals. There is, therefore, no prima-facie internal warrant for such a distortion of the text, and it is illegitimate on Jenson’s grounds.

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83Jenson, Canon and Creed, 81.
84If this is true, an external critique of his thought could reject the adequacy of positing a ‘canon with the canon’ from an evangelical perspective.
85And, indeed, before, see: Jenson, Religion Against Itself.
86Jenson, After God, 157.
87Ibid., 159.
88See, for example, a recent book review Jenson evaluates a theological proposal based on the propriety of its scriptural interpretation, as well, interestingly, as the fidelity of its use of the Church fathers. Jenson, “Athens and Jerusalem”.

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Having established this, we must now ask what control belief is operating in Jenson’s use of these texts. An answer presents itself on the very next page of *God After God* after his exegesis.

### 2.1.6 Jenson’s Anthropology

Jenson moves straight from this exegesis to an outline of his understanding of a human being. This understanding is that, a “human being is being in a not-yet.” This is because human beings are judged by the future: present deeds only become ours in what comes of them, present deeds are “not yet what I must and shall become.” Indeed, only when the facts of a person’s life are interpreted in relation to the future do they have meaning.

Grasping this “intrinsic determination by the future” is apprehending God. Yet we apprehend this only religiously, we apprehend the God of religion: the religious defence is the “the alienation of our lives from the truth” in that “we apprehend our futurity only by attempting to evade it.”

This religious alienation can be healed only if the future has specific content (i.e. it is “narratable”) and if that content “is not among the possibilities of the present.” Jesus’ appearances have exactly these characteristics: 1. Jesus’ appearance in the past, as future to what is already is, gives a narratable content to the future. 2. That the possibilities that are narrated (death and resurrection) are in discontinuity to the possibilities of our present.

It is apparent then, that Jenson’s anthropology requires Jesus’ resurrection appearances to have just the characteristic he discerns in the text. It looks like his anthropology is a good candidate for the control belief operative in his reading of scripture. What becomes clear, however, in the latter part of *God After God* is that there is in

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89 Jenson, *After God*, 159.
90 Ibid., 159.
91 Ibid., 159.
92 Ibid., 159.
93 Ibid., 160.
94 Jenson draws on Heidegger to note that death is never something “I can do; it is never an event in my present.” Ibid., 160.
fact an ontology which itself lies behind this anthropology, and which, therefore, is the most likely candidate for the control belief we are seeking. To this ontology we now turn.

2.1.7 Jenson’s Ontology

Jenson argues that ‘Being’ arises in the fundamental question “who am I?”⁹⁵ Socrates is the fountainhead of this reflection. The notion of being therefore raises the question of the relationship between what we are and what we shall or ought to become.⁹⁶ When I ask the question of being I both examine my past and project a future. In projecting a future we make a choice.⁹⁷ ‘Being’ is therefore “what comes between given past and fulfilling future, between facts and hopes.”⁹⁸ In the competing understandings of being on offer in intellectual history “whether to unite or separate them [past and future] is what has been in dispute.”⁹⁹

What is at stake in the question of being is how to narrate our lives. What is meant by someone’s life is a selection of events that have happened to their body, events “which belong together by dramatic coherence,” i.e. a story.¹⁰⁰ Because “the dramatic coherence of a story is given by its conclusion” this is inevitably a question about the future.¹⁰¹

One way to answer the question of being, therefore, is to say that “we already are what we are to be, so that the present choice and decision is not a break, but the immanent development of a changeless essential nature.”¹⁰² The opposite view is that “what I am to be must always be won from what I am, that the choice of purpose is a true choice only if it is defiance of what the past would dictate, even if I finally choose just that. My being is my winning of freedom from the past.”¹⁰³

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⁹⁵Jenson, After God, 180.
⁹⁶Ibid., 180–82.
⁹⁷Ibid., 180–81.
⁹⁸Ibid., 180–82.
⁹⁹Ibid., 180–82.
¹⁰⁰Ibid., 180–82.
¹⁰¹Ibid., 180–82.
¹⁰²Ibid., 180–82.
¹⁰³Ibid., 180–182.
¹⁰⁴Ibid., 180–82.
¹⁰⁵Ibid., 180–82.
This last view is the nihilist option (Sartre): the position that “being and nothingness are the same.” If being (that between the past and future) is always negation of the past then being is negation of what is, is nothingness. All nihilisms ultimately assert “that man is his own God, creating his meaning out of nothing but his miraculous choice. Consistent nihilism only adds the recognition that if I am God, then God is the devil.”¹⁰⁴ These two options are both ‘religious’ options. We once again arrive at the genesis of religion.

Christian faith must, therefore, navigate a median between these positions: “Faith’s understanding of our being insists both that our being is freedom, and that we do not create our purposes by choosing them.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, in contrast to nihilism, this freedom is not located in the individual, but in the communication into which we are born. Freedom that is not self-deification is possible because someone who is called is “given the possibility of choice,” but by another, “one who is what I am not yet.”¹⁰⁶

As others address us an openness to the future built on past understanding (the shared understanding necessary for communication) occurs. Yet being is only achieved by the coherence of the past with the true future. This happens by “a particular word” the gospel: “it is the story of a past event as the future, so that if I play my life as a role in this story, my past and future are one, yet not in what I do, but in the whole plot in which I have my role.”¹⁰⁷

Jenson acknowledges that this definition of Being is widespread within the contemporary theological and philosophical scene in which he was working. He draws on the work of Ernst Fuchs to illustrate his major differences from these schools of thought, but notes that he could have used Ebeling, Gadamer, or even Pannenberg.¹⁰⁸

Fuchs conceives of ‘being’—the “possibility of being called into question”—as time.¹⁰⁹

The gospel saves by promising “us time, thus ending our attempt to have time, and so

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 182.
¹⁰⁶Ibid., 182.
¹⁰⁷Ibid., 182.
¹⁰⁸Ibid., 184-3.
¹⁰⁹Ibid., 184.
freeing us in time for ourselves”—i.e. by causing us to accept that time is “the ground of our life” rather than attempting “to dispose of time” as the ground.¹¹⁰

Yet Jenson argues that Fuchs (and the widespread consensus) must be reversed: “time is [not] the possibility of the true word,” for historical time is made possible by word, more specifically, promise: “All utterance is opening to the future. But only promise gives the future.”¹¹¹ Without promise, the future opened by the purely “formal structure of the event of communication” is “nothingness.” What is promised in the gospel is love, which overcomes the antinomy of hope.¹¹²

Promise precedes historical time, promise creates the future. Being is not, therefore, time but that which creates the possibility of time: promise, word. Therefore “communication is being. …God is the communication that creates our communication … the word to which all other words respond.”¹¹³

That we live by promise is not due to our alienation (falleness). A pre-fall Adam would still “have been able to live in time only because of a specific promise remembered in the past.” Thus “the word is prior to time, if indeed time is historical time. Our existence is temporal self-transcendence because we are addressed, because we live in communication, not the other way around. To live in time is to hope, and the call to the future is the ground of hope.”¹¹⁴

In making this case Jenson argues that he is not moving from an “analysis of being in general” to God. The causality runs the other way: “if the doctrine of being we

¹¹⁰In other words, “language as we receive it, as it precedes us as tradition, is the reality for us of our past, and of the determination of our self-understanding by the past. Yet the event of language, speech in our received language, is precisely the possibility of decision and, therefore, our openness to the future. Thus language is the meeting of past and future, it is the challenge to the future, given by the past: this is ‘being.’” Jenson, After God, 184.

¹¹¹Ibid., 188–9.

¹¹²The antinomy of hope arises in the context of Jenson’s critique of Pannenberg. His question is what happens when the future arrives. Does history stop and thus God become, after all, the God of the past? If not, how? Somehow the end must not close down the openness of reality. This is solved by the promise of the future as love. Love is a “particular relation among specific persons.” The future is never surpassed because God has sealed his identity as love in Jesus, and love is “openness to unbounded possibility.” God is still able to surprise us: hope is not for an object that can be fulfilled and become past, but for love. Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1. See also: Jenson, After God, 178.

¹¹³Ibid., 189–90.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 188–90.
have developed is true, it is a consequence of the gospel’s use of the word ‘God.’\footnote{Jenson, After God, 190.}

We may understand God’s transcendence in the light of this analytic: “God is the word whose future-opening utterance does not depend on a prior word, on a language which would subsist even were this word not spoken. …The language in which God is uttered and which he presupposes is always and only the new language which that utterance seeks as its future.”\footnote{Ibid., 190.} This utterance, which is God, is the Gospel.

This ontology is the perfect fit for the control belief we are seeking. Here we have the necessity of God occurring as ontological promise. The eccentricity of Jenson’s exegesis suggests, against his own assertion, that he has indeed moved from an “analysis of being in general” to God.\footnote{Ibid.} Moreover, by his own admission, this ontology is one derived from his own theological and philosophical milieu. It is beginning to look as though Jenson’s project must suffer self-referential incoherence. There is more to do, however, before this can be settled: we must determine the what Jenson means by the religious quest in light of the above findings.

2.1.8 The ‘Religious Quest’ Revisited

What should be noticed at this juncture is that Jenson’s notion of the ‘God of religion’ is not merely a category for rejecting timelessness, but a critique parasitic on the above ontology. It is not simply an assertion that God must be able to do new things, but one that presupposes the ontological priority of the future. We need only recall one sentence from above: religion, Jenson argues, in the early pages of God After God is a result of the enacting of “fundamental directness to a purpose beyond our present grasp, which is the essential reality of man.”\footnote{Ibid., 7, italics mine.} The italicised phrase, we should now be able to see, expresses the ontology described above.

Let us take stock of Jenson’s thought. Jenson’s whole theological system is formulated as a polemic against the ‘God of religion.’\footnote{In addition to the statements outlined above, and even a casual perusal of virtually any of his}
‘religiously’ of God, we must allow God’s own narrative—captured in scripture—to
guide our descriptions of God’s character. As a result of enacting the anti-religious
polemic (itself contained in scripture and the creeds) we are forced to the conclu-
sion that there can be no gap between God’s revelation and God-in-himself. We
find that scripture’s own testimony points us to conceive of God’s transcendence as
futurity, his being as Word.

If the above analysis is correct, then what is in fact happening here is that at every
critical juncture of this argument, Jenson’s ontology is already acting as control belief.
Crucially, this control belief is not the Gospel itself but—against Jenson’s own stated
theological agenda—philosophy controlling theology. The question now becomes,
does this analysis of—predominantly—God After God have purchase in his mature
thought?

2.1.9 The Applicability of this Critique to His Mature Thought

The first stop on this survey of Jenson’s wider thought is his work immediately prior
to God After God.¹²⁰ This is The Knowledge of Things Hoped For.¹²¹ In this work he
critiques Origen and Aquinas’ understanding of theological language and offers a
constructive formulation of how theological language functions.

At the most significant turning point in this work, Jenson rejects Origen and Aquinas’
proposals. He then reflects on why the flaws of their thought are so apparent to us.
He writes that the clarity of perception we moderns are afforded of these fatal philo-
sophical and theological pitfalls is due to “the triumph of scientific method and the
discovery of the historicity of man’s [sic] being.”¹²² The historicity of humanity’s being
is spoken of by Jenson in these terms:

That man is a historic being means that his creativity is not defined ahead
of time, that what ought to be is not determined by what is. That man
is a being of history means that he exists precisely in that he projects

120 God After God and it were published in the same year, 1969.
121 Jenson, Knowledge of Things.
122 Ibid., 96, italics mine.
his future, in that in free positing of what must and shall be, in free positing of the good, he transcends what he is and has been. It means he is freed from the shackles of an eternally defined ‘nature of man’: that the coincidence of ‘being’ and ‘good’ which underlies the entire image-analogy of language is revealed as a prison from which we are called to escape.

We no longer live in a mythically structured reality (whatever other, perhaps more sinister, delusions we may be prey to); we do not, and are not allowed to, apprehend images or think in analogies. The presuppositions of such apprehensions have been discovered and thereby discredited.¹²³

We are, Jenson argues, “not allowed” to believe certain things because of the “discovery of the historicity of man’s [sic] being.”¹²⁴ Putting aside the absurdity of the notion that we all are called to walk in absolute synchrony though history, it could not be more clear that this ontology is acting as control belief here.¹²⁵ It is also critical to note that there is no scriptural support offered for this assertion.

This same pattern is seen throughout Jenson’s corpus. The Trinity is developed along the lines of Jenson’s above assertions and fundamental ontology in his *Triune*

¹²⁴Ibid., 96.
¹²⁵Jenson’s comments on what we are “not allowed” to do are eerily similar to Bultmann’s argument on the possibility of miracles in the age of the electric light bulb and are subject to the same critique: as Plantinga points out such arguments are historically naïve and nothing but a kind of *force majeure* argument. See: Plantinga, “Two (or more)”, 43. Even if we reduce the scope of his argument to everyone in the know, there are, and were then, well educated people that do not feel compelled to accept this ‘inevitability.’ To take as an example someone with whom Jenson interacts not two pages before this assertion: E.L. Mascall. Jenson, *Knowledge of Things*, 94. Perhaps one might also mention the massive revival of Thomist studies following Pope Leo XIII’s 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, the fruits of which he was almost certainly reaping in his chapter on Aquinas: MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 151.
*Identity*.\(^{126}\) The same pattern of thought occurs in *Story and Promise*.\(^{127}\) Jenson reads Edwards’ project as possessing similarities to his own along the lines of this pattern in *America’s Theologian*.\(^{128}\) The failure to recognise these fundamental truths is the ‘basic flaw’ in ecumenical theology in *Unbaptized God*.\(^{129}\)

To tell this story of continuity in detail would take us beyond the scope of the present critique. Instead we will look in some detail at possibly the most mature and comprehensive development of his thought: his Systematics.\(^{130}\)

### 2.1.9.1 Jenson’s Argument in the Systematics

In the systematics, Jenson’s *prolegomenon* emphasises the impossibility of a pre-theological beginning for theology. Theology must begin from the Gospel:

> If theological prolegomena lay down conceptual conditions of Christian teaching that are not themselves Christian teaching, that are more than a formal demand for coherence and argumentative responsibility, and that in the Western world are therefore theologoumena of Mediterranean paganism, the prolegomena sooner or later turn against the *legomena*.\(^{131}\)

And again:

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\(^{126}\)Jenson, *Triune Identity*. Jenson here seeks to develop warrant for his system from the creeds. The degree to which Jenson can claim fidelity to the creeds will be evaluated in the external critique, particularly in relation to his Christology in section 2.2. It might be suggested that if Jenson were to be understood to be correctly rendering the creeds, then he has the internal warrant for his reading of scripture. Yet insofar as the creeds are intended precisely as an accurate reading of the Christian narrative it is hard to see that this would be a successful argument.

\(^{127}\)Jenson, *Story and Promise*. In this work Jenson argues that the criteria for true Gospel proclamations are: “(1) they are true recollections of Jesus-in-Israel, and (2) they accomplish for their hearers an unconditional promise’s liberation from the law and its bondage to the past.”

\(^{128}\)On which points Edwards naturally receives approbation. see, for example, the chapter entitled ‘Recovery of the Word.’ Jenson, *America’s Theologian*.

\(^{129}\)See, particularly the last three chapters. Jenson, *Unbaptized God*.

\(^{130}\)Jenson published another volume very late in my candidature. It is a series of undergraduate lectures, written in a wonderfully clear manner, but it written in a narratival fashion and does not have the same level of argumentation as his Systematics. I could not find any major step forward in Jenson’s theological understanding contained in it (e.g., in relation to the Son, “you have to think of reality as more constituted in the relationships between things than in the things themselves.” See section 2.2.2. below). I therefore leave this statement unaltered. Jenson, *Bones*, 47.

\(^{131}\)Jenson, *Systematic Theology* vol. 1, 9.
It is a particular and particularly baneful instance of an error earlier noted that theology, when it has acknowledged its own claims to universal scope, has sometimes nevertheless thought it must achieve this by finding the ‘the right’ metaphysics among those offered by officially designated philosophers. …[For example] Bultmann simply adopted those of Heidegger.¹³²

In contrast to this manner of working Barth provides the alternative model:

“he refused to depend on the official philosophers because what they offered to do for him he thought he should do for himself, in conversation with them when that seemed likely to help. The Kirchliche Dogmatik is an enormous attempt to interpret all reality by the fact of Christ.”¹³³

When we turn to the argument for how, then, to conceive of God, we find the following structure. Jenson notes that the Bible ascribes temporal actions to God.¹³⁴ From brief surveys of several biblical themes (such as God’s jealousy) he pivots quickly to assertions like “it is the metaphysically fundamental fact of Israel’s and the church’s faith that its God is freely but, just so, truly self-identified by, and so with, contingent created temporal events.”¹³⁵ Only later does he justify “directly” the assertion that God is not identified “by [certain] events in time” but “with those events.”¹³⁶

The justification for this assertion runs so: were it only the case that God was identified by certain events, then “the identification would be a revelation ontologically other than God himself. …this, of course, is the normal pattern of religion. …It is precisely this distinction between revelation and deity itself that the biblical critique of religion attacks.”¹³⁷ Where are we to find this argument in detail? We are told, in a footnote to this start of this section: “For an expansive version of the following, God After God.”¹³⁸

Jenson then builds on this assertion at the beginning of the next chapter. Because

¹³²Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 21.
¹³³Ibid., 21.
¹³⁴Ibid., 43–46.
¹³⁵Ibid., 48.
¹³⁶Ibid., 59.
¹³⁷Ibid., 59.
¹³⁸See footnote 97. ibid., 59.
these Gospel “statements identify God … they display what we may call his hypostatic being.”¹³⁹ As his hypostatic being is constituted by narrative “his self-identity … is constituted in dramatic coherence.”¹⁴⁰ Because God’s identity is so composed, his very identity requires a narratable future: the end of the story is what allows dramatic coherence to be constituted. At this juncture Jenson notes that “This, of course, is in one way or another the great insight of Western modernity, as its Cartesian self-knowledge has discovered the self’s finitude. Perhaps the classic analysis of finite freedom is indeed that of Martin Heidegger in Sein und Zeit. The most sustained exploration of the insight to theological purposes is Wolfhart Pannenberg, Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive.”¹⁴¹ Thus, argues Jenson, we are inexorably lead to the conclusion that God is future-determined.¹⁴²

We should recognise this as the same basic structure of argument as that employed in God After God. The God of religion is identified and said to be rejected by the God of the Bible. God must therefore be identified with the Biblical narrative and conceived of in the terms of time itself. Jenson then introduces dramatic coherence as the means to understand God and, in open acknowledgement of the philosophically situated nature of the insight, argues that therefore God must be conceived of as future.

As we have noted, Jenson appeals to God After God explicitly for the articulation of his understanding of religion. Were this not so, it would still be clear that Jenson’s understanding of ‘religion’ has not altered: “human religion as such is the refusal of the future.”¹⁴³ God is the future and in religion “we try to barricade ourselves” against his “futurity.”¹⁴⁴

Given that the structure of argumentation at the critical point of Jenson’s project is that same as in God After God, and given that he explicitly appeals to that text, it can be fairly concluded that Jenson’s conception of ‘religion’—the control belief of his whole enterprise—is, once again, parasitic on his ontology. So, in consequence, is

¹³⁹Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 63.
¹⁴⁰Ibid., 64.
¹⁴¹See footnote 10. Ibid., 65.
¹⁴²Ibid., 66.
¹⁴³Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 2, 146.
¹⁴⁴Ibid., 146.
every major step of his argument.

One final part of Jenson’s system might dull the significance of this argument. Jenson follows Barth in arguing that all speech about God—including his own theology—is natural theology (i.e. religious discourse about God) and that it only becomes speech about God when God makes himself its object.¹⁴⁵ In other words, Jenson might happily admit that his theology fails in this way, because all theology so fails.

Does this alleviate Jenson’s difficulty? No, for two reasons: In the first place notice that once again this is parasitic on the critique of religion, itself parasitic on a particular ontology. In the second place Jenson clearly imagines that there are more and less ‘religious’ ways of talking about God (what, otherwise, is the point of his whole project, and the opponent against which his polemic is directed?). Revelation, of course (once again following the structure of Jenson’s own thought as illustrated above), is the key here—and Jenson’s understanding of that revelation has been demonstrated to be distorted by a philosophical control belief.

It might have been that Jenson’s observation about the ‘natural theology’ character of all theology caused him to evaluate and justify his philosophical presuppositions. But they are understood by Jenson as the Gospel, and so they take on the noetic certainty of that narrative.

2.1.10 Summary

Jenson’s theological system looks to be self-referentially incoherent. He seeks to develop a theology stemming solely from God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Yet he has a philosophically and theologically situated control belief that distorts his understanding of Scripture. If this is correct, it is not only a surprising result given that we are evaluating a theological system developed by a theologian of Jenson’s stature, but it is ironic given that the philosophical milieu influencing him is one whose proponents have consistently reminded us of our own pre-understanding.¹⁴⁶

Notice that were Jenson’s system to allow him to justify this philosophical belief,

¹⁴⁵Jenson, After God, 79-92.
¹⁴⁶To use Gadamer’s phrase. See: Gadamer, Truth and Method.
qua philosophical belief as a control for his theological discourse, his system would not have an internal incoherence. We would have to evaluate whatever arguments were supplied to justify this particular analytic of the human. Yet because of the way Jenson’s system is structured, this is rendered impossible as he understands a philosophical starting point external to the gospel as guilty of the sin of religion. As his understanding of God’s futurity is what lies behind his understanding of God’s impassibility, this means we have internal justification for rejecting his system as an appropriate construal of God’s impassibility.

This critique does not mean that the warrant for all the constituent parts of Jenson’s system is absent. Consider two aspects of Jenson’s critique of religion. It is parasitic on a particular ontology. Yet Jenson is pointing to a genuine scriptural phenomenon: God is identified as acting temporally and able to do new things. Noticing the validity of this observation does not impel us to follow his ontology, nor does rejecting his ontology and subsequent systematisation of this ontology mean that this observation is invalid.

This thesis’ emphasis on the question of impassibility means that Jenson’s argument that timelessness is a fundamentally inappropriate category within which to conceive of the biblical God must still be reckoned with.

2.2 External Critique

At this point we turn to look at Jenson’s work from an external perspective. I will no longer be seeking merely to evaluate his theological system according to its own presuppositions, but according to mine. This still requires a careful reading of his thought built upon the internal critique, but it will be conducted by testing his work with the aid of theological and philosophical categories I ascribe to. The purpose of this section is to evaluate his thought in order to learn what I can and cannot say about God as impassible, as an aid to my own theological enterprise.

The scope of Jenson’s thought is particularly broad, and any treatment of his system will need to focus carefully. We will, therefore, examine the parts of Jenson’s system that are necessary to arrive at his articulation of impassibility. Other areas—often
very interesting—will have to be left to one side. It should be noted what this means:
this critique is not a criticism of Jenson’s system simpliciter, but only of those areas
relevant to the question of impassibility.

With this said, there are two areas where our attention should focus: the doctrine
of the Trinity and Christology, or to put it differently God’s life and the way his
life comes into contact with our world in Christ. These areas are the centrepiece of
Jenson’s thought and in them are wrapped up the questions of being and time, and
therefore of impassibility. To the first of these areas we now turn.

2.2.1 The Trinity

The centre of Jenson’s thought is the Gospel understood as trinitarian event. Speak-
ing of the Trinity “is Christianity’s effort to identify the God who has claimed us.”¹⁴⁷
Jenson constantly redefines and subjects other doctrines—such as divine simplicity—
to this pattern.¹⁴⁸ His version of the Trinity is developed with a “Lutheran-Cyrillian
Christology modified by a Barthian doctrine of election.”¹⁴⁹ It is controlled above all,
however, by the anti-religious commitment: there must be no room for Feuerbach.
Metaphysics must proceed by way of the Gospel, it must be revisionary.¹⁵⁰

For Jenson God’s being is primarily hypostatic.¹⁵¹ The ousia is the infinity of the
“mutual action of Father, Son, and Spirit.”¹⁵² Wright, who did his doctoral work on
Jenson, argues that Jenson sees this—in agreement with Hart—as a formed infinity:
the essence of God is the existence of the three who cannot be reduced beyond
their relational definitions.¹⁵³ The hypostases are not identically related to God’s

¹⁴⁷We see here Jenson’s insistence on the primacy of God’s action, which will be explored in the
next three subsections. Jenson, Triune Identity, 4.
¹⁴⁸Wright, Dogmatic Aesthetics, 77-9.
¹⁴⁹Ibid., 14.
¹⁵⁰For a brief account of Jenson’s movement from a critique of metaphysics to a position critiquing
religion and proposing a gospel-centred revisionary metaphysics see: Wright, “Introduction”, Kindle
loc. 110.
¹⁵¹Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 215. Jenson’s doctrine is different from Luther’s in this respect,
where Luther’s emphasis is on the unity of the one essence. Mannermaa, “Trinitarian Ontology”,
144.
¹⁵²Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 215.
¹⁵³Stephen Wright is quoting from Jenson’s review essay of Hart’s work, wherein Jenson is sum-
This forming of infinity means that predicates applied to God, such as the transcend-ents or ‘simple’ are not shapeless. The mutuality of God’s life means that any such predicate must be ‘run across the three.’ In other words, the rule that the opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa, when understood in the light of a formed infinity, means that “each of the identities appears in a role specified by the inner-trinitarian relations that define it, i.e., by the reality of God in one of time’s arrows.”

In the creation of the church, for example, “the Father elects, the Son heads, and the Spirit calls.” Or, following Wright’s construction, Beauty as transcendental should be understood as “God as artist, God as art, and God as beauty.” Indeed Wright argues that God as unformed infinity—as simplicity wrongly understood—is the sublime and just so to be eschewed.

This is deeply interesting. A shaped infinity is necessary to speak Christianly of God as ‘infinite,’ for the doctrine of the Trinity prevents us from conceiving of God as a monad. Both Hart and Aquinas—coming from very different theological perspectives to Jenson—speak in a similar way. For Aquinas it is precisely the perfect internal emanation and return of God’s immanent being that makes sense of the economic missions and is the guard of God’s goodness and creation’s freedom.

Similarly in Hart ousia is determined by “the perpetual handing over in love of all

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the Father is to the Spirit and Son.”¹⁶⁰

As such the notion of a shaped infinity should be appropriated.¹⁶¹ But notice that at this point it provides a way of conceptualising eternity—and impassibility in particular—for projects as different as Hart and Jenson’s. We must continue on to evaluate the details of Jenson’s trinitarian theology as it intersects with the question of impassibility. The first question we will ask is how God as Trinity and the world relate in Jenson’s thought.

2.2.1.1 The God-World Relation

Jenson’s theology is frequently under fire for being ‘Hegelian.’¹⁶² What is meant by this is a God-world relation that fails to appropriately realise God’s independence from creation. Jenson has strenuously denied this charge.¹⁶³ Yet he also appropriates part of Hegel’s thinking.¹⁶⁴ Our first task is to try and understand the fairness of the charge.

Jenson’s defence is, I believe, most ably collected and conducted by Stephen Wright.¹⁶⁵ One of the first things that Wright does is point out that Hegel’s ideas are not so tainted that one cannot borrow from them without sacrificing orthodoxy.¹⁶⁶ Jenson’s debt to Hegel consists in the simultaneous recognition that he was “a theolog-


¹⁶¹The degree to which this depends on a primarily hypostatic understanding of God’s being, and the theological tenability of such a conception is something that will be examined in my constructive work. The reason for this is that, as has been shown, it can find its home in very different theological projects, and so the question will be the degree to which it fits in mine. In the following sections the reasons why I reject the apparatus surrounding Jenson’s construal will be shown (see all of 2.2.1 and 2.2.2).


¹⁶³Perhaps most forcefully in: Jenson, “Ipse Pater”, 117.


¹⁶⁵While Scott Swain’s recent work presents a sympathetic reading of Jenson he ultimately finds Jenson’s work unconvincing at key points, including Jenson’s understanding of the relationship between time and eternity. Swain, *God of the Gospel*, 185–87.

¹⁶⁶Wright, *Dogmatic Aesthetics*. Wright is particularly thinking of Hart’s criticism that “one step toward it [Hegel’s system] is complete capitulation.” Hart, *Beauty*, 163. Though, as above, note that this is something Hart later qualifies: Hart, “Lively God”, 33.
ical disaster,” and an appropriation of “Hegel’s acute discernment of the sort of sense history makes.”¹⁶⁷

Jenson argues that the logic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis—seen as the very pattern of the possible rather than its limit—must be the logic of history’s being.¹⁶⁸ History must be a series of sublations of thesis and antithesis which, at history’s end, can only be either nothing or the sublation into God’s “infinite history” which itself can never be sublated.¹⁶⁹

History’s meaning is teleological. Its meaning is either nothing or a kind of ‘divinisation.’¹⁷⁰ The key thought here seems to be that an a-historical meaning of history is no meaning at all. There is no space in a monadic infinity to accommodate history; if that is its resting place history is nothing.¹⁷¹ Infinity must have room in some sort of historical way.

Is this dialectic convincing? Why cannot history have a teleology that is a-historical? If we said that history’s purpose was for human beings to become one with being itself and then to cease to exist, I am not sure why we must think this makes history meaningless. Though the final state of history might be destruction, its purpose is not destruction, rather destruction is the result of fulfilling its purpose. This would reduce history to a means, but not to meaninglessness.

This aside, there are difficulties with the question of providence in Jenson’s formulation. Providence depends on a robust doctrine of creation, whereby creation’s structures are understood as complete.¹⁷² The ends to which things are ordered do

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¹⁶⁸ The qualification in the middle of this sentence is perhaps best explained by a recourse to Jenson’s exposition of Hegel in God after God. This is outlined just below. See: Jenson, After God, 34–35.
¹⁶⁹ Jenson, “Great Transformation”, 40.
¹⁷⁰ Though Jenson, as we will see, seeks to never confuse creator and creature.
¹⁷¹ Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 2, 12. See also: Wright, Dogmatic Aesthetics, 149.
¹⁷² This and the below three paragraphs are a condensed version of the argument against historicism in the chapter entitled “Eschatology and History” in Oliver O’Donovan’s Resurrection and Moral order. I am aware that O’Donovan’s argument regarding generic and teleological relations is not uncontroversial, but—whilst I would agree with his project at this point—I think that the below argument that historicism doesn’t do justice to the doctrines of creation and providence must be reckoned with by any historicist. Jenson has, moreover sought to distance himself from any straightforward historicism, so it is a useful tool for testing the success of that enterprise. O’Donovan, Resurrection and Moral Order.
not change in history. There is a natural teleology: orderings to flourish and serve. History as a whole is ordered to eschatology, and this rules out the possibility of creation reaching any ends but God’s and (just so) grants meaning to the world’s temporal extension. Eschatology is what creation was created for.

Much contemporary historicist thought confuses natural ends with historical ends, making ‘end’ mean “development in time.”¹⁷³ Thus historical order collapses to become only orderings-to-transformation. They become raw material for transformation:

Instead of the threefold metaphysic of a good creation, an evil fall and an end of history which negates evil and transcends the created good, we have in historicism a dualist opposition between a historical ‘from’ and ‘towards,’ in accordance with which all the traditional language of good and evil is reinterpreted.¹⁷⁴

History is collapsed into a process.¹⁷⁵ Similarly the distinction between creation and providence is collapsed, as providence is the assurance of the goodness of creation and the realisation of its eschatological end despite the contingencies of history. Creation must be such that it has ends other than historical transformation for there to be genuine providence.

Jenson’s notion of history as a series of sublations that are eventually sublated into God looks suspiciously like process rather than providence. Yet Wright defends Jenson against the charge of Hegelianism: “Jenson plunders Hegel in order to argue that God is the agent of history’s mutations, but for Jenson this is not a process of self-actualisation. … The world exists as the object of God’s transformative activity.”¹⁷⁶

Compare this to Jenson’s criticism of Hegel in God After God:

The fundamental anti-historical drive in Hegel is that all things are understood as the self-development of thought—and that what thought is is

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¹⁷³O’Donovan, Resurrection and Moral Order, 58.
¹⁷⁴Ibid., 63.
¹⁷⁵Ibid., 60–61.
¹⁷⁶Wright, Dogmatic Aesthetics, 140.
not supposed to be changeable in history. ‘Freedom’ itself is thus understood as the superiority to the contingencies of history of a subjectivity which is ‘free’ precisely in that nothing can alter its self-determination, in that it is unchangingly itself.”

The difference between Jenson and Hegel is that Jenson wants history’s transcendence meaning to be changeable, subject to contingency. This can be seen if we take the mirror image of Jenson’s description of the problem in Hegel above: freedom is not superiority to contingency or mutability. The key feature of Jenson’s theology is present here: the anti-religious critique of a changeless eternity.

This contrast is sharpened once we see that Jenson also understands history as our participation in the event of the evangal which is the infinite triune life of God. The form of this history is this: “the Son is begotten and liberated, and so reconciles the Father with the future his Spirit is.” Jenson places evangelical history where unchangeable thought would be in Hegel’s system.

History is not God’s self-actualisation but the object of a historical God’s transforming activity. God is a history. As such he can be that which simultaneously transforms the world and be subject to contingency while not thereby ‘self-actualising.’ In other words God is never merely the subject of history; whilst he is defined by the contingencies of history he is always the one who has shaped it. The conceptual heavy-lifting here is done by a voluntative understanding of God’s being: Barth’s doctrine of election. God is that story.

This results in a trinitarian structure that is “constitutive of the human experience of time while exceeding those structures by means of a divine infinity.” Here, then,
is Jenson’s ‘shaped infinity.’ When we ask what connects God and us together, how God is subject to contingency, the answer is inevitable: Jesus Christ who is God the Son.

We have seen that history’s transcendent meaning must be changeable and that this happens through the life of the Trinity connected to us in the Son. This life is ordered towards the Spirit—God’s future—and thus so is ours. The question which must be asked here is what kind of ‘goal’ for history the Spirit is. Jenson argues that: “to be God is always to be open to and always to open a future, transgressing all past-imposed conditions.”¹⁸³

The future is an ever-further *transgression* of the past. Even though Jenson speaks of the fixedness of the identity of God in the Gospel event, one becomes suspicious that there is indeed some sort of ends developing in time rather than a truly teleological process in our experience of history. If all past-imposed conditions are transgressed, and this is not mere hyperbole (and Jenson’s notion of the ontological priority of the future suggests that it is not), it is hard to see how any natural ends can endure.

Perhaps Jenson would point to his ‘antinomy of hope’ to show that history does have a telos distinct from the historical process. He writes that: “all theology since the Commentary on Romans has agreed that Christianity is the discovery of hope as constituent of humanity. All agree that to hope is to be human, and that this assertion is central to Christian faith.”¹⁸⁴

Yet in dialectical theology, “the End” becomes not “what is awaited in the whole of life” but rather “the ultimacy of each present moment.” In other words “the awaited future became an ‘eternal’ future, immediately related to every present.” The gospel therefore becomes an “exhortation to hoping itself.” It becomes “futurity.”¹⁸⁵

This was challenged by theologians such as Pannenberg and Moltmann, as to hope “is evidently to hope for something.”¹⁸⁶ But a problem emerges even with this re-

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¹⁸⁴The place of hope in human life is not meant merely as a phenomenological observation but as an ontological reality. Jenson, *After God*, 160-161.
¹⁸⁵Ibid., 160-161.
¹⁸⁶fn10: “Here is the primitive, fundamental insight driving the movement represented by Pannenberg, Moltmann, Braaten and Sauter.” ibid., 160-61.
casting: if the future is narratable, “must this not mean that this future may one day become the present—so that hope will end?”¹⁸⁷ And so hope would be, after all, not “a necessary characteristic of human life.”

Love solves this problem. It “transcends the antinomy of hope” by being both something that can be hoped for—“the overcoming of the barriers to our being—for one another”, etc—and by preserving “hope’s affirming openness to the future.”¹⁸⁸ Love is an existence of perfect mutuality where the other can still surprise. “The End is when the future is open as future, without an intervening time in which the future must be achieved or prepared for—so that life is an event of openness.”¹⁸⁹

Jenson might, then, be able to say that the ordering of our being—being towards perfect mutuality with one another—is inherent in creation from the beginning and was established by God despite sin and death as a realisation of an eschatological hope. Indeed he does say something very like this: “the work of redemption, just as it occurs in the actual event of Christ, is the purpose of creation.”¹⁹⁰ The implication of this is that:

When God declares his creation good, it is in view of both sides of its destiny, its glorious salvation and the sin from which it needs saving. …the Crucifixion must be an intermediate good; there cannot be a resurrection of someone who has not died.¹⁹¹

If this is true it looks like Jenson’s theology can accommodate genuine providence. But there is a phrase that requires some clarification before we can be sure of this judgment: “just as it occurs in the actual event of Christ.” What does this mean?

What does Jenson understand to be the content of the Gospel proclamation? This will be answered by paying close attention to his The Knowledge of Things Hoped For, where there is an extended discussion of how Gospel proclamation works.¹⁹² I
argue that in doing so we see that Jenson does indeed collapse the triad of creation, providence and eschaton into a dualism of past and future.

Jenson’s argument runs so. We only encounter the world “as the world” in that it is a “bespoken reality.”¹⁹³ God is ontologically specifiable as a conversation in which we are spoken into being.¹⁹⁴ This phenomenon of being addressed and called to respond is that which is the basis of our temporality.¹⁹⁵ Being addressed is to be called from a past to a future.

The true, salvific word-event is one that would allow our identities with our past and future to concur.¹⁹⁶ But this is possible only in the form of a promise that “calls the hearer to rely utterly upon the promised future.”¹⁹⁷ True freedom is being “free from our past history for our future history.”¹⁹⁸ Yet “only God has His own future so as to be able to promise it.”¹⁹⁹ This word-event takes place in the Gospel.²⁰⁰

As a word-event the Gospel is dependent on tradition: language is our “relation to reality,” one both formed by word-events and altered by new word-events.²⁰¹ The tradition within which a text from the past is interpreted is, therefore, not a hinderance but that by which we are granted the pre-understanding necessary for the task of interpretation.²⁰² If we had no understanding of God, then he could not be proclaimed to us.²⁰³

This pre-understanding of God—that which is necessary for the comprehension of the Gospel—comes through the word-event that is the Law, heard in “all speak-

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¹⁹³Here Jenson is using an insight from Gadamer. Jenson, Knowledge of Things, 178.
¹⁹⁴Ibid., 179.
¹⁹⁵Ibid., 179.
¹⁹⁶Ibid., 182-3.
¹⁹⁷Ibid., 183. This is explicated in terms of Fuchs’ analysis of the language of love: “the proclamation gives us a new mode of existence in that how I exist and what I have to say are the same.” All understanding results in a new language worked out between interpreter and text. See: ibid., 196-201.
¹⁹⁸This is from Fuchs, but Jenson seems to be citing it with approbation. ibid., 198.
¹⁹⁹Ibid., 183.
²⁰⁰Ibid., 184.
²⁰¹Ibid., 180.
²⁰²Once again, this is the Gadamer whom Jenson is co-opting. ibid., 182.
²⁰³Ibid., 184.
ing,” yet coming ultimately from God.²⁰⁴ As historical beings, the address of others constantly confronts us with our past and future, and thus calls for decision. But in doing so it “ties the future to the past …its pattern is: If you do so and so, such and such will happen.”²⁰⁵ This tying to the past is the Law.²⁰⁶

The historical character of Jesus’ life makes the proclamation of the Gospel understandable, but only as prophesy.²⁰⁷ Jenson makes a distinction here “between the man Jesus and the historical Jesus.”²⁰⁸ The historical Jesus includes all that happened in Jesus’ life up to the resurrection. But no historical research could discover the resurrection.

This historical event, this word-event, is God brought to word as “Law and Gospel.”²⁰⁹ Law is history narrated without the eschatological meaning of the Gospel. Jesus’ life narrated without the resurrection is Law. Jesus’ life narrated with the resurrection is Gospel.²¹⁰ The Gospel is therefore reliant on the Law, on our understanding of ourselves as guilty.²¹¹ The Gospel overcomes Law, it is “antithetically” related to it.²¹²

Jenson himself summarises his line of argument here as replacing “the Bultmannian dualism of facts and existentiell meaning with the even more radical dualism of Law and Gospel.”²¹³ The Law binds us to our past, it opens the future, but as one “without hope.” The Gospel grants God’s future and therefore frees us from the past.²¹⁴ God’s future will bring about the reconciliation between Law and Gospel by overcoming Law by Gospel.²¹⁵

²⁰⁴Jenson, Knowledge of Things, 185–6.
²⁰⁵Ibid., 188.
²⁰⁶And, given Jenson’s notion of temporality of God it hard to see that the Law is not strongly tied to the Father.
²⁰⁷Though, at least according to Ebeling, it does not substantiate it. Jenson, Knowledge of Things, 190–3.
²⁰⁸Ibid., 195.
²⁰⁹Jenson is self-consciously following Lutheran tradition, which he sees as illuminating, in this distinction. See footnote 238. Ibid., 193–4; 208–9.
²¹⁰Ibid., 209.
²¹¹Ibid., 210.
²¹²Ibid., 211.
²¹³Ibid., 227.
²¹⁴Ibid., 232.
²¹⁵Ibid., 233.
What is to be made of this? The past is the Law, related ‘antithetically’ to the future promised by the Gospel. The Gospel can only exist in history as a ‘promise’ as it must be God’s future given to us in a way that is not tied to the past. While the theme of Law and Gospel does not have the same prominence in Jenson’s later work, the theme of promise continues into Jenson’s mature work.²¹⁶

In the Gospel proclamation we find that we cannot cling to the past but must cast ourselves wholly on God’s future. The preunderstanding of the Law provides the grounds for us to cast ourselves upon God’s future by relinquishing all hold on the past. Jenson even identifies this as a ‘dualism:’ that of Law and Gospel. The past, it seems, is like Wittgenstein’s ladder, its destiny is to be is thrown away.²¹⁷

It is very difficult to sustain any vision of Jenson’s theology here except as collapsing the three fold scheme of creation, fall, redemption into a dualism of past and future. If so, though this antinomy of hope might suggest otherwise, I would argue that Jenson’s thought is, in fact, historicist. Once again, however, this is not conclusive. Jenson’s trinitarian ontology of time suggests that there is some sort of genuine three-fold aspect to the relationship between creation and redemption.

Jenson argues that the Trinity is the basis of our time.²¹⁸ Jenson suggests that while the Father can be identified with the past, and the Spirit with the future, the “difference is not measurable; nothing in God recedes into the past or approaches from the future. But the difference is also absolute.”²¹⁹

How can the past not recede into the past whilst remaining past? It is not clear. Yet it is clear that the Father, if the Spirit is future, must be somehow forever ‘exceeded’ by the Spirit, whatever form this ‘exceeding’ takes. Contra Jenson’s intention, this ‘exceeding’ without receding could be construed as a kind of Thomistic ‘motionless motion.’²²⁰

If the Thomistic possibility is rejected—and it should be as Jenson is seeking to articulate a genuinely temporal topology—it must be that the arrow of time as genuine

²¹⁶See, for example, chapters 15 and 26 of: Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 2.
²¹⁷Wittgenstein, Tractus, 89.
²¹⁸See sections 2.2.1.2 and 2.2.1.3 for a detailed evaluation of Jenson’s thought of time.
²¹⁹See chapter 17, section II of: Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 2.
motion is meaningful, even if the past somehow never recedes. In the Systematics Jenson articulates this property as the arrow of time being asymmetrical. The asymmetry between the past and future in God’s life is what makes it genuinely temporal.²²¹

We have seen above that the past is in some way ‘antithetically’ related to the future. Asymmetry and antitheticality are not synonymous, but the arrow of time can denote the way in which two antithetical realities are related. Whilst ‘antithetical’ clearly does not apply without qualification to the relationship of Father to Spirit in Jenson’s work, there is still a priority, an ordering towards the future, in the divine life. Jenson’s statement that there is no receding in the divine life blocks any straightforward charge of historicism, but it is, I think, an open question for Jenson’s work as to how he reconciles the talk of the contradiction of the past by promise with the asymmetry of the divine life.

In addition to the problem of historicism Jenson faces other difficulties with his theology of time, particularly as it relates to his trinitarian ontology of time. Jeremy Ive argues that assigning the roles of the Father, Son, and Spirit to the three arrows of time is, as a conceptual move, problematic. Ive suggests that Jenson conflates “the role of the Spirit with the state of affairs that the Spirit is bringing about.”²²² This in turn detracts from the “past or present work of the Spirit in the world.”²²³ He also suggests that Jesus’ role as the future person in Jenson’s antinomy of hope makes his identification as present problematic.

Jenson can and does speak of the Spirit working in the past to overthrow the past by the power of the future. God anticipates his future, working by the power of promise.²²⁴ Nonetheless Ive’s analysis highlights an important difficulty in Jenson’s thought. I think it is most clearly seen, however, not in the discussion of the Spirit as future but in the identification of Jesus as present. It looks rather like Jesus is the specious and ungraspable present strung out between the Law of his past history without resurrection and the Gospel of God’s future (which is the Spirit).

²²¹Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 217.
²²²As is, perhaps, inevitable if God does not have a history but is it. Ive, “Theology of History”, 154.
²²³Ibid., 154.
²²⁴See, in particular, chapter 4 of: Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1.
Comparing this with Augustine’s discussion of time is illuminating. For Augustine:

In eternity nothing moves into past: all is present. Time, on the other hand, is never all present at once. The past is always driven on by the future, the future always follows on the heels of the past, and both the past and the future have their beginning and their end in the eternal present.²²⁵

He then iteratively evaluates the notion of present until he comes to the conclusion that the present is of no duration because if it had temporal extension it would be able to be divided into past and future.²²⁶ It is the durationless boundary between past and future.

An important qualification of the above analysis is that Augustine’s discussion of time is often understood as dealing with the subjective experience of time. This is something Jenson recognises. He argues that we need both objective and subjective theories of time and that they need to be rationalised somehow. But Jenson self-consciously objectifies Augustine’s analysis such that it is the subjective reality of God’s personal distention which provides our objective time. He says that we need both: “Augustine’s ‘time’ and Aristotle’s ‘time,’ …both ‘real’ time and imaginary time. A resolution presents itself: that time is indeed à la Augustine, the ‘distention’ of a personal reality, and just so it provides creatures an external metric of created events.”²²⁷

Jenson, then, accepts Augustine’s analysis.²²⁸ Given this, and Jenson’s identification of the three persons of the Trinity with the arrows of time, I would argue that Jenson’s Trinity dissolves into something like a binity with a specious present which is the ever-flowing boundary of a process of transformation. The Son’s life is shrunk to a durationless boundary between past and future. The charge that Jenson’s thought results in a historicist dualism is given further conceptual warrant.

There is yet another part of Jenson’s ontology which might mitigate against this

²²⁵Confessions.XI.11. Augustine, Confessions.
²²⁶ibid. XI.15 ibid.
²²⁷Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 2, 34.
²²⁸I too accept Augustine’s reasoning and conclusion regarding the nature of the present.
difficulty: he wants to suggest that time is neither linear nor circular but narratival or fugal.²²⁹ This might give Jenson internal warrant for rejecting such a critique.²³⁰ Nonetheless the teleology in God’s being (the priority of the future) means that it is difficult to see how ‘the present’ is being used so disanalogously that this critique fails.²³¹

It is interesting that Augustine argues that the only way that the present could do something like capture the essence of God’s life (if we understand God as a narrative and therefore extension in time as Jenson does) is by conceiving of the present as eternal. The present can only capture any ‘duration’ if all time is somehow present, an impossibility in our creaturely experience of time. Thus any identification of God with the arrows of time (with Jesus as the present) is bound to have a Christology which—no matter what intentions there might be—can only conceive of him as the durationless marker of the process of God’s transformation.²³²

This raises the question of exactly what the content of Jenson’s Christology is. This will be examined in section 2.2.2. Right now we need to see that this is one side of Jenson’s conceptualisation of the God-world relation. Jenson has an explicit ontology of being where we find this relationship articulated from an alternate angle. This is what will now be examined.

### 2.2.1.2 Being

A critical question in any discussion of impassibility is the question of being. What is the relationship between God’s being and our being? Where does any point of similarity occur? Does any particular articulation successfully prevent God’s being from being dependent on our being? We now turn to ask these questions of Jenson’s

²²⁹See section 2.2.2.1. for an outline and evaluation of how this works. Jenson, *Systematic Theology* vol. 1, 140–41.

²³⁰See: Cumin, “Spirit of it All”, 172–73.

²³¹In fact I argue that Jenson must have an absolute linearity in section 2.2.2.1 below.

²³²Assume that Augustine’s argument is correct. How this is true of a theology like Pannenberg’s with his less clear appropriation of the poles of time to the person’s of the Trinity (the Son is the future of the Father, the Spirit the Future of the Son, and the Father the future of both) would be an interesting study. It seems, however, that any talking of grounding past, present, and future according to the ordering of the life of Trinity is vulnerable here. Pannenberg, “Eternity”, 69.
work.

Jenson argues that to be as a creature, as creation is “to be mentioned in the triune moral conversation, as something other than those who conduct it.”²³³ A temporal being is a story (word extended through time).²³⁴ We must take a moment to understand how Jenson understands conversation.

Recall that the fundamental character of speech—or narration—is that it opens up the possibility of becoming different than one is.²³⁵ As others address us, an openness to the future built on past understanding (the shared understanding necessary for communication, an already spoken reality) occurs.²³⁶ To restate this in language Jenson does not, a conversation is an event which is teleologically ordered.²³⁷

God and the world are both ontologically speech. The ontological difference between us and God is that our existence requires the existence of an already existing ‘word-event:’ the gift of creation.²³⁸ Thus “the ontological difference between God and man [sic] is that God speaks before being spoken to, that He is in himself questioner and responder. God is ontologically specifiable as a conversation.”²³⁹ Or, using Jonathan Edwards’ insight, a fugue.²⁴⁰ It might, therefore, be said that God is a teleologically ordered ‘word-event’—though it is the telos and not the arche which is determinative of ‘who’ he is—whose telos is his own infinite life gratuitously incorporating the presence of those who once were not.

We can now see the irreducible role each member of the Trinity plays in creation. The Father is one who sings creation into being, who opens “God’s musicality … *ad extra.*”²⁴¹ The Spirit is the one who frees the Son and Father to love each other, the divine future who is God’s liveliness, the possibility of the spontaneity of the

²³⁴Jenson, *Knowledge of Things*, 207–8. Jenson uses this notion in apologetic context against the West. See: Jenson, “Can We Have a Story?”, “Lost its Story”.
²³⁵We have just seen this in section 2.2.1.1. Jenson, *Systematic Theology* vol. 1, 223.
²³⁷On ordering in God see: Jenson, *Systematic Theology* vol. 1, 160.
²³⁸Again, the use of ‘word-event’ here is Jenson co-opting and extending some of Gerhard Ebeling’s analysis of ‘word-events.’ Jenson, *Knowledge of Things*, 171–78.
²³⁹Ibid., 179.
The Son is the one by whom the creating word has definite content, the “moral content,” the present of divine life opening space for our participation.

The being of God and creatures is, therefore, univocally predicated. In his second systematics Jenson rejects Aquinas’ notion of the relationship of God’s being to our being as archetype to ectype; our being incompatible with God’s because of the “imperfection of this imaging.” The only other option is univocal predication: “whatever God himself means by ‘be’ is exactly what it means for a creature to be … ‘being’ must after all be univocal rather than analogous.”

The difference between God and creatures is that when ‘x is’ is said, univocity is only true for the locutionary force of the utterance, while illocutionary force is equivocal. God creates when he says ‘creatures are.’ When we say ‘God is,’ we “acknowledge our entire dependence on a primary cause and reason for our being.”

Wright is adamant that by so articulating the creator-creature relation Jenson “altogether” circumvents the dialectic of transcendence and immanence:

Nothing can overcome the way that God transcends creatures as the triune Creator. Creatures cannot attain a status of perfection, timelessness, or holiness wherein they become their own antecedent condition. …As the transcendent Creator who speaks being with illocutionary force, God transcends precisely in creative immanence. No dialectic is required. The triune God embraces all created being by opening up the eternal perichoretic harmony, thereby encountering creation as Creator. The distinction between Creator and creatures ‘names an absolute

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243 Again, building on my argument above if the present is anything like Augustine’s conception of it then its moral content is nothing more than change. ibid., 45.
244 On the following see also the discussion in: Wright, *Dogmatic Aesthetics*, 195; 203–206.
245 We have already seen the roots of this rejection of any image-ontology in section 2.1.9. and Appendix A Jenson, *Systematic Theology* vol. 2, 38.
246 Ibid., 38.
247 Jenson then argues that a form of analogy can be used. ibid., 38. See also Jenson, “Creator and Creature”, 221.
249 Wright, *Dogmatic Aesthetics*, 205.
difference, but no distance at all."²⁵⁰

This ‘difference without distance’ is grounded ultimately in Christology: it is in the person of Jesus Christ that this distinction holds together.²⁵¹ Jesus is both the willer with the Father and Spirit, and the acceptor of that will. Creation, in Jesus, is joined to God while never being simply absorbed into him.²⁵² In the incarnation transcendence is demonstrated in every immanent activity of the Son as the place where God “meets with creation as the reconciling and restorative Creator.”²⁵³

This is a tantalising idea, but does it work? It looks as though the most appropriate way to specify the ontological difference between transcendence and immanence is power. God, as Word, has the illocutionary power to say ‘be’ and it will be so. Humanity, as word, can say ‘be’ only in thanksgiving. If our beings are the same apart from this difference then it is indeed power that distinguished us.

If the difference between God and creation rests on power I wish to ask what it means for God to possess an attribute such as righteousness.²⁵⁴ Recall from section 2.2.1 that Jenson conceives of God's attributes in a uniquely trinitarian mode. Since God’s life is the mutuality of the three particular relations we see revealed in the Gospel any attribute is run across the lives of the three members of the Trinity.²⁵⁵

Jenson would no doubt want to say that 'righteousness' somehow “runs across the three” in the eternal election of the Son. So we have “God the Father is righteous as …God the Son is righteous as …God the Spirit is righteous as ….” In other words God's righteousness rests on a particular narrative.

God is one particular story told in power. He is simultaneously narrator and story. Righteousness belongs to the narrative. But there is a strong voluntarism here, and as such an attribute such as righteousness must be understood as accidental to God’s being.

²⁵¹Jenson, “Creator and Creature”, 219-221.
²⁵²Ibid., 221.
²⁵³Wright, *Dogmatic Aesthetics*, 206.
²⁵⁴Even if Jenson eschews any form of property-talk, the following argument works in virtually any sense of God’s being able to be described as ‘holy.’
²⁵⁵Recall also that the *ousia* is the infinity of the “mutual action of Father, Son, and Spirit.” Jenson, *Systematic Theology vol. 1*, 215.
By ‘accidental’ I mean that such a property is not necessary to God’s being. Using possible worlds language, it means that God does not have to possess the property of righteousness in all possible worlds. He could lack it. For a property to be essential is for it to be necessary, possessed in all possible worlds.²⁵⁶

The implication is, therefore, that God has control over his own nature.²⁵⁷ This is deeply counter-intuitive and harbours intractable philosophical difficulties (what if a being exists before its choosing of what it is/will be?). What exegetical warrant is there for such a position?

Jenson’s commentary on Ezekiel—which deals extensively with the historical actions of the transcendent YHWH, and therefore of God’s nature being worked out in history—gives me a unique opportunity to engage with Jenson’s exegesis of a sustained passage of scripture.²⁵⁸ What I wish to do here, therefore, is explore the challenge Jenson’s theology has raised here by exploring the Biblical warrant for such a conclusion before then engaging with some of the philosophical issues.

Whilst a wide examination of the biblical texts is not possible I propose to visit two locations: Abraham’s interactions with YHWH in Genesis 18 and the text of Ezekiel. I have chosen the former because it is a passage where YHWH’s relationship to ‘justice’ does not appear fixed. The passage is taken by some scholars to confirm this possibility. I have chosen the latter text for the reasons outlined directly above.

Let us now turn to the first of these texts. In Gen 18:25 Abraham, after being told that YHWH will go and judge Sodom, says to YHWH “Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the

²⁵⁶This is philosophically loaded territory. Essentialism—the position that at least some objects have essential properties—is not uncontroversial. Quine, for example, argues that there is no such distinction. He suggests that two sentences ‘(1) necessarily 9 > 4’ and ‘(2) necessarily the number of planets > 4’ would be taken as true and false respectively. Because ‘the number of planets = 9,’ however, ‘9’ in (1) “is not purely referential and hence …the necessity operator is opaque.” In other words the criticism is that the reference of words or figures cannot be understood outside of their linguistic context, thus suggesting the distinction between intuitively necessary and intuitively non-necessary concepts is destroyed by linguistic inter-dependence. Quine, Word and Object, 197. For an excellent discussion of these issues, and counter-arguments see: Robertson and Atkins, “Accidental Properties”; Rey, “Analytic/Synthetic”.

²⁵⁷Though, if nature is understood as the conjunction of all of God’s necessary properties, then nature cannot be used univocally here without being reduced to ‘power.’

²⁵⁸Jenson’s commentary is: Jenson, Ezekiel.
wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”

Does this make live the possibility of YHWH’s infidelity to his own justice, or the need for YHWH to be tutored in his understanding of justice?

To begin with we will examine Walter Brueggemann’s work on this text. I have selected his reading due to both his prominence, and the fact that he answers this question in the affirmative. Breuggemann emphasises Abraham’s role as the teacher of YHWH. His case runs so: he argues that Genesis 18:16-32 was written after Genesis 19 and breaks open the “closed, fated view of the world given in 19:1-28.” YHWH seems to adopt the popular practice of retribution in Genesis 19. In Genesis 18 Abraham risks a conversation with YHWH where he is “the bearer of a new theological possibility.”

A central gambit of his argument is the acceptance of the witness of the tiqqunê soferim (emendations of the scribes) which renders the original text—before its emendation—as “YHWH remained standing before Abraham.” He accepts this emendation as it is “very early” and “not to be doubted in its authority and authenticity.” This original version of the text, says Brueggemann, has YHWH in a position of submission and accountability.

Brueggemann, therefore, reads the interplay between YHWH and Abraham in 18:17-21—and 17-19 in particular—with a sense of YHWH’s subordination. This interchange can take place because Abraham is, in 18:17-19, shown as the “historical bearer of Yahweh’s purposes,” these being “righteousness and justice.” In this role Abraham opens up for YHWH a new way for this purpose to be realised.

In his meeting with YHWH Abraham urges YHWH to “act like God and not like a childish, score-keeping litigant.”

God’s holiness transcends the “indictment-
punishment scheme of chapter 19.” Such action would diminish and jeopardise his own holiness.

Abraham, therefore, carries a possibility which “God must now consider.” This possibility is that the righteousness of the righteous should save not only themselves but the guilty should be saved by innocent ones. The passage ends abruptly at verse 33 with the question of 10 righteous. The old material of Genesis 19 is then encountered, and Abraham’s question is “left to germinate in the heart of God.”

Brueggemann clearly acknowledges that the grounds for Abraham’s argument are “God’s defence of his own character and reputation,” God’s “compassionate justice” and holiness are linked. But he equally clearly suggests that this is a moment of moral learning for YHWH. Abraham’s insight into YHWH’s character is superior to YHWH’s own. He understands—or so it seems—his commission to do ṣedāqāh ũmišpāṭ in the way of YHWH better than YHWH does.

This is confusing. How can YHWH’s character be both the foundation for Abraham’s role and the thing to which Abraham calls YHWH to act in coherence with, and yet Abraham be YHWH’s tutor? Perhaps we need to understand this as Abraham appealing to YHWH’s better nature. Abraham has seen a higher moral possibility in YHWH’s character and is now pointing out that this should be indicative of the whole of what YHWH does. Or perhaps YHWH’s threatened—is Genesis 19 just a barbaric textual tradition?—action would abrogate his character and Abraham talks him back from the brink. Brueggemann never quite makes this clear.

What is clear is that Brueggemann’s account can be used to support a view that YHWH’s properties—such as being just—change in their content. God’s justice is

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266Brueggemann, Genesis, 170.
267Ibid., 171–72.
268Ibid., 171.
269The same argument is made by Von Rad. See: Rad, Genesis: A Commentary, Old Testament Theology.
270Brueggemann, Genesis, 172.
271Ibid., 171.
272Abraham as tutor of YHWH, whilst bearing YHWH’s purposes (i.e. in some way embodying YHWH himself), has some resemblance to Jenson’s idea of God as both author and story.
273Here is why Jenson would not adopt the whole of this reading as it stands. God’s gracious overcoming of the past happens in an intra-trinitarian movement written in history. God’s righteousness is based on the triune decision of election. God’s future is not opened up to him by Abraham.
different now from what it once was. As noted above Jenson would not subscribe to Brueggemann’s whole argument, but the fundamental possibility that YHWH can grow in justice would lend credence to his project (though at the same time necessitating that he exegete the passage in a way amendable to his own project).

Before moving on to evaluate Brueggemann’s exegesis we should recognise that there is one possible reading of Brueggemann’s argument which Jenson would have to reject outright: that God’s actions do not fully measure up to his justice. On this conceptuality YHWH would have an unchanging justice towards which his actions would slowly grow in fidelity. It would be God’s fidelity to his own nature which would be contingent. This understanding of God’s power entails the possibility of acting out of accord with his own character. Jenson would see such a static nature that God had to overcome as a dangerous relic of the religious temptation.

Can Brueggemann’s account be answered? We will first examine his case for the *tiqqunê soferim*. Making judgments about the *tiqqunê soferim* is not easy. They are not witnessed in early manuscripts.²⁷⁴ Indeed they are only found in the Masorah, not—unlike *Qere* and *Sebirin* forms—in medieval manuscripts.²⁷⁵ Neither is there consensus in the scholarly community that these actually reflect the original form of the text.²⁷⁶

Weighing against these factors is the need to provide an explanation for the dynamic of emendation. Why would the ‘original’ form—which appears to have been corrected for its irreverence—have been invented? Tov argues that the form’s very irreverence makes it unlikely to have been the original form of the text. But this can be used just as easily to argue that the same concern would render the ‘original’ form’s invention perhaps even more unlikely.²⁷⁷ Brueggemann’s argument, outlined above, is problematically curt, but not—if sympathetically filled out—easily rejected.

²⁷⁵It is worth noting that this particular *tiqqunê soferim* is mentioned in Gen. Rab. 49.7. In the BHS the form is *wē abrāhām odennū ōmēd lipnē yhw* and the ‘original’ form swaps the position of *abrāhām* and *yhw*. See the BHS and: ibid., 61.
²⁷⁶In this case, in particular, suspicion is caused by the fact that they do not normally engage in so drastic a textual alteration as would be case here. See the respective treatments of the subject in: Brotzman, *Textual Criticism*; Tov, *Textual Criticism*.
The clearest factor weighing against the ‘original’ text of the *tiqqunê soferim* is that 19:27 continues the narrative as if Abraham had been standing before YHWH. Supporting this are the facts that in some of the earliest *midrashim* no *tiqqunê* is indicated and that—as mentioned above—it is attested only in the Masorah.²⁷⁸ I would conclude, on the basis of these three facts, that the BHS is likely to be the original text. This undermines a key part of Brueggemann’s argument though, of course, not conclusively.²⁷⁹

Even if the original text of the *tiqqunê soferim* were to be counted as authentic, this would not incontestably mean that YHWH was in a position of submission. The full—amended—verse reads “So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, while the LORD remained standing before the Abraham.”²⁸⁰ The first thing to notice is the function of this verse: the departure of the men requires clarification of who has remained behind. The function of 18:22 is to transition to a new scene.

If one concedes this then the import of ordering of agents of the parley in the second clause is to establish the dynamic of that scene. Abraham is set up as the primary instigator, YHWH is set up as the respondent.²⁸¹ But, by paying attention to the function of the verse as transition, we can see the continuity with the last scene. Abraham occupies this position according to YHWH’s own purpose: he is ‘deputised’ by YHWH into this role in 18:16–21.

I would suggest that the foregrounding of Abraham’s role here is part of an overall rhetorical thrust that *emphasises* the dependability of YHWH’s character. Brueggemann’s reading takes the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah as already past by placing

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²⁷⁸There are other factors such as discourse grammar at play, but Hamilton finds these to be inconclusive. See: Hamilton, *Genesis Chapters 18–50*, 24.

²⁷⁹Such considerations have led other scholars to reject Brueggemann’s argument. See: MacDonald, “Listening to Abraham”, 36.

²⁸⁰Gen. 18:22

²⁸¹Abraham’s own speech must also be mentioned here (vv. 27; 30; 32). His speech has temerity, but simultaneously “deploys a whole panoply of the abundant rhetorical devices of ancient Hebrew for expressing self-abasement before a powerful figure.” This might be taken as evidence that Abraham recognises his inferiority, but it need not mean there is any more than an inferiority of power. He might recognise his moral superiority. Indeed such speech would be all the more necessary were Abraham negotiating with Brueggemann’s capricious God. This evidence is, again, equivocal. Alter, *Genesis*, 82.
the text after Gen 19. Yet, if one takes the reading in canonical order, there are rea-
sons to reject the fixedness of Sodom and Gomorrah’s fate. As Nathan MacDonald
argues, YHWH’s announcement in v. 17 (“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am
about to do”) has no textual indication that it must be read as YHWH’s decision
of judgement, but it is more likely to be YHWH’s decision to investigate: “Then
the LORD said, ‘How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how
very grave their sin! I must go down and see whether they have done altogether
according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know.’”

MacDonald goes on to argue that this suggests that Abraham’s response is one of
misunderstanding: he believes that YHWH’s judgement is already decided and thus
“may not necessarily have listened well to Yhwh.” I do not think this conclusion
is necessary: the openness of what God will do in response to his investigation is
precisely the grounds of Abraham’s queries. This is the tension of the text, and the
possibility of Abraham—and therefore the reader—learning what YHWH’s ṣedāqāh
ûmišpāṭ look like.

The phrase ṣedāqāh ûmišpāṭ is used for the first time in the Hebrew canon in Gen
18. It is bound up with the Abrahamic covenant: he and his descendants are being
charged by YHWH to carry out these duties (18:19). Abraham’s question is, then,
whether “this is actually a way Yahweh can go about being a šōpēt, a person in
authority;” in this case one executing judgment on behalf of the oppressed.

It might be, then, that this very exchange actually raises the logical possibility that
YHWH could have done otherwise than according to Abraham’s complaint. From
one perspective this possibility must be affirmed: it is how the drama of the text
functions. But this is because the passage is about Abraham as one whose task is to
do ṣedāqāh ûmišpāṭ, which is precisely his “keeping the way of the LORD” (18:19).

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283Ibid., 30.
284178–83 Goldingay, “Justice and Salvation”.
285Abraham’s ṣedāqāh has already been seen in Gen 15:6 ibid., 179.
286Both Goldingay and MacDonald argue for this understand of the import of ṣedāqāh ûmišpāṭ. ibid.,
287It is for this reason that I think that Hamilton’s notion of “Abraham’s confidence in Yahweh’s
character” is somewhat infelicitous. Hamilton, Genesis Chapters 18–50, 25.
The passage is about Abraham learning what YHWH’s ṣeḏāqāh ēmišpāṭ is like. It is Abraham’s uncertainty we are invited into, not YHWH’s.

I would suggest that God’s role of ‘judge of all the earth’ strengthens this case. In John Walton’s examination of Genesis 1 he argues that the fundamental category of concern in Ancient Near Eastern cosmologies is one of function. The collapse of the meaning of ‘light’ on day 1 of creation into the periodic fluctuation of light experienced upon the earth—God calling the ‘light’ ‘day’—demonstrates a concern not with light as a material object, but its function: the coming-into-being of time. The role of a thing and what it is are tightly integrated.

As Genesis 1 (and 1-12 more broadly) constitute the backdrop to this interaction in Genesis 18 I would argue that such a world-view can plausibly be read into the designation of YHWH as judge, though the key difference here is that what is revealed is not the shape of the cosmos, but the character of its creator. Whilst ‘judge of the earth’ is indeed a functional role it is just thereby not something that is accidental to who God is, but a revelation of who he is. What Abraham learns is who God is. Once we are on the other side of this text, we see that the gap that Abraham opens between judge and justice is shown to be a per impossible one.

On the whole, then, I would argue that there are strong exegetical grounds for understanding God’s justice as something which is already fixed: a part of God’s character. The conclusion is not unimpeachable and further theological argument must be added for this to be understood as representative of an a se state of affairs. Yet it is enough to conclude that we are not forced by this text to follow Jenson’s construction of God’s freedom.

Let us turn to the second text I wish to highlight: Ezekiel. Ezekiel, as a book which

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288 This is MacDonald’s conclusion, though he assigns Abraham a greater degree of misunderstanding than I have above. I much prefer the notion of ‘uncertainty.’ MacDonald, “Listening to Abraham”, 40.

289 It is important to note that Walton is not arguing for an absolute split between Hebrew and ‘Greek’ ontological concerns, but rather that it is a question of “what they [the ANE world] gave significance to” in understanding the cosmos. But his argument that chaos is nothing (especially as evident in the Egyptian Instructions of Merikare) as contrasted with the order of Genesis 1 is powerful evidence that right-functioning is necessary for something to ‘be.’ See: Walton, Lost World, 27-8, italics mine. See also: Walton, Ancient Cosmology.

290 Walton, Lost World, 54-5.
foregrounds the action of the transcendent God in history and which is the subject of a commentary by Jenson, is a useful second touchstone in this examination of the contingency of God’s properties. I wish, for the purposes of limiting scope, to focus on the vision in chapter 1.

In his commentary on Ezekiel chapter 1 Jenson argues for a striking degree of immanence in the prophet’s vision. The climactic language of chapter 1—of the one on the throne with the “appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord”—does not put great ontological distance between the vision and the enthroned reality because ‘glory’ “controls the whole sequence.”²⁹¹ The “inner meaning of all Ezekiel’s variations on ‘then they/you shall know that I …’ …is that the identified persons will feel the impact of the Lord’s kabod.”²⁹² For the Lord’s glory to be present is for the Lord to be present. But because it is the glory of the Lord it is God present as “an other that is the same God that he is.”²⁹³ Therefore the figure is the Son. Indeed, it is the human Jesus.²⁹⁴

Jenson summarises his position in this language: “I regard this vision of the heavenly throne’s earthly career as a vision of the incarnation. The division of God’s place from ours is overcome: the heavenly throne, God’s place, becomes an item within our place.”²⁹⁵ We can see here key themes of Jenson’s theology: Christology seals any distance that might open up the space for Feuerbach.

How persuasive is Jenson’s reading? Let us first turn to the general language of the vision: the constant refrain of ‘something like,’ talk of sapphire, fire, splendour, clouds, firmament all signify something important. They function perhaps incontestably as indications of God’s power.²⁹⁶ Yet, while the language used by various scholars differs, there is agreement within the scholarly literature on Ezekiel that this language suggests the transcendence of, or adds a note of dissimilitude to, the things depicted in the vision.

²⁹¹Jenson, Ezekiel, 41.
²⁹²Ibid., 42.
²⁹³Ibid., 42.
²⁹⁴Ibid., 43–45.
²⁹⁵Ibid., 39.
²⁹⁶Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, 120. Hummel, Ezekiel 1–20, 63.

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Allen, for example, argues that such language has “the effect of veiling God.”²⁹⁷ While Odell, after a careful study of Assyrian aesthetic practices, argues that Ezekiel is evoking the distinction between object and representation with such language: “Ezekiel is describing not Yahweh, but a representation of Yahweh.”²⁹⁸ Other commentators argue similarly.²⁹⁹

What of the figure on the throne? The language used describe the likeness of the form on the throne is very similar to that used to describe the four living creatures.³⁰⁰ The four living creatures are described as marʾêhen dmt ʾādām, while the figure on the throne is dmt kmrʾh ʾādām. The language for the human form implies a greater similarity, but it is still only a representation.³⁰¹

But this is a part of Jenson’s point: the figure on the throne is the glory ‘of’ God. The only difference is that for Jenson the figure on the throne is not just a representation of God but the representation: God’s perfect image and likeness revealing God’s glory (John 1:14-18, Col. 1:15). Does this mean that Jenson’s case stands?

Let it first be said that Jenson’s definition of glory is convincing. The import of glory ascribed to figures of power is generally understood to mean something like “the sheer weight of that person’s majesty.”³⁰² Walther Zimmerli describes glory, in terms advancing towards the “innermost kernel” of the term, as “the weightiness of a person,” God manifesting himself “in history and creation,” and “the personal presence of the deity in light.”³⁰³ All these function on the same lines as Jenson’s argument.

Furthermore the vision of YHWH’s glory is indeed critical, as Jenson argues. The prophet’s description of the vision in 1:28 as a vision of glory is often regarded as the hermeneutical key for it.³⁰⁴ That this vision takes place in exile means that it

²⁹⁷Allen, Ezekiel 1-19, 36.
³⁰⁰Allen, Ezekiel 1-19, 35.
³⁰²Block, Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24, 105.
³⁰³Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, 123-24.
³⁰⁴See, for example: Block, Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24, 105. And: Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, 124.
is the extraordinary immanence of YHWH in an unexpected place which is given
focus.\textsuperscript{305} Jenson’s emphasis on glory and immanence is not without warrant.

So what, then of likeness and representation? Jenson’s understanding of the figure
on the throne being a Christ-figure is one that has—to various degrees—a strong
historical provenance.\textsuperscript{306} It also claims many present-day champions. A convenient
example is Hummel, who uses logic similar to Jenson’s regarding glory: the glory
of YHWH has the same relationship to the Father as that between Jesus Christ and
the Father. The figure is the \textit{logos asarkos}.\textsuperscript{307}

But here is the key difference: the figure is normally understood as the \textit{logos asarkos}.\textsuperscript{308}
Jenson, however, has the \textit{incarnate} Jesus upon the throne.\textsuperscript{309} Recall Jenson’s language
above: the ontological distance between the figure on the throne and our reality is
not great: “The division of God’s place from ours is overcome: the heavenly throne,
God’s place, becomes an item \textit{within our place}.”\textsuperscript{310}

Even if we concede for the sake of argument that the figure on the throne is the
incarnate Christ then Jenson’s reading is still far from convincing. A distinction
should be made between an item \textit{in} our place and an item which is \textit{both in and of} our
place. Jesus the \textit{logos asarkos} upon this throne would be, in some mysterious way,
an item \textit{in} our place. But he certainly would not—while unincarnate—have been in
anyway of the ontological order \textit{of} this place. Yet the \textit{incarnate} Christ—insofar as he
has a fully human nature—is \textit{both in and ontologically of} this place.\textsuperscript{311} When Jenson
says ‘within’ our place, he has to mean, \textit{in and of}.

\textsuperscript{306} The earliest version of this tradition, in which the four living creatures are associated with the
gospel writers, occurs in Irenaeus. For a brief discussion of this tradition see: Odell, \textit{Ezekiel}, 33.
\textsuperscript{307} Note that Hummel is careful to suggest that the the Son is not co-terminus with the Father’s
\textsuperscript{308} Some early iconography has Christ directly identified with the figure on the throne. Exactly
what is meant by such a depiction is not a straightforward question, and I would suggest—given the
general eccentricity of his theology—Jenson bears the burden of proof to show that this is an instance
\textsuperscript{309} Jenson rejects the \textit{logos asarkos} completely, and so must speak this way of the figure on the throne.
See section 2.2.2.
\textsuperscript{310} Jenson, \textit{Ezekiel}, 39.
\textsuperscript{311} Though ontologically remaining fully God. See section 2.2.2. for a discussion of how Jenson
understands Jesus’ divinity.
There can be no doubt that the import of Ezekiel's vision is that God's presence is in this (surprising) place. But the above argument regarding the representationality of the vision as a whole does not support the kind of immanence Jenson is arguing for. The figure on the throne is not just the glory ‘of’ the Lord. It is also described as: *dmt kmrʾ*h ādām*, not just ādām. The whole tenor of the vision’s repeated linguistic patterns—include the description of the figure on the throne—functions in a way whereby the ontological order of the vision is shown to be distinct from our own. Quite decisive, I would argue, is the fact that the vision as a whole is is couched in language that suggests distance and transcendence. Ezekiel describes the vision as: *marʾē dmt kbwd-yhw*h. Jenson, I would argue, has focused on the question of ‘glory’ and failed to do justice to the features that promote a sense of distance in the vision.

The relation between God and history seems, in Ezekiel 1, to suggest a greater degree of transcendence than Jenson will allow. Are there any consequences of this mis-reading for the book as a whole? I will explore this by looking at Ezekiel 20 and 23.

In Ezekiel Chapter 20 (and 23) we see the interplay between transcendence and immanence in YHWH’s historical action. We see that the name of YHWH, understood as YHWH’s self revelation in history, is determinative of God’s historical action. God works so that his name is neither profaned in front of the nations, nor forgotten by Israel. This is a tension within which YHWH has to act, with the exile itself profaning YHWH’s name. There is a distinction between the kinds of action open to YHWH given the historical particularity of Israel’s election, and the content of the character YHWH wants to be faithfully conveyed through historical action.

Notice that the relationship between history and character can be understood as

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312 Wright, *Ezekiel*, 36.

313 Ezekiel 20:38; 23:49. In the so-called revisionist history lesson of Ezekiel 20 YHWH repeatedly asserts that he “acted for the sake of my name.” C.f. Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22, 44. Some scholars see this as an either/or choice between understanding this as God’s character (the love revealed in election) or reputation. I would argue that the primary concern in these chapters is right-knowledge. For the case for this as character see: Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 267. And the case for reputation: Block, *Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 629.

314 Ezekiel 36:16-21
something like sign and signifier. YHWH here in Ezekiel 20-23 clearly considers his historical action to communicate to Israel and the world around it. That is the nature of his bind when facing a disobedient Israel. He wants his historical action to communicate rightly. His actions can be read, or understood, though part of the problem is that other nations can only do this in part: Israel's punishment would look like YHWH's impotence or infidelity.

Here, I think, something like Nicholas Wolterstorff’s argument that speaking—meant in the speech-act sense of doing—is not revealing is appropos.³¹⁵ To speak is to perform an action, and said action is not identical with any revelation that may—intentionally or otherwise—accompany it.³¹⁶ To use one of Wolterstorff’s examples a husband might reveal to his wife that he is anxious by the tone of his reply to one of her questions, but the primary work his speech was doing was answering her question.³¹⁷ The accompanying revelation may or may not be intended, but revelation—understood as the unveiling of some hidden knowledge—is not identical with actions.³¹⁸ God’s historical acting-in-accordance-with-his-character in judging Israel can, therefore, only be correctly understood once both its character as judgement and what that judgment reveals about God is correctly discerned.

What Jenson forces us to say is that God is identical with his action, and with what he reveals in so acting, for God is the narrative of his history with us. By having the incarnate Christ on the throne in Ezekiel’s vision Jenson re-iterates this: God is the historical narrative of the life of Jesus Christ. Does this account allow for the kind of communication we see in Ezekiel 20–23 to take place?

If God is a history and there is nothing beyond or behind that history, how can revelation say more than ‘God did x at time t₁?’ How can God truly take on a property—or a metaphysically equivalent way of speaking—like being ‘just?’ How do we move from ‘God did x at time t₁,’ to ‘God is y?’ If there is a way to do this, what is the metaphysical status of this new property? Is it somehow located in the text itself?

³¹⁵See the second chapter of: Wolterstorff, Divine Discourse.
³¹⁶Assuming that the action is not itself revelation.
³¹⁷Again, see chapter 2 of: Wolterstorff, Divine Discourse.
³¹⁸Ibid., 23.
If there is no satisfactory answer to these questions then the dynamic that drives this part of Ezekiel’s text would lose their drama, indeed the very text as revelation loses its self-understanding. For God would simply become ends developing in time, possessed of no fixed identity or essence that anyone could read rightly or otherwise. Jenson would, I think, point to the future, to Jesus’ presence as a promise or proclamation, that which has sealed God’s identity and given us the stability we need for these identifications. As this is a christological problem I will deal with in section 2.2.2.1.

The relationship of transcendence and immanence which I have argued that Jenson misreads into Ezekiel 1 is, then, not benign. It seems to jeopardise not just the coherence of much of the tension of the book, but the book’s own self-understanding. The possibility of the kind of communication upon which the book’s whole logic depends is threatened.

Neither Genesis 18 nor Ezekiel 1 give evidence for the theological position that God has power over his own nature. Both can be plausibly read as support for a case against voluntarism, and Ezekiel lends strong support to the necessity of some sort of interval between God and history. Yet in neither case is there an air-tight case against voluntarism. Further theological and philosophical reflection would be needed to make such an argument.

What has been shown is that: 1. By foregrounding power as the main ontological differential, and by positing being as narrative, Jenson’s position is actually much more difficult than a merely voluntarist one (how do we ascribe things like ‘justice’ to him?). 2. That there are strong exegetical arguments that can be built on to reject a voluntarist position. Thus, Jenson’s project has not, at this stage, forced a rejection of something like Hart’s project.

Part of Jenson’s response to this criticism would be—I believe—his argument that the overall biblical witness shows that you can’t ask the implicit counter-factual—what properties would God possess in the abstract without creation—in the first place. God’s decision is analogical, there is no before for anything to have the space for anything to become an accident. No property God possesses is accidental. Jenson writes:
The sentence ‘How would the Trinity have been the Trinity if God had not created a world, and there had therefore been no creature Jesus to be the Son, or had let the fallen creation go, with the same result?’ is often taken for a real question. ...I now think ...[this] concedes too much to our unbaptized notion of time ...It has now dawned on me that the putative question is nonsense.³¹⁹

The character of this argument is fiat. One has to either accept or reject it. I reject it on the basis that I do not share his construal of time. Now we come to a decision. If we concede that there are certain characteristics that the biblical narrative would see as ‘essential’ to God it seems that a strong voluntarism is forbidden.³²⁰ This, of course, opens up a large and difficult area of debate on the nature of God’s freedom which goes back at least to Lombard, and later Scotus and Ockham.³²¹

For now we will let this pass but will pick it up in my constructive work. One thing we should not do is dismiss Jenson’s position as simply fideistic. There are theological analogies (so to speak) to his metaphysical fiat regarding the inability to get behind God’s decision. Gregory of Nazianzus says in his Third Theological Oration in relation to the generation of the Son, “How was he begotten? Again with displeasure I will say this same thing. Let the generation of God be honoured by silence.”³²² Granted, Gregory is working with a scriptural term, but it is not entirely dis-analogous: the objector is seeking the push behind reality that Gregory believes cannot be gotten behind. He simply refuses the intelligibility of the question.

In other words, by making our metaphysical world strange Jenson forces us to question the arbitrariness of our own metaphysical boundaries. Jenson shows us the fragility of all metaphysical systems. This is, I think, one of Jenson’s greatest contributions to those who cannot follow the specific trajectory of his theology.

We turn now to examine the last of the three categories which lie at the intersection of the Trinity and impassibility: time.

³²⁰It is worth noting that even for Barth there is in God’s freedom “nothing arbitrary or accidental but in which God is true to Himself.” Barth, CD III.2, 218.
³²¹O’Donovan, Resurrection and Moral Order, 41.
2.2.1.3 Time

Jenson’s understanding of time has already been touched upon in section 2.2.1.1., but it will continue to feature in this critique of Jenson’s theology.\textsuperscript{323} I will, therefore, engage in a brief outline of his understanding of time as a means to a clearer statement of his work than context has yet allowed. Two challenges presented by Jenson’s account of time will also be highlighted.

God’s infinity is one in which “beginning and goals and reconciliation” are not transcended. What God transcends is “any personal limitation in having them … any limit imposed on what can he be by what has been, except the limit of his personal self-identity.”\textsuperscript{324} Yet what makes this “duration” genuinely temporal is that “source” and “goal” in God’s infinity are asymmetrical.\textsuperscript{325} God is:

Primally future to himself and only thereupon past and present for himself. It is in that he is Spirit that the true God avoids—so to speak—the timelessness of mere form or mere consciousness. Therefore such paired denials and affirmations as the following must always be to hand: God is not eternal in that he adamantly remains as he began, but in that he always creatively opens to what he will be; not in that he hangs on, but in that he gives and receives; not in that he perfectly persists, but in that he perfectly anticipates.\textsuperscript{326}

God’s infinity is not spatial but temporal. All temporal infinity is some kind of transcendence of time, but in God’s case this is not because he contradicts time but because “no temporal activity can keep up with the activity that he is.”\textsuperscript{327} The Aristotelian view of temporal infinity would be that God lacked boundaries, but the Christian view (seen, he argues, in Gregory of Nyssa) is that he overcomes them: “to be God is always to be open to and always to open a future, transgressing all past-imposed conditions.”\textsuperscript{328}

\textsuperscript{323}Particularly the evaluation of Jenson’s Christology in section 2.2.2.
\textsuperscript{324}Jenson, \textit{Systematic Theology vol. 1}, 217.
\textsuperscript{325}Jenson is drawing upon, and going further than, Barth here. \textit{Ibid.}, 217.
\textsuperscript{326}\textit{Ibid.}, 217.
\textsuperscript{327}\textit{Ibid.}, 216.
\textsuperscript{328}\textit{Ibid.}, 216.
Time is, therefore, not a ‘line,’ but “the infinity of the life that the Son, who is Jesus the Christ, lives with the Father in their Spirit.”³²⁹ We have already established that God is word (or song). The metaphysical leap Jenson is making here is that a story must be able to cause—and, thereby, the end must be able to cause—and not simply be about something.³³⁰ Jenson argues:

The order of a good story is ordering by the outcome of the narrated events ... The great metaphysical question on the border between the gospel and our culture’s antecedent theology is whether this ordering may be regarded as its own kind of causality.³³¹

So we arrive at Jenson’s definition of time: it is the “distention of a person reality,” in this case the infinite life of God.³³² Does this work?

The key questions are these: how can “absolute” distinction be maintained between a narratival ‘past,’ ‘present’ and ‘future’ whilst also asserting that God is “pure” duration (where nothing from the past escapes God and nothing from the future is out of reach)?³³³ Moreover “Why should we think that God’s past is identical with the Father, or his future with the Spirit? What does that mean, exactly?”³³⁴

It is very hard to see why either of these two things should be true. My question for Jenson would be this: is this conception of time really any less problematic than a-temporality? Consider the number of conceptual burdens and philosophical fiat that have accrued in order to make it work with the biblical narrative. The answer seems to be that it is not.

³²⁹Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 140.
³³⁰Cumin, “Spirit of it All”, 174-75.
³³¹Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 159.
³³²See chapter 17, section II of: Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 2.
³³³Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 217.
³³⁴Crisp, “Pre-Existence of Christ”, 36. Pannenberg gives a hint in suggesting that “the Son is the future of the Father, because it is the Son who establishes the kingdom of the Father on earth. Similarly the Spirit is the future of the Son since it is the Spirit who raises Jesus from the dead.” Yet immediately this rationale is given, the arbitrary nature of such reasoning manifests itself insofar he immediately introduces another formula that would be deeply problematic for Jenson: “Again, the Father is the future of both, the Son and the Spirit, since it is the Father’s kingdom they bring about by their joint activities.” This demonstrates the danger of trying to assign the poles of time to the persons of the Trinity with any sort of biblical warrant (notwithstanding something like the Eastern doctrine of the Father as arche). Pannenberg, “Eternity”, 69.
Nor does Jenson’s articulation seem any more immune to idolatry than the ‘religious’ conception of God. It is unclear to me why—when operating at this level of conceptual abstraction—this path locks Feuerbach out. God’s future can always be the future I imagine, even if I pretend it runs through Jesus Christ. The future can be the ground of idolatry—even in Christ—just as much as the ‘frozen past.’ This would no-doubt, be a misuse of Jenson’s system, but no more than it would be of, say, Hart’s. As one outside of Jenson’s system I simply cannot see that assuming the conceptual burdens here is worthwhile. Nonetheless, we will have to answer Jenson’s implicit question here: if a shaped infinity, then how?

Having now discussed three important aspects of Jenson’s understanding of the Trinity as it relates to impassibility, we turn to examine his Christology insofar as it relates to the question of impassibility.

2.2.2 Christology

Christology is one of the key loci for the debate on impassibility. Indeed it is possible to read Christological controversies as hinging around the question of impassibility. As the unification of God and humanity in Jesus Christ does not result in a tertium quid, impassibility seeks to guard the fullness of the divine nature in such a union. The examination of impassibility in relation to violence, therefore, demands an understanding of how the world and God relate in Jesus Christ.

It is, therefore, important for me to examine Jenson’s Christology, and particularly his use of two figures whose thought I wish to use in my own constructive work: Cyril of Alexandria and Maximus the Confessor. What can I learn from Jenson’s Christology, and from his use Cyril and Maximus?

In a similar vein to Barth, Jenson argues that the only join between creator and

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338 Hart will also ask this question. I will answer it in section 4.4.1.2.
339 See, for an excellent overview: Gavrilyuk, Impassible God.
340 Jenson has a preference for the Eastern tradition in his discussion of pneumatology, and for the Eastern Neo-Chalcedonian tradition with regards to Christology. See: Forde, “Soteriology”; Jenson, “The Holy Spirit”.

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creature occurs in Jesus Christ. Jenson follows a “hyper-Cyrillean Christology.” In a recent article Jenson outlines four “maxims” that shape his thinking. These are as follows: 1. Jesus is not a coordinate reality of a pre-existent Logos and Jesus the human, but is rather “the Son/Logos of God by his relation to the Father.”

2. Mary as Theotokos means that we cannot imagine an antecedent Son who was somehow himself without the human Jesus. Mary bore God the Son, not a union of God the Son with a human being. Whatever the disruption this brings to our understanding of time, it is to theology’s good. The counter-factual question of how God would be as we know him without the world is meaningless. It takes for granted unbaptised notions of time.

3. The counter-factual question of how God would be as we know him without the world is meaningless. It takes for granted unbaptised notions of time.

4. We are not allowed to posit metaphysical entities beyond scripture’s warrant. In John’s prologue ho logos is simply a gloss on the creative utterance from Genesis 1. There is, therefore no warrant for belief in some metaphysical entity called the ‘Logos.’

Before we move on and examine Cyril and Maximus, we can dismiss points 3 and 4. Point three is a fiat. There is no justification except that Jenson’s baptised notion of time disallows it. As I have already rejected his notion of time and the biblical interpretation underlying it I can simply reject the fiat.

The key question for point 4 is what to make of John 1:14, “Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο,” in light of 1:1 “in the beginning was the Word.” ἐγένετο is a 2nd aorist indicative, the most common usage of which is the representation of past time in relation to the time of speaking. If we then look at the broader context of the chapter, and particularly verse 1, there are no clear textual signals that indicate why this should not be the case here. As such there is a strong prima facie case that it

338 Thus, in addition to the above argument about the collapse of creation and providence, there is a good case to be made that Jenson collapses creation and redemption. I.e. the telos of the ‘process’ of history is eschatological only insofar as it is redemptive. Wright, *Dogmatic Aesthetics*, 130.

339 Insofar as I am still a recognizably Lutheran theologian, it is the hyper-Cyrillean Christology/sacramentology of Johannes Brenz—shortly adopted by Luther himself—that is the chief bond” Jenson, “Autobiography”, 47.


341 Emphasis mine. ibid., 130.

342 Ibid., 130-31.

343 Though Jenson has attempted to respond to this in the past, he retracts his previous answers. ibid., 131.

344 Ibid., 131.

should be translated ‘became,’ and understood as a transition of state.

As his doctrine of creation is Christological Jenson would perhaps equate this ‘becoming’ with the decision of election: the inclusion of the man Jesus in the Trinity. There are only two possible ways of understanding this, however: either the decision is ‘eternal’ such that it is impossible to conceive of the man Jesus ‘before’ being a member of the Trinity, or some sort of transition takes place.

In the former case—no transition of state—the Word doesn’t becomes flesh at all, he always is flesh. John’s prologue must then be read squarely against the grain of the text. In the latter case—from man to God—Jenson has rejected the Logos asarkos so the only possible way to have a transition is one from man to God. But this means that the subject and object of John 1:14 are reversed, and is clearly not the intention of Jenson’s theology. And, if this were a live possibility, what would John 1:1 refer to?

Wright argues that Jenson’s position actually creates less difficulties than a classical one. Wright maintains that if we were to adopt the traditional position of the ‘antithesis’ of time and eternity then the notion of ‘before’ makes no sense. God the Son has no ‘before’ or ‘after.’ If God is atemporal then there is no becoming. Thus if he is Logos asarkos ‘before’ he is Logos asarkos ‘afterwards.’ Jenson bites this bullet and chooses to speak instead of an eternal Son and to work out how to say whatever else needs to be said.

This critique of atemporality might be cogent. Yet it does not make Jenson’s theology fit John 1 more easily. As such, having already rejected his metaphysics, I would argue that John 1 weighs against Jenson’s theology and frees us to think of a Logos asarkos.

Points 1 and 2 rest in part with Jenson’s appropriate of Cyril and Maximus. To these figures we now turn.

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347 See the four criteria above and section 2.2.2.1. below.
348 Wright, Dogmatic Aesthetics, 169-70.
349 Ibid., 169-70.
350 I will confront this sort of issue in my external critique of Hart in section 3.2.1.
2.2.2.1 Cyril of Alexandria

According to Jenson the Christological story into which Cyril and Maximus fit is this: the Church sought to escape the straightforward implications of the phrase “Jesus is Lord.” These implications were first avoided in subordinationism, until Arius forced the issue and Nicea and Constantinople were held. Then Nestorius and Eutyches—putting aside the issue of whether they were actually representative of that which they came to symbolise—sought in different ways to separate the identity of the man Jesus and the Logos. Both of these were quashed as strategies at Chalcedon.

It was the Christology of Cyril, with his insistence on the oneness of Christ which was the main concern at Chalcedon. But here “the council fathers fudged it.” Cyril’s formulations were not perfect—“language fails us here”—but the Chalcedonian formulas “do not really meet Cyril’s concern.” This was made worse by Leo’s Tome, particularly the following language:

> For each ‘form’ [or nature] does the acts which belong to it, in communion with the other; the Word, that is, performing what belongs to the Word, and the flesh carrying out what belongs to the flesh; the one of these shines out in miracles, the other succumbs to injuries.

This, says Jenson, is, if not Nestorianism, “something rather worse.” It has come to represent the West’s general Christological gambit:

> The facility with which contemporary academic and church-bureaucratic types can separate ‘the Christ’ or ‘the Logos’ from Jesus, is simply the coming home to roost of chickens long incubated in Western theology. The Word does his business and the man Jesus his: the one ‘shines forth

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351 Jenson, “Jesus in the Trinity”, 308-16.
352 It is worth noting that a strand of modern scholarship sees the fifth century theological debates—and in part Nicene theology—as focused on the issue of impassibility. See: O’Keefe, “Impassible Suffering?”
353 Jenson, “Jesus in the Trinity”, 313.
354 Ibid., 314.
355 Ibid., 314.
357 Jenson, “Jesus in the Trinity”, 314.
in the miracles, the other submits to the injuries.’ So Jesus is male, but never mind, ‘the Christ’ is whatever sexuality we prefer. Jesus is Jewish, but the Logos is ethnically malleable. Jesus is voluntarily poor, but the Christ can even represent our aspirations to be rich.358

The Christological arc from Cyril to Maximus articulates what Chalcedon should have.359 We turn first to Cyril. Jenson argues that at the heart of Cyril’s concern was a strong version of the communication of idioms (communicatio idiomatum).360 As this is Jenson’s hermeneutical key for Cyril we will examine how the communication of attributes features in Cyril’s work as a means of both assessing the fidelity of Jenson’s reading and being able to later appropriate aspects of his work.361

Jenson is not alone in seeing the communication of idioms as the centre of Cyril’s thought.362 Weinandy, for example, argues that Cyril was guided by the creed of Nicea: that the ‘only-begotten Son’ being ‘made man’ means that the Word was united with flesh. For Cyril Jesus must be one entity, and that the divine Son existing as a man.363 In order to be truly one the divine and human idioms must be able to be predicated of this one entity. While other scholars do not use the terminology of the communication of idioms, other proposed centres of Cyril’s thought—such as his reading of the unity of the Son in the Gospels and issues of soteriology (including the Eucharist)—need the same conceptual circumscription that the communication of idioms offers: an emphasis that the truly divine Son took on flesh and became one entity.364 This prima facie

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359 And what was eventually articulated in the second council of Chalcedon in 553. Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 133–36.
360 Ibid., 129.
361 This might look like a method of inquiry that belongs to the internal critique: assessing the fidelity of Jenson’s reading of another thinker. It belongs in the external critique, however. I will be developing a reading of Cyril (and Maximus in the next section) by which I will be accepting or rejecting Jenson’s proposal. I will not be using it simply to work out the cogency and warrant for his own control beliefs.
362 Anderson, “Deification”; Kalantzis, “Room For Two?”; Weinandy, Does God Suffer?
363 Weinandy’s agreement with Jenson at this point is telling given that Weinandy’s theological project is very different from Jenson’s in its use of Cyril. Weinandy, Does God Suffer?, 190–91, c.f. fn36.
evidence aside, however, the critical question is if and how the communication of attributes works in Cyril's text.

Cyril has a very strong emphasis on the unity of Jesus.³⁶⁵ This can be seen in Cyril's preferred way of talking of Jesus as the ‘one nature of God the Logos, that has been enfleshed.’³⁶⁶ The two natures are often described as only abstractly specifiable: “we recognize two natures in him …but we divided them only at a theoretical level (en philais dielontes ennoiais), and by subtle speculation (en ischnais theoriais), or rather we accept the distinction only in our mental intuitions (nou phantasias).”³⁶⁷

Perhaps most tellingly he insists upon Jesus' oneness as an entity. He writes that:

We do not separate the natures out or attribute a capacity for radical severance to them (οὐκ ἀνὰ μέρος τίθεμεν τὰς φύσεις οὔτε μὴν διαμιμταξι διατομῆν δύναμιν ἐφίεμεν αὐταῖς), but see that they belong to one man so that the two are two no more and the single living being is constituted complete by a pair of them.³⁶⁸

All predications of the Gospel and Apostolic writings must refer to this one entity. Cyril writes that:

If anyone interprets the sayings in the Gospels and apostolic writings, or the things said about Christ by the saints, or the things he says about himself, as referring to the two prosopa or hypostases, attributing some of them to a man conceived as separate from the Word of God, and attributing others (as divine) exclusively to the Word of God the Father, let him be anathema.³⁶⁹

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³⁶⁵Jenson is right to see this stemming from a commitment to the Gospel narrative. Cyril was deeply informed by the biblical text. O'Keefe writes that: “Cyril was first and foremost an exegete. During the 16 years of his episcopacy before he began his struggle with Nestorius, he had been busy working on commentaries for nearly every book of the Bible.” O'Keefe, “Impassible Suffering?”, 45. Though note that O'Keefe is criticised for positing a too-strong either/or between Cyril's thinking being biblical or philosophical. See: Gavrilyuk, “Theopatheia”, 195.

³⁶⁶Jenson, *Systematic Theology vol. 1*, 129.


³⁶⁹Cyril, “The Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius”, 274.
Thus the predications of fleshly nature must be accorded to the Son. Cyril argues that “when we read ‘grew in wisdom and knowledge and grace’ this must be predicated of (the incarnate Son) …and so also hunger and thirst. And indeed, even when we read that he petitions the Father to escape suffering, we attribute also this to the same one.”

Yet this emphasis on unity is not untempered. Cyril talks of “the difference of the two natures not having been destroyed by the union.” Jesus is not a tertium quid. As Cyril is committed to divine impassibility this means that Jesus’ suffering does not take place “in the nature of the Godhead:”

He suffers in his own flesh, and not in the nature of the Godhead. The method of these things is altogether ineffable …. Yet, following these most correct deductions …we do not deny that he can be said to suffer (in case we thereby imply that the birth in the flesh was not his but someone else’s), but this does not mean that we say that the things pertaining to the flesh transpired in his divine and transcendent nature.

How is this unity and distinction held together? Or is Cyril inconsistent? There is divided opinion among Cyril scholars. Some see that there are two incompatible Christological models in Cyril, one emphasising unity and one compositional. Others, like Weinandy or McGuckin, argue that Cyril is simply clearly demarcating how to speak of the mystery of the incarnation.

The controversy with Nestorius caused a change in language towards an emphasis on the two natures and the paradoxical language of ‘impassible suffering.’ This

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373 For the case against consistency see: Wessel, Cyril of Alexandria, 277. For the case for consistency see: McGukin, Christological Controversy, 112.
374 See: Norris, “Christological Models”.
375 As I have already discussed, mystery is a category theology must embrace, though the responsibility the theologian bears is knowing when and how to appeal to it. See section 1.3.4. Weinandy, Does God Suffer?, 182-213. McGukin, Christological Controversy, 202-3
376 See: Hallman, “Seed of Fire”.
development, combined with the fact that Cyril’s corpus is composed of occasional writings makes it clear that there are surds in Cyril’s work which resist easy categorisation. Carefully deciding between these two competing theses is beyond the scope of our present project: we are assessing the degree to which the communication of idioms is present in Cyril’s work. We will, therefore, adopt the course of following those trying to find unity in Cyril’s presentation, while making note of important places where the opposing scholarship disagrees.³⁷⁷ This double-vision—a narrative of unity and a foregrounding of the difficulties of this narrative—should give us the tools to assess Jenson’s appropriation of Cyril.

Against Nestorius—who distinguished two subjects in order to make sure Christ’s human actions and experiences were distinct from the divine nature—Cyril, as we have seen, spoke of a single subject. This subject is the “one divine Word …[who exists] in two distinct states: apart from the incarnation and within the framework of the incarnation.”³⁷⁸

It is the single subject that undergoes suffering, birth, death, etc.³⁷⁹ This is a new existential experience. Cyril writes that:

When he enclosed himself in our flesh he was ‘tempted in every respect’. We obviously do not mean that he had been ignorant before, but rather that to the God-befitting knowledge that he already possessed was added the knowledge gained through temptation. He did not become compassionate (συμπαθης) because of being tempted. Why? Because he was and is merciful by nature as God.³⁸⁰

This single subject is the seat of unity. Weinandy argues that Cyril communicates

³⁷⁷Apart from this heuristic consideration, I would also argue that reading a thinker to try and find unity, while noting difficulties, is the right methodology to use when approaching any body of work. Disunity or inconsistency, while a possible conclusion, should be adopted as an interpretation of last resort. This is a hermeneutic of charity.


³⁸⁰Ad Augustas, 29 (ACO 1.1.5.47). Cited in: ibid., 156.
the idioms to the subject of the Logos, the mia physis.³⁸¹ This physis is not a quiddity—a tertium quid—but the person/subject of the Son.³⁸² Cyril illustrates this union with a body-soul analogy. The “inseparable unity” of the two natures of Jesus is like that of a human being which “is seen to have no duality but to be one (ἕν) consisting of the pair of elements, body and soul.”³⁸³

The becoming and union takes place καθ᾽ὑπόστασιν (according to the person): “we affirm this: that the Word personally [according to the person] united to himself flesh.”³⁸⁴ Thus the union of natures takes place “within the person of the Word.”³⁸⁵ This means that he distinguishes “the person (the who) and the person’s nature (the manner of the who’s existence).”³⁸⁶ God the Son now exists as a man, indeed as God and man.

In other words the Son exists in a new condition, the union (henosis) of two conditions: being God the Son and being a man.³⁸⁷ The apparently paradoxical character of what must be said as a result of this is not incoherence, but the consequence of this mode of existence;³⁸⁸ one where the righteous Word was numbered as a transgressor.³⁸⁹ The union is not paradoxical but ineffable:

[The natures are not] mixed … Each nature is understood to remain in all its natural characteristics for the reasons we have just given, though they

³⁸¹Weinandy, Does God Suffer?, 192.
³⁸²Ibid., 192–196. Cyril does indeed seem to use such language in talking about the unity of Christ. In the context of defending the lack of mixture of the two nature Cyril writes that “The term ‘one’ can be properly applied not just to those things which are naturally simple, but also to things which are compounded in a synthesis.” He then uses a body-soul analogy, to illustrate this, on which see directly below. Cyril, “Second Letter of Cyril to Succensus”, para. 3.
³⁸³It is important that this does not serve as a model for that union, but a means of illustrating how two things can make a single entity. Ad Nestorium, 3, 8. cited in: Weinandy, Does God Suffer?, 192–96.
³⁸⁴Ad Nestorium, 2.3. Note that καθ᾽ὑπόστασιν is here translated as a special kind of substantial union—one lacking a quiddity—and that it is translated differently by other Cyril scholars. Nonetheless, following a hermeneutic of charity, I think Weinandy makes a compelling case that this must be so if Cyril is not to be simply inconsistent when he vehemently protects the integrity of the humanity and deity of Christ For details and for this translation see: ibid., 197; c.f. footnote 47.
³⁸⁵Ibid., 197.
³⁸⁶Ibid., 197.
³⁸⁸Ibid., 201.
³⁸⁹Gavrilyuk, Impassible God, 158.
are ineffably and inexpressibly united, and this is how he demonstrated to us the one nature of the Son; though of course, as I have said, it is the ‘incarnate nature’ I mean. The term ‘one’ can be properly applied not just to those things which are naturally simple, but also to things which are compounded in a synthesis.³⁹⁰

God the Son is born in the flesh, but not born as God. Mary as theotokos means that: “It was not that first an ordinary man was born from the holy virgin, and then the Logos came down upon him, but it is said that united from the womb he underwent fleshly birth, making the birth of his flesh his own.”³⁹¹ He suffers in the flesh he has taken on, not as naked divinity. Gavrilyuk quotes a convincing passage from Cyril:

The Word of God is by nature changeless and unalterable, and in his proper nature is altogether incapable of any suffering. That which is divine is impassible and does not admit even the ‘shadow of change’ (James 1:17) of suffering. On the contrary it is established with unshakable stability in the realities of his own goodness. I maintain, however, that it was the Only Begotten Son of God, the One Christ and Lord, who suffered in the flesh for our sake, in accordance with the scriptures, particularly with that saying of the blessed Peter (1Pet. 4:1).³⁹²

Scholars who appeal to the unity of Cyril’s thought see this language of impassible suffering as a key element of Cyril’s soteriology.³⁹³ Weinandy argues that the “the impassible suffers” means that God the Son was experiencing truly human suffering.

³⁹⁰Cyril, “Second Letter of Cyril to Succensus”, para. 3. Remember when reading ‘incarnate nature’ that Cyril tends to use “physis, hypostasis and prosopon interchangeably.” Gavrilyuk, Impassible God, 140. Wessel argues that stronger emphasis on two-nature language required explanation from Cyril to make it logically consistent with his earlier emphasis on unity and the only abstractly specifiable natures, and that Cyril offers surprisingly little of this. He points out that some of Cyril’s contemporary followers were puzzled by the change. The persuasiveness of Wessel’s argument hinges upon whether Cyril’s appeal to mystery here—which all Christologies must eventually do—is the right move at the right time. Wessel, Cyril of Alexandria, 277–78.


³⁹²Ad Acacium, 7. See also Ad Succensus, II. 4. Gavrilyuk, Impassible God, 160.

If God suffered in his own nature he would not be suffering as a man. Nor would God any longer be God—the union would have resulted in a tertium quid. But God does genuinely suffer as “God-enfleshed-within-history.” God’s perfect power transfigures the suffering in the flesh, the limits assumed by the Logos an expression of God’s redemptive power. The suffering is an “economic appropriation.”

Let us take stock of where this leaves us in our understanding of the communication of idioms in Cyril. Lutheran theology distinguished between several sub-types of the communication of attributes. We will use these sub-types to clarify how Cyril’s theology can be understood.

The genus idiomaticum involves applying the attributes of the divine and human natures to the Person. This was the majority position in patristic and medieval theology. The genus maiestaticum predicates the divine nature’s attributes to the human nature. This is Luther’s innovation and was used particularly in the discussion over the Eucharist. The genus apotelesmaticum speaks of the each nature doing what is proper to it in Christ’s work of salvation.

Based on the exposition above it looks as though the sub-type of the communication of idioms present in Cyril is the genus idiomaticum. We are now in a position to interrogate Jenson’s understanding of Cyril. He believes that the communication of attributes is the hermeneutical key to Cyril’s Christology. We can compare Jenson’s understanding with these findings.

How does Jenson understand the communication of attributes in Cyril? When dis-
cussing the teaching of Cyril in the context of Chalcedon Jenson argues that the line ‘in two natures’ is a mistake. He argues rather that it should be Cyril’s ‘from two natures.’ Jenson understands this to mean that the two natures are only distinguishable abstractly: “from’ did not in Cyril’s use have a chronological meaning …[it indicates] the realm of possibility.”

The two natures “emerge into one hypostasis” from possibility alone. Thus for Cyril it is abstractly conceivable that Jesus could have been this particular man but not the Son, but is in fact not the case. Because of the ambiguities of Chalcedon, Cyril’s real victory is at the second council of Chalcedon where the hypostasis—bearing all the weight of the term’s use in trinitarian theology—is identified as the agent of the whole gospel narrative, both the divine and human in it.

In a book chapter dealing specifically with the communication of attributes, Jenson argues that, when considering the genus idiomaticum, the attributes are not just communicated to the hypostasis, but that they happen between the natures. This is because the hypostasis is the only concrete reality of the two natures “and further is itself nothing other than that, so that what is attributed to him is in fact attributed to both natures.”

Given that Jenson has seemingly already argued that the genus idiomaticum involves mutual predication between the natures, his definition of the genus maiestaticum is a little confusing: “each nature of Christ is active in communication with the other, each contributing what is proper to it and in its own way what is proper to the

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⁴⁰⁴ Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 131.
⁴⁰⁵ ibid., 131. See also: Jenson, “What If It Were True?” Kindle loc. 765
⁴⁰⁶ Though, of course, Jenson rejects such a proposition. Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 131-32.
⁴⁰⁷ Jenson is here consciously exegeting the neo-Chalcedonian Christological arc leading up to Maximus through a Lutheran lens (particularly the work of Chemnitz). Cyril is not mentioned by name, but I believe this can serve—given the centrality Jenson accords Cyril in this story—as a reasonable guide to what he means by a “strong version” of communication of idioms in Cyril. Jenson, “Christ in the Trinity”, 65.
⁴⁰⁸ Jenson argues that this allows calling the hypostasis ‘he’ where usual Western Christology posits the hypostatic union as a purely metaphysical event which entails no ability to accord it concrete terms like ‘he.’ We have seen above that Weinandy denies that the hypostasis is a quiddity, but he does argue that it is the existential reality of the second person of the trinity who can undergo new modes of existence and is just thereby the ‘he’ or ‘I.’ As difficult as it is to quite grasp what occurs with Weinandy’s conception, the great difficulty with Jenson’s argument here is that it seems to lead to a tertium quid. ibid., 65.
other.” Jenson notes that Luther—in distinction from later Lutheranism—did not hold this relation as asymmetrical. Thus it could be said that “One of the Trinity suffered for us according to his human nature and, in communion with that nature, according to the divine nature.”

Jenson is clearly sharing Luther’s view with approbation: this is something “Lutherans, and even more Luther himself, got … right.” How one articulates the *communicatio* determines “how stringently the Son’s inner-triune role is plotted by what happens with Jesus.” Jenson needs this to be a stringent as possible. Luther’s view that the predication that happens in the *genus maiestaticum* happens also in the other direction (i.e. that predication happens across both natures) is, then, required for Jenson’s theology. Jenson’s Lutheran heritage sets him squarely against the *extra calvinisticum*, and in agreement with the *finitum capax infiniti*, though the ecclesial and eucharistic doctrines that develop from this are both fairly unique and complex.

To take a concrete example of the predication of a divine property to the human Jesus the divine–human is omnipresent. Jenson qualifies this by saying that somehow each nature does this “in its own way.” Jenson does not articulate this as erasing a part of Jesus’ humanity but as in some way appropriate to it (somehow Jesus can be humanly omnipresent). Nonetheless, a divine property has been predicated of the human nature, and not just the hypostasis.

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410 We saw just above that this can be disputed.  
412 Ibid., 69.  
413 Emphasis original. Ibid., 69.  
414 Any less stringent doctrine of the *communicatio*, that is to say, any less stringent identification between Jesus’ story and the Son’s role in the triune drama, leaves the way open for the plot of triune life to be determined by other stories than the biblical story.” Ibid., 69.  
415 It is precisely at this point that Colin Gunton demurs from the fullness of Jenson’s Christology. Gunton, “Creation and Mediation”, 83. On the Capax see: Fackre, “Capax”. In Jenson’s writings see: Jenson, *Unbaptized God*. The strength of the association Jenson means by the *capax* can be seen immediately below in the exploration of the relationship between the two natures. For a mature statement of how this intersects with the sacraments see chapter 28 of: Jenson, *Systematic Theology* vol. 2.  
416 See chapter 28 of: ibid.  
How much of this can fairly be understood as Jenson co-opting Cyril? Jenson does point to Cyril’s work to defend a predication of properties from the divine nature to human nature. He quotes a line from Cyril’s *First letter to Successus*: “therefore we say the body of Christ is *divine* since it is the body of God. It shines with unutterable glory and is incorruptible and holy and life-giving.”

Does Cyril mean this with the strength that Jenson seems to be reading into it: along the lines of Luther’s version of the *genus maiestaticum*? Looking at the wider context of the quote tempers this possibility:

After the resurrection the same body which had suffered continued to exist, although it no longer contained any human weakness. …it was no longer susceptible to hunger or weariness …but was …incorruptible. …yet the earthly body itself did not undergo a transformation into the nature of Godhead, for this is impossible. …We maintain, therefore, that Christ’s body is divine in so far as it is the body of God, adorned with unspeakable glory, incorruptible, holy, life-giving; but none of the Holy Fathers has ever thought or said that it was transformed into the nature of Godhead.

This is soteriological language: divinisation. The body is devoid of human weakness and is “life-giving” because it is the body of the life-giver. This is important for both the Eucharist and humanity’s participation in the divine life. We are given Christ’s work: “Christology is the paradigm of all salvation, and that salvation is understood as an ontological rescue of the race. What Christ was and did naturally [that is, by nature], he transfers to humankind as an inheritance.”

Jesus destroys corruption in the human nature. Yet Jesus’ flesh is only ever cre-

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419 Cyril, “First Letter of Cyril to Succensus”, 357.


421 Cyril, “First Letter of Cyril to Succensus”, 357.


423 The eucharist is, therefore, a deifying encounter with Christ giving healing and salvation. McGukin, *Christological Controversy*, 187.

ated, divinisation does not mean it becomes divine.\footnote{Cyril, “First Letter of Cyril to Succensus”, 356. 8–10.} This means that we cannot understand Cyril as suggesting that the uniquely divine attributes such as omnipresence can be applied to Jesus’ divinised nature. Not only would this be a confusion of natures, but it would mean that we participate in these attributes insofar as we participate in Jesus’ flesh. Jenson cannot, therefore, legitimately claim support for this strong an understanding of the communication of idioms in Cyril’s work.

It also worth mentioning that Jenson’s treatment of Cyril’s work is silent about the pre-existence of the Logos in Cyril’s christology. When he talks about the nature’s being only abstractly specifiable and the ‘from’s’ having no “chronological meaning”, his wording is amenable to his rejection of the Logos asarkos.\footnote{Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 130.} Mary bore God the Son and there is no abstract existence of the Son of God without being this particular human being.\footnote{Jenson, “Once More”, 130–31.} But there is a clear sense of the pre-existence of the Logos in Cyril’s text.

Cyril writes that “as I said, if the Word was not made flesh neither the power of death nor the way of sin is brought to nothing.”\footnote{The whole sentence: Οὐ γὰρ γεγονότος, ὡς ἔφην, σαρκὸς τοῦ Λόγου, οὔτε τοῦ θανάτου κατεσείσθη τὸ κράτος, κατήργηται δὲ κατ’ οὐδένα τρόπον ἡ ἁμαρτία, καὶ ἐσμὲν ἄριστα τοὺς πρώτους παραβάσεις ἕνοχοι, τουτέστω τὸν ἀδὰμ, οὐδεμίαν ἀναφοίτησιν ἔχοντες εἰς τὸ ἄμεινον, τὴν διὰ γέ φημι τοῦ πάντων ἡμῶν Σωτῆρος Χριστοῦ. Cyril, “Quod Unus”, 722.} The use of γίγνομαι—and its strong association with change of state—as well Cyril’s clear commitment to an impassible God weigh heavily against Jenson’s thesis. For—without Jenson’s metaphysical gymnastics—what undergoes fleshly birth such that it enters a new existential mode without losing it’s distinctive impassibility?\footnote{Once again: “Speaking of Mary as theotokos Cyril argues that, “It was not that first an ordinary man was born from the holy virgin, and then the Logos came down upon him, but it is said that united from the womb he underwent fleshly birth, making the birth of his flesh his own.” Cyril, “Second Letter to Nestorius”, II.4.}

Jenson does note that Cyril’s articulation of how the language of ‘two natures’ works is “not so clear …as one could wish.”\footnote{Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 130 fn. 27.} But for this to be a valid defence there would have to be a current in Cyril’s thought that agrees with Jenson’s own theology. As we have seen Cyril can be read as vacillating on how to understand the oneness of
Jesus and the two natures in the incarnate Christ, but this does not entail vacillation on the status of the *logos asarkos*.

At this point there appears to be either a clear eccentricity in Jenson’s interpretation of Cyril, or an omission of a critical aspect of Cyril’s thought in Jenson’s appropriation of him. Cyril—the champion of the unity of Christ—is nonetheless working within a theological framework which is, at critical points, at odds with Jenson’s own.

Let us take stock. Jenson cannot read Cyril’s understanding of the communication of idioms with the strength that he would like to read them for his overall system. As he never *directly* outlines exactly how to understand what he calls Cyril’s “strong reading,” there is no direct evidence that he means that Cyril’s understanding of the communication of idioms is as strong as his own. Nonetheless the passages that I have engaged above are sufficiently accessible that were he to be trying to co-opt Cyril as an ally the omission of this aspect of Cyril’s work would be troubling.

This evaluation has allowed us to get a grasp on both Cyril’s work and Jenson’s. Cyril’s Christological framework will be of further use in both in my evaluation of Hart and in my constructive work. Isolating Jenson’s positive thesis from Cyril’s has allowed us to see that we are not compelled to follow Jenson by virtue of the weight of this part of Christian tradition. It also raises an important question about Jenson’s Christology.

If Jenson argues for so strong a unity of divine and human natures in the person of Christ, how can we even speak of these different natures? Jenson defines ‘nature’ just after his discussion of Cyril. It is communication of idioms, in fact, that highlights just what the natures are: “the fact of the *communicatio* is that the narrative of the Son is a human narrative, also as he plays his role in the divine life.”

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431 Remember that we interrogated the following article for an understanding of how Jenson construes the communication of idioms: Jenson, “Christ in the Trinity”.

432 See sections 3.1.3.1. and 4.

433 It should be noted that Jenson here leaves direct reference to Cyril, but he is self-consciously engaging in a Cyrillian arc of interpretation, and makes no obvious concession that he is departing from Cyril in offering the following definitions of the natures. He does say that his definition of Christ’s natures are “or ought to be” as follows, but again this section logically follows the recounting of the victory of Cyril’s theology at Constantinople II. Jenson, *Systematic Theology vol. 1*, 134.

Christology is about Jesus and to speak of a divine or human nature is to denote in different ways this Jesus.\textsuperscript{435} It is a hermeneutical enterprise: “the doctrine of the Trinity and the canonical Gospels given, a necessary form of the gospel is: ‘Jesus, the one who …, is one of the Trinity,’ with the ellipse filled from the Gospels. Proper ‘Christology’ would be hermeneutic of this form of the gospel.”\textsuperscript{436}

For Jenson any properly Christological language—whether ‘divine nature,’ ‘hypostasis,’ etc—“speaks truly about this one as it displays him as the Son, \textit{that is}, as it displays this one’s relation to the Father in the Spirit.”\textsuperscript{437} Such predicates are “analytically different ways of referring to Jesus as the Son.”\textsuperscript{438}

My question at this point would be whether his notion of the two natures works. Natures, given what we have just seen, are a hermeneutic of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{439} In other words they are an interpretation of a story, or indeed its proclamation.\textsuperscript{440} Given the nature of hermeneutics, and the partiality of interpretation that can only ever be achieved of this infinite event, I suggest that this means natures must be lenses through which we may faithfully read the evangels.

But what kind of existence do these hermeneutical lenses have?\textsuperscript{441} Do the labels ‘human’ and ‘divine’—considered as inserted into the formula ‘Jesus, the one who …, is one of the Trinity,’—exist as ‘properties’ of the narrative and just so pick out ‘natures’ in a realist sense? This kind of metaphysical extra is exactly what Jenson wants to avoid. But then are they simply a human construct? ‘Nature’ talk is an extra-biblical language. Where does the truth-value of such a construct come from?

Perhaps we might anticipate Jenson and suggest that they are things spoken about the Son by the Father, or by the church under the guidance of the Spirit. For the

\textsuperscript{435}Jenson, \textit{Systematic Theology vol. 1}, 134.
\textsuperscript{436}Ibid., 134.
\textsuperscript{437}Ibid., 134.
\textsuperscript{438}Ibid., 134.
\textsuperscript{439}Ibid., 134.
\textsuperscript{440}R. W. Jenson, “The Triune God”, 187.
\textsuperscript{441}For an argument as to the necessity of realism in conversation with Robert Jenson see chapters 1, 3, and 6 of: Murphy, \textit{Not a Story}. My project is somewhat different from Murphy’s as I am seeking to discovering whether Jenson’s project can, in fact, accommodate the kind of realism I hold as a control belief. Her engagement with Jenson is not always convincing, particularly the argument that he is unwittingly modalist. It is worth noting that her general fidelity of engagement with narrative theologians has been criticised. See also: Placher, “Not a Story”.
Logos is God's *self-interpretation*, and any interpretation that we add would be Jenson’s foe: natural theology.\(^{442}\) So let us say that they are divinely sanctioned lenses through which Jesus’ life must be understood.

The question still remains. Where do they get their truth-value from? Does this rest in the Father’s *speech*? But Jesus *is* the Father’s speech, the Logos.\(^{443}\) To try and make some sense out of this I want to suggest a manner of analysing truth, by proceeding as if disquotation is the essence of truth. In other words I want to adopt the principle that the truth of a proposition takes the form of ‘*p* is true iff *p*,’ where *p* is something referring to/grounding what the proposition *p* is about.\(^{444}\)

Using this principle we might say that ‘Jesus has a human nature iff the Father says that Jesus has a human nature.’ But if Jesus just is the Father’s speech then this becomes: ‘the Father’s speech has a human nature iff the Father says that the Father’s speech has a human nature.’ But because the Father’s saying is the same as the Father’s speech this becomes: the Father’s speech has a human nature iff the Father’s speech has a human nature.\(^{445}\) It is circular.

If we consider the Father’s speech about the Son in Jesus’ baptism, then we might think that second-order speech is ‘baked in,’ so to speak, to Jesus’ narrative. But this would still mean that ‘the narrative of Jesus’ life has a human nature iff the narrative of Jesus’ life has a human nature.’ For the Father’s speech is a *part* of that narrative, not a *reference to* that narrative. It is not truly second-order speech.\(^{446}\)

It might be objected that this is not a problem on the grounds that God’s saying it

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\(^{443}\) ‘The risen Jesus is the Son as he is the Word, the self-introduction of the Father. …the Jesus of history must somehow be what God says by raising him. …The Word is not what Jesus says but Jesus as what the Father says,” ibid., 165.

\(^{444}\) This is widely accepted. For example: “No sentence is true but reality makes it so.” Quine, *Philosophy of Logic*, Kindle loc. 178. C.f. Frege, Wittgenstien, Tarski, Ramsey, Strawson. See for this and further information: McGinn, *Logical Properties*, 87.

\(^{445}\) ‘The Father says that the Father’s speech has a human nature.’ Can be reduced to ‘the Father’s speech has a human nature’ because there can be no second-order speech about Jesus if Jesus just is the Father’s speech, in other words—as we have seen—the Father *is* part of the narrative that happens with Jesus Christ.

\(^{446}\) O’Donovan points out just this difficulty when he argues that historicist notions of history result in a story that is not *about* anything as there is nothing but story. O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 60.
makes it true. But any talk of ‘ground’ implies something external to the narrative. If this ground is God, who is—once again—part of the narrative, we see that this is still beset by the same problem. And Jenson would not allow any truth to lie ‘behind’ the narrative. In order, therefore, for Jenson’s conception of nature to be true, one must concede that a narrative and the truthmaker of the narrative are the same thing. Jenson tells us that the Gospel forces us to accept that narratives can cause, but to this we must also add that they can also be their own truth-conditions. We have already rejected Jenson’s metaphysic and so must reject his understanding of the two natures. For without accepting Jenson’s metaphysic there is, assuming his construction, nothing that can make it true that Jesus possesses two natures. Chalcedon’s “without admixture or confusion” is breached.

The consequences of this argument also highlight another difficulty. The labels ‘divine’ and ‘human’ fit the life of Jesus: a narrative identity that was sealed in death. But how do they apply to Jesus the person as he lives now?

Jenson wants to talk of Jesus in this way: his identity is sealed in death, whilst an open future of love with him remains. Therefore Jesus as story transitions to having a fixed identity. He is, however, in both states still a story, a narrative. So how does the eschatologically-fixed identity of Jesus—the one who is now promise—possess ‘divine’ or ‘human’ in such a way that it is a fixed property?

Jenson’s wider work provides some more clarity about how this might function: the dynamic of God as both changing and unchanging is given most attention in his definition of God as ‘not-impassible.’ He takes Cyril’s apathos pathoi as the basis

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447 The same applies mutatis mutandis to an appeal to something like God’s intention or knowledge.
448 In other words, Jenson’s refusal to open up space for Feuerbach closes this possibility down.
449 I am using ‘truthmaker’ as a stand-in for any conception of how the right side of a disquotation works (i.e. the p of ‘p is true iff p’). There is nothing invested in the validity of truthmakers in this usage.
450 Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 159.
451 For this rejection see section 2.1.9.
452 Gunton makes just this point in a discussion of Jenson’s Christology: Gunton, “Creation and Mediation”, 84.
453 Recall the antimony of hope.
454 This is the question first asked in section 2.2.1.2.
for his position and argues that ‘God is not impassible’ is the correct way of stating the issue. Impassibility and passibility are not static attributes but are possessed in different ‘waves’ of the “narrative’s music.”

In the central move of this discussion Jenson argues that narrative and music time are non-linear by drawing on the work of Jeremy Begbie. He argues that while a song might be thought of a single unit of time, it is in fact divided into smaller units such as bars and themes. The question of what time it is in the music depends on the level of bar/hyperbar in question. Thus:

Is God, considered as the subject of his total history with us, impassible?

By the testimony of scripture, he is indeed—in any plausible sense of the word. Is God, happening upon a lost sheep, passible? By the testimony of scripture he is indeed—in any plausible sense of the word. Is then God, abstracted from all such tales, passible or impassible? But that last is a pseudo-question, since the abstraction cannot be performed on the Biblical God.

We might make sense out of this by appealing to perdurantist notion of identity.

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455 The double-negative is important for Jenson. Jenson, “Ipse Pater”, 119.
456 Ibid., 121–22.
457 “The pure actuality of narrative time can most sharply be seen in western music as it was from the sixteenth century through most of the twentieth.” Ibid., 122.
458 Western music has “a bottom temporal level of meter-bars, and as many superimposed levels of evermore encompassing ‘hyperbars’—phrases, themes, movements, etc—as the music’s sophistication requires.” Ibid., 122–26. Jenson is appealing to: Begbie, Theology, Music, and Time.
459 God’s immanent life is narrative time, or something like it. It is analogous to rather than exactly like our experience of narrative time. It transcends linear time and any “mere negation of our time.” Jenson, “Ipse Pater”, 123–24.
460 Perdurantism is a theory of how material objects persist through time. It is defined immediately below. The other major option for understanding persistence time is endurantism. An endurantist believes things have no temporal parts. Therefore a thing changes over time but does not extend through time (they are not events or processes), though they do have spatial parts. Jenson would clearly reject this, as his notion of God is precisely event. The use of these terms might be ruled out as disanalogous to Jenson’s project, as his notion of narrative does not need to have any conception of spatial location (God is a narrative). But I contend that the fundamental insight they offer regarding how to construe identity as it interacts with time is a useful heuristic device for analysing what Jenson is trying to do, and that this does not depend on spatial relationships. His talk about the human Jesus presents no difficulty with regard to the spatial elements of these definitions (though his notion of what happens in the resurrection might). Yet insofar as the Father and Spirit’s roles are concerned, I submit that Jenson forces us to admit the possibility of a non-material being whose identity is a sum of what extends across time $t_i, i = 1, \ldots, n$. Insofar as this is true I argue that—mutatis mutandis—the
Indeed he seems to imply that it is how he understands personal identity.\footnote{Jenson, “Identity, Jesus, and Exegesis”, Kindle loc. 1629.} For the perdurantist things have both temporal and spatial parts, thus an object’s identity does not merely persist through time, but spans across time. Not only does this appear to sit very well with Jenson’s notion of narrative identity, but there is an analogous duality of changeability and unchangeability in some articulations of it.\footnote{One might hold that a story is a four-dimensional object stretching through time but lacking parts. But, as argued in the footnote above, I do not believe that this changes the analysis. Hawley, “Temporal Parts”.}

The discussion of temporal parts arises in the context of explaining change. Those who hold to a perdurantist understanding of change have been criticised on the grounds that on their conception objects do not change at all. Each part of the four-dimensional object is permanently what it is. Thus at \(t_1\) Jesus is an infant, and at \(t_2\) he is turning over a table in the temple, and these are both unchangingly true.\footnote{Ibid.} In response perdurantists distinguish between atemporal and temporal ways of talking about objects.\footnote{This itself depends on the validity of a B-theory of time. I would agree with Craig that there is something about the world that means that tensed facts cannot be irreducibly reduced to tenseless fact, and that therefore b-theory should be rejected in favour of a-theory. C.f. his argument that someone waiting for an appointment at, say, 12 o’clock on Monday the 11th June 2015, will get up from her chair to go to that appointment in a way that tenseless facts cannot accommodate. She knows that it is now time to leave. See: Craig, Time and Eternity.} Speaking a-temporally the above is true, but speaking temporally it is true that Jesus does indeed change.\footnote{Jenson, “Ipse Pater”, 123–24.}

This has some similarities to what Jenson is trying to do with his notion of narrative or musical time and the ‘not-impassible’ God. But it won’t do. It is clear from the talk of a-temporality that Jenson would reject such a construal. An atemporal God is frozen past.

So how does Jenson avoid this difficulty? In Jenson’s thought one can point to God “as the subject of his total history with us” and here God is impassible.\footnote{Jenson, “Ipse Pater”, 123–24.} By this Jenson would, I think, mean that God is the subject and not object of history above categories hold for the Father and Son. Thus while the following discussion is about Jesus, the Father and Spirit’s immateriality, or the Son’s post-resurrection state, do not invalidate this analysis. On these philosophical concepts, and some non-standard theories, see: Hawley, “Temporal Parts”.

\footnote{Ibid.}
and therefore not altered by it, but is always open to the future. Yet because God genuinely subjects himself to contingency, he genuinely undergoes change, and is responsive to things like petitionary prayer. Then he denies that one can finish at either pole of this dialectic. 467

The way this works seems to be as follows. We must remember that God creates history through his Word, through promise: the “Word spoken by the Father in the freedom of the Spirit.” 468 Creator and creature is a relation made possible in Christ. 469 All other notions of time are disrupted by the fact that Jesus’ fleshly birth is his birth as Son and his birth in eternity. This same logic applies to things like petitionary prayer. Jenson writes: “What if there is a section through the bar-and-hyperbar structure of God’s time with us, in which his determination precedes my prayer, and one in which my prayer precedes his determination?” 470

This non-linearity of time is odd indeed, but it answers to the question of how God “as the subject of his total history with us” is not conceivable a-temporally. The first is that God is the constant moving-forward we see in musical score or narrative, the second is that one cannot abandon either side of the dialectic of passible-impassible. And so one can never think of God as subject of his total history alone.

The notion of perdurance is still of use here, however. God is an infinitely perduring object, existing in a system of narrative temporality that forbids looking at him under the aspect of a-temporality. In other words we must still say that God’s identity is extended through time. God’s identity appears to be perdurantist.

But when we return to the question at hand—how does the eschatologically-fixed identity of Jesus possess the property of being ‘divine’ or ‘human’ in such a way that it is a fixed—we see that the picture is more complicated. For Jesus’ identity to be fixed after death it appears that Jesus transitions from a perdurantist existence, to an

467 Is then God, abstracted from all such tales, passible or impassible? But that last is a pseudo-question, since the abstraction cannot be performed on the Biblical God.” Jenson, “Ipse Pater”, 123-24.
468 Wright, Dogmatic Aesthetics, 130.
469 See, for a good discussion, chapter 3 of: ibid.
470 Whilst this work is speculative in nature, it is the closest that Jenson gets to his articulation of how impassibility works. I think it is fair, therefore, to press the question of how it works. Jenson, “Ipse Pater”, 126.
endurantist one (otherwise, on Jenson’s own definition, his identity would still be incomplete).\textsuperscript{471} Death and resurrection complete Jesus’ identity.\textsuperscript{472}

Yet the finished quiddity that endures must somehow be the story that makes up the perdurance. In other words God’s temporally infinite future is defined by a finished perdurance.\textsuperscript{473} If we then remember that being is “anticipation of what I will be at the end,” then surely the identity that just is the finished perdurance of Jesus’ life, is in some respects the cause of the perdurance which is its own identity.\textsuperscript{474} This is very odd.\textsuperscript{475}

The thing at the end of the story is a story, but somehow the enduring story at the end has a causal relationship to the unfinished or perduring story that was Jesus’ life which just is its own self/identity. Does appealing to bars and hyperbars and music do any work at all to make sense of this?

Let us use property talk to sharpen the question. The doctrine of the Trinity, Jenson says, is derived from the “full biblical talk” of God’s “life with us,” with all its bars and intersections.\textsuperscript{476} But an orchestral piece only makes sense because it is grounded in our time.\textsuperscript{477} Whatever else is going on in the piece there is an absolute frame of reference. Is this what Jenson means by saying that “God, considered as the subject of his total history with us, [is] impassible?”\textsuperscript{478} Yet we have to take into account that Jenson has just told us that God’s life with us contains bars and intersections.

\textsuperscript{471}As above: an endurantist believes things have no temporal parts. Therefore a thing changes over time but does not extend through time (they are not events or processes), though they do have spatial parts.

\textsuperscript{472}Jenson seems to want to speak of identity (univocally) continuing without interruption on both sides of Jesus’ death and resurrection. I think he can only do so by jeopardising his notion of the need for stories to end. Jenson, “Identity, Jesus, and Exegesis”, 1705.

\textsuperscript{473}According to Jenson’s definition of the Trinity Jesus is a subsistent relation, for Jesus to be is to be in a relationship of love. Jenson, \textit{Systematic Theology vol. 1}, 108–112. We should also remember that the narrative of “Jesus-in-Israel … is God’s self-determination as the particular God he is.” Jenson, “Christ in the Trinity”, 68.

\textsuperscript{474}Jenson, “Ipse Pater”, 117.

\textsuperscript{475}Remember that it is the \textit{story} itself that causes. This would be less problematic if we were talking about temporal extension as constituting the identity of, say, a person.

\textsuperscript{476}This \textit{just is} the story of Jesus’ election. Jenson, “Ipse Pater”, 123.

\textsuperscript{477}Arguments against the reality of time (McTaggart), or the implications of special relativity’s dislodging of the Newtonian notion of absolute time notwithstanding. I am content to simply appeal to the reality of time here.

\textsuperscript{478}Jenson, “Ipse Pater”, 123.
Does this mean that we can take a slice of God at absolute time $t_1$ (where God, Jenson has told us, has the property of being impassible), while in some sub-bar he is passible? This would mean that God simultaneously possesses two contradictory properties.\textsuperscript{479} But Jenson won’t have impassibility and passibility defined as contraries. It is, rather a relation between creator and creature.\textsuperscript{480}

Recall the quintessence of the relationship between God and creature outlined above: a difference of power of illocution.\textsuperscript{481} Since impassibility is a relation between God and creation, it must be shaped in this way.\textsuperscript{482} Our speech is not efficacious when we talk back to God, while his is when he talks to us. But passibility would then be the change wrought in God by our speech.\textsuperscript{483}

So God, as efficacious speaker, is only ever the subject, not the object of history. But within that history he allows himself to be affected by creation’s speech. God is totally in control of all he allows to happen to himself, including his response to our entreaties. Is this all Jenson means? It does not appear so. To demonstrate this we will consider his understanding of petitionary prayer.

Regarding petitionary prayer Jenson asks the following question: “what if there is a section through the bar-and-hyperbar structure of God’s time with us, in which his determination precedes my prayer, and one in which my prayer precedes his determination?”\textsuperscript{484} On one level my request precedes his determination. God’s being in control does not encompass what Jenson means by God’s passibility.

These are\textit{ contradictories}: God’s determination cannot both antedate and postdate my prayer. The properties of passibility and impassibility seem to be two different activities for Jenson. God’s being in control does not, therefore, solve the apparent contradiction of God’s being at the same time both passible and impassible at the same absolute reference time.

\textsuperscript{479}This is contingent on absolute reference entailing simultaneity for each temporal unit down all the bars and sub-bars. But I would suggest that the burden of proof that it does not lies with Jenson, if this were a position he wanted to take. For this is just what an absolute reference does.
\textsuperscript{480}Wright, \textit{Dogmatic Aesthetics}, 140–41.
\textsuperscript{481}Jenson, \textit{Systematic Theology vol. 2}, 38.
\textsuperscript{482}It must be so because this is the only form of difference in being that Jenson allows.
\textsuperscript{483}Speech understood as, \textit{per} Jenson, what we are ontologically.
\textsuperscript{484}Jenson, “Ipse Pater”, 126.
Perhaps talk of an ‘absolute reference’ is disbarred making this question meaningless for Jenson. He rejects any absolute linearity of time. But then what is “God, considered as the subject of his total history with us?” Jenson says in God “‘source’ and ‘goal’ are present and asymmetrical in him, because he is primarily future to himself and only thereupon past and present for himself.”

Putting aside the conceptual difficulty of the ontological priority of the future, it is clear that there is some sort of linearity in God’s life. As God’s total history with us is that which can be called impassible—and therefore serves, it seems, as an absolute reference for his temporal system (he is the ground of our time)—I think the question of how Jenson avoids the above difficulty is fair. I don’t think he, therefore, can resolve this difficulty by pointing to the non-linearity of time in narrative/music.

Jenson’s appeal to a narrative or musical temporality does not aid in discerning how Jesus’ identity can be sealed and bear properties such as ‘divine’ and ‘human.’ I conclude, therefore, that I can appropriate neither his Christology, nor his understanding of impassibility. Nor does it appear that Cyril can support his Christology.

Is this a critique which Jenson would need to take seriously? Perhaps not. Jenson’s metaphysical system is particularly difficult at such junctures. Nonetheless, I would hold that it is sufficient warrant for a rejection of his construals here from outside his system.

It must immediately be said that Jenson’s forcing us to consider the nature of the Gospel narrative’s relation to the natures of Christ has been a useful exercise. In particular he has taken seriously phenomena such as petitionary prayer in his theology. I, as an evangelical, must wrestle with this. Jenson has also shown us that trying to reduce being to narrative is not the way to accomplish this.

Furthermore I have found an important conversation partner for the constructive phase of this project. With Cyril’s focus on the unity of Christ his articulation of

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486Ibid., 123.
487Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 217.
488Indeed: “the history of the universe is an incident in the story of Jesus in Israel.” Jenson, “Christ in the Trinity”, 68.
489It also raises issues for his claims to fidelity to the Creeds, which drives home the question first raised in section 2.1.9.
impassibility will be particularly important. We will therefore appropriate Cyril as conversation partner from Jenson’s work.

Next we will consider another important player in Jenson’s Christological arc, and indeed the one Jenson looks to to offer the conceptual tools for articulating the Christological implications of the Gethsemane prayer: Maximus the Confessor’s Christology.

2.2.2.2 Maximus the Confessor

Despite the brevity of treatment that Maximus receives in Jenson’s writings there are several important reasons why focusing on Maximus is important. Maximus’ thought is positioned at, and used to justify, Jenson’s conclusion about the Gethsemane prayer, and therefore impassibility. It can be said that in doing so it gives final conceptual warrant to his ‘hyper-Cyrillian’ Christology. David Bentley Hart also appeals to Maximus’ thought in order to defend his argument for impassibility, and gaining some familiarity here will serve as an important touch-stone in my further constructive work.

Jenson argues that Maximus’ theology runs so: Jesus has both human and divine natures and wills. His human will is a genuinely human will, meaning that, for example, the decision in Gethsemane is a “painful human decision achieved with struggle.”

As he is the second trinitarian hypostasis, he does not have individual decisions to make, for the divine nature is what he and the Father and the Spirit are mutually. The Son’s divine will is simply his participation in the triune life, which is in one of its aspects a single great act of decision. Thus the Son’s individual act of suffering decision to die for our salvation is his human decision, which however occurs as an event in the triune life.

Thus:

490 Jenson, “Jesus in the Trinity”, 316.
491 Ibid., 316.
Maximus has said what had eventually to be said, and in the West has not yet been fully acknowledged: the man Jesus, exactly as his personhood is defined by the life-story told in the Gospels, is the one called the Son, the second identity of God. Jesus is the Son, with no qualifications.\textsuperscript{492}

How much fidelity does this show to Maximus’ thought? Jenson admits that he pushes Maximus’ theology “a bit, but …not too much” and that he draws the conclusions that Maximus “never quite drew for himself” as his thought is “never quite free to follow its own impetus.”\textsuperscript{493} These provisos are only offered for the final strong statement that Jesus the human is a member of the Trinity. As Jenson is clearly insinuating that the basic structure of Maximus’ \textit{strongly} supports his conclusion I will proceed to examine the degree to which \textit{these summary statements} can be supported.\textsuperscript{494}

To begin with let us look at the way that Jenson understands Jesus’ natures and wills to work in Maximus’ thought. Jesus is not different from us in \textit{what} he is—his self-determination is identical to ours—except that it is not marred by sin.\textsuperscript{495} But he is different in \textit{the way} that he is, for his human life occurs only in “the divine identity called the Son.”\textsuperscript{496} Thus “Jesus’ ‘Let it be so’ in the garden and elsewhere is a proper human decision, but one that \textit{occurs} as God the Son’s actuality in the triune life; and the actuality of the Son \textit{is} perfect obedience to the Father.”\textsuperscript{497} Hence Jesus could not have disobeyed despite his genuinely human self-determination.

Jenson cites several passages in support of this reading, but I want to call attention to one in particular:\textsuperscript{498} “As God is Logos by nature, he altogether transcends …obedi-
ence or disobedience⁴⁹⁹ Jenson uses this to support his thesis about the transcendence of the human Jesus’ decision. Yet following directly on from these words Maximus writes:

Because being Lord by nature He is the giver of every commandment, the observance of which is obedience and the transgression of which is disobedience. For the law and its commandments, along with their observance or transgression, apply to those who by nature are not moved, and not to Him whose being by nature is immovable. …[Yet] having become man by nature …[he clothed] himself with our nature’s condition of passibility …including its blameless passions …[and] having absolved our penalty in himself, he gave us a share in his divine power, which brings about immutability of soul and incorruptibility of body through the identification of will with what is naturally good.⁵⁰⁰

The divine Son transcends obedience or disobedience by virtue of the fact that he is immutable. Nowhere do we see this in Jenson’s analysis. Not only does this make Maximus’ reasoning very different to Jenson’s appropriation, but antithetical to his project more generally. This aside, we see Maximus talking about the immutable becoming mutable, which raises the question of how these two coincide. Is Jenson—the grounds for the assertion aside—correct in seeing that the human decision somehow takes place in the divine life?

In order to evaluate this claim we need to first understand the relation between some of Maximus’ anthropological terms and his Christology. Of importance are γνωμικὸν θέλημα, προαιρετικόν θέλημα, and γνώμη. The terms, respectively, roughly approximate to deliberation, the choice and actualisation of that which is deliberated, and ‘inclination.’⁵⁰¹

⁵⁰⁰Ambigua 1041B–1044A Maximus, The Ambigua.
⁵⁰¹There is the kind of ambiguity of usage that you would expect from somewhat similar terms in a corpus of writing occasional in its character—indeed the first two terms are sometimes used synonymously. γνώμη plays an important role in Maximus’ earlier work and there is discussion over whether γνώμη should be associated with sin in wholesale terms or whether it has a more nuanced role. For further details see: McFarland, “Naturally and by Grace”, 412; 416–17. On the first two terms see: Bathrellos, The Byzantine Christ, 148–50.
Maximus also introduces the phrases λόγος φύσεως, τρόπος ὑπάρξεως and τρόπος χρήσεως: the ‘logos of nature,’ the ‘personal mode of existence,’ and the ‘mode of operation.’\textsuperscript{502} The logos of nature is the ‘what’ of a being, the ‘personal mode of existence’ and ‘mode of operation’ roughly speak of the ‘how’ human nature is lived out by a particular human being.\textsuperscript{503}

What is important is that the first set of terms (γνωμικὸν θέλημα, προαιρετικόν θέλημα, and γνώμη) are—at least in Maximus’ post-monothelite controversy works—denied of Christ.\textsuperscript{504} They are associated with τρόπος χρήσεως, rather than the λόγος φύσεως.\textsuperscript{505} In other words the Son can have a fully human nature without γνώμη or προαίρεσις.

The reason these terms are denied Christ—apart from their usage by the monothelites—is that they are related to mutability and the ability to choose virtue or passion (with Gnōmē in particular denied of Christ due to the divine status of Christ’s hypostasis).\textsuperscript{506} They are, in short, the results of sin. In the words of Maximus:

\begin{quote}
The Fathers … openly confessed the difference between two natural but not gnomic wills in Christ … For they knew it was only this difference of gnomic wills that introduced into our lives sin and separation from God. For evil consists of nothing else than the difference of our gnomic will from the divine will, which occurs by the introduction of an opposing quantity (viz., number) in the will, showing the opposition of our gnomic will to God.\textsuperscript{507}
\end{quote}

Christ, therefore, possesses a natural human will, but in the different mode mentioned above: a nature exercised without γνώμη or προαίρεσις. He can exercise this mode because of his voluntary possession of our nature and therefore our nature’s attributes.\textsuperscript{508} This state of having a human nature without the sinful passibility

\textsuperscript{502}Bathrellos, \textit{The Byzantine Christ}, 103.
\textsuperscript{503}Ibid., 103. McFarland, “Naturally and by Grace”, 416.
\textsuperscript{504}Bathrellos, \textit{The Byzantine Christ}, 148–61.
\textsuperscript{506}Ibid., 158. McFarland, “Naturally and by Grace”, 419. See also Blowers, “Gnomic Will”.
\textsuperscript{507}This is McFarland’s translation of ‘Opuscule 3’ (PG 91:56B) in: McFarland, “Naturally and by Grace”, 419.
\textsuperscript{508}Ibid., 425.
of our fallen natures is part of the divinisation that occurs for us in the human na-
C.f. Ambigua 1044A
This does not mean that Jesus does not experience human desires. The natural (hu-
man and blameless) desire to avoid death is there in Gethsemane along with a genuine
decision.510 But it needs to be noted that because of the different and deified mode
in which the human nature operates Christ’s human will is “is wholly deified, in
its agreement with the divine will, since it is always moved and shaped by it and
in accordance with it.”511 This is not an overruling, but simply what it means for the
human will to be deified: it agrees with the divine will.512
Jenson’s notion of a human decision occurring in the divine life is clearly unsupport-
able here. Christ’s human will—because of its divine mode and consequent lack of
γνώμη or προαίρεσις—is, says Maximus, ‘moved and shaped’ by the divine will.513
This is what Maximus means by the ‘ontological qualifications’ of Jesus’ human will
transcending ours.514 It seems difficult to construe the divine will as anything but
antecedent to the human will here, and Maximus’ work does not support the notion
of a human decision in the divine life.
But what would Jenson’s construal even mean when talking about Jesus as possess-
ing two wills? For Jenson Jesus’ decision is the one act of human decision which
occurs in the context of the mutual divine decision of election.515 As God’s life is
primarily hypostatic, Jesus the human’s participation in this life as one of the three is
his divinity. Let us use property talk to try and make sense of how this works.
Let Jesus’ divinity be the property of participating in the life of the three persons.
Let his humanity be the property of possessing a human nature.516 Jesus can simulta-
Bathrellos, The Byzantine Christ, 148. See the brief discussion in: Gondraeu, “Suffering of Christ
in the Garden of Gethsemane”, 224–25.
512Ibid., 426.
513Ibid., 426.
514Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 135–36.
515The “single great act of decision” that is God can be nothing other than the decision of election.
ibid., 140; 316.
516We will see how Maximus defines human nature. Here let it simply stand for that which sets
human beings apart as human. There is a strong current in contemporary theology which points to
neously possess both of these properties. But how can the agreement of the human nature with the two other divine persons be understood as the exercising of two wills?

But is not Jenson equivocating? What one person does is will, what three people do is act in concert, their wills aligned, but these are not one act of will in the same way. It is clear that Jenson is giving Jesus’ human decision an ontological reality. It occurs in the triune life, he says. Yet this makes the human willing simpliciter Jesus’ contribution to the Trinitarian will. I cannot see how Jesus’ divine will can be described as other than ‘the agreement of his human will with the other two persons of the Trinity.’

If this is the case then when Jenson talks about Jesus’ individual will and the will of the three persons he is indeed equivocating. They are different ontological realities, one is second order. Jesus’ possession of the property of being human and one of the three does not give warrant for speaking of two wills. It is one willing and one agreement with other wills. It would seem that Jenson, against all intent, ends up articulating a monothelite Christology.

Normally there might be some cover for Jenson here by appealing to the mystery of God. But he has put a human being simpliciter into the life of the Trinity. Indeed he suggests that Maximus’ thought leads to placing a priority on the Son as human that was once reserved for the divinity. This makes analogical moves much harder to make. Jenson might make the appeal to mystery. Nonetheless, I would argue that Maximus’ notion of the human will being conformed to the divine is a much more comprehensible theological move, and I cannot see the coherence of Jenson’s position.

The only solution to this problem which I can see as consistent with Jenson’s project

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517 Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 137.
is for Jenson to make the same move he did with the nature: make it about hermeneutical lenses. From one angle it looks like Jesus is a human exercising his will in Gethsemane, from another angle it looks like Jesus participating in the life of the Trinity.

Does this do any work for talking about two wills? I can’t see how. We come again to the crux of a narrative and its truth-maker being one and the same. We would expect that the two hermeneutical lenses—which pick out Jesus’ one decision in two different contexts—would pick out a truth which can somehow be grounded in order to successfully suggest that there are two different wills in Jesus’ willing. Yet all we have is the narrative. There is no warrant for accepting Jenson’s construal of the two wills.

Jenson caps his discussion of Maximus’ Christology by drawing the conclusions that Maximus’ work leads to on impassibility. Maximus, Jenson argues, shifts the boundaries of the normal paradox of the impassible God suffering so that it “is now not that the presumed impassible Logos suffers, but that the suffering Son is the Logos of the presumed impassible Father.”\(^{518}\) The Logos is “with full conceptual rigour and intent the ‘suffering God.’”\(^{519}\) Jenson quotes the phrase “suffering God” from Maximus’ *Ambigua*.\(^{520}\)

The rest of the passage is once again enlightening. Maximus is commenting on an oration by Gregory of Nazianzus and after arguing that the hypostasis suffered by virtue of assuming the flesh he writes that:

> The teacher is making a distinction between ‘essence,’ according to which the Word remained simple, even though he became flesh, and ‘hypostasis,’ according to which He became composite, by the assumption of the flesh, so that in the work of salvation the incarnate word can be properly called ‘suffering God.’”\(^{521}\)

This is still the impassible Logos suffering in his hypostasis while remaining impassible in his divine nature. This is not the Son *simpliciter* suffering and related to an

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\(^{518}\) Jenson, *Systematic Theology* vol. 1, 137.

\(^{519}\) Ibid., 137.

\(^{520}\) *Ambigua* 91:1037B.

impassible Father. Maximus remains straightforwardly Cyrillian.

Whilst this is an external critique, and Jenson would reject much of the conceptual and metaphysical analysis as not sufficiently Gospel-shaped, I would argue that not only is Jenson’s Christology deeply flawed conceptually, but that it simply cannot be supported in Maximus’ work. Jenson, despite his desire to avoid it, not only does not appropriate Maximus’ work convincingly but is, I would argue, a monothelite. And, furthermore, in speaking of the human Jesus simpliciter as the divine Son, it is hard to see how he is any longer speaking within the bounds of trinitarian orthodoxy. In both these matters, particularly the latter, Jenson is in danger of no longer speaking Christianly.

As a final note we also see that when speaking of the divine hypostasis of the Son in Maximus Jenson—using his own terminology—uses the phrase “divine identity.”\(^5\) This is relatively minor, but “divine identity” clearly carries significant conceptual baggage in Jenson’s work.\(^6\) One would expect a careful interpreter of texts to avoid so quick a terminological substitution.

What can be appropriated here? It is clear that Jenson’s understanding of the relation between the two natures of Christ cannot be sustained either outside of his revisionary metaphysics or by appeal to Maximus. Yet the parts of Maximus’ work that he has highlighted give us conceptual markers around which any question of impassibility can be weaved. His drive to avoid any splitting of time and eternity in the person of Christ also stands as a challenge. Do we say that somehow ‘the impassible suffered,’ or follow a non-classical path for guarding the relationship between God and creation? Jenson has shown us that Maximus is one from whom conceptual tools can be taken, though our analysis of his use of Maximus has shown that this should be done cautiously. I too will use some of his thought to test the orthodoxy of my Christology proposal in the construction in section 4.3.2.

Having examined two key Christological thinkers one final area needs to be examined regarding Jenson’s Christology and impassibility: what Jenson’s Christology means for the relationship between God’s identity death.

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\(^5\) Jenson, *Systematic Theology vol. 1*, 135.

\(^6\) The notion of ‘dramatic coherence,’ for example, ibid., 64.
2.2.2.3 Death

Jenson writes that God’s “self-identity is constituted in dramatic coherence, it is established not from the beginning but from the end, not at birth but at death, not in persistence but in anticipation.”\textsuperscript{524} Thus, Jesus must die for God to have identity. This makes death integral to the identity of God, and raises the serious question of whether Jenson has made God’s identity too dependent on sin, which itself imperils the ultimate goodness of God.

Jenson self-consciously adopts a supralapsarian position, most closely identifying his position with that of Barth:

\begin{quote}
The goal of God’s path is just what does in fact happen with Jesus the Christ, and sin and evil belong to God’s intent precisely—but only—as they do appear in Christ’s victory over them. So also a mystery of suffering, of an interplay between created regularities and evil, must belong to the plot of God’s history with us and to the character of its crisis and fulfilment.”\textsuperscript{525}
\end{quote}

Jenson acknowledges that the consequences of such a decision are “extreme” but argues that it is a theological necessity.\textsuperscript{526} He acknowledges that death is not a natural part of the created order.\textsuperscript{527} Indeed it is God’s opponent; it threatens the relationship of YHWH and Israel.\textsuperscript{528} But it is only ever God’s opponent, and is not related to God by any sort of Hegelian scheme of thesis and antithesis.\textsuperscript{529}

Precisely because death is God’s opponent, however, it becomes a part of his identity: “the Lord’s resolve to meet and overcome death and the constitution of his self-identity in dramatic coherence are but one truth about him. For if death-and-resurrection occurs, this is the infinite dramatic crisis and resolution, and so God’s

\textsuperscript{524}Jenson, \textit{Systematic Theology vol. 1}, 66.
\textsuperscript{525}Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{526}Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{528}Jenson, \textit{Systematic Theology vol. 1}, 66; 72.
own.” God is still the one whose identity is formed, by and as the Son, by the events contingent on sin and death.

This makes death necessary. Jenson says that these realities “must belong” to God’s history. Not only must they belong to God’s history, but Jenson suggests that any question of whether God could be otherwise than he is is nonsense:

The sentence ‘How would the Trinity have been the Trinity if God had not created a world, and there had therefore been no creature Jesus to be the Son, or had let the fallen creation go, with the same result?’ is often taken for a real question. …I now think that even this response concedes too much to our unbaptized notion of time …It has now dawned on me that the putative question is nonsense, and so therefore is my previous attempt to respond to it.

If we combine Jenson’s “must belong,” and the impossibility of God being other than as we know him, it looks as though evil and death are necessary in the strongest possible sense. The phrase ‘necessarily if God exist, then evil exists’ can be taken in two ways: as simple necessity or conditional necessity (or de dicto and de re necessity). If we let $G$ stand for God exists as we know him, $E$ stand for evil exists, and $\Box$ stand for necessity, then the statement can either be $(G \supset \Box E)$ or $\Box (G \supset E)$. Simple necessity means that the consequent (here $E$) is necessary itself: evil necessarily exists in all possible worlds. Conditional necessity means that the consequence (here $(G \supset E)$) is necessary, and that the consequent is not necessary: if God didn’t exist as we know him it is possible for evil to not exist.

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530 Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 66.
531 Douglas Knight’s interpretation of Jenson at this juncture is at odds with the fullness of what Jenson means here. Knight argues that “Israel defines all the various paths of the divergent times of the world as nondirections, as ‘death,’ and defines death as what will never be.” Death as the end needed to finish the story is clearly far more than something that will ‘never be.’ Knight, “Jenson on Time”, 74–5.
532 Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 72.
533 I am repeating this quote in order to explicate this aspect of his thought. Jenson, “Once More”, 131.
534 The question of how to define necessity and accident is fraught. I will, however, follow the general trend of analytic philosophy from the mid-twentieth century in doing so modally.
535 The reality of de re necessity is debated. I will simply point to a work that I think argues convincingly for it and take it to be true, as I do not have the scope to make the argument here: Plantinga, The Nature of Necessity.
Because Jenson limits possible worlds to just this one in terms of God’s being, and makes evil a necessary part of that being, evil and death have a simple necessity. This means that Jenson is vulnerable to Hart’s moral and ontological objections—God becomes the metaphysical ground of evil—creating enormous difficulties regarding the goodness of God. Evil is now itself necessary in the strongest possible sense because it is tied so tightly to the identity of a God who cannot be conceived of as separate from it.

But what of Jenson’s only, that sin and death are only part of the story as God’s—and more specifically the Son’s—victory over them?\textsuperscript{536} What of his insistence that the events find their home only in the narrative context of the Father and Son against the background of the Old Testament?\textsuperscript{537} Does this help him? Jenson’s appeal to God’s relationship with Israel/the Son rather than history generically certainly points us to God’s victory over sin. Nonetheless, it appears that the significant role played by evil and death in shaping the character of God’s story precludes the ‘only’ doing much work to limit evil’s scope. Let us look more closely at how it functions in Jenson’s work to find out.

Summarising Barth’s work with approbation Jenson writes that “evil exists in that God rejects it.”\textsuperscript{538} This appears to be a species of understanding sin as privation.\textsuperscript{539} Jenson’s ‘only’ might, then, be understood in a couple of ways. One is that evil exists only as that which is destroyed (insofar as God’s overcoming it is its destruction). Another is that evil provides the trough in the divine comedy.\textsuperscript{540} Quite possibly Jenson means both.

So what good is the ‘only?’ I cannot see how it does any more than two things: it testifies that evil has indeed been defeated, and it seems to point to some divine moral calculus. Evil’s very scope is limited to this moment of supererogatory good. The ‘only’ becomes an argument that evil exists insofar as this great good can be brought from it. Once again Hart’s critique of Jenson is valid: “morally …[Jenson’s

\textsuperscript{536}Jenson, \textit{Systematic Theology vol. 1}, 83. \\
\textsuperscript{537}Jenson, “Doctrine of the Atonement”. \\
\textsuperscript{538}Jenson, \textit{Alpha and Omega}, 150. \\
\textsuperscript{539}For Jenson sin is the betrayal of righteousness understood as rightly ordered relationships. Jenson, \textit{Systematic Theology vol. 1}, 72. \\
\textsuperscript{540}Using comedy in the sense argued for by Graham Cole. See Cole, \textit{God the Peacemaker}. 

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theology] seems to fail the test of Ivan Karamazov.”⁵⁴¹ In other words, God becomes a moral monster whose hidden calculus justifies unspeakable evils.

It is important to note that it is not just God’s identity that is forged in death but ours also as participants in the life of the Son. Explaining our relation to God Jenson argues that if God were mere monad:

Either God’s identity would be determined extrinsically by creatures or it would at some depth be after all immune to the gospel events. But the God of Exodus and Resurrection is above all free and sovereign, and if his identity is determined in his relation with others, just so those others cannot be merely extrinsic to him.⁵⁴²

Jenson then begins to reflect on the persons of the Trinity in the form of dramatis dei personae (characters of the person of God).⁵⁴³ The Son is identified as both Israel and an individual within it.⁵⁴⁴ The Son, and only the Son—as both member of the community and its representative—achieves Israel’s inclusion in the divine life as he is “the one who in his own person can be an agent in the divine life and the community that in his identity with it is taken into that life.”⁵⁴⁵

This, Jenson argues, is where there is space for the difference between God and creation:

Were there only a singular creature who in his own person was ‘one of the Trinity,’ in his instance, the difference between God and creature would simply be abolished; but, in that the one person is the one he is only as identified with a community whose members are not, in their singular persons, identities of God, the one Israelite’s membership in God in fact sustains the difference between God and creature. Were there to be only a homogeneous plurality of persons to be taken into the triune life, again, the difference between God and creature would vanish in religious murk; but, in that the community subsists only in that the one

⁵⁴¹Hart, Beauty, 165. See: Jenson, “Hidden and Triune God”.
⁵⁴²Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 75.
⁵⁴³Ibid., 75.
⁵⁴⁴Ibid., 76–7.
⁵⁴⁵Ibid., 83.

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is within it, this one is, just so, a unique individual whose reality as ‘one of the Trinity’ does not release a proliferation of divine hypostases.\footnote{Jenson, Systematic Theology vol. 1, 83.}

Because the identity of the Son is the bridge between God and creation, our own beings are contingent upon what happened with Jesus Christ. We too depend on sin and death to be who we are in Christ.

Jenson’s work here leads to conclusions that I cannot accept. It does, nonetheless, raise important questions. It is—amongst other things—as a way of avoiding these consequences that Hart champions the notion of impassibility.\footnote{The centre of Hart’s critique of Jenson’s theology, is that despite its sophistication it makes God and the world too close: “It is simply prima facie false that if God achieves his identity in the manner Jenson describes, he could have been the same God by other means, without the world. …if God could be God otherwise, then he already is God otherwise; this is who God is, which history can manifest but never determine. If, however, the particular determinations of this history are also determinations of God—as he ‘chooses’ to be God—then there can be no identity of God as this God apart from the specific contours of this history.” Hart, Beauty, 163.} Christology is the centre of this mystery, and it is the question of how Jesus’ relationship to the Father and the World is articulated—without falling into the dangers Hart outlines here—that is part of any stance on impassibility. Jenson has shown us the danger faced by any sort of temporal becoming, no matter how sophisticated. My constructive work will need to be interrogated by these dangers.\footnote{I deal with them in section 4.4.}

2.2.3 Conclusion

Jenson’s work has been shown to be creative and challenging. However, because of this very creativity, I have found much with which I am in disagreement. I have argued that Jenson’s theological system looks to be self-referentially incoherent. He seeks to develop a theology stemming solely from God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Yet he has a philosophically and theologically situated control belief that seems to distort his understanding of Scripture.

Were Jenson’s system to allow him to justify this philosophical belief, \textit{qua philosophical belief} as a control for his theological discourse, his system would not have an internal incoherence. Yet because of the way Jenson’s system is structured, this is
rendered impossible as he understands a philosophical starting point external to the
gospel as guilty of the sin of religion.

We have then seen that, from the perspective of my external critique, there were
difficulties with some of the key theological structures that allow Jenson to articulate
his doctrine of impassibility. In terms of the relation between God and the world
Jenson’s Trinity dissolves into something like a binity with a specious present which
is the ever-flowing boundary of a process of transformation. The Son’s life is shrunk
to a durationless boundary between past and future: Jenson’s thought results in a
historicist dualism in both history and Trinity.

Jenson understanding of being and narrative foregrounds power as the main on-
tological differential between creation and God. This resulted in a question about
how God can possess any property such as being just, and an exegetical exploration
that demonstrated the possibility of a non-voluntarist foundation in Scripture.

Similarly Jenson’s articulation of time accrued a considerable number of conceptual
burdens and philosophical fiat in order to make it work with the biblical narrative.
This raised the question as to whether his conception of time was really any less
problematic than a-temporality. I believe the answer to that question is that it is
not.

Indeed Jenson’s articulation does not seem any more immune to idolatry than the
‘religious’ conception of God. The future can be the ground of idolatry—even in
Christ—just as much as the ‘frozen past.’ This would no-doubt, be a misuse of Jen-
son’s system, but no more than it would be of, say, Hart.

Jenson’s use of Cyril was found to miss important aspects of Cyril’s text, such that
he cannot straightforwardly claim to be Cyrillian. The Christology Jenson argues
is based on Cyril was examined, in particular the question of how Jesus can be the
bearer of two natures or properties like ‘divine’ and ‘human.’ After long exploration I
do not see that his Christology can properly accommodate these things. In the course
of trying to answer this question I explored Jenson’s understanding of impassibility
and I concluded that I can appropriate neither his Christology, nor his understanding
of impassibility.
The exploration of Jenson’s use of Maximus made it similarly clear that Jenson’s understanding of the relation between the two natures of Christ cannot be sustained either outside of his revisionary metaphysics or by appeal to Maximus.

Finally, I suggested that Jenson’s understanding of the the necessity of sin and death in God’s decision of election does indeed fall foul of Hart’s charge that Jenson is vulnerable to Ivan Karamazov’s critique.

Jenson has, however, provided a number of positive contributions to this exploration. His Christology has shown the danger faced by any system that includes God in temporal becoming. My constructive work will need to be interrogated by these dangers.

Jenson has highlighted one of the tools for guarding God’s temporal becoming: some sort of shaped infinity. I will explore the adequacy of this and use it in my own constructive work.

Jenson’s argument that timelessness is a fundamentally inappropriate category within which to conceive of the biblical God must be reckoned with. His attempt, in particular, to wrestle with petitionary prayer as genuinely affecting God’s being is something that I, as an evangelical, must wrestle with. Jenson has also shown us that trying to reduce being to narrative is not the way to accomplish this.

Furthermore I have found an important source for the constructive phase of this project. With Cyril’s focus on the unity of Christ his articulation of impassibility will be particularly important. Maximus’ work gives us conceptual markers around which the question of impassibility can be weaved.

Jenson’s drive to avoid any splitting of time and eternity in the person of Christ also stands as a challenge. Do we say that somehow ‘the impassible suffered,’ or follow a non-classical path for guarding the relationship between God and creation? Jenson has shown us that Maximus is one from whom conceptual tools should be taken, and whose understanding of impassibility we must revisit.

Finally, Jenson has made our metaphysical world strange, and so forces us to question the arbitrariness of our own metaphysical boundaries. Jenson shows us the fragility of all metaphysical systems. This is, I think, one of Jenson’s greatest contributions
to those who cannot follow the specific trajectory of his theology. At our moment of theological history, facing the choices that we do, we can learn from Jenson and his mistakes. Because of the shape of his project his mistakes alone would be reason enough to read him.

I will utilise Jenson’s work primarily in my constructive work in section 4.3. Yet some of his thought—particularly his making the metaphysical world strange—will aid me in my engagement with David Bentley Hart. We turn now to Hart’s work for a very different look at impassibility.
Chapter 3

David Bentley Hart

David Bentley Hart is an American Eastern Orthodox theologian, whose *Beauty of the Infinite* brought him widespread acclaim. In this and his subsequent work Hart has been a key figure not only in the revival of the defence of *apatheia* but of the *analogia entis* as a key component of this defence.¹ Not only does Hart offer an alternative perspective to Jenson, but one could not examine the contemporary question of impassibility without reference to his work.

Hart’s work becomes yet more valuable for my project as he ably represents a position which has been held in one form or another throughout much of Christianity’s history: what is broadly called ‘classical theism.’ Accepting or rejecting Hart’s work will serve as a proxy for the acceptance or rejection of classical theism.²

¹See, as evidence of this, the proceedings of 2008 conference on the analogy of being in Przywara and Barth the precipitation of which can be traced in part to Hart’s work. *Analogy of Being*.

²Obviously the tradition is broader than Hart’s one articulation of it, and indeed he holds some minority opinions, such as his universalism. Nonetheless, to the extent that examining Hart’s work will mandate an examination of the coherence of concepts such as divine simplicity or a strong impassibility, Hart’s work does indeed offer a chance to examine some of the foundational patterns of thought seen in classical theism.
3.1 Internal Critique

3.1.1 An Overview of Hart’s Project

“Is the beauty to whose persuasive power the Christian rhetoric of evangelism inevitably appeals, and upon which it depends, theologically defensible?” This is the question that David Bentley Hart asks at the start of his magnum opus *The Beauty of the Infinite*. At the centre of Hart’s answer to this question is a vision of God’s apatheia, his impassibility. There is no more important single work than this in Hart’s corpus for understanding his case for God’s impassibility. I will, therefore, give an overview of this work as a means of offering a brief summary of the overall shape of Hart’s argument.

The question of beauty is one made acute by the challenge of postmodernism, most powerfully embodied by its prototype: Nietzsche. Hart argues that Nietzsche’s work is “first and foremost a virtuoso performance, a rhetorical tour de force …[calling] for a comparable demonstration on theology’s part of a comprehensive and creative renarrations.” Nonetheless, while academic fashion has come to emphasise Nietzsche’s antiessentialism and irony, there are indeed “miraculously broad, but earnest, pronouncements …[like] ‘life simply is will to power’” within Nietzsche’s work. Nietzsche—whatever his desire to the contrary—offers an alternative metaphysics.

This is a metaphysic that Nietzsche’s followers have inherited. Hart follows Milbank’s argument in *Theology and Social Theory* that post-modern thought, despite the differences between thinkers, articulates an ontology of violence. If the ‘will to power’ defines ultimate reality, then no rhetoric—including the Gospel pronouncement—can be other than dissembled violence. Christianity’s announcement would herald only another actor in the “endless epic of power.”

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⁴Ibid., 94.
⁵Italics original. ibid., 94.
⁶Ibid., 99.
⁷See the chapter entitled ‘Ontological Violence’ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 278–326.
Christianity, moreover, cannot escape the challenge Nietzsche (and postmodernism) presents: it itself proclaims the potency of “violence, falsehood, and death” in the world. The only way to meet this challenge, Hart argues, is to show how beauty belongs at every moment to the Christian story: that beauty is identical to the infinity that is God.

We see this identity of God and beauty in the incarnation. As von Balthasar argues, Christianity holds that the infinite God took on the particular form of Jesus, therefore not opposing infinity and form: “The whole mystery of Christianity, that which distinguishes it radically from every other religious project, is that the form does not stand in opposition to infinite light …This makes the Christian principle the superabundant and unsurpassable principle of every aesthetics; Christianity becomes the aesthetic religion par excellence.” This beauty evokes desire, says Hart.

Postmodernism articulates its own form of desire. The will to power is itself a form of desire. As an ethic of desire it is in the form of beauty that Christianity most appropriately addresses the post-modern challenge. Christianity’s counter-story to post-modernism’s story of violence is that desire can be directed to a form of infinite peace.

At the centre of this theological vision is a strong doctrine of impassibility. Hart is adamant that the narrative found in the form of Christ can only be one of peace and not violence, if God is the simple God whose inner-trinitarian life of bliss does not alter through contact with the world. The world’s peace depends on in its being freely birthed from and brought into that radiant peace. Which is to say that the world’s hope consists, in part, in it not altering that bliss into which it will be brought.

Hart argues for the necessity of impassibility on three main criteria. The first is

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10Hart is not appealing to beauty in distinction from truth. Beauty is a transcendental for Hart, and therefore Beauty and Truth cannot truly be separated. ibid., 3-4.
12This can be seen in the fact that Hart thanks McGuckin, in his review of *The Beauty of the Infinite*, for identifying *apathia* as one of the key themes of the book. Hart, “Hart to McGukin and Murphy”, 96.
13This sentiment pervades the beauty of the infinite, but see, for example: Hart, *Beauty*, 346–94.
14Putting aside the argument from the authority of Christian tradition on this point.
ontological. Unless our conception of God meets Anselm’s *id quo maius cogitari nequit* then this God is a “metaphysical fable.”¹⁵ If one conceives of God as passible, of a God whose “possibility exceeds his actuality,” then he fails this test.¹⁶ A passible God is not the God of Christian theology.

The second argument is moral, though Christologically and ontologically grounded. Hart argues that if one tries to assert that God finds himself in Jesus *tout court* then “in specifying this one historical object God must also specify the entire web of historical and cosmic contingencies in which this object subsists.”¹⁷ All historical actualities, including horrors such as Auschwitz become necessary.¹⁸ In short, impassibility guards God’s aseity. If God has any dependence on the world, the world *in toto* becomes necessary, insofar as God himself is a necessary being.

The third argument is Christological and soteriological. Hart argues that impassibility is vital to the hope offered by the Christian evangel.¹⁹ The incarnation achieves a miracle of transformation: while the Logos has suffered through his human nature, the impassibility of the divine nature was preserved. It was impassibility that meant that he was able to bear the sufferings of Easter “as an act of saving love.”²⁰ Because the divine nature is impassible, Jesus’ sufferings were transformed. Insofar as we are ‘in Christ’ we are in “radiant shelter of his divine peace, his *apatheia*.”²¹ This is the good news of *theosis*.

Pervading each of these points are three important ontological supporting structures: divine simplicity, the analogy of being, and participation. God is simple: a God who is fully in act, and the nature of this act is a inner-trinitarian bliss of self-giving love.²² We are related to this simple God via the analogy of being (*analogia entis*) and by ‘participation.’²³

This overview gives us a good idea of what must be examined in order to evaluate

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¹⁵Hart, “No Shadow”, 189; See also: Hart, “Impassibility as Transcendence”.
¹⁷Ibid., 191.
¹⁸Ibid., 192.
¹⁹Ibid., 160.
²⁰Ibid., 204.
²¹Ibid., 203.
²²See: Hart, “Impassibility as Transcendence”, “No Shadow”.
Hart’s case for God’s impassibility. Hart’s key arguments for impassibility cannot be evaluated until my constructive work, for they force a careful examination of an alternative thesis in order to be answered. What I will do here is examine his supporting structures in order to discern both the internal cogency of his argument, and whether or not I, as an evangelical, should embrace these same structures.

The structure of what follows will, therefore, take the following form. As a part of my internal critique I will investigate the analogy of being, participation, and Hart’s Christology. As a part of my external critique I will investigate divine simplicity and God’s potentiality, and Hart’s universalism.

The reason these are so divided is this: Hart’s use of the analogy of being and participation is vital to the overall comprehensibility of his project, yet they are not conceptually filled-out in his work. In order to evaluate the overall coherence of his work they need close examination.

Hart’s Christology is grounded in the thought of the Church Fathers in particular—Cyril of Alexandria among them—but his actual engagement with them is fleeting. As Cyril of Alexandria’s thought has already been examined this presents an opportunity to assess the degree of fidelity that Hart has to this thinker, and therefore the degree of fidelity of Hart to his own internal presuppositions.

In doing this sort of investigation of the sources for Hart’s ideas, it is worth noting that such analysis has warrant in Hart’s project:

To understand the traditional theistic approach to the matter, one has to step back from contemporary Anglo-American philosophy’s parochial tendency to treat all ideas as either successful or deficient attempts to comply with rules of contemporary analytic habit, and adopt instead a certain “hermeneutical” respect for the past—a certain willingness to try to understand earlier philosophical systems on their own terms, that is.²⁴

Hart’s adoption of simplicity has the form of a control belief, one which has long attestation in the Christian tradition. As it is shaped as control belief rather than

²⁴Hart, *Experience*, 129. It is worth pointing out Hart’s lament would be considerably chastened if he paid attention to work like that of Wolterstorff on Divine simplicity: Wolterstorff, “Divine Simplicity”.

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emerging from any internal argument it must be evaluated externally. Hart’s universalism is a consequence of the systematic shape of his thought, emerging from it intelligibly and carefully. Thus the only fruitful mode of engaging with it is externally.

This will then enable a conclusion on whether Hart’s case compels the acceptance of his understanding of impassibility. We will see that it does not. This means that in the final construction Hart’s actual arguments against impassibility will need to be overcome. If it is found that they cannot be we will have to reconsider whether Hart’s system will have to be accepted, despite its difficulties.

A final thing to take note of is that by investigating these parts of Hart’s work, I have foregrounded only parts of Hart’s overall project. There will, for example, be no independent treatment of desire—so central a theme for Hart—but will be addressed only insofar as desire relates to Hart’s account of universalism. Nor will I deal in detail with his understanding of postmodernism, or any number of his wider dogmatic statements. I believe, however, that I have done no violence to Hart’s work, but merely highlighted that which is necessary to understand and evaluate his conception of impassibility. The reader will have to judge how successfully I have done this.

To our examination of Hart’s articulation of impassibility we now turn.

### 3.1.2 The Analogy of Being and Participation

Properly understood analogy is one of the key ontological supporting structures of Hart’s thought, serving as a means of articulating the relationship between God and the world:

I use the term ‘analogy of being’ as shorthand for the tradition of Christian metaphysics that, developing from the time of the New Testament

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25 Hart does defend simplicity against its detractors, but the success of these argument need to be decided externally.

26 The account of desire that he uses to ground this task draws most heavily from Gregory of Nyssa, though other thinkers such as Maximus the Confessor feature prominently. A question for further study is whether the ontology of these two thinkers is indeed compatible. Hart, *Beauty*, 29.
through the patristic and medieval periods, succeeded in uniting a metaphysics of participation to the biblical doctrine of creation, within the framework of trinitarian dogma, and in so doing made it possible for the first time in Western thought to contemplate both the utter difference of being from beings and the nature of true transcendence.²⁷

Several important things are evident here. The first is that analogy is linked to participation. The second is that these concepts function in the conceptual space between the doctrine of creation and the trinity. Finally they allow for an articulation of the “utter difference” of God as being from ourselves as beings. In this statement we see that the analogy of being and participation provide the framework for, among other things, articulating the God greater than which nothing can be thought.²⁸ Analogy and participation serve, therefore, in a conceptual framework for understanding the dynamics of the relationship between the triune God and the Christian understanding of creation.

Surprisingly, despite their importance for Hart’s thesis, both the analogia entis and participation receive comparatively little explication in Hart’s work, particularly given their complexity.²⁹ This is most evident in the case of participation. In the case of the analogy of being Hart both spends a little more time talking about the doctrine and is very clear where his understanding of it comes from.

It is Erich Przywara’s form of the analogy of being to which Hart points as the articulation of the doctrine. Indeed Hart has made an effort—in the form of the first English translation of Przywara’s major work on the topic—to see that Przywara’s thought reaches a wider audience.³⁰

Three tasks present themselves here: the first is to identify what Hart means by the analogia entis. This will be done by examining Przywara’s works, as Hart identifies his position so closely and explicitly with Przywara’s. The second is to identify what Hart might mean by participation. This is a more complex affair and will—for

²⁷Hart, Beauty, 241.
²⁸The first of Hart’s argument for impassibility as seen above.
²⁹Only the analogia entis has any major sustained argumentation attached to it, though it should immediately be noted that Hart undertook the labor of translating Przywara’s Analogia Entis along with John Betz. Hart, “Christian Metaphysics”; Przywara, Analogia Entis.
³⁰See: Przywara, Analogia Entis, Along with John Betz.
reasons which will become apparent—involves tracing and evaluating both participation and the real distinction in the work of a number of thinkers. The third and final task is to evaluate the cogency of these concepts as they intersect with one another in Hart’s work. In other words, to offer an internal critique of Hart’s use of these concepts. We turn now to the first of these tasks.

3.1.2.1 Przywara’s analogia entis

Przywara was a German–Polish Jesuit theologian born in 1889.³¹ He had a significant influence on twentieth-century German theology, notably on figures such as Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner, and, less straightforwardly, Karl Barth.³² There has been a revival of interest in Przywara’s work in recent years, due in large part to the work of Hart and Betz.³³

The centre of Przywara’s conception of the analogia entis is that the rhythm of being ‘in-over,’ or ‘in-and-beyond,’ with the rhythmic emphasis falling on the “ever greater dissimilarity” of the beyond.³⁴ This rhythm happens in two analogies. The first is a creaturely analogy of essence and existence, by which Przywara means a suspension or oscillation back and forth between these poles which ultimately point to something beyond it.³⁵ The second deals with the relationship between the creaturely and God, and has the most marked note of ever-greater dissimilarity.

There is a great deal of complexity that lies beneath this summary, and we will now attempt to summarise and evaluate it. As his analogia entis serves as his most mature major work on the issue we will look at that work primarily, supplementing from other sources where necessary.

Turning to the first analogy Przywara begins by arguing—in conversation with Aristotle—that Metaphysics means seeking the ἐν-τελ-έχεια (“ground and end and

³¹For a short but excellent outline of some of the theological sources informing Przywara’s thinking see: Oakes, “Przywara”.
³²Barth and Przywara clashed over the analogia entis, as we will see.
³³Betz serves—along with Hart—as the co-translator for, and author of the introduction for, Przywara’s analogia entis. He has also written prominently on his work outside of this venture. See: Betz, “After Barth”, “Beyond The Sublime”, “Beyond The Sublime 1”, “Introduction”.
³⁴Italics Original Przywara, Analogia Entis, 234.
³⁵Ibid., 158-59; 190-91.
definition in itself⁶) of the being of *physis*, the highest instance of which is *psyche*. Yet a problem arises here: our conscious acts (*psyche*) interrogate being for its ἐν-τέλ-έχεια. There is, in other words, a difference between the act and object of cognition. Metaphysics has a choice: does it depart from the act of knowledge (meta-noetics) or the act of being (meta-ontics), or even the being of the act of knowledge?³⁷

Which starting point should claim primacy? Meta-noetics can make the case that the act of knowledge precedes the object. Yet seeking a sure epistemic ground leads to infinite regress, and there is no account of the act of knowledge that is not already ontological (to think in the categories of act and potency, for example, is to think ontologically).³⁸ This suggests that meta-ontics should be prior. But any meta-ontics already presupposes an epistemological foundation, some sort of adequate grasp of being by the mind.

Przywara argues that, on-balance, meta-noetics takes primacy, but always with the awareness that it is pervaded by the ontic. In order to proceed in a manner that understands its character as both a primary departing point and already pervaded by the ontic, he argues that a meta-noetic starting point will: 1. examine the intentionality of consciousness towards being (realism); 2. develop meta-ontic categories through its own immanent reflection; and 3. examine these categories.³⁹ This offers the means to begin metaphysical reflection. But in doing so it highlights the final problem of metaphysics.

It becomes apparent that there is a priority that can also be assigned to the meta-ontic. Meta-noetics has a methodological priority, meta-ontics has an objective priority: is it the pre-existing object being examined.⁴⁰ The act of consciousness (becoming) is directed towards being, being in which it itself is located. Given this language we can see that Przywara connects meta-noetics and meta-ontics to the categories of act and being respectively.⁴¹ In other words one can look at the same phenomenon through a meta-noetic (epistemological) or meta-ontic (ontological) mode.

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⁶Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 120.
⁷Ibid., 120–121.
⁸Ibid., 121.
⁹Ibid., 120–123.
¹⁰Ibid., 119–124.
¹¹Ibid., 123.
Metaphysics’ final problem is, then, just this: the mutual belonging of the noetic and ontic. As neither the meta-noetic or meta-ontic can be said to have absolute priority Przywara calls the relation a “suspended tension." Moreover he classifies this as a creaturely metaphysic as “it proceeds according to the in fieri—becoming—of the back-and-forth relation (and not by way of a discrimination between self-sufficient unities).” It is a creaturely metaphysics insofar as it is a metaphysics of becoming. It is creaturely also because it does not possess its own ground for existence: it has neither stability nor foundation in itself.

The formal structure of this creaturely metaphysics—and answer to the final problem of metaphysics, though one that points beyond itself—is “essence in-and-beyond existence.” It is “inaugurating a new beginning by simultaneously pointing back towards and recapturing what has gone before.” In other words it is recognising that there is a fundamental non-identity between our essence and existence, which are joined only by a rhythm directed towards something that is not yet. This rhythm is the fact that “the thus towards which becoming proceeds already is at the same time the there of that which becomes,” i.e. “the thus beyond the there” and yet “the thus in the there:” “the thus in-and-beyond the there.”

Przywara then provides further evidence for how the analogia entis, in both its ontic and noetic connection, can be demonstrated to be necessary in the light of the history of thought. Drawing on Aristotle, Przywara argues that the noetic is a “unity (to employ a provisional term) of the scientific, ethical, and artistic comportments of consciousness.” The ontic (Ὄν) is “synonymous with the ‘proper being’ of ‘the true, the good, and the beautiful’.” The transcendentals can be characterised as

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42Przywara, Analogia Entis, 123.
43Ibid., 124.
44Ibid., 124.
46Ibid., 124.
48Because these descriptors a joined tightly to meta-ontics and meta-noetics, it is very difficult to see how Przywara’s pattern forms an adequate description of non-human creation which has no psyche. Do rocks have no kind of analogical correspondence to God at all, and perhaps, therefore, no existence? Przywara, Analogia Entis, 124.
49Ibid., 125.
50though Ὄν, in turn, has an “intrinsically ‘energetic’ character” as a “potency-act” relation. Przy-
both ontic and noetic, though throughout most of history they have been taken as primarily ontic.

The transcendals can, therefore, be understood in two ways. Przywara calls these two categories ‘metaphysical transcendentalism’ and ‘transcendental metaphysics.’ In antiquity, as we have seen, they are primarily meta-ontic, which is to say that they are claims about being: metaphysical transcendentalism. In “Kantian transcendentalism” they are primarily meta-noetic, where they are understood as “‘pure reason’ (the true), ‘practical reason’ (the good), and synthesizing ‘judgement’ (the beautiful).” They are epistemic structures: transcendental metaphysics.⁵¹

After some analysis neither metaphysical transcendentalism nor transcendental metaphysics prove adequate as absolute starting points for analysis. Each is necessary in the way of the meta-ontic and meta-noetic above.⁵² Moreover they both aim at unity: metaphysical transcendentalism “aims at a comprehension of being (esse) in its unity (unum),” transcendental metaphysics aims “towards a comprehension of being’s threefold radiance (verum–bonum–pulchrum) and its unity (unum).”⁵³

This aligning of the explicitly transcendental in both the ontic and noetic, and the interdependence of the transcendals themselves, shows the ultimate direction that both the noetic and the ontic must take. They move towards a more and more general pattern that ultimately allows each to realise their own instability when taken as absolute, and finally to arrive at the formal structure of metaphysics Przywara has already outlined: essence in–and–beyond–existence.⁵⁴ By examining a widely regarded metaphysical structure—the transcendals—and finding the abstract principle he has already articulated at work, Przywara sees a confirmation of his thesis.

Przywara goes on to develop this fundamental ‘in–beyond’ insight. He turns next to the relationship between a priori and a posteriori metaphysics. Does one work from being as Being towards its concrete instantiation, or from the concrete to being as

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⁵¹Ibid., 125-27.
⁵²Ibid., 130.
⁵³Ibid., 130.
⁵⁴Ibid., 131.
Przywara then tackles the problem as one of *a priori* and *a posteriori* metaphysics of the act—roughly super and trans-historical truth respectively—but this ultimately follows the same pattern. In their extreme form these options result in ahistorical truth (whereby the creature’s reason escapes its creaturely mutability by grasping unchanging truth) and historicism (truth dissolved into history) respectively.

Przywara notes that the trans-historical will always form a backdrop to super-historical investigation, and *vice versa*. Their relation is thus “truth in-and-beyond history.”

It is fair, I think, to take this as a description of the relationship between some form of foundationalism (Platonism) and historicism, and their ontological correlates. The argument can be read, then, as one for the existence of an ‘analogical’ middle between these two. Recall Przywara’s earlier outline of his epistemic (meta-noetic) method: 1. examine the intentionality of consciousness towards being (realism); 2. develop meta-ontic categories through its own immanent reflection; and 3. examine these categories. He appears to be engaging in part three of this method here. We can say, then, that Przywara is engaged in the articulation and application of a particular epistemology. I will offer some critique of this below.

Przywara moves on to explore the relationship between philosophical and theological metaphysics. He notes that, so far, only the first part of his definition of

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56Ibid., 134.
57Ibid., 139-154.
60Ibid., 139-154.
61Ibid., 120-123.
entelechy—"ground and end and definition in itself"—has been dealt with. The “in itself” yet remains.

The question of the “in itself” is a question of ‘how’ asked of a “neutral, factual ‘that.’” How does this concrete creature, suspended between essence and existence, carry a ‘ground, end, and definition’ that transcends itself? This inquiry takes place from the ‘in-between,’ and is ultimately addressed to the ‘in-between’ but going, in its aim, “through and beyond it.”

If one begins answering this question of how with an a priori metaphysics the answer is seen as “a deduction of the grounded, directed, and determined from its ground, end, and definition.” The movement here is from above to below. This results in a “certain relation between God and creature: namely, a oneness with God of the ‘Ideas’ and of ‘Truth.’”

If one departs from an a posteriori position, the movement happens in the opposite direction. It works from the given plurality of forms and understands the relationship between God and creation as “sum” whereby God is “the limit idea of ‘all in existence.’”

In other words, the problem of the one and the many is at play once again here: an a priori metaphysics leads to a swallowing of the universe in God’s oneness, an a posteriori metaphysics leads to a definition of God as the sum of the universe’s parts. Przywara concludes that the question of whether to begin with a priori or a posteriori metaphysics leads inexorably to the question of the relationship between “the absolute and the relative,” and therefore God and creature. The one way forward is to ensure God’s transcendence from the world:

The concept of God, which is formally immanent to the question thus distinguished, is situated beyond the reach of those concepts of God that were revealed in the forms of their equation: beyond, that is, either the ‘God who descends’ to the creature (in an a priori metaphysics of the

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62Przywara, Analogia Entis, 155.
63Ibid., 155.
64Ibid., 155-56.
65Ibid., 156.
66Ibid., 156.
67Ibid., 156.
68Ibid., 157.
object or of the act: divine ideativity and creaturely reality) or the “God who comes to be” from the creature (in an a posteriori metaphysics of the object or of the act: creaturely multiplicity and divine all-unity). It follows, therefore …that the concept of God proper to this ‘distinction’ should have the formal fundamental form of ‘God beyond the creature.’

The formulation ‘God beyond the creature’ is very important. It is not ‘God in-and-beyond the creature,’ the emphasis is on the beyond which means it is ‘God beyond-and-in the creature.’ What we see is that ultimately the ‘in-beyond’ relation of creatureliness does not terminate with the ‘suspended back-and-forth.’ Rather, it points beyond itself to a ‘beyond-in.’ Therefore “the formula ‘essence in-and-beyond existence’ is vertically transected by ‘God beyond-and-in the creature.’”

It is the union of the two poles of the creaturely—essence and existence—to which this relation points. If one takes the a priori as absolute one ends up with “essence as existence.” If one takes the a posteriori as absolute one ends up with “essence as existence.” They are both names for God, and the idolatrousness of both perspectives is the ‘as.’ The true name is the divine ‘Is’—existence is essence—and this knowledge is the apex of creaturely metaphysics: “The unity of these two names [‘essence as existence’ and ‘essence as existence’] thus yields, immanently, the name for the absolutum of creaturely metaphysics.”

There is more to this emphasising of the ‘beyond’ in our relation to God. God is, as the ground of both essence and existence, ‘in’ the creature. Yet as the being whose essence is to exist, God is beyond the creature in the most fundamental way:

This does not simply mean that the divine absolute as it appears ‘from’ the creaturely can only be ‘beyond (everything creaturely).’ On the contrary, this ‘beyond’ is ‘beyond’ in the fullest sense only when the appearing of the divine absolute is not bound in any way intrinsically to this ‘from (the creaturely),’ but instead presides independently over the man-

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69 Przywara, Analogia Entis, 157.
70 Ibid., 160.
71 Ibid., 160.
72 Ibid., 161.
73 Ibid., 160.
ner of it own appearing—such that now, conversely, this ‘from’ appears from ‘beyond.’ Indeed, one might ask whether the ‘beyond’ does not show itself as ‘beyond’ until it is seen not ‘from (the creaturely),’ but from Itself. This then raises the more pointed question: Is metaphysics (as we have conceived of it thus far) fully possible ‘from the creaturely’ or does it intrinsically entail the necessity of a self-revelation of the divine absolute ‘from Itself? It is the question concerning philosophical and theological metaphysics: both general and concrete.⁷⁴

In other words, Przywara is arguing that the relation necessitated by the fundamental rhythm of creaturely (or philosophical) metaphysics points inexorably to a ‘beyond' which is present in full freedom to creation in that it is not conditioned by it.⁷⁵ He has created intellectual space for creation and creator to occupy different ontological orders.⁷⁶

This serves as the foundation for Przywara’s understanding of nature and grace. He carries on his development of this under the aegis of the relation of theology to the philosophical (or creaturely) metaphysics (the apex of which we have just seen). ‘Theology’ has two possible meanings. The first is when philosophy “projects itself into theology” insofar as theology is understood as a “statement about God.” Theology as a “statement by God” is, however, “a completely different genus over against the philosophicae disciplinae.⁷⁷ The first of these options renders theology “the immanent theology of philosophy.”⁷⁸ It is the latter sense that Przywara makes fundamental in understanding the difference between philosophy and theology as it “alone allows for a clear discrimination of the two.”

Theology is fundamentally aimed ‘from above to below’ while philosophy is aimed “from below to above.” This is the same as the movement in a priori and a posteriori metaphysics. These two points of departure result in neither perfectly coincident

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⁷⁴Italics original. Przywara, Analogia Entis, 161.  
⁷⁵Przywara doesn’t use ‘freedom’ but I believe it captures his intent: the divine absolute “presides independently over the manner of its own appearing.” ibid., 161.  
⁷⁶An aspect so vital to Hart’s use of this analogy. Hart, Beauty, 232.  
⁷⁷Emphases mine. Przywara, Analogia Entis, 162.  
⁷⁸Ibid., 167.
nor completely unrelated disciplines and findings.⁷⁹ Failing to relate the two disciplines correctly leads to the two errors of “theo-pan-ism” and “pan-the-ism:” “God becomes the all ... [or] the all becomes God.”⁸⁰ We have seen these outlined already, and Barth is held to be guilty of the first.⁸¹

Przywara articulates the distinction and relationship between the two disciplines so: philosophy maintains its character as “creaturely metaphysics” insofar as it inquires after the “ground, end, and definition” of being.⁸² God, as “positive limit concept,” is only the object of philosophy insofar as the creature is an object: God is the positive limit concept of the creature.⁸³ The Vatican council affirmed that duplex ordo cognitionis non solum principio, sed objecto distinctus.⁸⁴ God as ‘limit concept’ is grasped, but that is all philosophy can offer.

Given that creaturely metaphysics can only be properly preserved in the balance between its a priori and a posteriori extremes—and therefore not absolutising itself and confusing itself with theology—this balance is very difficult to find. It only happens “on Catholic soil.”⁸⁵

Theology is “a movement of God into humanity … a visible entrance into this visibility.”⁸⁶ Theology is not, here, a “theologia archetypa: one of God in himself,” but, as Aquinas says, is “Sacra Scriptura:” “God speaking the word of God.” For Przywara this means that theology is “the positive word of revelation through the infallible magisterium of the church. ... an ecclesial theology of revelation.”⁸⁷ At this point

⁷⁹Przywara, Analogia Entis, 164.
⁸⁰Ibid., 167.
⁸¹That Barth is guilty of this soteriologically is not an unfair accusation. That he is guilty of it ontologically is, I think, a case less easily made. As I am articulating the logic of Przywara’s claim I do not need to go deeply into this tangled debate. For further details see: Johnson, Karl Barth.
⁸²Przywara, Analogia Entis, 169.
⁸³Where the apriori and aposteriori, no longer understood as absolute—thus escaping the possibility of being labeled ‘theology' and ‘philosophy’ respectively—reflect merely “the immanent span of the creaturely itself.” ibid., 168.
⁸⁴“A twofold order of knowledge, distinct not solely according to principle, but according to object.” trans. Betz and Hart. ibid., 168.
⁸⁵As opposed to, say, reformation theology which tends to a “purely apriori metaphysics.” It seems clear that the grace/nature relation of Barth’s theology is at the forefront of Przywara’s mind. ibid., 169.
⁸⁶Ibid., 171.
⁸⁷Ibid., 171.
Przywara suggests that “speculative theology” is distinct from “positively ecclesial” theology.\(^{88}\) Proper theology unfolds the conclusions of revelation. The relation between the two disciplines happens with the aid of Catholic (and particularly Thomist) thought, crystallised in the noetic and ontic assertions that “\textit{fides non destruit, sed supponit et perficit rationem … gratia non destruit, sed supponit et perficit naturam.}”\(^{89}\) \textit{Ratio et natura} are not destroyed, but they are the “negative side of a positive.”\(^{90}\) Both \textit{ratio} and \textit{natura} are \textit{perfected} by faith and grace, where perfection is being “supernaturally exalted and redeemed.”\(^{91}\) This means that philosophy, which is concerned with the creature, is provisional until it “attains ‘finality’ through theology.”\(^{92}\) Notice that it is through theology, “not ‘as’ theology.”\(^{93}\) In other words philosophy only attains finality through grace and faith’s perfecting of its object of study.\(^{94}\)

At this point it is worth asking whether God as ‘limit concept’ and the God of theology have the kind of noetic space between them that Przywara wants. Some form of theological knowledge seems to be a possibility here in this life (otherwise Przywara would not be able to speak of it). Theology is a movement \textit{from above to below}, yet it is not just God’s revelation \textit{simpliciter}, but includes our \textit{thinking from} such revelation.

Philosophy and theology might have different objects and methods, but, if both can be done in this world, then in both cases what we are doing is \textit{thinking}. There is a commonality between theological and philosophical thinking that cannot be undone by simply isolating method and object. \textit{We} already seem to have a noetic fittedness for both philosophy and theology (however much we might need grace to aid our theological thought). This fittedness calls into question the ‘ever-greater’ of the ‘above’ as we do indeed seem to have an epistemic purchase on theological knowledge which cannot be reduced to ‘nothing,’ without risking theology as a

\(^{88}\)Przywara, \textit{Analogia Entis}, 171.
\(^{89}\)Ibid., 166-70.
\(^{90}\)Ibid., 170.
\(^{91}\)Ibid., 170.
\(^{92}\)Emphasis mine. Ibid., 170.
\(^{93}\)Emphasis mine. Ibid., 170.
\(^{94}\)Ibid., 171.
category meaning nothing to us at all. In other words does enough nature survive the transition to grace in Przywara’s analogy?

Ironically Barth’s famous debate with Przywara was fueled by Barth’s concern with Przywara’s articulation of nature and grace that ran the other way. Przywara suggested to Barth that his *analogia entis* could be summed up as ‘Mary!’⁹⁵ This works as a shorthand for the sentiment expressed by Aquinas: “*fides non destruit rationem, sed excedit eam et perficit.*”⁹⁶ Or as Przywara would have it: “*fides non destruit, sed supponit et perficit rationem.*”⁹⁷ Nature has a capacity for grace. In the midst of all the other (possible) misunderstandings between the two men, this openness of nature to grace was always a bedrock issue that Barth could not concede without altering the fundamental starting point of his project.⁹⁸

To continue with Przywara’s project he goes on to ground the *analaogia entis* in the principle of non-contradiction. This essentially replicates the pattern we have already seen. He outlines interpenetrating ontic and noetic forms of the principle of non-contradiction drawing on Aristotle.⁹⁹ Something cannot both “be” and not be” (the ontic), nor can that same thing be considered “true and not true” (the noetic). This principle is the “most formal ground” of the interpenetration between the ontic and noetic.¹⁰⁰

This correlation of the ontic and noetic is one of the reasons why Przywara places the principle of non-contradiction as foundational to the *analogia entis*.¹⁰¹ The second reason is found in his emphasis that it is the *negative* nature of the principle that is its governing character as the foundation of thought: it highlights that there is

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⁹⁸Keith Johnson has argued that Barth perfectly understood what he was rejecting in the *analogia entis*. Von Balthasar, who knew both men and their theology intimately suggested that Barth did not fully understand what he was rejecting. As much of this debate as possible will be elided. Suffice to say that, as John Betz has argued, much of it comes down which of the two men’s opinion you trust. What does not seem up for debate is the fact that Barth accurately discerned and rejected the natural theology present in Przywara’s position from the beginning. For details see: Betz, “After Barth”, 93–95. Johnson, *Karl Barth*. Balthasar, *Karl Barth*.
¹⁰⁰Ibid., 199.
something that cannot both be and not be by its very existence as a principle. He calls this the principle of non-contradiction in the “mode of a ‘negative reductive formality.’”¹⁰²

This true understanding of the principle of non-contradiction as foundation is threatened by ‘pure logic’ and ‘pure dialectic.’¹⁰³ ‘Pure logic’ reduces the principle of non-contradiction to the ‘principle of identity:’ “what is (valid), is (valid).”¹⁰⁴ In contrast to this the negative articulation of the principle of non-contradiction that Przywara wants to hold on to is one that joins the principle of non-contradiction to a governing understanding of a “journey towards truth.”¹⁰⁵ The principle of non-contradiction reduced to the principle of identity takes its findings as absolute: “the ontic version of the principle of identity, ‘what is, is’ …implies an immediacy to the ‘I am who am,’ understood as the name of God.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, Przywara seems to be worried about a kind of metaphysical/theological foundationalism leading to ‘theopanism:’ “‘pure being’ is known as ‘pure truth.’” Under the error of ‘pure logic’ he groups German rationalism, Kant, Descartes, and Husserl.¹⁰⁷

Aquinas stands as the example of how to avoid this error. He recognises the primacy of the principle of non-contradiction, and will derive principles from it. But he distinguishes between the mode of knowledge proper to human beings and to pure spirit (God), and disallows any transfer of the mode of knowledge of pure spirit to humans.¹⁰⁸

‘Pure dialectic’ seeks to abolish the certainty of ‘pure logic.’ Nonetheless in simply contradicting ‘pure logic’ it rejects only the “static and material mode of the principle of identity,” the “dynamic-formal” aspect remains.¹⁰⁹ What does this mean? In Hegel ‘contradiction’ is the “form in which self-identical ‘ontic truth’ or self-

¹⁰²Przywara is drawing heavily on Augustine’s discussion of doubt in De Trin. X, x, 14. Przywara, Analogia Entis, 199.
¹⁰³Ibid., 199-203.
¹⁰⁴Ibid., 199.
¹⁰⁵Ibid., 199-201.
¹⁰⁶Ibid., 199.
¹⁰⁷Ibid., 201.
¹⁰⁸It is worth noting that Aristotle comprises the most common source during this part of Przywara’s work, but Aquinas appears at the most critical points. Ibid., 201.
¹⁰⁹Ibid., 202.
identical ‘noetic being’ is immanent to the mutable world from above, so much so that the world is its dialectical unfolding.”¹¹⁰ The purely logical absolute being and truth are replaced by “the pure becoming of a creature incurvated upon itself.” What happens in Hegel is true for all forms of ‘pure dialectic:’ absolute being and truth are dismissed and are traded for creaturely becoming. Absolute being and absolute truth are the ‘static-material’ mode of the principle of identity which are traded in ‘pure dialectic’ for becoming.

Przywara’s argument is made difficult here by the volume of neologisms that he has coined, but we can say—using the terminology above—that the ‘dynamic-formal’ mode of the principle of identity that remains after pure dialectic rejects its ‘static-material’ mode—i.e. the shadow of the principle of identity that remains after dialectic tries to do away with it—is the investing of creaturely becoming with the value of being absolute itself: “becoming is underway to itself in an infinity of intensity: as nothing but ‘ever its own possibility.’”¹¹¹ If we recall that Przywara is working with principle of non-contradiction on the noetic and ontic levels, we might say that the epistemic problem is historicism, and the ontic is the identity of history with God (theopanism).

The ‘negative reductive formality’ of the principle of non-contradiction is preserved only in analogy. Przywara argues that in Aristotle “this principle arises as the minimum of a dynamic synthesis, and is therefore situated within the movement of this synthesis. That is to say, it is not something ‘from’ which one can make deductions; rather, it itself is simply the basis for a back-and-forth debate, whose dynamism is again ever-renewed.”¹¹² He situates it in the “debate” raging between Parmenides and Hereclitus (understood as arguing, respectively, that all is rest and all is movement).¹¹³ The principle of non-contradiction is actually grounded in the “debate between thought’s two deepest antitheses.”¹¹⁴ While analogy is still understood in the sense of mean Przywara emphasises, once again, that this is not a fixed point but a rythm.

¹¹⁰Przywara, Analogia Entis, 202.
¹¹¹The terminological complexity here is a reflection of Przywara’s text. ibid., 202.
¹¹²Ibid., 203.
¹¹³Italics original. ibid., 203.
¹¹⁴Ibid., 205.
Parmenides’ assertion that ‘all is rest’ “entails the denial that the creature changes either noetically—between true and false—or ontically—between being and non-being.”¹¹⁵ Przywara argues that this means that true and false, being and non-being are taken as the same, thus eliminating the principle of non-contradiction. Heraclitus’ position denies “truth (since the true can turn into the false), nor any being (since being can turn into nothing).”¹¹⁶

In contrast, an analogical understanding of the principle of non-contradiction preserves both the ‘is’ and ‘is not’ of the principle. Heraclitus’ and Parmenides’ ‘identity of opposites’ destroy the principle of non-contradiction because they exist in the realm of pure possibility and unchanging actuality respectively. In a place of pure possibility everything might be true or false, in a place of pure actuality nothing can be other than what it is.¹¹⁷ Therefore “the principle of non-contradiction is comprehensible only as the energy of this movement between the limit concepts of ‘pure contradiction’ (in δύναμις) and ‘pure identity’ (in an ἐντελέχεια brought to completion).”¹¹⁸ The principle of non-contradiction is the creaturely dynamic of the suspension of “actuality (ἐνέργεια) between dynamic possibility (δύναμις) and an inner end-directedness (ἐντελέχεια).” But just so it is also the dynamic between the creature and ‘pure identity’ which is the end of its ἐντελέχεια (which is God).

Przywara goes on to layer the schema of analogy we have already seen on this principle: it implies that ‘pure identity’ already is in the creaturely realm, as that which has caused it to be something other than ‘pure contradiction.’ The creaturely and “transcending” analogy intersect vertically. The ‘pure identity’ has the priority, it is the always above despite being ‘in.’¹¹⁹ Therefore “every last ‘attribute analogy’ (analogia attributionis) reduces to an incomprehensible ‘suspended’ analogy (analogia proportionis).”¹²⁰

At this point Przywara gives crowning definitions of his most important claims. He

¹¹⁵ Przywara, Analogia Entis, 205.
¹¹⁶ Ibid., 206.
¹¹⁷ Ibid., 207-9.
¹¹⁸ Przywara argues, as noted above, that ‘pure dialectic’ tries to subvert the ‘principle of identity’ but fails. I take it that he is speaking here of an idealised version of both, but the transition is not explicit. ibid., 209.
¹¹⁹ Ibid., 207–220.
¹²⁰ Ibid., 231.
discusses secondary causes. The possibility of the creature is one given by God as good, who is the one that sets limits to it, and who at the same time gives the creature the capacity to obey. This *potentia oboedientialis* is the co-ordination of the in-over dynamic of analogy.¹²¹

The *analogia entis* is shorthand for the distinction between primary and secondary causality. Przywara identifies three “stages of intensity in Aquinas’ articulation of secondary causes.”¹²² The first is that “God’s maximal proximity to the creaturely is the maximal liberation of the creaturely unto active, free self-movement.” The second is that God “imparts even the ability to give …to the point of sharing its property of being the ‘cause of all good’ …indeed to the point of sharing even its providential office.”¹²³ Finally God is the necessity of creaturely being such that:

> There is a complete co-relation between spirit (*mens*) and God …in the sense that this immediacy leads to the creature’s greatest possible independence—even to the creature having the property of being ‘self-caused’ …indeed even to the point of the creature having the possibility of saying No to God …which does not however override the one will of the one is, but rather fulfils it.”¹²⁴

He finally offers a overall definition of the *analogia entis*. Firstly it is the analogy of attribution where something positive can be said of God. Secondly it then becomes ‘ever greater dissimilarity’ as a negative principle of God’s ineffable transcendence. Finally “what is peculiar to the creature hereby stands out positively, against the background of the *Deus semper maior*, in its relatively distinct autonomy or proper causal agency (*causae secundae*).”¹²⁵ The final definition offered of the *analogia entis* is this:

*Entis* means that the analogy is decisively located in that foundation which is expressed by the principle of non-contradiction: ‘is (valid) as ‘is not not (valid).’ Analogy is thus identified—as follows from our entire

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¹²²Ibid., 230.
¹²⁵Ibid., 235.
exposition—as what is ultimately fundamental: in the ontic as well as the noetic. At the same time, therefore, it is the ultimate structure, encompassing and thoroughly shaping everything. Within the intra-creaturely it spans the abyss between being and nothingness that lies perpetually open within all becoming …But it also spans the even greater distance between the divine Is, which alone, as such, is ‘true being.’ (Germanum Est), and the creaturely ‘is,’ which in comparison with God (secundum commensurationem) looks like nothing (Deo comparata, invenitur quasi nihil) …What is ultimate and decisive …[is] that it [the creature] stands out as ‘nothing’ against the divine Is and herein is its authentic relation to Him. …The intra-creaturely ‘is (valid)’ is so intrinsically (in the essence of ‘becoming’) an ‘is in the not’ (the Augustinian est non est that, in the relation between God and creature, it is related as ‘nothing’ to the ‘Creator out of nothing.’¹²⁶

This account of analogy raises a number of questions. Przywara’s articulation of secondary causality—so vital to his definition of analogy—is rather compact, so in an effort to make it somewhat clearer it is worth looking at Aquinas’ account (from which Przywara is drawing).¹²⁷ God acts through secondary causes in four ways: “God gives the power, sustains the power, applies the power to the cause, and achieves effects that go beyond the natural power he applies.”¹²⁸ This is not occasionalism, however, as the nature of the cause is determined by the secondary cause: it is truly instrumental.¹²⁹ Creatures have instrumental causality, while God is first or efficient cause.¹³⁰

¹²⁶Przywara, Analogia Entis, 236–37.
¹²⁷There is some debate in the literature as to how to understand Aquinas’ account of primary and secondary causality, but at least part of the following outline should be broadly acceptable. Given the controversy I will simply refer to some of the scholarly literature, as there is not the space for a careful exposition of Aquinas here. Nonetheless, a good portion of it would be uncontroversial. See: Silva, “Divine Action”, 158–63.
¹²⁸The last two of these four ways refer to God’s using the agent to achieve effects according to the bounds of the agent’s own potentiality. God’s brings about effects using the agent to achieve things beyond their natural power (inasmuch as secondary causes bring about a mode of being). Italics original. ibid., 665.
¹²⁹Ibid., 664.
¹³⁰Raitt, “free will”, 190–91.
If this is brought together with Przywara’s reflections it seems that he is trying to articulate the following: 1. That God works in our works in an incomparably greater way than us, and yet without undoing our genuinely creaturely otherness. God is intimately present to our works, but does not eradicate them. He makes them total. 2. That Przywara is committed to the continued presence of the potentia oboedentialis after the fall. 3. That if salvation is only a divine work, then grace is an abrogation of nature and hence the destruction of that which is not God. 4. That our own being is genuinely separate from God (as instruments whose being determine the shape of the effect). Przywara writes that:

Though the creature is entirely from God and similar to God, God nevertheless transcends the creature and is unconditionally separate from the creature; hence the creature is endowed with its own being [Eigen-Sein] and efficacy [Eigen-Wirksamkeit].¹³¹

The cogency of secondary causality as a whole is not certain. What is most critical for Hart, however, is the question of whether such an understanding of the operation of the will and God’s work allow for an understanding of evil that meets the criteria for Hart’s own theological convictions. If even our ‘no’ is a fulfilment of God’s will, how does one conceive of God—as Hart wants to—as a God of universal salvation and fundamentally of peace?

Hart has a particular understanding of the immutability of the will’s teleology whereby all creatures necessarily choose God as their end.¹³² This has a prima facie incompatibility with ‘no’ that fulfils God’s will. Each thinker is making key claims with these issues, and I would suggest that if Hart disagrees with Przywara here, he would have to re-articulate the analogy of being to make it do the work he wants it to.

There is also a question of the degree to which Przywara truly preserves the doctrine of creation—one of the fundamental goals of his project. If the ‘over’ always transcends to the degree that Przywara argues there is a sense that the creaturely—however much it stands out ‘positively’ in its uniqueness—is never fully real or fully true (as both reality and truth themselves have an entelechy towards the ‘over’). Can

¹³²See section 3.2.2.
we say that creation is not fully real, or does not fully contain truth? The doctrines of creation and the incarnation both weigh heavily in favour of a ‘no’ in answer to this question.

To restate this problem from another angle there is an ambiguity about whether we are to be taken as ‘nothing’ in relation to God or not quite ‘nothing.’ But even the not quite ‘nothing’ is not fully ‘something,’ only ‘not not being.’ This ambiguity can be understood if we recall the three stages of the analogy entis. The first creaturely stage, where the analogy of proportion holds, is found in the creaturely relation between essence and existence. This is where something positive can be said in relation to existence. But this is broken by the second stage of the ‘ever-greater’ relation to God whereby the analogy entis takes shape. Here we take the form of ‘nothing.’ In the third stage we become highlighted in our uniqueness in our difference from God as ‘not not being.’¹³³

If this is understood as a simple progression—unless one moderated Przywara’s language about the second stage and suggest that he really only means that the creature seems like nothing in relation to God—it is very difficult to see how a progression from the second to the third stage is possible. Alternately, if the language surrounding the second stage is to be taken as it stands, and the three stages are to be taken as simultaneously true, then saying that these threads can be held together by the concept of ‘suspension’ or ‘rhythm’ only works if Przywara’s rejection of the law of the excluded middle is accepted. Otherwise it is simple incoherence.¹³⁴

Even if one were to accept the rejection of the law of the excluded middle, what does language such as ‘suspension’ actually do other than offer a fairly tenuous lexical bandaid that raises all the normal problems associated with analogy: it means that the creature has being in a way that bears some resemblance to God’s being, but is also very different from it. If this is indeed so, what advantage does Przywara’s account have over more traditional accounts of analogy? Possibly that it links teleology with analogy, and demonstrates how some dominant intellectual threads from Ancient Greece through to early twentieth century German theological thought can be both

¹³³See above.
¹³⁴Hart raises this object and seeks to deal with it, but in doing so all he does is re-state the case we have just seen Przywara make. It does not, therefore, help him. See: Hart, “Christian Metaphysics”.

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chastised and redeemed by the pattern.

Yet Przywara wants to accomplish more than traditional accounts of analogy: see how he located the analogy of proportion within his own overarching account of analogy. He is seeking to articulate a way of affirming the utter difference of God from creation without suggesting that we have a linguistic ‘grasp’ on God—that no univocal element in our language about God should be presumed—whilst also holding on to some relation between the creature and God.¹³⁵ If, therefore, his language of ‘suspension’ conceals only another version of analogy that presumes some sort of linguistic ‘purchase’ on God then his project has serious difficulties.¹³⁶

There is also an epistemic difficulty. Thought is grounded in the principle of non-contradiction and inherently analogical.¹³⁷ This is a universal claim about the nature of thought. Drawing on the epistemic problems of ‘pure dialectic’ and ‘pure logic’ we saw above it seems that Przywara is trying to emphasise the partiality of our knowledge. In other words he, as we have seen, wants to find a middle ground between foundationalism and (historical) relativism. Przywara appears to have a serious problem with self-referential incoherence here: how does he know so decisively the fundamental shape of metaphysics (even if he identifies that shape as a partiality of knowledge)? He writes that:

It is not that the analogia entis, as a principle, spares one the necessity of undertaking ever new and unpreserved examinations of objective facts. But rather the opposite: it enables one to undertake such examinations, and indeed compels one to do so. Nor is it the case that the analogia entis, as a principle, is grounds to be satisfied with a system that is once and for all finished. Rather the opposite: it enables one to see through and beyond everything that seems to be finished into what is ever new (inventur quaerendum). Thus one could say that the analogia entis not only represents what is genuine in both phenomenological and aporetic

¹³⁵Again, see the three movements of analogy above.
¹³⁶That there are difficulties in both directions—God’s overtaking the world and our having purchase on God—is unsurprising. If the connective between the two does not work, then his work will overshoot its mark first in one direction then the another as it tries to articulate both sides of the analogy.
¹³⁷Przywara, Analogia Entis, 311.
methods, each individually, but also binds them together into a unity.\textsuperscript{138}

This is ostensibly a call for deep epistemic humility, but it finishes with a flourish of profound metaphysical confidence. Przywara has seen the fundamental shape of metaphysics such that he can unite the truth in Plato and Aristotle, and Heidegger and Husserl. Even though he seeks to ground this insight in Thomas it is worth recalling that this is an eccentric interpretation of analogy and therefore a creative one: Przywara’s confidence in his version of analogy cannot be given \textit{simpliciter} as an appropriator of authoritative tradition. I would argue that this is reminiscent of Heidegger’s confidence, something that Hart identifies as deeply problematic with Heidegger’s work.\textsuperscript{139}

If this critique is cogent Hart would need to articulate the epistemic commitment with which he was taking Przywara’s \textit{analogia entis}. The question would be whether it is possible to appropriate an epistemically chastened Przywara, or whether Przywara’s work becomes unrecognisable in the chastening.

Jenson has taught us the strangeness of metaphysics, and particularly the ways in which our metaphysical language can be bent and twisted. So we will ask one more time what Przywara’s language accomplishes. What does ‘rhythm’ mean metaphysically? If we consider the analogy between God and creation does this mean our speech vacillates backwards and forwards until the rhythm dies away in its journey ever-outward? How does it actually help us to conceptualise God’s presence in creation except telling us, once again, that he is both in and above it?

I cannot answer these questions. It might be that I have not sufficiently understood Przywara’s very difficult work. Nonetheless, as near as I can make out, the new terminology used to address old metaphysical questions—which would be helpful and stimulating in a self-consciously \textit{tentative} metaphysical portrait—do not have the purchase and depth necessary to support a totalising metaphysical account. Perhaps Przywara means his work as a stimulus to further thought. But this is not easily reconciled with the overall tone of his work.

\textsuperscript{138}Przywara, \textit{Analogia Entis}, 312.

\textsuperscript{139}This is true, I think, despite von Balthasar’s protestations that it not be taken in any absolute sense. See: Casarella, “Problem of a Catholic \textit{Denkform}”, 196.
Christology is also an issue. One of the driving convictions of Przywara’s work is of God as ‘ever-greater.’ The ‘ever’ greater, which we have questioned above, gives further pause in light of the incarnation. Przywara’s own student von Balthasar criticises him at this juncture. In what direction does Przywara’s analogy lead? Is it a problem?

The fullness of God that dwells bodily in Jesus Christ certainly does not include the Father or the (totality of) Spirit. In this sense there can be said to be an ‘over’ in addition to the ‘in’ of the incarnation. But is it an ‘ever-greater’ over? Within a Cappadocian trinitarian understanding of the Father as arche there is perhaps warrant for this. But, without departing from Christian orthodoxy, one cannot somehow make the God-man Jesus—note the hyphen that cannot be undone—less than the fullness of God. Jesus as God cannot point to an ever-greater God. Since the ‘in’ of Przywara’s analogy is a ‘negative,’ the ‘in-over’ does not seem to alleviate the difficulties here.

If the ever-greater functions as a guardian of the trinitarian mystery—God is not exhausted by this fullness of God we encounter in Jesus Christ—it seems, therefore, to face a serious challenge. Yet there is another possible reading for how the ever-greater works. It could be taken to refer to the two natures. In Jesus Christ there is the human nature and the ever-greater divine nature.

Certainly Chalcedon’s ‘without admixture or confusion’ gives warrant for distinguishing between the two natures. And as we have seen, in our discussion of Cyril’s Christology, the human nature does not inherit all the divine attributes. Thus it would be acceptable to talk of the omnipresence of the divine nature without including the human nature. In this sense the divine nature exceeds the human nature.

But there are at least two conceptual directions for understanding this divine ex-

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141 Indeed, Hart argues for just such a transcendence, one of two types, namely God’s transcendence simpliciter and the transcendence of the Father: “The infinity, and so inaccessibility, of God is known to us in both aspects, and it is only because the former invisibility (divine transcendence) proceeds from the latter (the plenitude of the paternal arche within the Trinitarian structure of manifestation, of self-outpouring love and self-knowing wisdom) that the restless mutability of our nature can become, by grace, a way of mediation between the infinite and the finite.” Hart, “Mirror”, 552.
cess: superabundant presence, or a distance. Given that the rhythmic ‘ever-greater’ of Przywara’s work implies negation, the conceptual direction of the relationship between the two natures on the basis of the analogy of being seems to imply an ‘ever-greater’ of distance rather than an excess of ‘presence.’

In order to evaluate this I will engage briefly in some ‘external’ comments. These threads of criticism show, I would argue, the necessary of a Christomorphic anthropology and a Christomorphic theology. These two aspects are seen in Psalm 8 and Colossians. In Psalm 8 we see a movement from the wonder of the Lord’s name and glory as revealed in creation to an awareness of the comparative insignificance of humanity, to the surprising news that humanity has been granted a position of glory, honour and authority.

Note that there is an overlap with Przywara’s analogia entis in Psalm 8: reflection on the world leads to an awareness of the greatness of God. Now it must be conceded that this is not a meditation on the knowledge of God unmediated by revelation. Verse 1a acts as an inclusio with verse 9 signalling the centrality of 1a for the Psalm as a whole. The theme present here is praise to the majesty of (the divine name of) Yahweh, where the divine name is synonymous with his self-revelation in historical action.

Nonetheless the reference to the “majesty” of the divine name in “all the earth,” should be taken as a reference to what the creation reveals about the creator. Part of the dynamic of this Psalm is that of a believer reading the import of God’s creation.

The reason why this remains at all parallel to what Przywara intends in the movement from philosophy to theology is that there is both something of God as ‘limit-concept’ here as well as reflection on creation (humanity) from the perspective of what would appear to be the case and what is actually the case.

Recall that grace completes nature, philosophy, as a negative of the positive. It might be argued that the relationship between humankind and God that Jesus institutes is, therefore, not fundamentally bound by his understanding of analogy. It cannot, however, be a contradiction of nature. To that extent it must fulfil not just its telos but its pattern.

Mays, Psalms, 65.

Leupold, Psalms, 102.

It might be argued that this latter issue—humanity—is about the surprising place we have in the universe in contrast to that which even a faithful reading of creation would seem to give us. I do not think that this is correct: the position given to humanity is part of the creative act itself (Gen 1:26–
while the first stage of reflection does indeed entail an understanding of God as transcendent and concomitant reflection upon our place in the universe, the second—
thological or revelatory—stage reveals the surprising closeness we have to God.

This is shown surprisingly—scandalously—in verse 5: humanity is a “little lower than God.” Granted, the translation of ʾĕlōhîm is contested, nonetheless as the second half of the verse includes royal imagery—“crowned him with glory and honour”—and vv 5–8 are about ruling (a function proper to God and his representatives in the Psalms), the rarer ‘angels’ is unlikely.¹⁴⁶ Even if ‘angels’ is kept, however, the undeniable import of the Psalm is the unexpectedly elevated status of humankind.

Rather than the second movement being one of ‘ever-greater’—and here it does not matter if it is compared to Przywara’s second or third stage of analogy—it is one of our ‘surprising closeness’ to God. Though this is, of course, still conceived within a framework of transcendence: that the works of the heavens are the handiwork of only YHWH’s ‘fingers’ shows both God’s intricate care and his incomprehensible power (v4). But the emphasis is different from Przywara’s: the transcendent God is ‘surprisingly close,’ it is not that the seemingly close God is ‘ever-greater.’

The incompleteness of the dominion claimed in vv 6–8 points in an eschatological, and as we discover in the New Testament, Christological, direction. In Hebrews 2 we find that Jesus is the person in whom this ‘surprising closeness’ is most properly fulfilled.

Here we turn to Colossians. The fullness of God dwells in Jesus. It is certainly true that he is not the Father or Spirit, but in all other respects Jesus is the fullness of God. This absence of the Father and Spirit leaves us with something of a choice: do we emphasise the non-presence of the Father and Spirit, the direction of the ever-greater, or do we emphasise the ‘fullness of God?’ Psalm 8 teaches us, I think, to read in the other direction to Przywara’s emphasis on the ‘ever greater.’ And indeed the import of the Colossians passage itself is the unassailable, wonderful presence of the

infinite God in creation. I would argue, once again, that the Bible’s emphasis is not ‘ever-greater,’ but ‘surprisingly close.’

I would, in light of this, argue that there is good warrant for taking a Christomorphic anthropology and a Christomorphic theology to work in a way that subverts Przywara’s project at the point of the ‘ever-greater.’ At least the question for Przywara’s project is how the fully present can ever be at the same time beyond in an ever-greater manner. If Hart relies on the ever-greater dynamic to ground or explicate the dynamic of impassibility, then this raises questions for the central concern of our investigation. I will assess Hart’s notion of God’s transcendence in my constructive work.

Returning to the ‘internal,’ there are certain presuppositions in Przywara’s construction of the *analogia entis* which make it less than convincing. The work more plausibly presupposes the real distinction than it argues for it: why align the split between the noetic and the ontic with that between essence and existence? No doubt the difference between Husserl and Heidegger is important for Przywara’s construction here, as is ancient psychology, but it is still not obvious that the noetic and ontic align with the essential and existential in the way that Przywara argues.¹⁴⁷

Przywara assumes a tradition, rather than defending it—indeed he simply proclaims the superiority of Catholic thought in preserving analogy. He seems to want the metaphysical elegance of his solution—insofar as it solves intractable philosophical dilemmas—to function as the principle’s primary proselytising force. This aesthetic move can be a powerful one, but it is precisely in the details that such a vision finds its coherence, and Przywara’s simple assumption of issues such as the real distinction with no further comment makes the barrier to belief perhaps higher than it need be.

In conclusion Przywara’s work suffers several difficulties. There is a potential breach in the way that Hart and Przywara understand secondary causality which would make it difficult for Hart to appropriate Przywara’s work as-is. There is some question about whether Przywara’s metaphysical language does the work necessary to allow him to do justice to creation as good in its relationship with God. Przywara’s

¹⁴⁷This is particularly so if one rejects substance dualism.
emphasis on the ‘ever-greater’ leads to the question of whether this can lead to an orthodox articulation of the relationship between Jesus, the Father and the Spirit, and the two natures of Christ. Finally, his project also seems to simultaneously call for deep epistemic humility while offering an expansive and dogmatic metaphysical vision. In other words his work suffers the same ultimate fault as Heidegger’s: the audacity of presenting the ‘true structure’ of metaphysics.

Hart’s unqualified adoption of Przywara’s work is, once again, ironic given his acute awareness of, and criticism of, just this tendency in Heidegger’s work. As Hart appropriates Przywara’s work fairly uncritically, the strength and weaknesses we have just seen will carry over to Hart’s system.

We will return to look at Przywara’s work during my examination of the participation in Hart’s work. Let us move on to look at Hart’s understanding of the analogy of being.

### 3.1.2.2 A Brief Overview of Hart’s Understanding of the Analogy of Being

Hart, as we noted in the introduction to his thought, owes a great deal to Gregory of Nyssa.⁴⁸ Gregory’s ontology, in particular, plays a structural role in Hart’s articulation of the analogy of being. We will, therefore, turn our attention to this as further background to Hart’s thought. Note, though, that this will be an examination of Hart’s understanding of how Gregory of Nyssa’s thought is shaped.⁴⁹

At the centre of Gregory’s thought Hart locates an ontology of reflection and mirroring.⁵⁰ Gregory has, Hart says, a “specular ontology.”⁵¹ As surface gathers light and gains a depth it did not have before reflecting back to the source, so creatures are granted being. Indeed this dynamic is true, to some degree, in God’s own life: “the

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⁴⁹Given that we have already identified and examined in detail the primary source of Hart’s thinking on the analogy of being there is little to be gained from critiquing the degree to which Hart has successfully appropriated Nyssa’s thought on analogy, though it is an interesting research question.
⁵¹Hart, “Mirror”, 548.
Son is the eternal image in which the Father contemplates and loves his essence, and thus the Father can never be conceived of without his Son.”¹⁵²

This mirroring happens in creation, in general, and—preeminently—in the human soul:

Created nature, which is in its inmost essence nothing but change, can manifest God’s loveliness only insofar as it continues forever to ‘capture’ it, and continues to preserve within its mutability a dynamism entirely oriented towards God, by which it can grow into an ever greater embrace of divine glory; and this can occur only within the individual will.¹⁵³

Since God is infinite, and created nature is “nothing but change,” the mirror of the human soul unable even to contain itself, it can persist infinitely in mirroring God without ever capturing God’s nature or exhausting his riches.¹⁵⁴ Our eschatological hope is an ever-deeper journey into the being of the infinite God.¹⁵⁵

God’s otherness is not simply an unrestrained infinite otherness, a sheer dialectic of finitude and infinity leading only to the creature’s increasing frustration. God’s accessibility, our ability to mirror at all, is contingent on his imaging himself first in his Son.¹⁵⁶ But the transcendence remains unassailable. Thus Gregory’s ontology provides the impetus for analogy:

God dwells in the fullness of his own glory and fellowship, while we reflect that plenitude and love across the infinite distance of imparted glory, in the ever more luminous surface of our mutable nature, both like and unlike the beauty that gives us being and shape, revealing that beauty both in what we are becoming and in the infinity with which it always exceeds the changing mirrors of our souls. Yet, even so, it is

¹⁵²Hart, “Mirror”, 548.
¹⁵³There is a question here about how non-human (and particularly inert) creation fits into this picture. Ibid., 549.
¹⁵⁴Ibid., 550.
¹⁵⁵There is a question here about how this fits with the physical nature of the new heavens and new earth that forms the centre of biblical eschatology.
¹⁵⁶Recall that Hart distinguishes between two types of transcendence in God here, God’s transcendence *simpliciter* and the transcendence of the Father. Hart, “Mirror”, 552.
here, to this miraculous incommensurability within union between the infinite and the finite, in the dual action (which is really one and the same act) of creation and redemption, that we must look for our images, however insufficient, of God’s triune nature.¹⁵⁷

A specular ontology is, then, an ontology of analogical reflection, where the commonality (that reflected) is the basis of existence: all the depth of the being is in that reflection.¹⁵⁸ Hart writes that:

This is an “analogical ontology” in the truest sense: our participation in the being that flows from God is an imparted splendour, always seizing us from nothingness, drawing us into the infinite depth of God’s essential simplicity and Trinitarian diversity, into his knowledge and love of his own beauty, but always only insofar as we comprise within our “essence” an interval of incommensurability that is the created likeness of the infinite ontological interval between God and us.¹⁵⁹

We see, then, that the ontological movements that accompany Hart’s understanding of analogy are participation, infinity, and God’s unchangeability. Of these participation is the most pressing. For we see that it is understood as the mode of our analogical existence: it is the gift of something like and unlike God which gratuitously summons us from nothingness to share in the life of that of which we are analogical reflections. This is a picture made possible by the undoing of the dialectic of the one and the many by the infinity of the simple, trinitarian, God.

This picture of Gregory’s thought, together with Przywara’s gives us the basis upon which to offer a positive statement of Hart’s work. Recall the statement we saw at the beginning of this inquiry:

I use the term ‘analogy of being’ as shorthand for the tradition of Christian metaphysics that, developing from the time of the New Testament through the patristic and medieval periods, succeeded in uniting a meta-

¹⁵⁷Hart is in this essay particularly concerned to overcome the widespread notion of ‘Latin’ and ‘Greek’ trinitarianism. I have included the last sentence as I believe it illustrates the analogy under discussion well, despite its specificity. Hart, “Mirror”, 556–57.

¹⁵⁸Note also the centrality of infinity. This is examined below.

¹⁵⁹Hart, Beauty, 556–57.
physics of participation to the biblical doctrine of creation, within the framework of trinitarian dogma, and in so doing made it possible for the first time in Western thought to contemplate both the utter difference of being from beings and the nature of true transcendence.¹⁶⁰

We can now see the source and reason for the general brushstrokes that Hart paints here. Hart is faithful to the broad outline of both Przywara’s and Nyssa’s work. What he tends to do is employ the doctrine as the need arises. Therefore in the *Beauty of the Infinite*, where he argues against Christian vulnerability to Heidegger’s ontological critique and against Neitzschean postmodernism generally, he emphasises the difference of ontological order that demarcates a true analogy of being.¹⁶¹ In the *Experience of God* he uses it, along similar lines, to defend divine simplicity against the argument of a ‘theistic personalist.’¹⁶² There is a gap between our being and God’s, argues Hart, such that even though God’s being is convertible with infinite power, created being is not so convertible.

There are, however, two important ways in which Hart expounds upon analogy which we have yet to see: language and Christology. Hart’s articulation of analogy and language is not concerned with epistemology, but “rhetorical style.”¹⁶³ The focus on rhetoric is due to the nature of Hart’s project in the *Beauty of the Infinite*. He is defending the peace, truth, and beauty of Gospel proclamation against Nietzschean postmodernism.¹⁶⁴

Language is conceived under an ontology of participation, and therefore “says more than can be said.”¹⁶⁵ For we participate in the infinity of a God who ‘corresponds,’ but only in the rhythm of affirmation of negation. Not just language but all creation is “a divine semeiology directed toward the God who comprises all signs in the infinity of this determinacy.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ See, for example: ibid., 232, 242.
¹⁶⁴ Indeed he argues that language, understood under analogy, is linked to *epektasis* (desire). ibid., 304–7.
¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 304.
¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 307.
This general pattern of analogical language is applied with particularity to Jesus Christ. Like a Ricoeurian ‘root metaphor’ Jesus’ form:

constitutes a moment of unique semiotic intensity, resistance, and in-exhaustibility that corresponds to the boundless fecundity of the Logos … This is the analogical and poetical eruption that follows from the aesthetic power of Christ’s presence, the inevitable exposition of the style of lordship—the measure of glory—that he embodies, never having said enough until it has said ‘God’—which is the very impossibility of never having said enough.¹⁶⁷

Jesus is the trinitarian perichoresis present in history, and therefore the presence of the very speech that brought creation into being. Jesus is, therefore, “the analogy that perfectly responds to the truth of the world—and so restores the world to truth.”¹⁶⁸

Not all the facets of the analogy of being are represented here, but both of these pictures are clearly compatible with it. In other words, both his understanding of language and his understanding of Jesus Christ rely on the discontinuity of and relatedness of being conceived of as a rhythm, where rhythm is a relation via fecundity that never reaches a final ‘lock’ on the being of God. What this shows us is that while Hart uses the analogy creatively, his use of it does indeed follow the fundamental structure we have seen. He has followed Przywara, and Nyssa.

Because of this, some of the questions and criticisms raised in the preceding engagement with those two thinkers do indeed carry over to Hart’s work. In particular one of the charges that was laid at Przywara’s feet. On the work that analogy does in theology Hart write:

God differs infinitely from created beauty not by being utterly alien to it, but by being infinitely more beautiful. And for this reason the language of analogy functions within theology not as some presumptuous grasping after the ‘essence’ of things, nor as a discourse that establishes a hierarchy within totality, but as a fruitful coincidence of the incommen-

¹⁶⁷Hart, Beauty, 328.
¹⁶⁸Ibid., 329.
surable within deferral; it is concerned with the ordering of language, the ways in which language crosses distance, mediates its measures, makes it interstices into suitable images of how it is with God.¹⁶⁹

We have seen in Przywara that just such a non-grasping of God’s essence can be as ‘totalising’ as any metaphysic. It is a sure conviction that God is so, even if the circumscription of the knowledge gained is ostensibly humble. What makes such a conception any less a ‘totality?’ Perhaps Hart would appeal to God’s infinity. We will examine this in section 3.1.3.2.

Here, coincidentally, is Hart’s answer to the Christological question directed to Przywara above regarding the ‘ever-greater’ of the incarnation. He seems to be transcendent though fullness. As Orthodox, however, Hart clearly also affirms the transcendence of the Father, the arche, and holds that this is revealed through God’s self-revelation.¹⁷⁰ In neither of these positions is he vulnerable to the charge of creating a disjunction between God and creation. The question still remains, however, as to whether the use of this form of analogy simpliciter leaves him vulnerable to this charge.

In sum, Hart does not deviate from the fundamental form of analogy seen in his two main sources. In Gregory of Nyssa, and Hart’s statements on analogical language, we have seen the importance of a theme not seen in Przywara: participation. We turn now to evaluate how Hart is using this central concept.

### 3.1.2.3 Hart’s use of Participation

Participation has long played an important role in Christian thought about the metaphysics of creation. The term cuts across confessional lines. Always critical to Orthodoxy and the Thomistic tradition it is presently seeing intense attention in the protestant world in light of movements such as Radical Orthodoxy, even counting champions in Reformed theology (which has generally been hostile to the con-

¹⁷⁰Hart, “Mirror”, 552.
cept).\footnote{For views for and against participation in the reformed tradition see: Boersma, \textit{Heavenly participation}; Gunton, \textit{The One}; Horton, \textit{Covenant and Salvation}.}

We have seen that Hart makes use of the term during his exposition of Nyssa’s thought, as well as more generally. Participation is:

The recognition that God is the being of all things, beyond all finite determination, negation, and dialectic, not as the infinite ‘naught’ against which all things are set off (for this is still dialectical and so finite), but as the infinite plenitude of the transcendent act in which all determinacy participates.\footnote{Hart, \textit{Beauty}, 242.}

Again Hart writes that:

All that exists comes from one divine substance, and subsist by the grace of impartation and the labor of participation: an economy of donation and dependency, supereminence and individualism, actuality and potentiality. God goes forth in all beings and in all beings returns to himself.\footnote{Hart, “God, Creation, Evil”, 4.}

Drawing on this and earlier work we can say that Hart’s articulation of participation is driven by at least four related factors: 1. Gregory of Nyssa’s image ontology whereby to be is to participate as finite mirror ever moving in the infinity of God’s light; 2. Hart’s more general desire to preserve an analogical interval between God and creation; 3. Hart’s desire to avoid God’s transcendence being ‘captured’ in the manner of onto-theology, but rather to have all likeness have an ultimately \textit{apophatic} end; 4. To overcome the Nietzschean emphasis on absolute multiplicity on the one hand and a tyranny of oneness on the other. These last three points in particular show that, were Hart’s use of participation problematic, it would cause serious difficulties for his overall project.\footnote{As well as, at least for Hart, its interdependence on analogy.}

Despite the term’s importance Hart never carefully defines it in his corpus. This is a problem with a concept that risks being—as Aristotle says—an empty phrase or metaphor.\footnote{Aristotle, “Metaphysics”, 991a20, c.f. 992a20.} We must try to work out what Hart means by participation in another
Fortunately in the *Experience of God* he does, however, point beyond his work to several authors whose works offer clear “general treatments” of Christian metaphysics.¹⁷⁶ This is not a wholesale endorsement of each point made by these authors, indeed Thomists dominate the list and Hart is by no means straightforwardly Thomist.¹⁷⁷ Nonetheless I will briefly summarise the findings of investigating these works to see if they aid our purpose.¹⁷⁸

I propose to proceed in the following way: 1. To undertake a brief historical survey of participation. 2. To briefly examine its use in Aquinas. 3. To summarise the survey of some of the representative thinkers from Hart’s list. 4. To then evaluate Przywara’s understanding of participation.¹⁷⁹ To this work we now turn.

### 3.1.2.4 Participation to Plotinus

The notion of participation can be traced back to Plato, where it links the ideal to the sensible. Soocrates, in the *Phaedo*, says that “I think that if anything is beautiful besides absolute beauty it is beautiful for no other reason than because it partakes [μετέχει] of absolute beauty; and this applies to everything.”¹⁸⁰ Indeed the ideal is the *cause* of the particular, though only an *exemplary* cause.¹⁸¹ Participation, then, answers the question of “how the same name or word attaches to the diversity of things;” i.e. the one and the many.¹⁸² Platonic participation suggests that there is continuity and discontinuity between the particular and the ideal, but the question of *how* the ideal and the form are *one* is, however, vexed.¹⁸³

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¹⁷⁶See the ‘Bibliographic Post-Script in: Hart, *Experience*.
¹⁷⁷Hart’s comment on Gilson’s historiography is an excellent example of this: Hart, *Beauty*, 224.
¹⁷⁸The detailed investigation and evaluation of these sources can be found in Appendix B.
¹⁷⁹Hart does not point towards Przywara’s work on this list, though this is likely due to the complexity of Przywara’s work, and the more popular level audience aimed at in the *Experience of God*. I propose to include the work in the following survey, but *after* a selection of other works have been examined. I propose this on the grounds that if this indeed the closest articulation of Hart’s understanding of analogy—with which participation is closely linked—then, despite being omitted from this list, we will be able to see whether it overcomes any problems found in the previous works.
¹⁸⁰Plato, “*Phaedo*”, 100c; c.f. 102b.
¹⁸³Ibid., 217.
This vexation is doubled when one considers that in some of Plato’s works the forms themselves participate in a single generative form of the Good or One. What is clear, however is that Plato’s understanding of participation is to do with the analogy between the ideal and the real.

Plato’s understanding of participation has long been controversial. Aristotle criticises Plato’s notion, arguing that “to say that the Forms are patterns, and that other things participate in them, is to use empty phrases and poetical metaphors.” He also, on the premise that forms are the substances of things, asks how the two can exist separately. Aristotle’s later commentators (such as Alexander of Aphrodisias) build on this critique and immanentised participation as the “exact comparability or equality of essential qualities in two or more particular things, it is koinōnia kat’ousian, common essence or definition.” This notion of participation is univocal.

Platonic lines of thought were similarly extended. In the discussion of Platonism, participation, and Christian thought three thinkers are often singled out due to the profound effect of so-called Neoplatonism on later Christian thought: Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus. Perhaps the most pre-eminent of these three thinkers, Plotinus, had an element of contradiction between the transcendent and immanent. For Plotinus the One is conceived of as beyond being, the negation of the many. It is beyond speech: “We speak about it, but in reality these efforts only amount to ‘making signs ourselves about it.’”

What emerges is a picture where the one and the many are seen as mutually exclusive

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184 Williams, Arius.
185 Ibid., 217-219.
186 Aristotle, “Metaphysics”, We saw this above. 991a20, c.f. 992a20.
187 Ibid., 991b1.
188 Williams is thinking of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Pophyry Williams, Arius, 217.
189 It should be noted, however, that in his efforts to combat the Parmenidian One Aristotle points out that both ‘being’ and ‘one’ have multiple meanings. Physics, 1.2. Metaphysics, XII. Cited in: Ge, “Participation and Creation”, 117.
190 Though it is worth noting that ‘Platonic’ thinkers were influenced by a great many philosophical currents. This included Aristotle’s criticisms of Plato’s work. Gatti, “Plotinus”, 11.
191 See, for example, the work of: Ge, “Participation and Creation”; Hart, Beauty; Williams, Arius.
192 Despite the efforts of Plotinus to avoid such a contradiction Ge, “Participation and Creation”, 43, 88.
(with different intensities by different thinkers) in Greek thought.\textsuperscript{194} It has recently been argued by Yonghua Ge that it is pre-eminently Aquinas who overcomes this dialectic by linking the Christian doctrine of creation to participation. Given that Hart makes just these links (though he would dispute the Thomist claim to pre-eminence), we will use Yonghua Ge’s argument as a means to both understanding Aquinas and how the doctrine of creation changes participation.

3.1.2.5 An Overview of participation in Aquinas

Let us then pick up Ge’s thread.\textsuperscript{195} Ge argues that, in part in Augustine, but in fullness in Aquinas, the Christian doctrine of creation \textit{ex nihilo}—and in Aquinas the concomitant move from essentialist to existentialist metaphysics—alters the question of the one and the many such that it is no longer a dialectic.\textsuperscript{196} Aquinas does this by showing that multiplicity is not univocal by distinguishing between unity, division, and multiplicity, such that it is possible for something to be both one and many, without being one and divided.\textsuperscript{197}

Aquinas’ notion of divine simplicity, the absolute unity of God, is opposed only to division: “it doesn’t mean that God lacks multiple things, but that God possesses the multiple perfections in an infinitely indivisible fashion.”\textsuperscript{198} The many are marked

\textsuperscript{194}Ge, “Participation and Creation”, 88, 117.
\textsuperscript{195}Ge’s thesis will be used because of the closeness of his project to our concern here. I will also cite the work of some more prominent scholars on Aquinas at several junctures of Ge’s argument to show that he is working with an understanding of Aquinas that is close to that of mainstream scholarship. Stump, \textit{Aquinas}.
\textsuperscript{196}His thesis is, in other words, one that departs from a similar position to Gunton’s but instead of arguing for the Trinity as the way to overcome the dialectic of the one and many he argues that it has already been overcome in Christian thought by a metaphysics of participation. One of Gunton’s fundamental mistakes was to disconnect the analogy of being from the concept of participation. Ge, “Participation and Creation”, 13; 109; 132. See; Gunton, \textit{The One}.
\textsuperscript{197}Unity is foundational to multiplicity, for, as Aquinas puts it, ‘unity enters the definition of the many.’ Multiplicity presupposes the inner unity of things which make up the multitude, because the idea of ‘the many implies something composed of unities.’ …On this understanding, there is no such thing as absolute multiplicity.” The Aquinas quotes are from \textit{ST} 1.11.2.; \textit{ST} 1.30.3. Ge, “Participation and Creation”, 19; 136–37.
\textsuperscript{198}Though, with regard to God, difference is understood as a “relative distinction.” Aquinas, \textit{Power of God}, 9.8., cited in Ge. Though it should be noted that this is a relation to the Trinity. For this and the two other definitions of difference in Aquinas see: ibid., 130, 139–44. See also: Stump, \textit{Aquinas}, 92–99.
out by *multiplicity*:

God chooses to create multiple creatures so that what is lacking in one creature can be somehow supplemented by others. …Creation is thus necessarily multiple because it falls short of the full image of God, and exists only by participation in Christ, who alone is the single perfect expression of divine goodness.¹⁹⁹

Creation’s forms exist in the mind of God, but not in multiplicity: the “intelligible likenesses of all the forms exist in God’s mind, which are called ‘divine ideas’ …An idea that exists in God’s mind, therefore, corresponds to a possible mode in which God’s essence can be imitated or participated in by creatures, as understood by God.”²⁰⁰ The multiple of ideas do not cause God’s essence to be multiple, because the object of God’s knowledge differs from his essence.²⁰¹ The apparent aporia of the one and the many is transformed with God’s being.

Creation is not a change but “a relation that is real in the creature,” for creation is not a work on pre-existing matter which can be changed.²⁰² Therefore “a creature’s being is essentially a being-in-relation-to-God. The creature is never a being-in-itself but exists only in relationship to God …a creature’s existence is rooted in its reference to “another”— God.”²⁰³ Because this notion of being in reference to another is “at the heart of the concept of participation” Aquinas adopts participation as a category. Creation and participation point to the same reality.

God’s being is then conceived of as a being whose nature is to exist (and is therefore simple). God has limitlessness of *form* (not matter) and unlike any creature, because his nature is to exist, his existence is not limited by his essence.²⁰⁴ The ‘real distinction’ between essence and existence is key to understanding both creation and God’s

¹⁹⁹Ge, “Participation and Creation”, 147–48.
²⁰⁰Ibid., 156–57.
²⁰²Aquinas uses Aristotle’s Categories and their characterisation of various types of change to show that creation does not belong to any of these categories. Ge, “Participation and Creation”, 162–64.
²⁰³Ibid., 163.
²⁰⁴Ge argues that this conception of limitlessness as a limitlessness of form is an innovation insofar as pre-Socratic and Platonic thought viewed limitlessness only as one of matter and thus viewed it as an imperfection. Ibid., 165–66.
transcendence of it.²⁰⁵

This very transcendence is the ground of God’s immanence: nothing would exist without him creating and sustaining it and thus “God is present to things in the way that a cause or agent is present to its effects.”²⁰⁶ Every cause must be in contact with its effects, either immediately or through intermediaries.²⁰⁷ As existence is the most intimate reality to a creature, God exists intimately in all things.

Aquinas clarifies this immanence. He first distinguishes the way of nature (creation) from the way of grace (God’s special presence to creatures with reason).²⁰⁸ He then argues that in the immanence of nature God is present in three ways.²⁰⁹ God is present by power, which is his power over all he has created, though this does not mean that he is substantially present in them. He is present by immanence of presence, which is the presence of all things to God’s gaze such that he is able to exercise providence over them, though without his being substantially present in them.²¹⁰ Finally, he is present by substance, which does not mean that God’s substance belongs to creaturely substance, but that God’s substance exists as cause (and in the continued causing) of all things.

Creation, of which participation is the logic, opens up an analogical interval between us and God.²¹¹ Creatures can both participate and have their own substantiality: “On the one hand, the creature is good by participation insofar as it receives the form of goodness from God—the first cause. On the other hand, the creature truly has its own inherent form, since its form is a real effect of the cause—it has real existence

²⁰⁵Whilst controversial, Gilson’s project, including his interpretation of Aquinas, places enormous importance on the real distinction. For a contemporary Thomist working with the real distinction Clark, Clarke, One and the Many; Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, Christian Philosophy, God and Philosophy.
²⁰⁶Ge, “Participation and Creation”, 167.
²⁰⁷Once again, Aristotle’s thought is the background here: “unless it acts through intermediaries every agent must be connected with that upon which it acts, and be in causal contact with it: compare Aristotle’s proof that for one thing to move another the two must be in contact.” ST 1.8.1, reply. Quoted in: ibid., 167.
²⁰⁸Ibid., 169.
²⁰⁹Ibid., 169–70.
²¹⁰Ibid., 169–70.
²¹¹Stump argues that God is “the non-univocal, non-equivocal, intellectively analogical efficient cause of the world.” Stump, Aquinas, 15.
that is distinguishable from the cause.”²¹² Thus a creature can be said to be Good in that it receives goodness, but the goodness it receives has its own form. Here we see something like the mirror ontology present in Gregory of Nyssa.

By arriving finally at an articulation of the way creation and participation, transcendence and immanence, and the one and the many, interrelate we have, it seems, come very close to an understanding of what participation means for Hart. This is evident in the way that it is these very things that form the chief focus of much of his work.²¹³ What remains now is to seek to create a succinct definition of what Hart might mean by the term.

### 3.1.2.6 An Attempt to Offer a Definition of what Hart means by ‘Participation’

What we have, finally, is a picture of participation as God present to his creation as cause to effect. This, I would argue, blunts Aristotle’s criticism of participation as merely an empty word. But some of the sting lingers. There is an irreducibly mysterious element to participation. How do we actually conceptualise this closeness of God to my being? How is God’s power in creation? I think this alerts us to the fact that participation—if it is meaningful—is a limit concept in the same fashion as ‘incarnation’ or ‘perichoresis.’ Indeed Gregory of Nyssa himself argues that how we participate in God is ineffable.²¹⁴

If this is so, we must, in order to be fair to Hart’s project, be careful not to push the limits of the term beyond what it is meant to accomplish. Equally, however, we should be aware that any explication of the term would tend to involve projection and, therefore, there is always the illegitimate possibility of reading such projections back onto the world as normative patterns.²¹⁵

Notice that in the above narrative participation has altered from something which

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²¹²Ge, “Participation and Creation”, 173.
²¹⁴This is particularly so as, while our final state is theosis, we do not share in the divine essence itself. Hart, *Beauty*, 204.
²¹⁵I have in mind here Kilby’s penetrating critique of modern trinitarian theology. See: Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection”.
accounted for the presence of any shared term such as ‘beauty’ (so Plato) in the world, to being based on two metaphysical gambits: 1. The so-called ‘real distinction’ between essence and existence. 2. The primordiality of our participating in God’s existence. We then see that our participation in God’s existence is also how we participate in other qualities such as beauty and goodness. In other words Plato and the Platonists attributed unity and goodness to every reality by participation, but Aquinas related each transcendental to being: being is good, being is true, being is beautiful.

This looks very much like what Hart would want to say. But Hart, as we have seen, has little explicit to say about the fine details of how he understands the *analogia entis* and participation. There is, however, a little more detail around the real distinction in that he argues that essence and existence should not be conceived of as separable. Hart writes that:

> The analogy subsists not between discrete substances sheltered alike under the canopy of being—between ‘my’ essence, to which existence is somehow superadded, and God’s essence, which possesses existence simply as a necessary attribute—but between the entire act of my being and the transcendent act of being in which it participates, the event of my existence, in its totality, is revealed as good and true and beautiful in its very particularity. Being, considered either as the truth of essence (the transcendental determinations that are imparted and mediated to us throughout time in the event of our existence, as we continuously become what we are) or of existence (the gratuitous event of our participation in being as what we are is called, every moment, into unmerited being), is one perfect act of self-manifesting love in God.

Hart is suggesting that the analogy of being lies not between being considered without essence, but in the conjunction of both between which—following Przywara—we are ‘suspended’ or oscillating. There is also the hint that Hart sees that neither

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²¹⁷Clarke, *One and the Many*, 291–301.
²¹⁹Ibid., 245.
has priority, both present only as an undivided act.

There is no more detail than this supplied, however. How can we put these hints together? Hart lists several works in the *Experience of God* as helpful introductions to Christian metaphysics. Such thinkers do not offer an account identical with Hart’s, but are useful tools for attempting to reconstruct how Hart might define the real distinction. For this purpose we will look at a summary of findings on Clarke and Miller’s work.²²⁰

Were Hart to adopt Clarke’s definition of the real distinction—whereby essence and existence are related by the subtraction of essence from existence—it would threaten to introduce univocity into Hart’s system. For he argues that existence is potentially infinite, and this—I would argue—commits him to the position that all existence is univocally related to God’s. Miller’s definition—whereby a subject is the bound of its instance of existence, which is to be understood as a real, first-level property—has potential difficulty with the notion of ‘bound.’ On his account it must have no possibility of being actual, and it does not seem that he succeeds in articulating how this is so, though it might be that he is able to appeal to a certain understanding of divine simplicity in order to defend this. The most plausible account is one not mentioned by Hart, that of Vallicella.²²¹ Again, however, this account requires divine simplicity.²²²

What this means is that Hart might be able to articulate a version of the real distinction that supports his overall position, but it would require a great deal of careful work for it to be convincing. Moreover it appears that accepting or rejecting the real distinction requires a commitment to divine simplicity, which seems to prevent my adopting this part of Hart’s proposal.²²³ We will make a final attempt to try and reconstruct what Hart means by participation by taking the fruits of this exploration and examining what the relationship of essence and existence is in Przywara.

²²⁰Clarke, *One and the Many*; Miller, *Fullness of Being*.
²²¹Vallicella, *Paradigm Theory*.
²²²A detailed analysis backing up each of these claims can be found in Appendix B.
²²³And possibly the notion of participation on which this depends. It would be fruitful to explore this matter in further research.
3.1.2.7 Essence and Existence in Przywara

We can only assume that while Hart did not point in this direction in _The Experience of God_ he would put significant weight on the understanding of the relationship between essence and existence in Przywara’s work, particularly given the relationship between these concepts and analogy. What do we find by examining it?

Przywara writes as follows:

> Creaturely potentiality does not, of itself, place limits on God, but rather receives its limits from God. Thus these limits are not ultimately something irrevocably fixed in the essence of this potentiality, but rather a provisional halting point imposed by the illimitability of God’s free decree.²²⁴

This seems to place Przywara’s understanding in the same vein as Clarke’s. Przywara’s work is, to be sure, attended by a great complexity but the language seems quite clear here. ‘Halting point’ and ‘rhythm’—which is seen used above—implies the potential to always go further. ‘Provisional’ also implies that this is an active rather than passive bounding. Whether this can be taken as the bounding of an infinite essence is uncertain, but the language of God’s ‘free decree’ implies at least a potential limitlessness: he was free to decree other than a limit.

At a minimum, therefore, Przywara is potentially vulnerable to the critique of Clarke’s work outlined above: that it introduced univocity into his theological system. It will require, however, further investigation to see whether this notion of the potential infinity of the person lives in Hart’s work. We will, therefore, turn now to look at Hart’s Christology and through it the question of infinity.

3.1.3 Hart’s Christology: Cyril and Infinity

Hart’s Christology is articulated with compelling beauty. Yet the complexity of Hart’s work at this point means that some care needs to be taken in trying to understand and evaluate his work. Harts draws extensively on the Fathers to articulate his

²²⁴Przywara, _Analogia Entis_, 222.
Christology, as well as the mostly-implicit resources of Orthodoxy. How, then, to represent Hart’s Christological thought fairly?

One of the thinkers Hart gives the most space to in his articulation of Christology is Cyril of Alexandria.\textsuperscript{225} Indeed the most important and relevant aspects of Hart’s Christology is constructed around a discussion of Cyril’s thought, as Cyril’s emphasis on the unity of Christ presents Hart an excellent opportunity to show that Cyril nonetheless emphasised the impassibility of God.

I will, therefore, examine Hart’s Christology by way of his interaction with Cyril’s work. The added benefit of this is that there has already been a groundwork laid for understanding Cyril’s work. This means that we can both see the shape of Hart’s Christology through his appropriation of Cyril, and be able to evaluate the degree to which his thought follows or differs from this important Father.

In the midst of Hart’s Christology it is apparent that the question of infinity must be evaluated. It serves as the critical concept in the discussion of how the incarnation can take place without a change in God’s nature. This too, will need to be examined. Discussing both Cyril and infinity will, for the purposes of understanding how Hart conceives of impassibility functioning in the person of Christ, offer a faithful portrait of Hart’s Christology.

3.1.3.1 Cyril

Hart argues that the Christological thrust of the fathers in general—though expressed in the midst of discussing Cyril’s Christology—is that:

\textsuperscript{225}While Hart identifies Nyssa’s theology as occupying perhaps the central place of all the Fathers in \textit{The Beauty of the Infinite} the part of his work that is central to Hart’s question is that of \textit{epektasis}: desire. Gregory’s account of desire, with its orientation towards the infinite, obviously deals with important supporting structures of Christological thought. Two critical aspects of this are his theological anthropology which identifies the \textit{pleroma} of humankind as that which Christ assumes, and his account of infinity which gives conceptual weight to the possibility of God taking human form without change. Both of these will be looked at below in the external critique in section 3.2.2. Neither deal with the technical aspects of the union of human and divine in Jesus Christ. Maximus the Confessor, another significant influence on Hart is said to have written “most beautifully concerning the relation of creation to the Logos.” Once again, however, Maximus is used primarily to speak of the ontology of desire. Hart, \textit{Beauty}, 29, 142, 144, 172.
What the Fathers were anxious to reject, however, was any suggestion that God becoming human was an act of divine self-alienation, an actual μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος, a transformation into a reality essentially contrary to what God eternally is: for this would mean that God must negate himself as God to become human—which would be to say that God did not become human. Hence, a strict distinction must be drawn between the idea of divine change and that of divine kenosis. When Scripture says “the Logos became flesh,” says Cyril, the word “became” signifies not any change in God but only the act of self-divesting love whereby God the son emptied himself of his glory, while preserving his immutable and impassible nature intact. God did not, he says (here following Athanasius), alter or abandon his nature in any way, but freely appropriated the weakness and poverty of our nature for the work of redemption.²²⁶

This passage has a helpful test for determining the success of an account of the incarnation: that God must not “negate himself.” This means a fundamental alteration from what God eternally is. This seems to present a stumbling block to conceiving of the unity of the person of Jesus Christ. Hart primarily uses Cyril as a way of showing that even the greatest champion of the unity of Christ of all the Fathers still conceived of the hypostatic union as one in which the divine Logos preserves his divine nature with its immutability and impassibility.²²⁷ Cyril asserts that the impassible suffered. This ‘paradox,’ Hart argues, and other like it, are in fact, “formulae for explaining, quite lucidly, the biblical story of our salvation in Christ.”²²⁸ It guards both Christ’s humanity and divinity.

Hart, as does Jenson, uses the communicatio idiomatum in discussing Cyril’s Christology.²²⁹ From the context it is clear that Hart means the genus idiomaticum: the perfection of redemption is achieved in Christ “for here the fitful and inconstant

²²⁷Ibid., 356.
²²⁸Ibid., 356.
²²⁹Though he does not explicitly suggest that it is a part of Cyril’s thought it is clear from the context of the passage that Hart views such a doctrine as—at minimum—compatible with Cyril’s thought, and there a useful hermenutical key. Ibid., 358.
nature of the first Adam is brought into intimate contact with the constancy of the
divine nature in the last Adam.”²³⁰

Note the soteriological anchoring of the communication of idioms: “salvation is a
matter of exchange for many of the Fathers.”²³¹ Indeed Cyril explicitly argues that
Jesus “having assumed our sufferings, liberates us from them through his unconquer-
able life.”²³² His impassible divine life is what allowed him to endure all suffering. In
other words, Cyril’s ‘paradoxes’ are the necessary ground of theosis. Thus:

Following Hebrews 10:19–20, Cyril speaks of the veil of Christ’s flesh—
like the temple veil that hid the Holy of Holies—concealing the transcen-
dence and exceeding glory of the Logos (EX 456), so allowing Christ
“both to suffer in the flesh and not to suffer in his Godhead (for he was
at once himself both God and human),” and thus show through the res-
urrection “that he is mightier than death and corruption: as God he is
life and the giver of life, and raised up his own temple (474–76).”²³³

Jesus’ resurrection body is a divinised body. It’s incapacity to feel pain is derived
here, it seems, from God’s own impassibility: “a pure mirror of a body, reflecting
without any shadow of sadness the light that God pours down upon it.”²³⁴ Our very
ability to experience the absence of pain in our resurrection bodies depends on God’s
apatheia. When the Logos enters our reality “the apatheia of God’s eternally dynamic
and replete life of love consumes every pathos in its ardor; even the ultimate extreme
of the kenosis of the Son in time—crucifixion—is embraced within and overcome by
the everlasting kenosis of the divine life.”²³⁵

Here we see that Hart joins the relation of infinity to finitude to the idea of kenosis.
More explicitly:

Because divine apatheia is the infinite interval of the going forth of the
Son from the Father in the light of the Spirit, every interval of estrange-

²³⁰ On the genus idiomaticum see section 2.2.2.1 above. Hart, Beauty, 358.
²³¹ Ibid., 358.
²³² Ibid., 358.
²³³ Ibid., 359.
²³⁴ Ibid., 359.
²³⁵ Ibid., 359.
ment we fabricate between ourselves and God—sin, ignorance, death itself—is always already exceeded in him: God has always gone infinitely further in his own being as the God of self-outpouring charity than we can venture in our attempts to escape him, and out most abysmal sin is as nothing to the abyss of divine love.\textsuperscript{236}

The intelligibility of Hart’s position on infinity is therefore bound up with the distinction that we have seen above: the difference between divine change and kenosis. What is this language doing? It freights kenosis with the conceptual weight of the claim that God can take on the form of a creature—a form which depends on the existence of creation—without undergoing any alteration from his eternal form.

Hart’s appropriation of Cyril’s Christology therefore raises two key questions: firstly is there a genuine intelligibility to the distinction between change and kenosis and by extension the question of infinity and finitude? Secondly if this does work does it add any credence to the assertion that the one hypostasis suffers only in the human nature, and if it doesn’t does this undermine the possibility of so speaking? We will examine these questions immediately below. Before we do so, however, we will briefly assess Hart’s presentation of Cyril’s thought.

Cyril’s ultimate emphasis on impassibility has already been established. So too has Cyril’s speaking of both the divine and human nature united in a single subject, while the divine nature maintains its impassibility.\textsuperscript{237} What Hart says of Cyril’s work is, therefore, unobjectionable. Indeed Cyril’s own appeal to the mystery of the incarnation functions as a reminder that Hart is self-consciously speaking of a mystery and the question of how or whether something works according to our human comprehension must stop at some point and bow to mystery: “Each nature is understood to remain in all its natural characteristics for the reasons we have just given, though they are ineffably and inexpressibly united.”\textsuperscript{238}

Yet it is important to recognise that some of the surds that were noted in Cyril’s work are not noted by Hart, and these surds show the difficulty of speaking of the incarnation within a strong framework of divine simplicity such as Hart’s. I particularly

\textsuperscript{236}Hart, \textit{Beauty}, 359.
\textsuperscript{237}See section 2.2.2.1.
\textsuperscript{238}Cyril, “Second Letter of Cyril to Succensus”, para. 3.
want to draw attention to Cyril’s argument that:

When he enclosed himself in our flesh he was ‘tempted in every respect’. We obviously do not mean that he had been ignorant before, but rather that to the God-befitting knowledge that he already possessed was added the knowledge gained through temptation. He did not become compassionate (συμπαθὴς) because of being tempted. Why? Because he was and is merciful by nature as God.²³⁹

God gains genuine existential experience in the incarnation. Were it not so it would be difficult to speak of the hypostasis of the Logos genuinely assuming a human nature, and suffering in the human nature. If we concede, for a moment, the intelligibility of speaking of the suffering of the Logos in the human nature being taken up by the undisturbed peace of the divine nature, does it make sense to suggest that nonetheless the existential knowledge of what it is to suffer in the flesh is not added to the hypostasis in the divine nature? Or is there somehow a division in the knowledge of the Logos? Or does the impassible God already know what it means to suffer as human being? What then of Hebrews 4:15 whose logic is contingent on the incarnation?

What, then, of change and kenosis? This distinction certainly adds clarity to what Hart is claiming by showing that change in not a part of kenosis. But that is all it accomplishes. Hart is certainly entitled to simply appeal to mystery at this juncture. Objections such as the one immediately above—whereby the very logic that Hart is trying to preserve seem to be endangered—must carry the possibility of penetrating that veil however. In answer to the two key questions above yes, the distinction is not without merit, however it does not add credence to the Son not suffering in the divine nature, but simply restates the mystery. The appeal to infinity holds out, however, the possibility of a more explicit spelling out this mechanic. To this we will turn shortly.

Hart has smoothed out some of the splinters in Cyril’s work. Given that what he is communicating does indeed cohere with the overall arc of Cyril’s thought this is not an unfair omission. Nonetheless it must be said that Cyril’s work contains seeds

²³⁹Ad augustas, 29 (ACO 1.1.5.47). Cited in: Gavrilyuk, Impassible God, 156.
that would challenge Hart’s overall emphasis. These seeds will serve as a valuable resource for articulating a Christology in the external critique.

We now move on to examine the question of infinity.

3.1.3.2 God’s infinity

The relationship between the infinite and the finite is one of the central ways that Hart explicates the logic of the incarnation, such that God stays the same while taking on time and human flesh. He writes:

The absolute qualitative disproportion between the infinite and finite allows for the infinite to appropriate and accommodate the finite without ceasing to be infinite; as all the perfections that compose a creature as what it is have their infinite and full reality in God, then the self-emptying of God in his creature is not a passage from what he is to what he is not, but a gracious condescension by which the infinite is pleased truly to disclose and express itself in one instance of the finite. …God is not some thing that can be transformed into another thing, but is the being of everything …there is no change of nature needed for the fullness of being to assume—even through self-impoverishment—a being as the dwelling place of its mystery and glory.²⁴⁰

This is a beautifully written passage and one that contains a central truth of the incarnation: that, in assuming creatureliness, God need not and does not change nature. Such a thought seems, moreover, to be one that could live in another theological system: God need not be simple for the words spoken above to be true. For the key thought is that God has the fullest expression of all the perfections of the creature, and thus in assuming creatureliness there is no antithesis to himself. There is no barrier to a non-classical theist making such a claim—indeed were God conceived of as somehow analogically temporal it can, *prima facie*, offer a more immediately comprehensible articulation of this principle. This would, of course, have to be defended against Hart’s broader argument for impassibility and all its entailments, which will

happen in the constructive work below.

The question for now is whether the relationship of infinity and finitude that Hart has articulated bears examination. We will, therefore, explore Hart’s thought in more detail. Hart derives his understanding of the infinite in large part from the work of Gregory of Nyssa.²⁴¹ He was the first to fully articulate the Christian alternative to Platonic notions of the infinite and is “still the greatest” thinker of Christian infinity.²⁴²

Gregory’s understanding of infinity is related to desire: “For Gregory God is to be understood first as ...an unanticipated beauty, longed for but without certain hope, and so evoking desperation ...a God ‘seen’ only by the infinite inflaming of desire.”²⁴³ We, then, as we have seen, journey ever-more into God’s infinity. Indeed this journey of desire is not the desire to return from finiteness but “it is our being.”²⁴⁴ This infinite journey is possible not simply because God is transcendent, but “because God abides in absolute intimacy with creation as the infinite of surpassing fullness, whose beauty embraces all that is.”²⁴⁵ Infinity, therefore, grounds our hope and must be understood from the perspective of those whose very dynamism is already to desire.²⁴⁶

In contrast to this, in Neoplatonic thought the infinite is “an excess of perfection in a state of divine and monadic simplicity.”²⁴⁷ A mirror image of the world’s difference.²⁴⁸ The Christian interruption of this thought happened when:

Christian thought defined the Trinity as a con-equal circumincession as opposed to a hierarchy of dimishing divinity, [with the result that] the Neoplatonic story of emanation—and with it, the last trace of an

²⁴¹On which see Mühlenberg’s exposition of Gregory’s transformation of the ancient understanding of infinity, but adding to it the idea of form: “The [ancient] infinite still lacks something, namely that it is determined and in this way takes form.” (my translations) Mühlenberg, Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa, 19. For Hart’s (partial) approbation of Mühlenberg’s work see: Hart, Beauty, 190-192.
²⁴²Ibid., 186.
²⁴³Ibid., 186.
²⁴⁴Ibid., 192.
²⁴⁵Ibid., 187.
²⁴⁶Ibid., 188-89.
²⁴⁷Ibid., 105.
²⁴⁸Ibid., 191.
ontological space of the simulacral—became meaningless; ...the beauty of material existence ...is the unnecessary, untrammeled, and contingent expression of a divine light that is always already “differential,” created difference is loosed, as univocally good in its creatureliness, though it is analogically imparted.

We see here part of Hart’s case that, against a postmodern articulation of difference as ontologically violent, a genuinely Christian ontology blesses difference as beauty and peace. We will see more of this immediately below. It should be clear how Hart’s vision of eternity coheres with the parts of Hart’s project that we have been able to examine: an ontology of mirroring, for example, blesses each individual expression of infinity reflected in the mirror of individual human existences with, analogically, the goodness, truth, and beauty of God. Each member of the human race captures, and reflects back, as an expression of the very teleology of humankind, the gift ray of infinite but already differentiated divine light. In other words, a differentiated infinity preserves the world’s integrity in an analogical interval.

It is worth pausing here to note that the Neoplatonic capture of God is not the only way in which Hart understands that the problem of univocality manifests itself. It is seen also in the ontological violence seen in postmodern thought. Since Hart relies on Milbank’s narrative here, we will briefly examine this, even though his understanding of key issues—such as analogy—is different to Harts.

Milbank follows Aristotle’s denial that Being is a genus, and understands this to mean that “the relationship between genus and genus is of an analogical character ... Generic determination does not qualify being, simply exemplifies it, diversely.” There is, therefore, an analogical relationship between genera: “in some sense alike and comparable ... the ‘goods’ of a stone, a plant, an animal and a man are all diverse, yet also similar in terms of qualities of resistance, persistence and growth.”

Hart, Beauty, 104–105.
See section 3.1.2.2.
Though the two expressions are linked.
The conceptual content of the following three paragraphs draws—in part—on my Grad. Dip. thesis, but this has been reconceived to fit the current context. Hart, Beauty, 29.
Milbank, Theology and Social Theory, 305.
Ibid., 305.
If the relationship between genera is conceived of as univocal—as Milbank argues is the case with Duns Scotus—the distinctions between genera become absolute.\textsuperscript{255} The thought here seems to be that the composition of essence and existence—where being is univocal—can be understood along the lines of ‘being is human.’ Each predicate nominal names a new and relevantly different instantiation of the one ‘being.’ For Milbank, then, an analogical conception of being might be written as ‘human–being is being,’ where the force of the compound noun means that the first ‘being’ is not identical with the second ‘being.’

Once this univocal move is joined to the postmodern denial of any kind of stable genera “the absolute diversity of genera becomes the absolute diversity of every ens as such.”\textsuperscript{256} Thus Being becomes “entirely empty of content, and indeed the medium of a sheerly differentiated content” and “cannot possibly appear in itself to our awareness, but can only be assumed and exemplified in the phenomena which it organizes.”\textsuperscript{257}

Here lives the sublime of post-modernism. We can see, therefore, something like Przywara’s logic here: theopanism and pantheism both manifest in the abandonment of an analogical relationship. Both of these problems seem, for Hart, to be solved by an analogical relationship within creation and between creation and God. Yet Hart makes an important qualification here:

Is this not just another metaphysics of the one and the many, an attempt to subdue difference by “grounding” it in a transcendent substance or ideal structure of differentiation as such? … [this] altogether misses what is genuinely of interest in the matter. Theologically there is no value in speculation about ideal or metaphysical causes of difference, ontic or ontological; the triune perichoresis of God is not a substance in which difference is grounded in its principles or in which it achieves the unity of a higher synthesis, even if God is the fullness and actuality of all that is; rather, the truly unexpected implication of trinitarian dogma is that Christian thought has no metaphysics of the one and the many, the same

\textsuperscript{255}Milbank, \textit{Theology and Social Theory}, 306.
\textsuperscript{256}Ibid., 306.
\textsuperscript{257}Ibid., 306.
and the different, because that is a polarity that has no place in the Christian narrative … for Christian thought difference does not eventuate at all, but is … Created difference “corresponds” to God, is analogous to the divine life.²⁵⁸

So, then: not only does infinity (and analogy) preserve the world’s integrity—its particularity—in its relationship to God but it shows that the problem of the one and many was never any problem at all. God is, above all, the object of desire whose very infinity allows us conceptualise the possibility of ever-new eschatological delight. Does Hart give any more detail on this relationship? He does: he argues that “a broader theological understanding of divine infinity …lends it some considerable degree of theoretical cogency.”²⁵⁹

Origen argues that God’s infinity would render him not merely undefined, but “incomprehensible even to himself.”²⁶⁰ But the trinitarian shape Gregory introduced into infinity means that God’s self-knowledge is the infinite Logos “towards which he is utterly—equally infinitely—inclined in the movement of the Spirit.”²⁶¹ Furthermore God is not oblivious to us in the way of the Neoplatonic One, but is an infinity “as a love that gives without need.”²⁶²

It is the very difference between God and creatures which is the basis of the possibility of a union between them. For the finite, in its “dynamism of finitude,” partakes in “what which is does not own, but within which it moves” precisely by growth in God’s goodness.²⁶³ The space for creatures—for “analogous being”—is provided by “the Trinity’s perfect act of difference.”²⁶⁴ This means that “God’s transcendence is not absence, … but an actual excessiveness … the impossibility of the finite ever coming to contain or exhaust the infinite” the God who “pervades all things, and all is present to his infinite life.”²⁶⁵ Because distance is already a part of the divine

²⁵⁸Hart, Beauty, 180.
²⁵⁹Ibid., 190.
²⁶⁰The next three paragraphs relay Hart’s articulation of Nyssa’s theology of infinity, but it is clear that he is relaying it with approbation and in order to appropriate it. Ibid., 190.
²⁶¹Ibid., 191.
²⁶²Ibid., 191.
²⁶³Ibid., 193.
²⁶⁴Ibid., 193.
²⁶⁵Ibid., 194.
life in the Trinitarian *taxis* the movement towards God does not mean a departure from difference, but a venture into it (though the divine *ousia* itself remains forever distant).²⁶⁶

What Hart seems to mean by this last assertion is that, in Gregory’s thought, in drawing closer to God, the creature does not move from alienated distance towards the absence of distance, but moves within God’s infinity which already contains difference and distance. Gregory articulates by this an ontology of *deification*.²⁶⁷ Gregory’s anthropology of desire and infinity—of our mutability—means that properly expressed our mutability is to mirror God’s changeless beauty in ever-growing virtue.²⁶⁸

Indeed the finite, already in God, in our journey back to him becomes “a kind of specular reflex of God’s own return to himself (from the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father) within his eternal circle of glory.”²⁶⁹ Within the trinitarian taxis the invisible Father already knows himself in the Logos (for Gregory ‘form’), and the infinite “within itself, is entirely mirroring of itself.”²⁷⁰

So we come to Jesus Christ. The infinite is able to dwell in a finite form because infinity already includes and overcomes all separations (including that between finite and infinite), the Logos already gives the infinite a form, and already journeys towards the Father.²⁷¹ Divine simplicity is found here. Hart argues that “one must say, at once, that the divine simplicity is the result of the self-giving transparency and openness of infinite persons, but also that the distinction of the persons within the one God is the result of the infinite simplicity of the divine essence.”²⁷² The formed infinity of God is the simplicity that allows for the Logos to become incarnate impassibly.

How much does this articulation of infinity help make sense out of Hart’s impos-

²⁶⁷Hart acknowledge that this is a contentious issue. Our project here is not to examine whether his reading is plausible, and so we will accept this assertion. *ibid.*, 196–99.
²⁶⁸*ibid.*, 195.
²⁶⁹*ibid.*, 202.
²⁷⁰*Hart* does make the distinction between the invisibility of the infinite and incomprehensible God *simpliciter* and the invisibility of the Father. *ibid.*, 203.
²⁷¹*ibid.*, 322-24.
²⁷²*ibid.*, 173.
sibilist Christology? Let us consider suffering of hypostasis. If God as infinite has already overcome all intervals and has a pattern of ascension back to himself there is some intelligibility to the drawing up of human nature into the unchanging bliss of God’s life in the person of Christ. If Infinity is not absence—but presences itself by crossing an interval it already contains in the Logos whose form is not betrayal—there is some intelligibility in the incarnation happening without any change in God’s being.

Having said that, there is something dissatisfying about this. The Christian story seems to become vacuously true, a drama with no tension, for every interval is already overcome. There is an ontological necessity for salvation, not simply a necessity of it being so because God so chose (de dicto necessity). More than this because it is every interval universalism seems equally necessary. This will be examined below.

The question of whether the incarnation costs God anything arises. Hart suggests that this formed infinity is the ground of love, but the definition of love in Philippians 2 involves not just selflessness but cost: humble obedience to death. Is this pattern so powerfully prefigured in the trinitarian taxis that death adds nothing to the hypostasis’ divine nature?

What we see, then, is that Hart’s conception of infinity already presumes a certain reading of the Christian narrative. There are some important things that can be grasped here: the constancy of the immanent and economic, the care to make sure that the articulation of the relationship between God and world embraces both difference and sameness, the way the trinitarian taxis might aid this enterprise. Such concepts I will draw upon in my constructive work. Nonetheless, because Hart’s conception of infinity—however much it seems to illuminate the logic of the incarnation—leads to universalism and questions of the cogency of speaking of the cost of the incarnation, this will have to be done carefully indeed.²⁷³

²⁷³Though I should emphasise that it is entirely possible to retain many of the key points of Harts position and avoid universalism. See, for example: Emery, “The Immutability of the God”.

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3.1.4 Summary

We have seen repeatedly that Hart’s often beautiful thought presumes a reading of the Christian narrative that has an underlying commitment to divine simplicity. None of the supporting concepts of Hart’s ontology—whether analogy, participation or infinity—have provided an unproblematic argument for Hart’s impassibility. These concepts contain much that is helpful, but any appropriation of them, or final assessment of Hart’s commitment to impassibility relies on an evaluation of his commitment to divine simplicity. To this, and the external critique more broadly, we now turn.

3.2 External Critique

3.2.1 Divine Simplicity and Potentiality

As we have seen, one of the critical ontological positions intertwined with Hart’s affirmation of divine impassibility is divine simplicity. Hart takes Anselm’s ‘that than which nothing greater can be thought’ as a kind of litmus test for discerning when we are talking about the “transcendent source of all being” and when we are “fabricating for ourselves a metaphysical fable.”²⁷⁴ If God’s “possibility exceeds his actuality,” which passibility would imply, then he fails this test and would not be the God of Christian theology.²⁷⁵ There is no ontological composition in God, including any composition of actuality and potentiality.

Furthermore, as we have seen in section 3.1.3.2., Hart articulates divine simplicity as the result of God’s infinity. So, this actuality must be understood as the infinite trinitarian taxis which has, in its infinity, already crossed all boundaries.

As has already been seen, one of the things Hart wants to avoid is any sense of God’s dependence on creation for his being who he is (in other words, either pantheism or

²⁷⁴Hart, “No Shadow”, 189; See also: Hart, “Impassibility as Transcendence”.
panentheism).²⁷⁶ He is particularly trying to argue against any sense in which God’s identity is derived from history (what he would identify as variants of Hegelianism). Yet, at first glance, the position that God has no unrealised potentiality seems to introduce great insurmountable difficulties:

(1) It seems that holding such a position commits one to a modal realism in the vein of David Lewis. If all God’s possibility is actual (though, of course, he would never posses the possibility), then he would have created all possible worlds. This has attendant ethical and other consequences that make it difficult to accept.

(2) Within each possible world, if such a world were temporal like our own, it seems to me that there are choices that God has to make that are genuine choices (though perhaps the language of ‘choice’ is infelicitous): I could not have been born as both a man and a woman. If this is so then God’s actuality is one that is dependent in some respects on our world: we know God as the God who actualised my being a man rather than a woman (or other, far more important, decisions). Perhaps it is the case that in actualising all possibilities, then there is no ‘choice’ because all possible worlds are actualised, including one where I am a woman. Though it seems intuitively true that another version of myself in another world is not me, so that once again it emerges that in regards to me and to this world a genuine choice has to be made.

(3) Such a view suggests Plotinian emanation and a creation that is logically necessary. In other words, it seems to me that the doctrine of creation collapses. A God who is by definition pure act with no potentiality, is by definition a creator.

Hart himself does not address any of these difficulties, but clearly would reject each implication I have drawn above. We will have to turn to the wider literature in order to try and discern the extent to which Hart can exonerate divine simplicity from the above charges.

²⁷⁶Though note that ‘panentheism’ is developing a meaning that excludes this sense of dependence: Olson, “Response to Panentheism.”
3.2.1.1 Pruss’ Arguments

Given the variable nature of the arguments put forward in favour of simplicity, I have chosen to carefully examine the arguments of one analytic philosopher of growing prominence: Alexander Pruss. The alternative would be to engage at a general level with several thinkers, but the detail required to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of such arguments makes this impractical.²⁷⁷ I have chosen Pruss not only because he has expertise in the field but he shares a similar religious situation to Hart: he is an American, Eastern Orthodox believer.²⁷⁸

Pruss argues that divine simplicity implies only that God has no *intrinsic* contingent properties. In his paper ‘On Two Problems of Divine Simplicity’ he addresses the problem that God’s willing one thing rather than another seems to be an intrinsic accidental property, as does his believing things about contingent events in the world.²⁷⁹ Pruss asserts that while he cannot demonstrate *how* it is true that God has no intrinsic accidental properties, he aims to show that these examples do not *contradict* Divine Simplicity in the way it first appears. This would, therefore, go a long way to addressing the above objections.

Before we begin to examine Pruss’ argument proper, there needs to be some clarification of definitions. What does Pruss mean by ‘extrinsic’ and ‘intrinsic?’ No small controversy exists in the literature about how to understand these terms.²⁸⁰ Here Pruss points to paradigm cases, rather than offering definitions.²⁸¹ He cites “Fred’s being in horrible pain” or “coal containing such-and-such a number of carbon atoms” as examples of intrinsic properties, and “John’s being taller than Fred” and “Bush being President” as extrinsic properties.²⁸²

²⁷⁷There is, for example, a highly-interesting, but controversial proposal put forward by Stump and Kretzmann. To engage in any depth with both Pruss and Stump and Kretzmann’s proposal would take far beyond the scope of this work. As I argue below there appears to be conceptual problems inherent in accepting simplicity if one is not already committed to it. The means that were my interlocutor(s) other than Pruss there is a strong chance the outcome would be the same. This does open up a matter for further research, however. Stump and Kretzmann, “Absolute Simplicity”.
²⁷⁸Pruss did his doctoral work on possibility and actuality: Pruss, “Possible Worlds”.
²⁸⁰See the discussion in: Weatherson and Marshall, “Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Properties”.
²⁸¹Pruss, “Two Problems”, 151. If one looks at the difficulties entailed in formulating a more formal definition, this move is understandable: Weatherson and Marshall, “Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Properties”.
²⁸²Pruss, “Two Problems”, 151.
What does Pruss mean by an essential property? Pruss uses the notion developed in contemporary analytical philosophy: an essential property is one which an entity possesses in all possible worlds in which it exists. This should be distinguished from the medieval/Aristotelean sense of essence/accident, wherein an accident inhered in, but was not a part of, the essence.²⁸³ It is, therefore, possible for a medieval accident to be a contemporary essential property.²⁸⁴ A ‘capacity for laughter,’ for example, was considered a concomitant of the human essence by the medievals: necessarily attaching to it, but accidental, not a part of it.²⁸⁵

Let us turn, then, to Pruss’ argument. Pruss begins with an important assumption, which has consequences central to his claim. This is the validity of the entailment principle for truthmakers:²⁸⁶

1. Assume the entailment principle that if \( T \) is a truthmaker for \( p \), then that \( T \) exists entails \( p \). Without this assumption, it is easy to defend the compatibility of Divine Simplicity and intrinsic accidental properties:

   (a) On such an account it is entirely plausible that in world \( W_1 \) entity \( T \) is the truthmaker for God-believes-\( \neg p \) and that in world \( W_2 \) \( T \) is the truthmaker for God-believes-\( p \).

   (b) Therefore God could be—without alteration—himself the minimal truthmaker for his having different accidental intrinsic properties.

2. The entailment principle sharpens the problem of accidental properties:

   (a) Let \( p \) be an intrinsic property of God.

   (b) If \( p \) is an intrinsic property, then the claim that God-has-\( p \) is a claim solely about God.

   (c) Therefore, God is the truthmaker of God-believes-\( p \).

   (d) But, by the entailment principle, the truthmaker’s existence entails the

²⁸⁴In terms of something that is present in all possible worlds. ibid., 159.
²⁸⁵For a useful and brief discussion of this see the following chapter of Ibn Sina’s Islamic and Porphorian appropriation of Aristotle’s categories. Shahram Pazouki, “Ibn Sina’s Jawhar”, 169.
²⁸⁶The following is a condensed version of Pruss’ argument from: Pruss, “Two Problems”.

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truth of the proposition it makes true.

(e) Therefore God’s existence entails that God-believes–p. p is an essential property of God.

(f) Generalising from this, all of God’s intrinsic properties must be essential. This sets up exactly the problem first raised above with divine simplicity. Pruss’ solution is to then argue that an accidental property like God—believes–p has a truthmaker that includes not only God but something other than God and contingent: “God’s having a contingent property is never a fact solely about God.” The implication of this is that—in having a truthmaker that includes something other than God—an accidental property ascribed to God is “at least in part extrinsic.”²⁸⁷ This is the central claim of this section of Pruss’ paper.

There are two questions which arise here: why use the concept of truthmakers at all, and what is the ‘something’ which is included as a part of the truthmaker of God’s belief?

In addressing the first question it is clear that there is an intuitive appeal to the concept of truthmakers: that truth depends on reality, rather than being ‘free-floating.’²⁸⁸ As such the concept is well–entrenched—though deeply controverted—in metaphysical discussions.²⁸⁹

It is clear that Pruss wants to connect the fact that, for example, ‘God-believes–P’ with something about reality. The fact that this does indeed make his question more difficult to answer means that he cannot be accused of ‘gerrymandering.’²⁹⁰ This move, therefore, has intuitive warrant and does not groundlessly make the question less difficult.

²⁸⁷Pruss, “Two Problems”, 158.
²⁸⁸As such it is tightly connected to a correspond theory of truth. See: Timpe, “Truth-making”, 302.
²⁸⁹On the controversy see: MacBride, “Truthmakers”. It is important to note that the fact that there are difficulties in regards to the concept (such as accounting for the truthmakers of negative existentials) does not mean that it should be rejected: Timpe, “Truth-making”, 303–4. It is in fact a good candidate for an ‘essentially contested concept’; Gallie, “Essentially Contested Concepts”.
²⁹⁰Which he acknowledges is the case with some introductory examples earlier in his piece. Pruss, “Two Problems”, 155.
The second question is one that Pruss himself answers. Pruss states that there are multiple possible (and legitimate) answers to this question, but suggests that one possibility is that the ‘something’ could itself be a truthmaker.²⁹¹ This too is a reasonable suggestion, for if both \( p \) and \( q \) have truthmakers then it is very hard to see why a proposition like \( (p \land q) \) is either illegitimate or ceases to have two truthmakers.

Pruss concedes that it seems counter-intuitive that something like belief has an extrinsic component. All it seems to require is that it is true that Jane believes \( p \), an intrinsic state. However he argues that it is not incoherent to suppose that a property intrinsic for one sort of entity, might not be for another.²⁹² This is made intelligible by the concept of analogy. If the claim is that two beings, \( x \) and \( y \), are both \( F \) is being made analogically “there is nothing that surprising about the idea that being \( F \) might be intrinsic to \( x \) while … non-intrinsic to \( y \).”²⁹³

This “content externalism” in God’s belief, is “radical.” It applies to all contingent propositions. This also applies to all God’s willings: all contingent willings have an extrinsic component. Pruss then discusses how willing and belief might work, as his account of willing is “more satisfactory.”²⁹⁴ His argument relating to willing runs thus:²⁹⁵

1. Assume libertarian free will and consider the case where Curley freely takes a bribe.

2. This requires there is a time \( t_1 \) after which it is no longer possible for Curley to refuse the bribe.

3. \( t_1 \) is the moment of Curley’s decision.²⁹⁶

4. At \( t_1 \), therefore, there is branching but the branching is yet to happen: Curley is deciding.²⁹⁷ Though, given the ambiguity of the participle ‘deciding,’ the

²⁹¹Pruss, “Two Problems”.
²⁹²Ibid., 159.
²⁹³Ibid., 159–60.
²⁹⁴Ibid., 160.
²⁹⁵The following argument comes from: ibid., 160–62.
²⁹⁶forgoing any complexities such a prior decisions that determined this one ibid., 160–61.
²⁹⁷Pruss assumes that the branching has yet to happen at \( t_1 \), but recognises that on the alternate
language of deliberation might be used here.

5. Let $S$ be Curley’s state at $t_1$: “the conjunction of all of Curley’s purely intrinsic properties at $t_1$.”

6. $S$ occurs in both the actual world, and the possible world where Curley refuses the bribe.

7. For any time $t_2$ after $t_1$ the branching has already happened, and the actual and possible world have diverged.

8. Regarding intrinsic properties the cause of the divergence between the actual and possible world is identical, for the cause is Curley who at $t_1$ is in state $S$.

9. Thus, deciding between incompatible possibilities does not intrinsically effect the being so deciding.

This, Pruss argues, meets the objection to divine simplicity based on the contingency of God’s choice. The difficulty still arises, Pruss admits, that after $t_1$ Curley’s intrinsic properties are divergent between the actual and possible worlds. But he suggests that:

The difference in these intrinsic properties appears mainly due to the fact that we humans execute our actions through the use of our bodily and mental components, which are put in different states depending on the choice and through which we interact with the physical world. This need not apply in the case of a being that has an efficacious will, one that directly affects external reality, without any internal mediating states.²⁹⁸

How convincing is Pruss’ argument? His analysis of the act of deciding is careful and convincing, but the most difficult aspect of the question—the transition from $t_1$ to $t_2$—remains largely unresolved. Even if it is conceded that God’s will is efficacious in the way that Pruss argues, it is unclear how choice works in Pruss’ scheme. What Pruss seems to outline is a choiceless decision. Based on his above argument model of free will at $t_1$ the branching has already happened, though since he is trying to demonstrate the possibility of “divine willings having a radical content externalism” he is content to work with one possible model. Pruss, “Two Problems”, 161–62.

²⁹⁸Ibid., 162.
relating to belief, it would seem that the contingent component of the property of God’s-being-the-one-who-chose-to-create-the-world is entirely extrinsic to God’s being.

It is interesting to stop for a moment and note Maximus the confessor’s Christology, which we have already seen in the discussion of Robert Jenson’s work. Christ, Maximus argues, does not have gnomic will and proairetic will, for this would introduce a human person—not merely a human nature—into Christ.²⁹⁹ These ways of willing are bound up with deliberation, the ability to move for or against nature, and passibility. Christ’s human nature, fully united as it is to the divine nature, does not exercise the human will in the same manner as sinful human nature. Christ genuinely exercises his human will, however, he must—not least in the garden of Gethsemane—make decisions.³⁰⁰

The exact interplay between divine and human will in Maximus is something that is debated, but note that Jesus’ human will is absent the deliberation and ability to move against nature of gnomic will.³⁰¹ After the Logos wills with his human will to hand that will over to his divine will, it looks rather like Jesus makes choiceless decisions.³⁰² Jesus knows what to will and this arises from his divine nature. Given the prominence of Maximus in the Eastern Orthodox traditions, his Christology might be exactly what Pruss has in mind as he considers the nature of decision. This would not get Pruss off the hook, however: were this the case, it would mean that the criticisms here might extend also to Maximus’ Christology.³⁰³

Nonetheless, let us continue with the analysis. A choiceless decision is deeply and problematically counter-intuitive. For choice is entirely concerned with contingency: the actualisation of possibilities. While it might be argued that something like belief’s extrinsic components can be analogically extrinsic in another being, it is hard to see what remains of choice if this move is made.

To illustrate this it is worth briefly examining an argument by Kevin Timpe for the

³⁰⁰Ibid., 147; 155–61.
³⁰¹Ibid., 148–53; 162.
³⁰²On the Logos willing with both wills see: ibid., 168–71.
³⁰³A point worth noting, but that requires far more depth than is accomplished in these two short paragraphs to explore.
compatibility of God’s knowledge of the world and divine simplicity.\textsuperscript{304} His thesis supports a weaker version of divine simplicity than Pruss’ as he rejects impassibility, but he too relies on truthmakers and a critical point emerges here.\textsuperscript{305} He argues that truthmakers do not have a causal relationship with that which they ‘make’ true. Rather the relationship is one of logical entailment: the existence of the truthmaker entails the truth of what it makes true.\textsuperscript{306} God, therefore, is not caused to believe something by the existence of a truthmaker, but there is the weaker link of entailment. This is why Timpe rejects impassibility: whilst there is no causal relationship God’s knowledge has an ontological dependence on truthmakers.\textsuperscript{307}

Timpe’s argument for ontological dependence has a stronger dependence than the one Pruss is trying to make, but it shows that any causal relation between knowledge and that which is known can be plausibly weakened (in the case of an omniscient being). It is very difficult to see, however, how deciding between possibilities and enacting a decision can be robbed of its contingency.

A choiceless decision is, at minimum, at risk of being equivocal—or humpty dumptying—rather than being truly analogical.\textsuperscript{308} Furthermore if this analysis is right and God’s decision to create really must be choiceless, it is difficult to see how it is not emanation.

There is an additional difficulty relating to the decision here that deepens these difficulties. If Curley is deciding at time $t_1$ then is this not itself an intrinsic property of Curley’s? The property of “is deciding” is dependent on Curley’s state of being and is—as Pruss points out above—neutral as to what is being decided on. In other words it depends only on Curley: Curley’s deciding is an intrinsic property. If we let $t_0$ be Curley’s state before $t_1$ wherein Curley is not deciding, then we can say that Curley is not deciding at $t_0$, is deciding at $t_1$ and at $t_2$ has decided.

The negative property of “is not deciding” at $t_0$ leads to difficult waters.\textsuperscript{309} Let it

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{304} Timpe, “Truth-making”.
\item \textsuperscript{305} He argues that the the doctrine of eternity only commits one to the thesis that God’s knowledge does not change over time. ibid., 308.
\item \textsuperscript{306} Ibid., 307.
\item \textsuperscript{307} Ibid., 311.
\item \textsuperscript{308} Carol, Wonderland.
\item \textsuperscript{309} For an interesting look at the difficulties see: Baron et al., “Negative Property”. Note that with
be taken to represent the fact that when the conjunction of all of Curley’s intrinsic properties is taken at $t_0$ then the property of “is deciding” is not among them. Even if this specific articulation of how to understand a negative property is not acceptable, it remains the case that Curley has entered into an activity at $t_1$ in which he was not engaged before.

Pruss’ argument concludes that $t_1$ is the same in all possible worlds no matter which decision is eventually made. Yet it doesn’t take into consideration the distinction in intrinsic properties between $t_0$ and $t_1$. In our temporal world entering the act of deciding is a change of state/intrinsic properties.

How might Pruss deal with this? Perhaps it can be argued that God was, before this time, deciding ‘whether’ to create, and thus once again his intrinsic properties do not change when he moves to deciding ‘what’ and ‘when’ to create (on Pruss’ argument above). Yet unless some form of deciding is held to be simply basic to God’s being, there is a vicious infinite regress here.

God, therefore, must be somehow the ‘deciding’ God. But unless God is deciding about himself (and therefore altering the content of his selfhood—unless we imagine him to be deliberating on what is already the case), does this not mean that there is a necessary outward directedness of God’s thought and will?

Apart from the potential difficulties with aseity here, unless Pruss can answer the question of choice satisfactorily, or refute this line of argumentation, it seems either that potential contingency is a part of God’s being, or that the problem of emanation rears its head once again.³¹⁰

It is worth noting that this position also mandates positions on other important theological issues. Take soteriology: the events of salvation cannot have brought about an intrinsic change with regard to God’s attitude to humanity. They could only have brought humanity into the kind of relationship with God that God had always had with his Son (i.e. humanity’s ontological position changed). God acts out of an

³¹⁰It might be argued that Pruss’ view already entails—by virtue of the doctrine of divine simplicity—that God’s knowing and willing are not separate. But this is not yet to suggest directedness towards the external content of God’s knowing and willing. I would therefore suggest that this criticism still holds.
unchanging attitude of love. But what is the effect of sin such that rescue is needed? It must surely only be that the consequences mean that God is moved to remedy humanity’s plight by that same love. Salvation is not caused by a moral interval. And indeed we find that Hart himself argues for salvation as recapitulation.\footnote{Hart, \textit{Beauty}, 325; 351; 359; 367.}

There are also questions of Christology that emerge here. These and the above observations about where it seems Hart must go will be examined later. For now it should be noted that they demonstrate in a \textit{prima facie} way that at least some of Hart’s theological positions are driven by philosophical considerations.

In conclusion, therefore, there is much to be gained from Pruss’ analysis, yet there are sufficient difficulties with Pruss’ position that it does not satisfactorily answer the three questions that began this enquiry. It seems clear that there are inherent conceptual difficulties with the position of simplicity that will not satisfy one who does not already hold to the position.

This on its own is not reason enough to reject simplicity: almost all major metaphysical positions have areas of difficulty. The fact, however, that the difficulties arise in areas precisely where Hart seeks to portray simplicity and impassibility as providing a solution means that it might serve as enough to call into question Hart’s claim of simplicity’s explanatory power. Let us now turn to examine whether Hart would accept Pruss’ argument.

\subsection{Would Hart Accept Pruss’ Argument?}

To what extent might such reasoning be acceptable to Hart? Hart’s distaste for analytic philosophy aside, let us begin with a crucial part of Pruss’ argument: that God’s intrinsic properties can not change.\footnote{For just one example of Hart’s distaste for analytic philosophy see: ibid., 298.}

Something like this intrinsic/extrinsic distinction must be adopted by Hart. If he were challenged that, for example, God has the property of being prayed to by his church (whatever one does with the tensed language) he would presumably have to respond with something like the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction (or one of its subsets,
like the relational/non-relation distinction), as a part of his answer.\footnote{Weatherson and Marshall, “Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Properties”} Whether Hart would then adopt the truthmaker-style argument is not certain, but he would, it seems, have to work on similar conceptual lines: he would have to articulate a relationship between God’s beliefs and will and creation that was asymmetrically causal, while allowing for libertarian free will (which he clearly affirms) and contingency of choice.\footnote{Hart, \textit{Beauty}, 432–39.}

These are structural issues that any articulation of divine impassibility has to tackle.\footnote{Along with several others, see: Plantinga, \textit{Does God Have a Nature?}; Wolterstorff, “Divine Simplicity”\textit{.}} I would therefore tentatively conclude that Pruss’ arguments and their weaknesses are a fair representation of the kind of interchange that might happen with Hart’s own articulation of the solutions to these problems.\footnote{If he chose to recognise them as legitimate questions.}

To the one final ontological structure which we must evaluate we now turn: universalism.

### 3.2.2 Universalism

The logical force of Hart’s position seems to necessitate a universalist perspective on salvation, and indeed he now acknowledges that he is a universalist.\footnote{It is interesting to note the shift in Hart’s tone when it comes to the question of universalism. In \textit{The Beauty of the Infinite} he says that his Orthodoxy does not “authorise” him to “enter a brief” on behalf of Gregory’s universalism. While he later claims that he has never hidden his universalism, it was certainly only implicit in \textit{The Beauty of the Infinite}. What certainly appears to have changed is his understanding of Orthodoxy’s scope for allowing universalist claims. He claims, in an online discussion of universalism, that Orthodoxy in no way proscribes universalism. If one takes the language of the first claim at face value then it seems that at least Hart’s understanding of how compatible his universalism is with Orthodoxy has changed. See: Hart, \textit{Beauty}, 410. Hart, \textit{Readings in Universalism}.} The force of his logic can be seen in his affirmation of a number of doctrinal positions: participation, the nature of evil, Gregory of Nyssa’s understanding of the \textit{imagio Dei}, and his understanding of the metaphysics of will. Given that this is the case it is important to evaluate his universalism. Appropriating any part of Hart’s ontological system

\footnote{\textit{Readings in Universalism}.}
without understanding which parts entail universalism would be problematic if his universalism turns out to be unconvincing.

The metaphysics of participation—certainly as conceived under the aegis of an ‘in-over’ pattern—demands that evil be conceived of as privation. If it were not so evil would have being: an existence which God would have to be ‘in’ in order for it to be, and thus his goodness would be undermined.\(^{318}\) As Hart says:

> The traditional ontological definition of evil as a *privatio boni* is not merely a logically necessary metaphysical axiom about the transcendental structure of being, but also an assertion that when we say “God is good” we are speaking of him not only relative to his creation, but (however apophatically) as he is in himself; for in every sense being is act, and God—in his simplicity and infinite freedom—is what he does.\(^{319}\)

Hart similarly co-opts Gregory of Nyssa’s understanding of the *imago dei*. Human nature properly belongs only to the whole body of humankind:

> The entire plentitude of humanity was included by God … as it were in one body … the image is not in part of our nature, nor is the grace in any one of the things found in that nature, but this power extends equally to all the race: and a sign of this is that mind is implanted alike in all.”\(^{320}\)

The individual possesses human nature only by being a part of this whole body, and indeed Jesus’s humanity is understood as being human nature proper: that belonging to the *pleroma*.\(^{321}\) Consequently the divinisation of the human nature in Christ is “introduced into the entirety of the common human nature.”\(^{322}\) If one human being from the *pleroma* were lost eschatologically, therefore, humanity as a whole would no longer be fully human—and nor would Jesus.\(^{323}\) Not even conceptually, therefore, can one human being be lost.

\(^{318}\)For Hart’s most in-depth discussion of evil as privation see: Hart, “God, Creation, Evil”.

\(^{319}\)Ibid., 4.

\(^{320}\)This whole, it seems, only exists in God’s foreknowledge as an eschatological reality, and not in the sense of ideal or substance. Gregory, “On the Making of Man”, 754, 756.

\(^{321}\)Hart, *Beauty*, 403-408.

\(^{322}\)Ibid., 199, 326.

\(^{323}\)Ibid., 403-10.
Finally, Hart’s commitment to a strong impassibility sees him unable to conceive of any change in God towards humanity effected through the events of salvation.³²⁴ Salvation is, rather, the restoration of the *imago dei.*³²⁵ The story of sin and death is unwound and “the story that God tells from before the foundation of the world” is reinaugurated.³²⁶ Jesus “recapitulates” humanity’s struggle with evil and wins the victory humanity could not, and the church becomes the “counter history,” showing the “way of return.”³²⁷ Therefore:

If creation is an address, a divine disclosure of glory, comprised as a parat-actic infinity within God’s eternal Logos, then the sign that Christ is, in its boundless ramifying fecundity, constitutes the analogy that perfectly corresponds to the truth of the world—and so restores to the world its truth. This is the aesthetic substance of the incarnation, the way in which the analogical interval—the infinite distance—between God and his creatures is shown to be entirely traversed in the incarnation. …He is the *ratio* of all things, but is also a word of contradiction, a sword of division. …the Logos is that infinite distance in which all things participate, but to which all things may attest only insofar as they are conformed to the measure of charity that Christ reveals as the true *form* of the infinite. The labor, then, whose issue is truth is not first that of dialectic, but that of repentance. Even in “recapitulating humanity in himself, Christ does not simply effect a “reduction” to an “essential” original, but opens up a new series, a real historical sequence and practical style, which permits endlessly various articulation (what theology calls the communion of saints). This is the limitless motion of *anakaphalaiosis,* the way in which the form of Christ renarrates the human form entirely, and in which his particularity at once claims and sets free every other, in the power of the Holy Spirit, who binds all things together in love and releases all things into

³²⁴Note that I covered some of this material in my Grad.Dip. research project and have used some of the knowledge I gained therein. I have not quoted the material directly. On salvation and God’s impassibility see Jenson’s comment in: Jenson, “Beauty of the Infinite”, 236.
³²⁵Hart, *Beauty,* 325.
³²⁶Ibid., 325.
³²⁷Ibid., 325-327.
their particularity in peace.³²⁸

The recaptulation Christ effects is, in other words, one that opens up the gift of creation anew for those who repent of the narrative of a world which has departed from that original gift. We are simply reunited to God’s triune life (theosis).³²⁹ Note, however, that no animosity of God towards sin is overcome, Hart affirms Ireneaus’ intertwining of “the ontological, the typological, and the moral accounts of salvation.”³³⁰

Given that God’s attitude towards humanity does not alter between creation and recapitulation there is a universalist tendency here. Were Hart to conceive of some sort of libertarian freedom of will such a position is not necessarily universalist. Without any such qualification, if we consider God as unchangeably committed to the good, then his omnipotent and unchanging love of the creature—unimpeded by any internal alteration in his attitude to humanity in the light of sin—cannot result in anything but universal salvation.

What we see, finally, is that Hart does indeed have a metaphysic of the will that not only results in universalism by force of his understanding of sin, but is universalist in force in its own right. This is derived from his understanding of creatio ex nihilo. Hart articulates his understanding of creatio ex nihilo as follows:

> Between the ontology of creatio ex nihilo and that of emanation, after all, there really is no metaphysical difference—unless by the latter we mean a kind of gross material efflux of the divine substance into lesser substances (but of course no one, except perhaps John Milton, ever believed in such a thing). In either case, all that exists comes from one divine source, and subsists by the grace of impartation and the labor of participation: an economy of donation and dependency, supereminenence and individuation, actuality and potentiality. God goes forth in all beings and in all beings returns to himself—as, moreover, an expression not of God’s dialectical struggle with some recalcitrant exteriority, but of an

³²⁹Hart, Delusions, 205–207.
³³⁰Though it is interesting, given how much he is indebted to Gregory of Nyssa, that he does not deal with Gregory’s allegiance to a ransom theory. Hart, Beauty, 326.
inexhaustible power wholly possessed by the divine in peaceful liberty. All the doctrine of creation adds is an assurance that in this divine outpouring there is no element of the “irrational”: something purely spontaneous, or organic, or even mechanical, beyond the power of God’s rational freedom. But then it also means that within the story of creation, viewed from its final cause, there can be no residue of the pardably tragic, no irrecoverable or irreconcilable remainder left at the end of the tale; for, if there were, this too God would have done, as a price freely assumed in creating. This is simply the logic of the truly absolute. Hegel, for instance, saw the great slaughter-bench of history as a tragic inevitability of the Idea’s odyssey toward Geist through the far countries of finite negation; for him, the merely particular—say, the isolated man whose death is, from the vantage of the all, no more consequential than the harvesting of a head of cabbage—is simply the smoke that rises from the sacrifice. But the story we tell, of creation as God’s sovereign act of love, leaves no room for an ultimate distinction between the universal truth of reason and the moral meaning of the particular—nor, indeed, for a distinction between the moral meaning of the particular and the moral nature of God. Precisely because God does not determine himself in creation—because there is no dialectical necessity binding him to time or chaos, no need to forge his identity in the fires of history—in creating he reveals himself truly. Thus every evil that time comprises, natural or moral—a worthless distinction, really, since human nature is a natural phenomenon—is an arraignment of God’s goodness: every death of a child, every chance calamity, every act of malice; everything diseased, thwarted, pitiless, purposeless, or cruel; and, until the end of all things, no answer has been given.³³¹

We see that Hart argues that emanation can be understood as a series of interrelated claims: that all comes from a single divine source, all subsist by impartation and participation, that somehow God goes forth in and returns to himself in all beings, all as an expression of power (and not struggle). The doctrine of creatio ex nihilio

³³¹4-5 Hart, “God, Creation, Evil".
simply adds that this power is exercised purely in freedom. This means, further, that—viewed from the perspective of God as first and final cause—creation can have no irrationality that can account for the evil in it, and only in the disclosure of the end of time will God’s goodness be able to be unambiguously seen in history.\(^\text{332}\)

As God is not determined by history it truly reveals him. What does this mean? Certainly Hart is saying that history has no power over God, but this is not sufficient for ‘true revelation’ to take place. We must also say something like ‘God is actively involved in a history in which he as subject (and never as object?) reveals himself.’ I take it, therefore, that Hart means something like the statement that ‘God’s self-revelation as the first and final cause of history, as well as throughout history, can be relied upon as accurate revelations of God’s being which has not altered and will not alter.’

Now if we consider a god who defines himself in history, we can, I think, conceive of such a god truly revealing him or herself: they can be truly revealed as the god whose identity is being forged in their interaction in the world. In other words they can be revealed as being in \textit{via}.\(^\text{333}\) Perhaps, then, we need to bring an element of ‘trust’ into the above definition: part of what Hart means by ‘truly reveal’ is that one can trust God to always be who he reveals himself to be \textit{in every particular}.

Now it is certainly true that a god who changes with history does not stay the same in all particulars. But this need not mean that such a god is untrustworthy. Such a god might have knowledge of tensed facts that alters with the passage of time, but who does not alter in their character.\(^\text{334}\) How one \textit{trusts} such a God is no more difficult for this view than for an unchangeable God: God has to reveal his character in a way that can be trusted.

Speaking of ‘truly revealing’ is, then, infelicitous. What he seems primarily to mean is ‘trustworthily revealing.’ Any dependence of God on creation would prevent this

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\(^\text{332}\) Hart’s aside about human nature being natural is a fascinating statement. It is rather gnomic and so hard to draw much in the way of inference from it, but it seems to be fit the structure of thought that undergirds his universalism, which rejects the categories of libertarian free will and compatibilism.
\(^\text{333}\) I use the lowercase ‘g’ for god here not because I think a god committed to history cannot be God, but rather because the god is a placeholder as an abstract possibility and clarifying the difference between Hart’s articulation of God and this abstraction brings some clarity to the discussion.
\(^\text{334}\) For a discussion of tensed facts and God’s changing knowledge, see: Craig, \textit{Time and Eternity}.
revelation being trustworthy, or ‘free.’ The trustworthiness of God’s revelation is indeed important, but given the brief discussion directly above there is a least \textit{prima facie} warrant for discounting the necessity of \textit{unchangeability} for a trustworthy revelation to take place. Once again there is a decision between simplicity and non-classical theism to make, and the reasons for adhering to a doctrine of divine impassibility are not immediately convincing. This will be further explored in my constructive work.

We see, furthermore, in Hart’s claim about the absence of any ‘irrational’ element a doctrine of secondary causation—as we have already seen that this is affirmed in Przywara and is indeed affirmed in Hart. But in what sense? In \textit{The Doors of the Sea} Hart seems to give creation considerable freedom, but it is clear that he eschews any libertarian or compatibilist notions of will. So too in \textit{The Experience of God} Hart writes that “secondary causes” are created and limited realities, with the power to affect and be affected, but lacking the power to create from nothing. Furthermore God’s “timeless donation of being to creatures need not be conceived as involving mechanistic determinism but can be thought of as the creation of contingent reality containing truly free secondary causes.”

What, then, is the difference between the freedom that Hart is talking about here and the freedom that one can find in libertarian or compatibilist conceptions of freedom? If we recall the discussion of secondary causation above in section 3.1.2.1., we should remember that God is present to creation as cause to effect. Let us rephrase the question in this light: what is the divine ‘presence’ in will which shapes Hart’s understanding here?

The relevant consideration here is that of God as final cause. Hart argues that:

\begin{quote}
Among more civilized apologists for the “infernalist” orthodoxies these days, the most popular defense seems to be an appeal to creaturely freedom and to God’s respect for its dignity. But there could scarcely be a
\end{quote}

\footnotesize
336 Hart, \textit{Doors}, 82-83.
337 Hart, \textit{Readings in Universalism}.
339 Ibid., 139.
poorer argument; whether made crudely or elegantly, it invariably fails. It might not do, if one could construct a metaphysics or phenomenology of the will's liberty that was purely voluntarist, purely spontaneous; though, even then, one would have to explain how an absolutely libertarian act, obedient to no ultimate prior rationale whatsoever, would be distinguishable from sheer chance, or a mindless organic or mechanical impulse, and so any more “free” than an earthquake or embolism. But, on any cogent account, free will is a power inherently purposive, teleological, primordially oriented toward the good, and shaped by that transcendental appetite to the degree that a soul can recognize the good for what it is. No one can freely will the evil as evil; one can take the evil for the good, but that does not alter the prior transcendental orientation that wakens all desire. To see the good truly is to desire it insatiably; not to desire it is not to have known it, and so never to have been free to choose it. It makes no more sense to say that God allows creatures to damn themselves out of his love for them or of his respect for their freedom than to say a father might reasonably allow his deranged child to thrust her face into a fire out of a tender respect for her moral autonomy. And the argument becomes quite insufferable when one considers the personal conditions—ignorance, mortality, defectibility of intellect and will—under which each soul enters the world, and the circumstances—the suffering of all creatures, even the most innocent and delightful of them—with which that world confronts the soul. Again, Reformed tradition is commendable for the intellectual honesty with which it elevates divine sovereignty to the status of the absolute theological value, and sovereignty understood as pure inscrutable power. But, alas, the epistemological cost is extravagant: for Reformed theology is still dogmatically obliged to ascribe to God all those predicates (except “love”) that scripture supplies, and so must call God “good,” “just,” “merciful,” “wise,” and “truthful.” But, transparently, all have been rendered equivocal by the doctrines that surround them; and this equivocity is necessarily contagious; it reduces all theological language to vacuity, for none of it can now be trusted; the system, in the end, is one devoid of logical
or semantic content: it means nothing, it can be neither believed nor doubted, it is just a formal arrangement of intrinsically empty signifiers, no more true or false than any purely abstract pattern.³⁴⁰

If we summarise Hart’s positive argument we see that we have a will gifted us in our creation with a teleological orientation to the good so immutable that we can only will for the good, even if we are mistaking the goodness of the object we are exercising our will towards.³⁴¹ Therefore—though the implication is never quite drawn out—humanity need only be able to see what is truly good for them to choose it.³⁴²

The negative argument runs thus: a truly libertarian act of will is impossible as it is based on the notion of the possibility of consciously choosing against the good. Will has an immutable telos: the good and free God who both gave the gift and whose own self is the ultimate orientation of that gift.³⁴³ This inextricable teleology can be seen both metaphysically and phenomenologically.

Furthermore any truly libertarian act of will will have no cogency: it will be indistinguishable from chance. Cogency seems to be precisely what is at issue here: Hart appears to be saying that for a decision to be discernible as an act of will there must be some over-riding intelligibility that make decisions decisions. Furthermore there is an implicit invocation of the law of the identity of indiscernibles: acts of willing which resemble randomness are to be discarded as randomness on that ground. As a result of this any defence of eternal conscious torment fails—though it seems that any non-universalist position must fail here—which tries to appeal to the metaphysics of the will as support.

Let us now evaluate this argument, starting with the claim that libertarian freedom is

³⁴⁰These are remarkably broad pronouncements, and indeed Hart goes on to say that “I suppose I might be accused not only of overstatement, but of having strayed far from my topic. To me, however, this all follows inexorably from the doctrine of creation.” Hart is aware of the broadness of these pronouncements, but defends them. It is legitimate, it seems, to take this as indicative of Hart’s understanding. Hart, “God, Creation, Evil”, 10–11.
³⁴¹Hart speaks briefly of the difference between these as the natural/gonomic distinction. Humanity’s will became gnomic after the fall. Hart, “Nature loves to hide”.
³⁴³We should remember that ‘good’ is a transcendental for Hart and ultimately grounded in God’s being.
indistinguishable from chance. All that libertarian freedom requires is that a course of action is not determined: a free action is one where a person is “free to perform that action and free to refrain; no causal laws and antecedent conditions determine either that he will perform the action, or that he will not.”

So we can articulate the two positions so. For Hart there is a determination of the will: a person must always choose according to what they identify as the good. A libertarian conception of freedom means that a person is free to choose against the good.

Hart’s position is that it is the constancy of the choice for the good which distinguishes a genuine act of willing from chance. We have already seen above that this is to do with cogency. In other words there must be a process internal to the agent that grants intelligibility to their external actions.

Why can such cogency not be true of libertarian freedom? Consider a series of actions. Because we are discussing a process internal to an agent we can conceive of the same set of an agent’s actions happening according to both Hart’s account of will and a libertarian account.

Given this identical external manifestation of action we should sharpen what we mean by cogency here. Is it simply that all the actions have something in common? It seems not: it might be said that all libertarian actions have in common is that they are random. This would simply re-affirm Hart’s criticism. Perhaps then it is meant that there is a discernible rationale. This is more plausible: Hart’s appeal to a consistent teleology would work under this classification. If we make a distinction between an explanation and a rationale—where a rationale presupposes a genuine ratio—we can say that randomness works only as an explanation: no genuine ratio lies behind the decisions.

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345Brentano makes the point that our knowledge of the mental life of others is only indirect. Because of the indirect character of this knowledge I think it is perfectly within the bounds of possibility to consider a series of actions whereby the one who acts reveals that they have chosen to act and what they have chosen to do, but not why they have so chosen. If I, for example, eat an ice-cream it might be that I was hungry, or that I was looking to cool down, or that I was on a diet and excited by the transgression. Since choosing for the good or not is a question of why, the interiority of that choice—or absence of choice—has the same potential opacity as any other decision. See chapter II of: Brentano, *Empirical Standpoint*. 206
Let us allow that the presence of a rationale is indeed a necessary condition for will to function as will. The question to solve now becomes whether a rationale can be discerned in libertarian acts of will. We should first acknowledge the sheer complexity of our mental lives: our access to our immediate mental life and our memory is always incomplete.\textsuperscript{346} To some extent, then, we should recognise that asserting the unbroken teleology of the will is primarily a metaphysical position. The question still remains, however: can a libertarian articulate a rationality of the will?

We should understand what Hart is saying according to the good and the right. On Hart’s account it seems that one can be conscious that an action is wrong but be aiming at what one considers the good.\textsuperscript{347} Wrongdoing—including consciousness of it—does not alter the teleology of each act of will.

Consider the case where a man with a happy, young family decides one day to spend the family’s grocery budget for the week on heroin in order to see what it feels like. He knows consciously that he is not only betraying the trust of his family, but he is subjecting them to financial hardship, as well as risking his own life which they depend upon. He knows all of this, and knows that there will be concomitant relational damage that comes from such an action. Yet he is interested to see just how good heroin will make him feel. Such a one is still identifying the good with pleasure. For by definition if what the will is directed towards is the good, then the object of direction will be considered a good.

Two kinds of final cause can be seen: 1. The finis operis, the immediate goal/purpose of action itself (e.g. giving a clerk money in order to buy a necklace). 2. the goal of the agent, the why (e.g. buying a necklace in order to give as a gift).\textsuperscript{348} The second purposiveness enfolds the first.

Phenomenologically the counter-example will be someone choosing against the

\textsuperscript{346}Once again Brentano is helpful here. He is working with a particular understanding of our access to our mental life in the form of ‘inner perception’ as opposed to ‘inner observation.’ Nonetheless I think this insight can be argued from a number of positions, not the least of which is our own experience of our mental lives. See chapter II of: Brentano, \textit{Empirical Standpoint}.

\textsuperscript{347}Hart’s appeal to a phenomenology of the will would seem to indicate the possibility of choosing the wrong over the right, otherwise his work would seem preclude agents having any genuine responsibility. This would be an odd thing indeed to claim, and so I take him to allow for this.

\textsuperscript{348}Clarke, \textit{One and the Many}, 202.
The difficulty with doing this is that Hart’s argument is that a person chooses what they perceive as the good, even if it is not a genuine good. Thus an example where a person objectively realises that they are choosing badly (and not justly wrongly) will still be said to be choosing the good. In order to counter this all one needs is a means of showing that one can indeed choose against what one sees as the good. Let us consider the case of adulterous sex. We have to show that one can have the recognition that this is not simply the wrong thing to do, but that the pleasure aimed at is not a genuine good.

If we allow that something like pleasure has the ontological status of being a genuine good, then is it like fire: fire—as a part of creation—retains the goodness pronounced upon creation in Gen 1. Its character as good is experienced when it is used for warmth, light, perhaps even—in ecological terms—bush fires. Nonetheless if one is set on fire that ontological good is, in that moment, no longer something that brings about your good. If this were done deliberately, knowing that such a good taken out of its appropriate context would cause harm and not good, then the assertion that agents choose only the good should be taken to refer only to the ontological status of that aimed at, not its contextual moral quality. Hart might say that on some level any such agent will be really choosing what they see as the good both ontologically, and in terms of the immediate object (here perhaps the warmth of fire, and the totality of that experience in self-immolation). Sex is a genuine good, but adulterous sex is incredibly destructive (and can be recognised as such before being engaged in; this knowledge can even be experiential in the case of repeat offenders).

The distinction being made here is that just because sex is good does not mean that adulterous sex is good. The adjective is morally decisive. The evidence for this lies in the destruction that adulterous sex brings about. Now Hart might contest this statement, or might not. If he did he not would have to—and indeed seems to—argue that the not-good is being mistaken for a good by the one engaging in it. Yet in the case of the serial offender they have first-hand knowledge of the fact that the behaviour they are engaged in is not good, whilst still being pleasurable (to some degree at least). One might argue that it is really pleasure or some other good.

³⁴⁹The question is partly phenomenological and so the following is an appeal to plausibility, and can be no more.
associated with sex which is the real good being aimed at then. It would still be, however, adulterous pleasure: the same destruction would arise from engaging in it.

What of the common moral experience of choosing to do something because it is easier whilst knowing that the best outcome will come as a result of the harder route? Such a decision will often come with feelings of shame and other immediately unpleasant thoughts and emotions. Can it truly be said that such a course is identified with the good?

If this analysis is correct Hart’s position would seem to require the following to be true: an agent can aim at a thing which they consciously know is not a good, but by the brute facticity of the will’s character be actually aiming all the time for what they understand to be the good. In other words the external character of the thing aimed and the interior mental life of the agent must be read in light of a prior metaphysical judgement about the character of the will.

Now Hart has, it should be recalled, said that the phenomenological character of the will testifies to his position. Yet I cannot see how he would counter the above analysis except to assert that a hidden feature of our consciousness is at play. In other words, the will’s rationale can be one hidden from those who will, an assertion of previous metaphysical commitments.

Given this, what might a libertarian account of the will’s rationale be? Simply, I think, that people decide according to incredibly complex psychological and social factors, as well as previous decisions, that constitute and form their personhood. When each agent is understood within this scope I would argue that the decisions are not random but can be unexpected. An agent’s action is not determined and therefore not (entirely) predictable, but there might well be a ratio for so acting: which itself might often or overwhelmingly be that the agent is seeking the good. If we allow for a hidden rationale—as, it seems, Hart must appeal to—a libertarian can simply assert that all decisions undertaken by an agent can be explained (though not predicted) according to such factors, even if the agent and other observers cannot discern this rationale. In other words the ratio of libertarian action is that actions have contextual meaning: they signify something about the agent’s mental life in a
way that randomness would not. The ratio of libertarian action is that it is meaningful, even if that meaning is that an agent has chosen against the good when the good is clearly perceived by them because of the horrifying tendency of us as fallen creatures to choose evil.

This is, I would argue, a scripturally warranted conclusion. Consider the various ways of describing sin in the Old Testament: a distinction is made between sins made in error and deliberate breaches of the covenant (cf. Lev. 16 and Num. 15:22f). It is God himself who is understood as having been consciously sinned against. The narratival setting for the covenant presupposes that Israel understand YHWH as a gracious God who is the fitting end for their action (to translate in the philosophical idiom God is identified as the appropriate teleology to their actions: the Good). In order, therefore, for a person to be held responsible for consciously breaking YHWH’s covenant they must not only be conscious of doing wrong, but also choosing against the Good. Notice that this still holds true if they mis-identify the thing they are choosing as the good: the mis-identification of the good, not just wrongdoing is at issue.

I would argue, therefore, that Hart’s objections against the libertarian or compatibilist conceptions of will, which support his assertion about the immutable teleology of the will can be met. This is not a defeater for Hart’s position, however. What, then, can we learn from Hart’s position? The consistency of Hart’s position is to be admired. He has woven together positions on creation, theological anthropology, the will, and other metaphysical commitments in a way that is systematically consistent. Furthermore what he argues for is plausible. One might demure at his phenomenology of the will, or at other points, but it is a compelling account and indeed one that would be wonderful if true.

There are two major points at which I depart from Hart’s work here, however. The first is with regard to the biblical testimony. Whilst there is enough material for there to be a genuine debate, I would argue that a universalist reading of the Bible

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350 See the discussion in: Torrance, Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ, 16.
352 Noting that this defence has rested on a libertarian understanding of the will, with which I identify, and work would need to be done in a similar direction to fully exculpate compatibilism.
cannot adequately deal with the broader context of passages called upon to make the universalist case.\textsuperscript{353} Philippians 2:9–11’s “every tongue confess,” for example, is not only used in the context of Jesus’ lordship—rather than salvation directly—but it draws from Isaiah 45:22–25 where some of those who bow are put to shame, a passage which Paul uses in the context of judgement in Romans 14:10–12.\textsuperscript{354}

The second point of difference from Hart follows, I would argue, from the first. The biblical testimony—and my broader experience of human life—suggests that there is a certain intractability to the human will. Consider Adolf Eichmann’s unrepentant contentment with his part in the Holocaust. Those who will not admit their wrongdoing cannot be a part of a restored community.\textsuperscript{355} The human ability to remain unrepentant is a constant feature of our experience, and one that I would argue gives credence to a libertarian conception of the will.

More importantly it looks as though Hart is vulnerable to a charge of violence insofar as God seems to forcibly re-orient our often intractable wills. Notice, however, that since Hart identifies the teleology of the will with the good, there is a sense in which the presentation of the good before one who has mistaken it for something else is not an act of violence towards that person’s will. It is a disabusing of an understanding of what is good, not a forced re-orientation of the will. Once a person sees the truly good they will truly will it. Perhaps some violence is necessary even here, but it is much easier to conceive of it as occurring without violence. Neither of these objections, then, present insurmountable difficulties to Hart. Nonetheless they are warrant enough for me to reject the necessity of his universalism.

\textsuperscript{353}I do not have the scope for detailed exegesis here, and will have to gesture towards the fruit of other scholarship. Perhaps the strongest case for universalism from an evangelical perspective is a relatively recent work by Gregory MacDonald. Despite the care and persuasiveness of his case, I find it ultimately unconvincing for reasons which can be found in the following piece by Marshall. MacDonald, \textit{Evangelical Universalist}; Marshall, “Universal Salvation”.

\textsuperscript{354}Marshall, “Universal Salvation”, 68–69. For the universalist counter-case see: MacDonald, \textit{Evangelical Universalist}, 97–100. I think the counter-case does not work because any such case requires the interpretation of Isaiah 45:22–25 and Romans 14:10–12 in a universalist direction and I think that they mutually reinforce one-another in precisely the opposite direction.

\textsuperscript{355}See the discussion in: Volf, \textit{Exclusion and Embrace}. 211
3.2.3 Summary

There are two serious difficulties with Hart’s work which have been raised and have resulted in the rejection of key structural components of Hart’s ontology. We have one task that remains: to determine what this means for Hart’s doctrine of impassibility.

3.3 Conclusion

We have now surveyed all the key pieces of Hart’s project. We have seen that Hart’s understanding of the analogy of being is not only vulnerable to the criticisms that can be level at the work of Przywara, whose work he appropriates, but also potentially vulnerable in his understanding of the real distinction. Hart’s appropriation of Cyril’s Christology is generally true to Cyril’s project, but in so doing he has smoothed out some of the ‘splinters’ in that work. In particular, Cyril’s notion of the Logos gaining a new existential understanding in the incarnation does not seem to be able to be satisfactorily expressed within Hart’s system.

Hart’s conception of infinity offers several attractive features: the constancy of the immanent and economic, the articulation of the relationship between God and world in a way that embraces both difference and sameness, both of these things being grounded in the trinitarian taxis. Nonetheless, because Hart’s conception of infinity—however much it seems to illuminate the logic of the incarnation—leads to universalism and questions of the cogency of speaking of the cost of the incarnation, it will have to wait to be determined as to whether I can utilise such insights in my work.

Divine simplicity is found to have inherent conceptual difficulties such that the position is unlikely to satisfy one who is not already committed to it. It is a matter of control belief. This on its own is not reason enough to reject simplicity: almost all major metaphysical positions have areas of difficulty. The fact, however, that the difficulties arise in areas precisely where Hart seeks to portray simplicity and impassibility as providing a solution means that it does not appear to have even the
persuasive explanatory power Hart wants. It is around God’s ‘decision’—creation, salvation—that the difficulty is particularly felt.

Hart’s universalism is marvellous in its consistency with his overall position and explanatory scope. I depart from it, nonetheless, for two reasons. The first is that I find a universalist reading of the scriptures unconvincing, the second is that my life experience simply does not allow me to make sense of the position that human beings always will the good, even if in doing so ignorantly willing evil.

Hart might yet win out. Having now seen that Hart’s position is not one that must be adopted by me on the strength of its positive statement, my next task is to embark on my constructive work. During this work I will test my proposal against Hart’s arguments against any sort of passibilist stance. Perhaps I will find that I must embrace some version of Hart’s position, despite its difficulties.

I will, therefore, only be able to come to a conclusion on the final persuasiveness of Hart’s position on impassibility in my constructive work. To this work we now turn.
Chapter 4

Construction

4.1 Overview of the Task to be Undertaken

We have seen that neither Jenson nor Hart have provided fully satisfactory accounts of how to conceive of God’s impassibility. Most significantly neither has caused me to alter my fundamental control beliefs. What they have done, however, is provide some key affirmations and objections that must be taken into account for any articulation of impassibility.

As the direction of general argument has indicated, this articulation of impassibility will reject both divine simplicity and strong impassibility, as well as Jenson’s too-close identification of God and creation in Jesus Christ. I will articulate a version of a chastened-passibilist doctrine of God.

What I need to do, however, is not to provide a comprehensive account of chastened-passibilist doctrine—of which there a number of evangelical attempts—but to show that such a position can meet the challenges given by Hart, Jenson, and—as we will soon see—Emmanuel Levinas.¹

Levinas enters the field at this point as we try and answer the fundamental question asked by this thesis: does such an articulation of God’s relationship with the world

¹I will be drawing upon these existing projects. Articulating this account of impassibility comprehensively would be an avenue of fruitful further work.
meet the concerns of the so-called ‘post-phenomenological ontologies of violence,’
whilst avoiding its weaknesses? Levinas serves as the representative of this strand of
thought.

We will begin this task by briefly recapping the challenges and affirmations offered
by Jenson, and Hart. We will then turn to work of Levinas as a means to discerning
the challenges and affirmations he brings to the question. With the framework out-
lined it will be possible to turn to the constructive work proper and articulate and
test a passibilist doctrine.

4.2 Challenges and Affirmations

4.2.1 Jenson

Jenson has provided a number of positive contributions to this exploration. His
Christology has shown the danger faced by any system that includes God in tem-
poral becoming. My constructive work will need to be interrogated by these dan-
gers.

Jenson has highlighted one of the tools for so guarding God’s temporal becoming:
some sort of shaped infinity. I will explore the usefulness of this as a tool.

I will simply appropriate Jenson’s argument that *timelessness* is a fundamentally in-
appropriate category within which to conceive of the biblical God in light of phe-
nomena like petitionary prayer. Jenson has also shown us, however, that trying to
reduce being to narrative is not the way to accomplish this. Furthermore I will use
some of Jenson’s Christological sources, though in an non-Jensonian way: namely,
Cyril and Maximus.

Finally, Jenson has made our metaphysical world strange, we will need to be sober
in assessing just what we have and have not accomplished in any such articulation
of God’s relationship with the world.
4.2.2 Hart

Hart’s conception of infinity has proven to be attractive, articulating the relationship between God and world in a way that embraces both difference and sameness whilst being grounded in the trinitarian *taxis*. Nonetheless, it has led to other consequences such as universalism which means it cannot be used as he articulates and will have to be used carefully, if at all.

This is true of Hart’s other positions such as analogy and participation. They are so heavily embedded in Hart’s broader theological framework, including divine simplicity, that they would require careful reworking if they are to be used. Thus such concepts will only be employed and tested if required.

Yet, as we have seen, Hart’s arguments against any sort of passibilist position have not yet been tested. To this task I must now turn. In doing so perhaps I will find that I must embrace some version of Hart’s position, despite its difficulties. Before proceeding, let me turn to the work of Emmanuel Levinas.

4.2.3 Levinas

Emmanuel Levinas’ career spanned much of the twentieth century. Indeed it has been suggested that the history of twentieth century French philosophy could be encapsulated in a biography of Levinas, even though he only came to prominence quite late in his career.² His presence and influence are felt in many of the currents that are a part of what Milbank identifies as the ‘ontologies of violence.’ He is an ethicist who wrestles with the question of violence, and articulates a particular understanding of the world’s violence and transcendence.

²Critchley writes: “The history of French philosophy in the twentieth century can be described as a succession of trends and movements, from the neo-Kantianism that was hegemonic in the early decades of the twentieth century, through to the Bergsonism that was very influential until the 1930s, Kojève’s Hegelianism in the 1930s, phenomenology in the 1930s and 1940s, existentialism in the post-war period, structuralism in the 1950s and 1960s, post-structuralism in the 1960s and 1970s, and the return to ethics and political philosophy in the 1980s. Levinas was present throughout all these developments, and was either influenced by them or influenced their reception in France.” Critchley, “Introduction”, 1–6.
These two features make Levinas an ideal interlocutor. He will allow me to test whether my construction of God’s relationship with the world meets the concerns of the so-called ‘post-phenomenological ontologies of violence,’ whilst avoiding the weaknesses of this stream of thought.

Levinas’ thought is centred around a key conviction, and, while there is development in his investigation and articulation of these convictions, it remains more or less constant throughout his career. Levinas has said, for example, that his whole philosophy is encapsulated in the phrase ‘Après vous, Monsieur.’³ We will see what he means by this.

4.2.3.1 Husserl and Heidegger

Two figures against which Levinas’ thought needs to be understood are Husserl and Heidegger. Levinas both co-opts and breaks from the thought of these thinkers. It is worth briefly surveying one key aspect of Levinas’ understanding of these two figures: their understanding of intentionality. Doing so will aid in understanding Levinas’ often difficult later work.⁴ I will turn first to Husserl.

Husserl’s phenomenology—which has consciousness and the concomitant concept of intentionality at its heart—had a profound effect on Levinas. The fundamental idea of intentionality is that consciousness is always object-directed.⁵ Levinas uses phenomenological analysis throughout his work, but with a significant break from Husserl’s overall framework, with the aid of Heidegger’s thought.⁶

We can see this break by drawing upon Levinas’ outline of Husserl’s idea of signi-

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³ See the account in: Critchley, “Introduction”, 27.
⁴ When I say things like ‘Husserl’s theory of intentionality,’ what I mean is ‘Levinas’ understanding of Husserl’s theory of intentionality.’ Note that there is a wide body of scholarship on both of these thinkers. How Levinas’ interpretation of both these thinkers holds up to this scrutiny is beyond my present concern, and I will not be engaging much of secondary literature on either Husserl or Heidegger. For a good introductory overview of each thinker see: Critchley, “Introduction”; Guigan, “Introduction”.
⁵ The following discussion includes a number of terms from Husserl’s work that are technical. There is debate over how almost all of them are to be understood. But my aim is to give a general overview of his argument. Levinas, “The Work of Edmund Husserl”, 58.
⁶ Though, as we will see, Levinas rejects central aspects of Heidegger’s thought as well.
ification of language? A word—as expression, not as the “image associated with the auditory or visual perception of the word”—is not a ‘sign’ to a signified. It ‘expresses’ rather than symbolises. When a word expresses meaning “it is like a window through which we see what it signifies.” The relation between word and meaning is not that between “two psychological facts nor two objects,” but “between thought and what it thinks.” This means that:

_That which is thought_ is ideally present in thought. Intentionality is the way for thought to _contain something other than itself_. It is not an exterior object entering in relation with consciousness, nor within consciousness, the establishing of a relation between two psychic contents, mutually interlocked. The relation of intentionality is nothing like the relation between real objects. _It is essentially the act of bestowing a meaning_ (the _Sinngebung_). The exteriority of the object represents the very exteriority of what is thought with respect to thought that intends it. The object thus constitutes an ineluctable moment of the very phenomenon of meaning. The affirmation of the object is not, in Husserl, the expression of any sort of realism. The object appears in his philosophy as determined by the very structure of thought having a meaning orienting itself around a pole of identity which it posits. To elaborate on the idea of transcendence, Husserl's point of departure is not the reality of the object, but the notion of meaning.

Intentionality is “_essentially the act of bestowing a meaning (the Sinngebung)_.” All intentions are “objectifying acts”—where an object is posited—or depend on such acts, and the objectifying act “identifies” or bestows meaning, indeed “constitutes” the object. Identification of an object is concluded in “self-evidence—the presence of the object in person before the consciousness,” or “the very penetration to the true.” The object is present to the subject in intellection.

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8Ibid., 59.
9Ibid., 59.
10Ibid., 59.
11Ibid., 59.
12Ibid., 59.
13Ibid., 61.

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Intention is always “a self-evidence being sought.” Representation is at the base of all intention. The mind, therefore, “while receiving something foreign, is also the origin of what it receives.”¹⁴ The world is always given for the mind, and this givenness is the basis of our freedom: through self-evidence we are located both as a being, and yet also importantly transcendent from it, preexisting the world.

Consciousness can be understood, therefore, as the seat of meaning bringing together the disparate parts of the world: “The intentionality of consciousness is the fact that there can be found an ideal identity, the synthesis of which the multiplicity does nothing more than bring about.”¹⁵

The end result of this is that Husserl’s philosophy is characterised by Levinas as a “philosophy of freedom” whereby freedom is “accomplished as, and defined by, consciousness.”¹⁶ This freedom is “prior to …[a] being.” Consequently the human person “retains the power to keep himself [sic] in reserve before the world, and thus remain free to accomplish the phenomenological reduction.”¹⁷ Our being present in the world is, therefore, “above all a certain meaning of our thought. …Before we behave with regards to things we understand them.” This does not mean that objects are not genuinely exterior, but rather that external object “is what is in conformity with the inner meaning of the thought that intends that object. …The exteriority of objects proceeds from the absolute respect given to the interiority of its constitution.”¹⁸

Levinas argues Husserl is thoroughly modernist in his underlying assumptions: a knowing subject is considered to be isolated “in relation to the object.”¹⁹ The subject, understood as cogito must “take leave of itself to attain the object,” whist at the same time we need to acknowledge that objects are, in a sense, already within the subject.²⁰

Heidegger modifies Husserl’s project. Heidegger pries apart meaning’s relation

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¹⁵Ibid., 59.
¹⁶Ibid., 84.
¹⁷Ibid., 85.
¹⁸Ibid., 85–86.
¹⁹Levinas, “Martin Heidegger and Ontology”, 12.
²⁰Ibid., 12.
to objectivity. Understanding does not entail “objective apprehension.”²¹ Against Husserl’s ahistorical meaning Heidegger argues that meaning is founded in history, in “one’s existence.” Mental life depends on existence.

This has significant consequences. Substance is understood as “that which is,” while existence is “essentially linked to time.” If substance is a “subject having to transcend itself,” how does the subject’s temporality cohere with its subsisting “in an eternally present substratum?”²² The relation to object must not be a temporal phenomenon, and yet one that is “bound to each moment of its passing” such that the relation to object cannot be reduced to idealism’s encompassing of the object in consciousness (i.e. the evasion of time): it is a lived relation.²³

Therefore, for Heidegger, a true ontology is a theory of time (where time is that which “effectuates” existence, rather than a ‘something’ existing itself). A true ontology is no longer a study of being as “that—which—is” but rather “the fact that it is and in its specified mode of being.”²⁴

Between the ontological dimension of a person—existence or time—and their knowledge there is a duality.²⁵ Heidegger followed Husserl’s notion of intentionality insofar as intentionality is seen as the “essence of consciousness” and that, therefore, “not only …[is] all consciousness the consciousness of something but that this striving towards something else constituted the entire nature of consciousness.”²⁶ In other words, consciousness is not first something that exists before transcending itself, but that “consciousness transcends itself throughout its existence.”

Heidegger makes the further distinction between “Being and being,” which allowed Heidegger to distinguish between a particular existing being and Being, where Being must not be confused with that which can be arrived at by beginning with an existing being and finally arriving at an “existent possessing existing fully, God.”²⁷ Existing (Levinas’ preferred rendering of Being) and the existent (Levinas’ preferred

²²Levinas, “Martin Heidegger and Ontology”, 12.
²³Ibid., 12.
²⁴Ibid., 17.
²⁵Ibid., 17.
²⁶Levinas, Time and the Other, 44.
rendering of being) are separate.²⁸

How does Levinas use this distinction? In *On Escape* Levinas engages in a phenomenological analysis of various aspects of our existence. Here Levinas contends that “the need for escape [from all that is not-I, that would limit our freedom] …leads us into the heart of philosophy,” namely “the problem of being qua being.”²⁹ Engaging in a phenomenology of need, shame, and nausea, Levinas argues that “the pure existence of being is an experience of its powerlessness.”³⁰ Nausea, then, reveals the nature of the *existing*, not just *existents*.³¹

When nausea overcomes us (though it is not experienced as something from the outside, but as ourselves) we refuse to remain in that state and yet find ourselves unable to get out. There is us and there is the nauseated state, but both are us: we are present to ourselves. The impossibility of escaping nausea means that Levinas defines it as “the impossibility of being what one is,” and in it “everything is consumed,” we experience despair.³²

Yet this fixedness is at the same time our very moment of departure. Being—the *existing* of the *existent*—is limitation and need.³³ “Pure being” is experienced both in its “internal antagonism” and “escape.”³⁴

What we find, then, is that our being born “into an existence … [we] neither willed nor chose” is the structure of being. But, while this is heavily influenced by Heidegger’s *Geworfenheit* (thrownness)—whereby *Dasein* finds itself thrown “abandoned” to its own possibilities—Levinas is seeking to move beyond Heidegger’s thought without falling back into pre-Heideggerian metaphysics.³⁵

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²⁸It is worthwhile bringing the secondary scholarship on Heidegger to bear at this point, due to the terminological confusion that otherwise ensues. Heidegger identifies Being as ‘ontological difference.’ Being does not itself exist. Carman, “The Question of Being”, 1.
²⁹Levinas, *On Escape*, 52-56.
³⁰This powerlessness is not the result of any kind of limit or finitude of being. Being is essentially so. ibid., 69.
³¹Ibid., 68.
³²Ibid., 66-67.
³³Ibid., 67-68.
³⁴Ibid., 67.
Levanas embraced Heidegger’s placing of the mind within a pre-existing relationship, indeed *Dasein* (or human being, ‘there-being’) is in a relationship with “the Other,” a relationship which constitutes “an ontological structure of Dasein.”

*Dasein* is in the situation of *Miteinandersein*: “reciprocally being with one another.”

The proposition *mit* shows, however, that this is “an association of side by side …around the truth.” What is required instead is a face-to-face relationship.

He co-opts Heidegger’s distinction between existing and existent, but takes it further: not distinction but separation. Furthermore Levinas is critical of Heidegger’s decision to affirm “Being over existents.” This subordinates the relation with a *someone* (existent) to the relationship with the “Being of existents.” If freedom is understood as “the mode of remaining the same in the midst of the other,” then the relationship of knowing—which characterises the relationship with the Being of existents—is a free one. Justice, which involves obligation, is opposed by this freedom.

Levinas, to sum up this brief survey of his use of Husserl and Heidegger, departs from Husserl’s belief that the transcendental ego has priority over any pre-existing relationship, whilst following “intentional analysis” as a method. He departs from Heidegger insofar as Heidegger mis-characterises this pre-existing relationship. In this rough sketch we can see emerging the fundamental thought that drives all of Levinas’ work. Let us turn, then, to exposition of Levinas’ positive thought.

### 4.2.3.2 An Overview of Levinas’ Thought

What, then, does Levinas mean by ‘Après vous, Monsieur?’ Levinas was a Jew who lost most of his family in the holocaust. The shoah is seldom mentioned in his work.
but it is always there in the background. As Levinas says in a small vignette of his life and intellectual influences: “it is dominated by the presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror.”⁴⁵

Levinas, as we have seen above, is trying to articulate an ethics using the tools of a post-Heideggerian phenomenology, whilst not falling into the mistakes of Heidegger’s thought (given deeply distressing form in Heidegger’s Nazism). What, then, is the fundamental idea seen in ‘Après vous, Monsieur?’

Simon Critchley offers an excellent summation of Levinas’ “big idea:” “ethics is first philosophy, where ethics is understood as a relation of infinite responsibility to the other person.”⁴⁶ If we look at one of his most seminal works—Totality and Infinity—we can see that the titular terms are concerned with this very dynamic. ‘Totality’ can be understood as that which happens when Husserl’s transcendental ego ‘captures’ its object: the otherness of the other is reduced to the same, its infinity elided by the very universality of objectivity. This can be seen most fundamentally in war, which destroys otherness.⁴⁷

'Infinity,' on the other hand, is that which is always exterior to totality, it exceeds it.⁴⁸ Eschatology is one way that Levinas conceptualises the relationship we can have with infinity. Morality—properly understood—is therefore eschatological: a relationship with infinity.

But this should not be mistaken for what Levinas characterises as philosophical, religious, and theological eschatology whereby the relationship is to revelation of the “finality of being.”⁴⁹ This would be a totalising relationship.

The kind of transcendence that this relationship to infinity offers is different. Transcendence is not a relationship of antithesis, but is a “positive movement.”⁵⁰ We are neither related to a transcendence where our true life is located nor an immanence wherein we truly possess being.

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⁴⁵Levinas, Difficult Freedom, 291.
⁴⁷Levinas, Totality, 21.
⁴⁸Ibid., 21–29.
⁴⁹There is an interesting parallel to Jenson’s antinomy of hope here: how does one articulate the relationship between hope and openness? Ibid., 22.
⁵⁰Ibid., 53.
Levinas articulates this relationship so: Infinity and the idea of infinity are distinct. Infinity exceeds the idea of infinity, but is inseparable from it. Infinity is only infinite insofar it exceeds every limit, which requires the “disproportion between the idea of infinity and the infinity of which it is the idea.”⁵¹ The idea of infinity is, therefore, infinity’s mode of being, its infinition.

Infinity does not pre-exist and then reveal itself. It is produced in infinition. For ‘produced’ Levinas uses s’évertue, which denotes both production and being “brought to light,” a duality Levinas suggests is present in the production of infinity.⁵² The mode of being of infinity is the presence to a subject of an idea that it cannot contain.⁵³

To put this differently ontological relations are totalities, whereas the ethical relation “has a formal resemblance to the relation, in Descartes Third Meditation, between the res cogitans and the infinity of God.”⁵⁴ Infinity is “a thought that contains more than can be thought.”⁵⁵ Though Levinas is not claiming that the thought can be captured, as Descartes would have it, and places the other in the place of God.⁵⁶ This is the formal structure of the ethical relation.

It is important to remember, when trying to understand the ground for this gambit, that Levinas begins his exploration with phenomenology, with lived experience where we are always already in relationship with an infinity.⁵⁷ Since intentional-ity cannot capture infinity the fundamental level of consciousness is not an inten-tionality that yields “adequation,” but “non-adequation.”⁵⁸ The conceptualities and frameworks of our thought are shattered “at every moment.”⁵⁹

This infinity is what Levinas calls the ‘Other.’ Indeed for Levinas metaphysics is the

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⁵¹Levinas, Totality, 26. As this is a key definition for Levinas’ enterprise it is worth noting the fidelity of this translation to Levinas’ French original: “La production de l’entité infinie ne peut être séparée de l’idée de l’infini, car c’est précisément dans la disproportion entre l’idée de l’infini et l’infini dont elle est idée que se produit ce dépassement des limites.” E. Levinas, Totalité, 12.
⁵²Levinas, Totality, 26. For some example uses see: E. Levinas, Totalité, 11, 243, 313, 323, 335.
⁵³Levinas, Totality, 27.
⁵⁵Ibid., 14.
⁵⁶Ibid., 14.
⁵⁷Ibid., 7–10.
⁵⁸Levinas, Totality, 27.
⁵⁹Ibid., 27.
relation to the Other. At the foundation of ontology there is already an ‘Other’ with which we are already in relationship. For Levinas this relationship entails responsibility and is it because of this that ethics is first philosophy, a description of what we already always involved in.

Levinas describes this relationship as a “face to face” one. Yet because of the objectifying nature of sight—and the risk that this relationship becomes one where the other is seen as able to captured in thought—this relationship is characterised as a linguistic one: speech. This should be understood along the lines already articulated between the thought of the infinite and infinity. Speech is an act not of objectification, but of conversation: the relationship remains irreducible to reason.

Here we see more clearly where the ethical obligation of the relationship with the Other comes from. There is an asymmetric foundation for language: The Master initiates the dialogue and yet remains the fundamentally foreign “Other who judges me; our relations are never reversible. …Exteriority coincides with mastery. My freedom is challenged by a Master who can invest it. Truth, the sovereign exercise of freedom, becomes henceforth possible.”

This relation means a constant calling—into—question of the self by the other: “we name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the other ethics.” Ethics is critique.

At the same time this relation is understood not as oppression but freedom, as the foundation of pluralism. The infinity of the face does not suppress my power but invites me to exercise it. It invites to a relationship where the enjoyment derived is “incommensurate” with the power exercised by me. Indeed the Other excites...
my goodness as I confront its nakedness. It is, above all, a relation defined by desire.

Desire is described by Levinas as liminal. Desire is movement towards the “never completely, yet nearly reached.” The other, the object of our desire, is an absent presence (a not-presence), the impossibility of our possibilities. Desire can be neither satisfied nor unsatisfied, but is “accomplished” in its relationship with the other. This means that desire yields *yearning without capture*, and *yearning without end*, both of which would ultimately occur if desire was based on need.

Levinas, therefore, posits “metaphysics as desire.” Since desire becomes disordered if it seeks to overcome the alienness of the other, to call the other from their otherness to a definite form, we might call such a metaphysics a metaphysics of the unrepresentable. Levinas’ ethic is, therefore, an ethics of the unrepresentable.

What Levinas means, then, by ‘Après vous, Monsieur’ is that each of us must be aware of the otherness into which we are thrown and the infinite duty that this lays upon us. Each the threads seen above from the thought of infinity to desire reinforces this fundamental pattern.

Now that we have established this we will examine one other key aspect of Levinas’ thought which is relevant to the question at hand. If we take seriously Levinas’ comment that the Nazi horror has dominated his life it appears legitimate to say that Levinas’ thought is a response to evil. Levinas states in an interview that “the essential problem is: can we speak of an absolute commandment after Auschwitz? Can

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70 Ibid., 301.
71 Though this relation is founded on an already existing encounter with the other whose responsibility we seek to evade. This and the next paragraph are significantly reworked material from a paper I presented at a conference in 2015. Ibid., 254–255.
72 Waldenfels, “Levinas and the Face”, 77–78.
73 Levinas, *Totality*, 179.
74 Ibid., 304.
75 Ibid., 304.
76 Once again, it is worth showing fidelity to Levinas text here. On desire he writes: “Générosité nourrie par le Désiré et, dans ce sens, relation qui n’est pas disparition de la distance, qui n’est pas rapprochement.” E. Levinas, *Totalité*, 22.
77 This is argued in: Bernstein, “Evil and the Temptation of Theodicy”. For an instance of Levinas’ use of the term ‘evil’ see: Levinas, “Useless Suffering”, 157.
we speak of morality after the failure of morality.”⁷⁸ What is critical to grasp here, however, is that Levinas’ work is inimical to any sort of explanation for evil.

In an essay entitled *Useless Suffering* Levinas begins by outlining a phenomenology of suffering.⁷⁹ Pure suffering, Levinas maintains, is “useless.” It has no meaning. Yet as a sensation it hurts and so acts to rivet the person to absurdity: they must undergo something present to self-consciousness as meaningless.⁸⁰

Suffering seems to have personal and societal utility: personal growth, criminal justice, bodily safety all seem to grant pain a certain teleology.⁸¹ Yet the meaningless of pain is demonstrated in its gratuitousness: the suffering of a patient with terminal illness, or, paradigmatically, Auschwitz.⁸²

When pain’s teleology is oriented to an other-worldly transcendence, and God’s innocence is asserted, we reach the heart of theodicy: theodicy seeks to make God innocent and suffering bearable. But this is a forgetfulness of the meaningless of pain and the evil with which it is so closely intertwined.⁸³ It forgets the holocaust.

Instead of theodicy we must see that our neighbour’s suffering is “unjustifiable.”⁸⁴ More is demanded of the self. We must suffer in alleviating the other’s sufferings, and only in doing so can suffering ever take on meaning. The implication appears to be that, if it is our own personal suffering for another, such suffering takes on a teleological relationship with an immanent good: the fulfilment of our fundamental ethical duty to deal with the intolerable suffering of the other.⁸⁵

This is a fairly ‘metaphysical’ overview of Levinas’ thought. A turning point for Levinas was Derrida’s critique of his work in *Violence et Métaphysique*.⁸⁶ Amongst the other points that Derrida makes is the charge that Levinas cannot borrow phe-

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⁷⁹See: Levinas, “Useless Suffering”.
⁸⁰Ibid., 156–59.
⁸¹Ibid., 159–61.
⁸²Ibid., 159–61.
⁸³Ibid., 159–61.
⁸⁴Ibid., 161–64.
⁸⁵Ibid., 156–59.

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nomenology’s methodology without inheriting the ideas that developed this method.\textsuperscript{87} The fundamental idea that phenomenology is wed to is that philosophy is a “science,” the very thing that Levinas is trying to question. In other words, Derrida charges that Levinas never really stops speaking Greek.\textsuperscript{88}

This critique was to have an impact on the kind of language that Levinas used to articulate his ethics. When asked what changed in his writing after \textit{Totality and Infinity} Levinas responded that “There is the ontological terminology: I spoke of being. I have since tried to get away from that language.”\textsuperscript{89} Nonetheless Levinas does not accept the whole of Derrida’s critique. Levinas argues that using Greek language does not fatalistically wed the speaker to the concepts it inherits: “there is always the possibility of unsaying that to which you were obliged to have recourse in order to show something.”\textsuperscript{90}

Levinas’ thought employs, in consequence, a greater focus on the distinction between the ‘saying’ and the ‘said,’ between the representation in speech and writing and the unrepresentable.\textsuperscript{91} What is striking is that, as is seen in a response to a question about Derrida’s criticism, his fundamental thought remains the same: that ethics is an unsurpassable relationship with the other.\textsuperscript{92} The above ‘ontological’ exposition of Levinas’ thought must, therefore, be qualified insofar as it must also be ‘unsaid’ in order that the non-ontological can be properly heard.\textsuperscript{93}

Nonetheless, whilst Levinas’ transition to attempt non-ontological language is important, the above analysis demonstrates that his fundamental thought does not change. This means that it can be taken as a reliable basis—if one under erasure—for articulating the importance of Levinas’ thought for the question at hand.

Having engaged in this overview we can move on the examine how Levinas’ thought informs our articulation of the doctrine of impassibility.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{87}He shows that Levinas had maintained this 30 years prior to \textit{Totality and Infinity}, but that he does not sufficiently learn the lesson from it. Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics”, 147.
  \item \textsuperscript{88}Ibid., 190-91.
  \item \textsuperscript{89}A. Wright H., “The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuual Levinas”, 171.
  \item \textsuperscript{90}Ibid., 179.
  \item \textsuperscript{91}See the discussion in: Critchley, “Introduction”, 17.
  \item \textsuperscript{92}A. Wright H., “The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuual Levinas”, 179.
  \item \textsuperscript{93}However that works.
\end{itemize}
4.2.3.3 An Engagement with Levinas’ Thought

How does Levinas’ thought contribute to our formulation of impassibility? Several areas contribute, positively or negatively. To these we turn.

A first area of inquiry is unrepresentability. Jesus’ summation of the two greatest commandments have a logic of dependence, which is seen in the law more generally.\(^9^4\) It is because of God’s character that his people both called and able to act in imitation. It is because God’s people have first been shown grace that they can be gracious.\(^9^5\) Christian ethics, in other words, depends on form.

For Levinas form is always betrayal. Christianity, however, holds that infinity and form do not stand in antithesis.\(^9^6\) As von Balthasar writes, in the incarnation “Christianity becomes the aesthetic religion par excellence.” To see Jesus’ life is to see the life of God. Jesus’ life cannot be captured by us, not because it is formless, but because it is, nonetheless, infinite.\(^9^8\) Levinas’ disavowal of form must be itself rejected. Hart’s project, in this regard, must be affirmed.

A second topic is ‘infinite responsibility.’ In the Gospels we see that, while we did not meet our obligations, the fullness of God’s demands have been met in Jesus Christ. God himself made a way for us to delight in him by granting us freedom from anything that hinders our participation in his life. In this respect I would argue that something like John Hare’s vision is to be preferred over Levinas’: we are met not just with demand, but the gift of it having been met for us, along with the assistance to meet it in the future.\(^9^9\) Levinas’ project does, no doubt, truly take account of the recalcitrance and impotence of our moral experience, but what does speaking of an infinite command truly offer such a world? We must affirm that God meets his own obligation in the incarnation. God’s position towards the world must be altered by his actions within it.

\(^9^4\)See the argument in: Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*.
\(^9^5\)Deut. 6.
\(^9^6\)One of the central thrusts of Hart’s work, as we have seen in section 3.1.1.
\(^9^8\)For an arresting portrait of how the form of Jesus’ life is not changed by us, but changes us, see: Cavanaugh, *Torture*.
\(^9^9\)See: Hare, *The Moral Gap*. 

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A third topic is the reduction of the other to the same. Part of Levinas’ concern here is one of freedom, that the world not be made in the image of the few through violence.¹⁰⁰ In the Christian narrative there is an image of God, and, ultimately, those rejecting that image will be judged. All but universalist thought requires of Christians the admission that judgement—violence—is, when exercised by God, not evil.¹⁰¹

Here, then, with regards to the critical area of violence, is a point where Christian thought and Levinas’ thought depart. Peace in human community, Christianity holds, is only possible by common allegiance to a particular form. We can draw upon Hart’s thought to show that, because of the trinitarian taxis, this is allegiance to a form that nonetheless has room for genuine otherness.¹⁰² This is, however, grounded on Hart’s version of analogy.

Levinas would not accept the violence of form. Hart’s answer, with his understanding of analogy and his universalism, shows that there is room for otherness in Hart’s infinite form. This is the right apologetic move. Yet I cannot appropriate Hart’s version of analogy as it stands. Answering Levinas requires, therefore, a passibilist articulation of the analogy between the trinitarian taxis and our world.

There is not scope to engage in this work. Since, however, it is already an area where non-universalist Christian thought must already depart from Levinas to some degree by arguing for the necessity of form, its omission is not critical. It stands as an avenue for further research.

A fourth topic is Levinas’ stance on theodicy. His linkage of evil to ‘useless suffering’ as a means for demonstrating the folly of theodicy is helpful indeed. Levinas’ insistent that the ‘meaning’ of evil is incomprehensible is itself a deeply Christian notion, found in the book of Job in particular.¹⁰³

By the same token we are prohibited from declaring evil’s effects meaningless. The wounds of sin and death are not those of foreign bodies that can be cleanly removed. They are, rather, woven deeply into our selves and our experience. Healing involves

¹⁰⁰See his concern with politics and war in the early part of: Levinas, Totality.
¹⁰¹On this, see: Boersma, Violence, Hospitality.
¹⁰²There are some things that See part 2.II. of: Hart, Beauty.
¹⁰³For an extended argument to this effect see: Tilley, The Evils of Theodicy.
a commitment to the meaningfulness of sin insofar as it was a part of the meaning of history. Insofar as the meaning of history can be assessed narratively—so Jenson—the whole nexus of cause and effect that makes history intelligible is broken if the presence of evil is erased.¹⁰⁴

Conquest need not be erasure of all consequences. Jesus’ resurrection body was both healed and scarred. True deification is the formation of a holy identity healed from the effects of sin. To call salvation recapitulation, as Hart does, fails to take seriously the major difference between creation and salvation: Jesus’ scars.¹⁰⁵ To the extent that Levinas’ critique of theodicy is correct I believe it highlights the deficiency of any articulation of God’s relationship with the world which does not take seriously Jesus’ scars. Jesus’ scars do not elevate evil itself into the risen identity of Christ, but are markers of an identity formed in response to it.¹⁰⁶

What we find is that to meet Levinas’ concerns, or to offer a compelling Christian alternative to them, we must affirm Hart’s position that the incarnation shows that there is no opposition between the infinite and the finite. We must also affirm that God’s own actions within history alter his attitude towards the world, by meeting his own demand. The need to articulate an alternative account of analogy has emerged.¹⁰⁷ Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Levinas’ account forces us to take Jesus’ scars with absolute seriousness.

Several of Levinas’ central—control—beliefs have been rejected; they cannot be met from within a Christian framework. Nonetheless, by paying attention to that which Levinas is seeking to preserve by making these moves, as I have above, it is possible to offer a Christian response to these concerns.

With these points, and the previous exposition of what Hart and Jenson demand, we are ready to enter the constructive phase of this project, and to test this construction against these points.

¹⁰⁴ Though, of course, I do not intend to capture the ontological commitments Jenson has to narrative.
¹⁰⁶ This will be expanded upon in section 4.3. below.
¹⁰⁷ Though this will have to remain an avenue for further research.
4.3 An Articulation and Assessment of a Doctrine of Impassibility

We have now examined the work of David Bentley Hart, Robert Jenson, and Emmanuel Levinas. In doing so we have gradually made a series of decisions about what a doctrine of impassibility should look like. What I will do now is make that implicit form concrete before assessing it against the projects of Hart, Jenson, and Levinas.

4.3.1 A Positive Statement of a Doctrine of Impassibility

4.3.1.1 A Scriptural Position

Although there have already been several decisive points in the above analysis that point towards a passibilist interpretation of God’s being, my fundamental guiding principle as an evangelical must be the scriptures. What we will see is that the decision of how to understand what the scriptures communicate with regards to God’s (im)passibility turns on a crucial hermeneutical decision. The question is this: which passages take precedence, those speaking of God’s change, or his unchanging nature?

I will outline the key points involved in this decision in conversation with a defender of God’s impassibility.¹⁰⁸ Given that Hart has engaged in almost no scriptural interpretation for his position on impassibility, and that we have already rejected the scriptural support for Jenson’s (eccentric) position, I will engage another thinker: Thomas Weinandy.

Weinandy argues that there are two important biblical currents with which we must wrestle. These are that God is the transcendent Creator, and that he is involved with the world—paradigmatically as Savior.¹⁰⁹ This pattern is, for exam-

¹⁰⁸I will not engage in detailed exegesis here, as this issue has received a great deal of attention in the evangelical sphere. I will be drawing from the fruit of this labor.

¹⁰⁹See chapter 3 of: Weinandy, Does God Suffer?
ple, seen in Deutro-Isaiah, which expresses the “mature Hebrew understanding of God.”¹¹⁰ Throughout this portion of Scripture God’s being Savior and holy Creator are linked.¹¹¹

We are set the challenge of relating these two strands of biblical thinking together. This requires, Weinandy argues, that God’s ‘responses’ to events within creation “arise out of and testify to his total otherness.”¹¹² The logic here is that ‘passibilist’ statements can be trusted as expressions of who God is only because God’s impassible and absolutely good, loving, and holy nature is unchanged by the vicissitudes of time and circumstances.¹¹³ It is this foundation which the Scriptures express in the passages that speak of God’s unchanging nature.¹¹⁴

It is immediately apparent that this position need not be one that portrayed a God who was fully impassible. Indeed Weinandy admits that there is no way to argue straight from the Scriptures to a full doctrine of impassibility.¹¹⁵ He also recognises that his description of the scriptural evidence could fit a notion of “ethical immutability” such as that seen in the work of I.A. Dorner.¹¹⁶

Ethical immutability is understood as God’s being ethically unalterable, but ontologically mutable.¹¹⁷ Weinandy argues that the reasons for preferring a full ontological immutability are philosophical. One must choose between philosophical possibilities on the basis of what makes Scripture’s intention philosophically intelligible.

Take the difficult passages where God seems to change his mind. He argues that the “classic passage” is 1 Samuel 15 where God regrets that he made Saul king and is then spoken of by Samuel as not changing his mind.¹¹⁸ Weinandy argues—along the

¹¹⁰Weinandy, Does God Suffer?, 51.
¹¹¹Most explicitly: 44:24. But Weinandy’s case is that the concept of transcendence linked with being Creator is linked also with his activity as Savior. Thus the selection of text is much wider. ibid., 50–52.
¹¹²Ibid., 62.
¹¹³Ibid., 59.
¹¹⁴E.g. Jam 1:17; Num. 23:9; 1 Sam 15:29; Is. 40:28; and Mal. 3:6. ibid., 59.
¹¹⁵This is because the Scriptures do not address the philosophical issues. ibid., 63.
¹¹⁶Ibid., 61.
¹¹⁷Recall from section 1.3 that I am using possibility to designate God’s ability to be causally altered from outside of himself. Weinandy is speaking in terms of immutability here, but the net effect is that an immutable God is impassible.
¹¹⁸Weinandy, Does God Suffer?, 60.
lines that we have already seen—that a hermeneutical decision is necessary in order to reconcile these two ostensibly contradictory truths.

Weinandy presents two complimentary arguments demonstrating how a position of ontological impassibility can do this passage justice, and greater justice than a position of ethical immutability. The first is that it is other people—here Saul—who have changed their position in relation to God. It is, therefore, possible to say that God has not himself changed.¹¹⁹ He then goes on to argue that God’s ‘reactions’ are “an expression of a deeper truth—that of his unchanging and unalterable love for his people and his moral rectitude.”¹²⁰

In the case of Saul, God’s sorrow over Saul is not simply related to Saul’s conduct but God is sorrowful because he, God, does not change: “the All Holy God consistently demands righteousness and this very consistency is expressed in his sorrow.”¹²¹ God’s holy consistency continues even in anguish over those he cares for.

God’s sorrow is, in other words, merely the expression of God’s holy, unchanging, love as another agent alters their relationship to God. God’s ‘reaction’ is based in his otherness: “in a sense God is said to ‘change his mind’ precisely because, as the Wholly Other, ‘he does not change his mind.’”¹²² God’s change of mind, and his sorrow, are expressions of that unchanging love. He argues that “God does not grieve or sorrow because he himself experiences some injury or the loss of some good, nor that he has been affected, within his inner being, by some evil outside cause …rather it accentuates the truth that God’s perfectly actualized goodness is wholly adverse to all that is contrary to goodness.”¹²³

Impassibility is, then, a negative qualifier which ultimately guards our predication such that God’s actions are always understood as the expression of a “passionate love and all-consuming goodness.”¹²⁴ Nothing can be added to God’s perfection, nor can sin deprive good from him who is absolutely good. The philosophical position evolves from reflection on the Scriptures as a means of guarding the integrity of oth-

¹¹⁹Weinandy, Does God Suffer?, 61.
¹²⁰Ibid., 61.
¹²¹Ibid., 61.
¹²²Ibid., 61.
¹²³Ibid., 152-71.
erwise contradictory statements. And here we find Hart’s thesis stated by a different thinker:

This is why most theologians who espouse a suffering God intentionally advocate a panentheistic notion of God—that is, that while God is potentially more than the cosmos, the cosmos is constitutive of his very being. (Those theologians who espouse a suffering God but deny panentheism fail to grasp the logic of their own position.)”¹²⁵

Weinandy does, nonetheless, allow for our experience of God’s emotions to vary. He anchors God’s impassibility in his unchanging love, creation does not causally alter God, but allows for some notion that this unchanging love is expressed and experienced in the different ways we see in Scripture.¹²⁶

Weinandy’s argument is helpful and clear. The essential argument is this: Scripture speaks both of God’s interaction with the world, and his unchangeability. Speaking of both of these faithfully requires adopting a philosophical position. Ontological impassibility is the philosophical position that does this best.

Weinandy’s position that the Scriptures do not present a philosophical argument is undoubtably true. So the question at hand is whether they make a stronger case for God’s being passible than Weinandy grants. We will put aside the philosophical issues until sections 4.3.1.2. and 4.3.2. Nonetheless it is worth mentioning Weinandy’s case is articulated within a framework of Divine Simplicity, and so is vulnerable to the above critique.¹²⁷

Let me begin to explore the scriptural counter-case by articulating a principle which will act as control belief in my biblical interpretation. The principle is this: the language used of God, or dispositions encouraged towards God, should be given as many of its original entailments as its new context allows.¹²⁸

¹²⁶Weinandy, Does God Suffer?, 159–171.
¹²⁷Indeed Weinandy derives a ‘positive’ reason for impassibility from this intellectual framework arguing that as evil is privation, and God is pure Good in pure act, God cannot be affected by evil. ibid., 157.
For example, Cole distinguishes between anthropomorphic and anthropopathic texts.\textsuperscript{129} He argues that there is a difference between an ascription to God of eyes and an ascription of grief.\textsuperscript{130} With the aid of the work of Basil Mitchell he argues that a non-arbitrary reason can be given for suggesting that the ascription to God of nostrils is metaphorical—God is Spirit. But, he says, there is no non-arbitrary reason for construing anthropopathic texts as metaphorical.

Taking this principle and the work of two biblical theologians—Fretheim and Bauckham—I will argue that there is indeed a stronger warrant for God’s passibility than Weinandy grants.\textsuperscript{131} Fretheim recognises the two strands of biblical witness we have been discussing.\textsuperscript{132} Nonetheless, he argues that the pervasive depiction of God’s suffering in the Old Testament demands that we see God as genuinely affected by his relationship with the world.

Fretheim suggests that God suffers on account of three basic motifs: “\textit{because} of the people’s rejection of God as Lord,” “\textit{with} the people who are suffering,” and “\textit{for} the people.”\textsuperscript{133} Let us look at the first of these: God’s grief \textit{because} of his people’s rejection. God grieves, Fretheim points out, as one committed to history, experiencing the disjunction of past and present.\textsuperscript{134} Therefore in Hosea 11 God is grieved by the memory of his history with the people who have rejected him.\textsuperscript{135}

In this passage the language is poignant and rich:

\begin{quote}
When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.
The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{129}Cole is drawing on the work of other theologians at this point. Cole, “The Living God”, 22-23.
\textsuperscript{130}Ibid., 22-23.
\textsuperscript{131}As noted above I cannot engage in detailed exegesis here, but have enlisted the aid of these two outstanding biblical-theologians to present my case.
\textsuperscript{132}Fretheim, \textit{The suffering of God}, 124.
\textsuperscript{133}Emphasis original. Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{134}Ibid., 113-126.
\textsuperscript{135}Ibid., 119-120.
bent down to them and fed them.¹³⁶

The main theme of the passage is God’s unrelenting love, the notes of grief arising from the rejection of God’s historical actions of love. But notice that it is the conflict of emotions that give this passage its drama. After recounting more of this history God asks “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.”¹³⁷

Two things should, therefore, be noticed: that God’s present grief arises due to a historical commitment, that this historical commitment put God in the position where he must commit to a particular course of action which arises in the context of conflicting emotions. In other words this passage depicts God as both clearly causally influenced by the world, and as having to make a contingent choice as to how to respond. God’s emotional life is not disordered, but is portrayed as having complexity.

Given the principle outlined above I can see no exegetical reason why this passage should be regarded as anything other than passibilist in its import. What is the good reason we have to limit this language to metaphor? Perhaps it is the presence of God’s holiness in such passages. God’s holiness is not lost on Fretheim, who points out that the people’s rebellion results in the grief of a “holy God.” But he concludes in the opposite direction: “it is God in all his Godness who grieves.”¹³⁸ I can see nothing within the Scriptures to suggest that this possibility is illicit.

In demonstrating God’s suffering with his people, Fretheim argues that “God is revealed as one who is caught up by the situation, who is genuinely anguished over what has occurred, and who is moved to take action.”¹³⁹ Focusing particularly on the prophetic texts Fretheim demonstrates the wide range of language used of God’s suffering with his people, such as in Jer. 9:17–18.¹⁴⁰ What is most striking is his
observation that the prophet himself is called by YHWH to mourn such that “The
people not only hear the prophet as spokesman of God but they also see the lament-
tation of God embodied in the person of the prophet.”¹⁴¹

If we take this last case a paradigmatic, there is nothing to indicate that the prophetic
communications support impassibility. Indeed, when the prophet is understood as
representative of the divine the prima facie direction of this thread runs clearly to-
wards our grief being theopathic.¹⁴²

Fretheim shows, in his discussion of God’s suffering for his people, how human sin
has cost God. He first points out the instructive nature of the cost involved in the
sacrificial system.¹⁴³ Next he shows passages casting God’s patience in the face of sin
as a burden, or as wearying, to God.¹⁴⁴ Whilst God is described as one who does
not “faint or grow weary,” Fretheim argues that the logic of such passages require
that “God’s life is in some sense being spent,” that he is suffering.¹⁴⁵ God is enduring
something would weary anyone else.

Finally, Fretheim points out the passages whereby God himself is humiliated in order
to bring salvation to his people, paradigmatically in Isa. 42:14.¹⁴⁶ This hints at a
connection between God’s suffering and new creation, but this is is “about as far
along this path as we can go in the OT.”¹⁴⁷

There is, again, no reason to suggest that God’s travail in the light of human sin
should be understood impassibly. There are passages which speak of God’s stability
and unchanging ways. But I would suggest that the Old Testament gives prima facie
warrant for reading God in a chastened-passibilist manner. Let us turn to the New
Testament.

I will draw here on the work of Richard Bauckham. Bauckham’s project is to ar-
ticulate the Christology of the New Testament “in its Jewish context.”¹⁴⁸ Towards

¹⁴²For the term, see: Cole, “The Living God”, 24.
¹⁴⁵Ibid., 141–42.
¹⁴⁶Ibid., 146.
¹⁴⁷Ibid., 146.
the end of this work, having established that the New Testament includes Jesus in the divine identity, Bauckham turns to show how Jesus’ sufferings reveal the divine identity.¹⁴⁹

Bauckham carefully compares Phil. 2:5-11 with the texts of Isaiah 40-55. In the correspondence between the two he notes that Jesus’ suffering and humiliation "ensures that his sovereignty over all things is also a form of his self-giving."¹⁵⁰ This very suffering and humiliation is, in the biblical dynamic, also how Jesus acquires “the function of implementing the eschatological sovereignty of God.”¹⁵¹ In other words, it is because of Jesus’ humiliation that he is vindicated as a part of the divine identity.

This dynamic is seen in John’s theme of Jesus’ being ‘lifted up,’ as well as in the picture of Jesus as the lamb who was slain in Revelation.¹⁵² Jesus’ “enthronement and parousia” are linked to his “sacrificial death” such that “only as the slaughtered Lamb is the Christ of Revelation also the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega.”¹⁵³ Furthermore John’s thematic ‘glory’ is to be understood as “the manifestation of God’s being.” Jesus’ manifestation of the Father is the revelation of who God is.

Bauckham’s case is persuasive. Drawing on the criteria articulated above there is very little reason in any of these passages to understand God’s self-manifestation in Jesus as merely revelation, and not also in some way part of God’s identity.¹⁵⁴ The passage in Revelation is decisive here. Jesus’ is identified as the lamb who slain. The most straightforward way to read the biblical text is to suggest that God’s identity is in some way defined by his interaction with the world.

As a final part of this discussion I propose to briefly focus on an activity which Jenson draws our attention to in this context: petitionary prayer.¹⁵⁵ If God is truly impas-

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¹⁴⁹See chapter 3 of: Bauckham, God Crucified.
¹⁵⁰Ibid., 61.
¹⁵¹Which is not a matter of gaining equality with God, which Jesus can be understood to already have had. Ibid., 58.
¹⁵²Ibid., 62-63.
¹⁵³Ibid., 63.
¹⁵⁴How we should understand ‘identity’ and what this means for our conception of God’s being is explored below in section 4.3.2.
¹⁵⁵As seen in section 2.2.2.1. For him, when considering a position of impassibility, “the really difficult question concerns the meaningfulness of petitionary prayer. Jenson, “Ipse Pater”, 125.
sible, does not the logic of petitionary prayer fall apart? Let us first look briefly at a Elanor Stump’s interaction with and rejection of Aquinas’ articulation of how petitionary prayer works. At the beginning of her article Stump—herself a proponent of a modified divine simplicity—highlights the difficulty raised by the doctrine. What we could imagine prayer doing if God is a morally perfect omnipotent and omniscient being: what would he choose that he would not already have chosen? Stump examines Aquinas’ solution to the problem: “human actions, too, are causes. ‘For,’ Thomas says, ‘we pray not in order to change the divine disposition but for the sake of acquiring by petitionary prayer what God has disposed to be achieved by prayer.’” This, she argues, does not really solve the problem. It is one of the highest expressions of arguments of this type focusing on God’s knowledge and human freedom, but it does not work. In what sense can it truly that a God who plans everything in this way fulfils or responds to my prayer? She then gives an “anthropomorphic” argument, in the vein of the Bible’s portrayal of God as both loving and wanting to be loved, to try and offer a more satisfactory solution. In this argument petitionary prayer is modelled as responsive friendship. She finishes by asking why Jesus waited until the disciples asked him in order to teach them to pray and answers that he did so perhaps “in order to teach …what is implicit throughout the Lord’s Prayer: that asking makes a difference.” Both Stump and Aquinas have sought to show that our petitioning is not incidental to the process of petitionary prayer. Both, in other words, acknowledge the overwhelming of evidence of the Biblical texts that God responds to prayer, and seek to accommodate that fact in some way.

Indeed, to take an example ostensibly favourable to a impassibilist interpretation, 1 John 5:14–15 nevertheless demands responsiveness on the part of God. The supplementary phrase “according to [God’s] will” might define prayer’s teleology, or

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156See: Stump and Kretzmann, “Absolute Simplicity”.
157Stump, “Petitionary Prayer”.
158Reply, a.2. in: ibid., 86.
159With this critique I am in agreement. ibid., 86.
160Stump and Kretzmann, “Absolute Simplicity”, 86.
161Stump, “Petitionary Prayer”, 86–90.
162Ibid., 90.
might be delimiting the kind of condition the one praying is in.\textsuperscript{163} But the hope of being heard and being granted the request is the thematic centre of John’s point. The hope is of a certain divine response to the request.

Jenson’s guidance proves useful here. One again, this is not absolutely decisive evidence, but it adds strong support to a cumulative case. The apparent responsiveness of God to prayer has to be dealt with in any theology, and a passibilist account can accommodate this far more easily than an impassibilist account.

I would suggest, therefore, that the weight of evidence is for a passibilist reading of the Scriptures. Impassibility is not a biblically illicit position, but issues such as petitionary prayer lend a strong prima facie credibility to passibilist readings. Nonetheless, it might be that the theological and philosophical arguments added by Hart against passibilism will be unanswerable. If the exegetical position I have taken only ever results in contradiction there is strong warrant—though not binding warrant—to reevaluate my reading.

I need, therefore, to test my constructive work before deciding whether the wider reading is indeed preferable or not. To this end I will now articulate a theological and philosophical position.

4.3.1.2 A Theological and Philosophical Position

On the basis of our analysis so far several conceptual positions are mandated. Both philosophically and now scripturally we have rejected divine simplicity, or at least suggested that the barriers to assent are too high. We will now sketch a basic set of beliefs about God’s being that follow from this decision.

God must be understood as passible, though it is important to note that the extent of this passibility is not determined by this decision. It does not entail that God is changeable in every way.\textsuperscript{164} God must be reliably who we shows himself to be, not all of God’s being can be causally altered by the world.

I will argue for a God of qualified passibility. This has precedent in the evangelical

\textsuperscript{163}For a discussion of both of these possibilities see: Strecker, \textit{The Johannine Letters}, 200–201.

\textsuperscript{164}Recall Creel’s taxonomy in Section 1.3
tradition. Graham Cole, for example, talks of “essential immutability” and “affect passibility.”¹⁶⁵ This distinction is a helpful one, though I will not appropriate Cole’s language.¹⁶⁶

This position requires that God be in some way temporal (as change is only possible with some kind of before and after). This has support not only by way of the process of elimination we have just engaged in, but also by virtue of current philosophical reflection on the nature of time. There are good reasons for preferring an a-theory (and presentist) understanding of time and doing so seems to require—on grounds such as God’s omniscience—that God is temporal.¹⁶⁷

So then: God must be passible, temporal, and yet unchanging in important ways. Let us take these skeletal assertions and develop them as needed with the aid of, and to defend them against, the work of Hart, Jenson, and Levinas.

4.3.2 The Doctrine Tested

We are, then, defending the thesis that there is something static about God’s life, and something that changes. This static part we will call ‘nature,’ with a subset of that being ‘character.’¹⁶⁸ The part that alters I will call ‘accidents’ by which God’s ‘identity’ is partly composed.¹⁶⁹

God’s identity is, in part, the outworking of his character in time. Jenson shows

¹⁶⁵Cole, God Who Wept, 11.
¹⁶⁶As noted in the introduction I do not think impassibility should be limited to the emotional life of God and so would avoid the language of ‘affect.’ It is because of this fact that I do not have to address a theory of emotions here. Vanhoozer, Remythologising Theology, 404-415.
¹⁶⁷For a well-argued defence of God’s temporality with arguments from an a-theory of time see the following volume. Note, however, that Craig argues that God should be regarded as being a-temporal before creation. This claim is one that goes beyond the scope of this paper, but would, in further research, be worth investigating in terms of the kind of necessity of the world this would mean for God’s being. Craig, Time and Eternity.
¹⁶⁸We will define nature below, but if we take it, for the moment, as the collection of those properties which do not alter it is clear that it cannot be identical with God’s character. For God’s being omnipotent cannot be a part of his character, but is one of the means by which that character is expressed.
¹⁶⁹I do not think this analysis need hinge on Aristotelean terms. All I want to express is that this is a non-necessary property or state of affairs, or similar. God’s identity cannot be wholly accidental. He must, for example, be triune before the creation of the world.
us how to articulate this. Definite descriptions do this work: ‘God is the one who …’ where the ellipsis is a part of his historical actions. God becomes the God who has done and experienced particular things as a result of relationship with the world.

We must add that part of this ellipsis will be arbitrary. God might have made any number of decisions differently and still have expressed his character truly. We must, therefore, say that, in the strongest possible sense, God’s identity is informed by the particularity of genuine choice as a part of his involvement with the world.

But have we not just asserted the very thing Hart warns against? Hart’s ontological and ethics arguments rely on the same fundamental logic. They seem to work so:

1. God has no composition of actuality and potentiality.
2. Nothing is, therefore, accidental to God’s being.
3. God is a necessary being.
4. If the world alters God then not only is this God a metaphysical fable, but the world is necessary, because all of God’s properties are necessary.

This argument is valid. By its force, any content of the ellipsis in the statement ‘God is the one who …’ which alters God’s being is always necessary. This necessity must be understood as de re necessity. In other words the content of the ellipsis could not have been otherwise, for this is the type of necessity that God himself has—and therefore the type of necessity any of his properties have.

We must, therefore, reject Hart’s fundamental premise. The task before us is to see what happens when we reject the premise (1) and all that follows from it. I am therefore, rejecting a compositional ontology and choosing to work within the style of a relational ontology: God is not a nature, but a nature is an abstract entity

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¹⁷⁰As long as we abandon the ontological implications of what he says.
¹⁷¹God’s providential rule of history seems to confront him with genuinely arbitrary choices, as argued above in section 3.2.1.
¹⁷²Hart, “No Shadow”, 189; See also: Hart, “Impassibility as Transcendence”.
¹⁷³Recall the discussion of de dicto and de re necessity from section 2.2.2.3.
which God has. Alvin Plantinga offers a paradigmatic definition of nature in the compositional style, and I will use it: (1') God’s nature is “a property he [God] has essentially that includes each property essential to him.”

Does embracing (1’) lead to the dependence of God upon the world? Plantinga provides another useful discussion here. He is addressing the question of what ‘dependence’ is in the context of Aquinas’ assertion that God cannot depend on anything, that God must have aseity. Plantinga lays out the “sovereignty-aseity intuition” as follows:

1. “He has created everything distinct from himself.”
2. “there is nothing upon which he depends for his existence.”
3. “Everything distinct from him depends upon him”
4. “Everything is within his control.”

He suggests that it is the “notion of control” that is critical to the intuition. Propositions (1)-(3) are special cases of (4). Consider (2): God’s having created the world involves the necessary truth that the world was, in fact, created by God, but “that state of affairs is one whose obtaining is up to him.” Plantinga then makes a similar argument for (1) and (3).

In addition to the expicability of (1)-(3) in terms of (4) he finds no other plausible candidate for articulating dependence. Consider the following definition of dependence: “x depends on y for P if and only if x has P and some proposition or state of affairs relevantly involving y is a necessary condition of x’s having P.” Plantinga dismisses this definition on the grounds that even something as straightforward as God’s having created me necessarily involves the two truths that “I exist” and “I have been created,” which themselves “do not relevantly involve God.”

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175 Plantinga, Does God Have a Nature?, 7.
176 Ibid., 71.
177 It is worth noting that the context of this discussion is whether nominalism can offer a solution to the problem of whether God has a nature. Ibid., 78.
178 Ibid., 71.
179 Ibid., 73.
Plantinga argues that another condition must be added to this definition. He concedes that it is not clear what this condition should be, but holds that the notion of control stands out: both “I exist” and “I have been created” depend on God, thus avoiding the difficulty just encountered.¹⁸⁰

Plantinga draws on Aquinas’ own work to drive this point home. Aquinas, he says, holds that it is possible that the world did not have a beginning.¹⁸¹ Aquinas can accommodate an uncreated universe—if we understand creating as entailing having a beginning—within his rigorous aseity because this world would still be envisaged as within God’s control.¹⁸²

This analysis creates a difficulty, however, and Plantinga puzzles over the nature of abstract objects such as numbers which, he asserts, are both uncreated and contain necessary truths over which God has no power.¹⁸³ Consider a truth such as $2 + 2 = 4$. Numbers cannot have come into being, and numbers are such that this truth could never have been otherwise. Plantinga offers the possibility that God’s nature might be seen as explanatorily prior to such necessary truths, but leaves this as a question for further exploration.¹⁸⁴

Let us set this last difficulty aside for a moment and evaluate Plantinga’s proposal. For it might be that this difficulty is to be preferred to the difficulties offered by divine simplicity, and that his positive proposal has sufficient power to warrant adoption. So, does (1’) combined with Plantinga’s definition of dependence help answer Hart’s criticism? At first glance it does not seem so. Consider the following passage from Plantinga:

We depend on God for our existence; that is, we depend upon God’s creative and sustaining activity for our existence. More explicitly, God’s acting in a creative and sustaining fashion is a necessary condition of our existing. In this last case, the necessary condition in question is a logically necessary condition; it is not possible, at least if traditional theism

¹⁸⁰Plantinga, Does God Have a Nature?, 73.
¹⁸¹Ibid., 81.
¹⁸²Plantinga understands aseity to mean God’s depending on nothing for his “existence and character.” Ibid., 68.
¹⁸³See section IV and V of: Ibid.
¹⁸⁴See section V: Ibid.
is correct, that we should exist and God not create and sustain us.¹⁸⁵

Hart’s notion of dependence is concerned with necessity, and Plantinga is freely conceding that our existing necessarily involves God’s creating us. God has the property, or something very like it, of having created us. We have already seen that creates as much of a difficulty for proponents of simplicity as for a passibilist.¹⁸⁶ Yet this does not take away from the difficult facing the passibilist here.

Some help is gained if we recall that there are two kinds of modality: \textit{de dicto} and \textit{de re} modality.¹⁸⁷ Now it is necessarily true that if we exist then God has the property of creating us, but it is also true that God does not necessarily have to have created us. In other words the statement that “necessarily if we exist then God has the property of having created us” has \textit{de dicto} necessity. The God’s property of having created us does not have \textit{de re} necessity.¹⁸⁸

But again Hart’s criticism is, in a sense, correct. God does have a new property. God is as we know him only because of the existence of the world. But this does not logically make either the world or God’s creating it necessary, only the logical relationship between these two things is necessary. The effect of God’s relationship to the world in time is not an elevation of the world’s existence to necessity. But the world is necessarily dependent on God for its existence. Does this mean that we must concede defeat to Hart?

Here, once again going part of the way with Jenson, the notion of sovereignty is the tool we need. If any of God’s interactions with the world defined his love, or goodness, or truth, then—as these properties are necessary according to the definition of God’s nature which are working from—the world would be \textit{de re} necessary for God to be who he is. God’s unchanging nature must be expressed in, but not conditioned by, the world.

¹⁸⁵There is some terminological debate as the nature of ‘logical’ necessity. It is sometimes used to refer to truths deduced through logic alone, sometimes in the broader sense of any truth true in every possible world. Here Plantinga seems to be using it in the narrower sense. Plantinga, \textit{Does God Have a Nature?}, 69. See: Vaidya, “The Epistemology of Modality”.

¹⁸⁶See section 3.2.1 above for a discussion of this. Plantinga suggests that Aquinas denies that these are properties at all. Plantinga, \textit{Does God Have a Nature?}, 42–43.

¹⁸⁷See section 2.2.2.3.

¹⁸⁸Remember that we have rejected the stance that all of God’s properties are invested with necessity just by virtue of being one of God’s properties.
God’s actions of love, goodness and truth which he performs in the world are those that are expressions of the constancy of his nature. The doctrine of the Trinity and the self-giving love that is integral to it, safeguards precisely this. I will here appeal to Hart’s marvellous articulation of the shaped taxis of the Trinity. Whilst this can be invoked by Hart to support divine impassibility, it can also be invoked in favour of a passibilist position.

The passibilist can thus say that God’s relationship to the world is necessary in only in terms of a logical relationship that imputes no necessity to the world itself. The world’s existence does not alter God’s nature, and therefore, as both accidental and within God’s control, the world takes on none of the necessity that Hart fears. Hart’s ontological and moral arguments are not fatal to this construction⁴⁸⁹.

I will, therefore, accept Plantinga’s account of the nature of God’s dependence, despite the difficulty with abstract objects. This account seems to offer fidelity to the Christian narrative while avoiding Hart’s criticisms. Nor should it be taken that the difficulty Plantinga is speaking of is insurmountable. Indeed he himself, as we have seen, points in the direction of a possible solution. Without jeopardising the project, therefore, this can be a matter further research.

Having accepted this account, the question of the incarnation arises here as a major hurdle for testing this thesis. What happens to God’s nature in the incarnation? If we recall the discussion of Cyril’s Christology in section 2.2.2.1. we can see that Cyril argued that the hypostasis of the Logos exists in two states: before and after the incarnation. The ‘who’ and the ‘how’ or ‘manner’ of existence are distinguished. The Logos enters a new ‘how’ and undergoes a new existential experience. Existential knowledge was added to God’s “God-befitting” knowledge.⁴⁹⁰ The Logos exists in the condition of union of the divine and human natures in his person. A similar distinction exists in Maximus the Confessor’s work.⁴⁹¹

When the Logos assumes a human nature the hypostasis assumes a new mode of being. In so doing there is—as explored in relation to Cyril and Maximus—a commu-

⁴⁸⁹ Though we will see the ontological argument answered in the facet of Christology just below.
⁴⁹⁰ Ad augustas, 29 (ACO 1.1.5.47). Cited in: Gavrilyuk, Impassible God, 156.
nication of idioms to the hypostasis, but no change in divine essence.¹⁹² Thus orthodox Christology—as represented by Cyril and Maximus—would disallow any alteration in the divine ousia as a result of the incarnation. The hypostasis of the Logos, instead, enters a new mode of being. Orthodoxy Christology depends on this being the case.

There is no reason I can see the chastened passibility model I have suggested fails this test. For God's essential properties do not change. Furthermore I want to suggest that when God is himself understood as able to change it does not violate Cyril's understanding of the communication of idioms to suggest that God suffers according to the divine nature.¹⁹³ God is already able to change, and is able suffer—in divine mode—according to the divine nature.¹⁹⁴ The hypostasis suffers in both natures, not because the human nature is communicating a non-divine property or experience to the divine nature, but because the divine nature can already suffer in its own way.¹⁹⁵

Yet both Cyril and Maximus anchor the reliability of God's nature in impassibility and the related characteristics of immutability and simplicity. Can their analysis be co-opted in a passibilist framework? As long as the distinction between nature and mode (‘what’ and ‘how’) holds—and there is no reason to suggest that the distinction would collapse—a passibilist view can safeguard the divine nature. For a passibilist can still speak of an unchanging divine nature, a human nature, and a hypostasis, and of the hypostasis taking on a new mode.

Consider both Cyril and Maximus’ arguments that Jesus’ actions are anchored in God’s nature.¹⁹⁶ Seen in the light of the definition of nature (1’) above, there is no reason why God’s reliability cannot be anchored in such a nature. The nature is still

¹⁹²See sections 2.2.2.1 and 2.2.2.2.
¹⁹³If God is not simple, ‘divine nature’ only describes a part of God’s being. Given that Cyril’s use of ‘divine nature’ is meant to capture all but the hypostasis, I think that, for a passibilist appropriating this formula, ‘divine nature’ should include not just God’s nature but also his non-essential properties.
¹⁹⁴As long as ‘according to the divine nature’ is understood as a qualifier along the lines already seen.
¹⁹⁵As we have seen in section 4.3.1.1. Fretheim makes a strong biblical-theological case for God’s suffering in his divine nature: Fretheim, The suffering of God.
¹⁹⁶For Cyril see, for example: Ad augustas, 29 (ACO 1.1.5.47). Cited in: Gavrilyuk, Impassible God, 156. For Maximus see: Ambigua 1041B–1044A Maximus, The Ambigua.
unchanging. By extension there is no reason to believe that a passibilist vision is not speaking orthodoxly at this point.¹⁹⁷

What about the relationship between human experience and the hypostasis? God in Christ does indeed experience human sorrow. Sorrow has indeed informed God’s identity, but in a manner entirely within God’s control: it has not altered his nature. This is sorrow experienced by the omnipotent God of self-giving love such that it can be enfolded in the divine life because God’s unchanging divine nature is absolutely in control of what he experiences. God’s nature is not altered by these experiences. They, therefore, have no more necessity that the other consequences of God’s being in time which we have seen.¹⁹⁸

It is at this point that a great advantage is given to the passibilist account of God. In assuming the human nature and adopting another mode of being the Logos does not assume the alien experiences of temporality and change, because they are not alien, but rather the experiences temporality in the mode of humanity. This does not remove the element of ‘mystery’ from the truth of incarnation, but it does mean that Jesus’ responsiveness in time has fidelity as an image of the life of God.¹⁹⁹

A challenge is put to the passibilist here, however. One thing that both Maximus and Cyril have in common is the belief that God’s impassibility is one of the key differentiators of the divine and human natures. Even if a passibilist affirms an unchanging nature, an alternative account of what is accomplished for salvation in the Word’s becoming flesh—in terms of theosis—is required. This is, also, Hart’s soteriological challenge. I will sketch an answer to this challenge, and in doing so meet one of Levinas’ concerns.²⁰⁰

Let me modestly propose that the particular aspect of God’s life we are brought into is not the absence of all sorrow but a pattern of being. Our salvation is being rescued by a God who has proven he will overcome the furthest interval to save us, and our

¹⁹⁷I believe this Christology would meet the criteria laid in Gavrilyuk’s excellent article on patristic Christology: Gavrilyuk, “Impassible Suffering”.
¹⁹⁸This maintenance of Christological orthodoxy is another avenue for expressing an answer to Hart’s ontological argument against passibility Hart, “Christian Metaphysics”, 401.
¹⁹⁹As we have already seen in section 4.3.1.1. Bauckham makes a compelling argument to this effect. Bauckham, God Crucified.
²⁰⁰There is a wide body of literature here. A fuller answer is an avenue for further study.
theosis is being patterned according to that pattern. We must remember one of the challenges coming from Levinas’ work: that of the scars of Jesus. While God will wipe every tear from our eyes, the lamb is still the lamb who was slain. Memory, even of sorrow, is, it seems, necessary for true worship.

Consider the joy of those healed by Jesus in his earthly ministry. Sickness becomes a memory and is replaced with wholeness and joy. Memory gives context for joy, though memory itself must also be healed. Levinas’ concern about theodicy is met here: evil is not simply erased, even in its most egregious horrors. It is healed, and it is important to note that healing does not imply comprehension.

The prime question here, of course, is whether we can we use the image of healing for what happens to God’s sorrow. We must be careful to state that God’s woundedness is not like our own for all the reasons of God’s unchanging nature, that he subject to nothing but that which he allows, and so forth. Nonetheless in the death and resurrection of Jesus we see a pattern of wounding and scars. We can say that God’s woundedness and healing is the willingly-undertaken expression of God’s unchanging essence. Sorrow has a place in God’s being. And we must say that its presence does not threaten our salvation. Indeed, it accomplishes and assures it.

It does not threaten our salvation for this reason: it is a woundedness on behalf of the powerless and lost, a self-healing to heal the other, using God’s own power of goodness, love, and joy. Thus God’s sorrow was never a force that disrupted God’s ability to give us an inheritance of joy by theosis. God himself always had the resources to heal the experience of sorrow. We might say—to misappropriate Hart—that this is precisely because the assumption of sorrow was no departure from his own unalterable character of self-giving love.

²⁰¹ Though memory can be paradoxical. See: Volf, Memory.

²⁰² If we take the ‘resolution’ of Job’s difficulty is not comprehension but a response. It seems unlikely that our eschatological destiny is to understanding everything that ever happened to us, but rather to have an experience somewhat analogous to Job’s.

²⁰³ See Sloane’s discussion of this issue: “Here, reflection on Jesus’ wounds is instructive. The visible wounds of the resurrected Jesus are not presented in either the gospels or the Apocalypse as signs of his current disability, the elevation of disability into his glorified form, but of the overcoming of death and of the clear identity of the risen Jesus with the one who was crucified. Of course, the form of the victory of the Crucified One is precisely through (and so over) death; but it is also the victory of the Risen One who has conquered death and Hades and who is, then, the Lord of life. The wounds are fundamental to his ‘storied identity’, and so woundedness can be fundamental to ours, but this is
The major objection that could be aimed at this work is Patrïpassianism. This is normally seen as a controversy over the subject of Jesus’ human experiences, over modalism. Nonetheless, some patrïpassian thought—as seen in Callistus and Praxeas—was more subtle than this and held that “the Father participated in the sufferings of the flesh without being overcome by these sufferings.”

Even in this more subtle form of the doctrine the problem was not that the Father was held to suffer *simpliciter*. Christology was the point of concern: the flesh is made out to be the Son, and the Spirit inhabiting that flesh was the Father. This is very different from the claim I am making, which is that the divine nature is passible in a qualified way and so the Logos suffers both in a divine and human manner. There is also the additional claim that, as the Son suffers, so also the Father must suffer *according to his own mode*. For it seems to me that if the Son suffers in the divine nature, this means that the two other members of the Trinity suffer according to their own mode of relation to the Son. This is not modalism, nor is it an illicit division of the Son’s natures between Father and Son. It is not, therefore, fairly labeled patrïpassion.

### 4.3.3 The Doctrine Vindicated

Whilst tentative, this seems to vindicate a chastened-passibilist doctrine of God against the charges laid down by Hart, whilst incorporating the key points and challenges learnt from Jenson and Levinas. This position has scriptural fidelity and is philosophically and theologically innocent of the kind of problematic dependence that Hart argues accompanies any passibilist position. It appropriates Jenson’s understanding of God’s control over all he experiences, the understanding of the work done by the shaped infinity of the trinitarian *taxis* articulated by Hart, meets some of the key Christological litmus texts met in Cyril (and to a lesser extent Maximus),

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204 This is Gavrïlyuk’s reconstruction of Callistus and Praxeas. See chapter 4 of: Gavrïlyuk, *Impassible God*.

205 Ibid., 97-98.
and meets Levinas’ concern about the trivialising of evil.

In short, the doctrine has met the challenge that was set out at the beginning of this thesis: to articulate a doctrine of impassibility that is evangelically-situated whilst meeting the concerns and criticisms of Hart, Jenson, and Levinas insofar as these could appropriately be met.

4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, I have accomplished what I set out to do at the beginning of this thesis. I have found that a passibilist account of God’s involvement in history can not only be scripturally founded, but meet the challenges presented by the work of Hart, Jenson, and Levinas. This account of chastened-passibility does, therefore, provide a Christian answer to the post-phenomenological ontologies of violence, without either surrendering God’s form, or the world’s contingency. As such I believe it has some potential to be useful as part of the important public conversation I outlined in my introduction.

In the course of this inquiry Jenson’s work has been shown to be creative and challenging. However, because of this very creativity, I have found much with which I am in disagreement. In my internal critique I have argued that Jenson’s theological system looks, surprisingly, to be self-referentially incoherent. From the perspective of my external critique of Jenson, there were difficulties with some of the key theological structures that allow Jenson to articulate his doctrine of impassibility. In terms of the relation between God and world Jenson’s Trinity dissolves into something like a binity with a specious present which is the ever-flowing boundary of a process of transformation. The Son’s life is shrunk to a durationless boundary between past and future: Jenson’s thought results in a historicist dualism in both history and Trinity.

Jenson understanding of being and narrative foregrounds power as the main ontological differential between creation and God. This results in a question about how God can possess any property such as being just. Similarly Jenson’s articulation of time accrued a considerable number of conceptual burdens and philosophical fi-
Jenson’s use of Cyril was found to miss important aspects of Cyril’s text, such that he cannot straightforwardly claim to be Cyrillian. Indeed he departs from Cyril at critical points, such as his understanding of the two natures. In the course of my exploration of how Jenson’s own Christology works I examined Jenson’s understanding of impassibility and I concluded that I can appropriate neither his Christology, nor his understanding of impassibility.

The exploration of Jenson’s use of Maximus made it similarly clear that Jenson’s understand of the relation between the two natures of Christ cannot be sustained either outside of his revisionary metaphysics or by appeal to Maximus. Finally, I suggested that Jenson’s understanding of the the necessity of sin and death in God’s decision of election does indeed fall foul of Hart’s charge that Jenson is vulnerable to Ivan Karamazov’s critique.

Jenson has, however, provided a number of positive contributions to this exploration. His Christology showed the danger faced by any system that includes God in temporal becoming. Jenson highlighted one of the tools for so guarding God’s temporal becoming: some sort of shaped infinity. Furthermore Jenson allowed me to find important sources for the constructive phase of this project: Cyril and Maximus. Both of these figures provided key tests for discerning the orthodoxy of my Christology.

Finally, Jenson has made the metaphysical world strange, and so forces us to question the arbitrariness of our own metaphysical boundaries. Jenson shows us the fragility of all metaphysical systems. Such an awareness allowed me to ask what certain language actually accomplishes, both in Jenson’s system and Harts.

Hart offered a similarly creative, though more orthodox account of impassibility. Hart’s conception of infinity offers several attractive features: the constancy of the immanent and economic, the articulation of the relationship between God and world in a way that embraces both difference and sameness, while grounding both of these in the trinitarian *taxis*. Nonetheless, because Hart’s conception of infinity—however much it seems to illuminate the logic of the incarnation—leads to universalism and
questions of the cogency of speaking of the cost of the incarnation, it had to be appropriated carefully.²⁰⁶

Hart’s understanding of the analogy of being was found to be vulnerable to the criticisms that can be levelled at the work of Przywara. His work is also potentially vulnerable in how he understand the real distinction. Hart’s appropriation of Cyril’s Christology is generally true to Cyril’s project, but in so doing he has smoothed out some of the ‘splinters’ in Cyril’s work. In particular, Cyril’s notion of the Logos gaining a new existential understanding in the incarnation does not seem to be able to be satisfactorily expressed within Hart’s system.

Divine simplicity was found to have inherent conceptual difficulties such that the position is unlikely to satisfy one who is not already committed to it. It is a matter of control belief. This on its own is not reason enough to reject simplicity: almost all major metaphysical positions have areas of difficulty. The fact, however, that the difficulties arise in areas precisely where Hart seeks to portray simplicity and impassibility as providing a solution to the problem of how to conceive of God’s relationship to the world means that it does not appear to have the persuasive explanatory power Hart wants.

Hart’s universalism is marvellous in its consistency with his overall position and explanatory scope. I depart from it, nonetheless, for two reasons. The first is that I find a universalist reading of the scriptures unconvincing, the second is that my life experience simply does not allow me to make sense out of the position that human beings always will the good, even if by doing so they ignorantly will evil.

Hart’s position is, therefore, not one that must be adopted by the force of its positive statement. Yet Hart still had several arguments against a passibilist stance which I needed to engage during my constructive work.

Levinas’ thought provided a further guide and challenge before I embarked on my constructive work. For Levinas form is always betrayal. Christianity, however, holds that infinity and form do not stand in antithesis.²⁰⁷ To see Jesus’ life is to see the life of God. Levinas’ disavowal of form was therefore rejected and Hart’s project,

²⁰⁶ And in a manner somewhat contrary to Hart’s intention.
²⁰⁷ One of the central thrusts of Hart’s work, as we have seen in section 3.1.1.
in this regard, affirmed.\textsuperscript{208}

Levinas’ notion of ‘infinite responsibility’ was similarly rejected. In this respect I argued that something like John Hare’s vision is to be preferred over Levinas’: we are met not just with demand, but the gift of it having been met for us, along with the assistance to meet it in the future.\textsuperscript{209} But in affirming that God meets his own obligation in the incarnation, it becomes clear that God’s position towards the world must be altered by his actions within it.

One of Levinas’ chief concerns is to avoid the reduction of the other to the same. Part of what Levinas wants to defend here is freedom, that the world not be made in the image of the few through violence.\textsuperscript{210} In the Christian narrative there is an image of God, and, ultimately, those rejecting that image will be judged. All but universalist thought requires of Christians the admission that judgement—violence—is, when exercised by God, not evil.\textsuperscript{211}

In other words, with regards to the critical area of violence, Christian thought and Levinas’ thought were found to depart. Peace in human community, Christianity holds, is only possible by common allegiance to a particular form. We drew upon Hart’s thought once again to argue that, because of the trinitarian taxis, this is allegiance to a form that nonetheless has room for genuine otherness.\textsuperscript{212}

Levinas’ stance on theodicy proved helpful indeed. Levinas’ insistence that the ‘meaning’ of evil is incomprehensible was seen to be a deeply biblical notion, found in the book of Job in particular. By the same token we are prohibited from declaring evil’s effects meaningless. The wounds of sin and death are woven deeply into our selves and our experience. Healing was found to involve acknowledging the impact of sin insofar as it was a part of the meaning of history.

To the extent that Levinas’ critique of theodicy is correct I believe it highlights the deficiency of any articulation of God’s relationship with the world which does not take seriously Jesus’ scars. Jesus’ scars do not elevate evil itself into the risen identity

\textsuperscript{208}Though, again, used in such a way that Hart would not recognise its validity.
\textsuperscript{209}See: Hare, \textit{The Moral Gap}.
\textsuperscript{210}See his concern with politics and war in the early part of: Levinas, \textit{Totality}.
\textsuperscript{211}On this, see: Boersma, \textit{Violence, Hospitality}.
\textsuperscript{212}There are some things that See part 2.II. of: Hart, \textit{Beauty}.

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of Christ, but are markers of an identity formed in response to it.

Many of Levinas’ positive theses were rejected. However—despite the often-vast difference between Levinas’ thought and Christian thought—by paying attention to that which Levinas is seeking to preserve, it is possible to offer a Christian response to these concerns.

Each of these threads came together in my articulation of a chastened passibility. Here I found that such a doctrine could be scripturally situated, in a way that was compelling, but not in such a manner that it was a defeater to impassibilist interpretations. I then took a number of theological and philosophical positions: God is passible, God is temporal, God is unchanging in important ways.

By drawing on the strengths of these three thinkers, and seeking to answer their challenges I then took some further positions: God possesses both nature and ‘accidents,’ God’s nature is a property containing all his essential properties, that God’s control over something is critical for working out whether he is dependent on it, that the only necessity in God’s relationship with the world is a logical relationship that imputes no problematic necessity to either the world or God, that this is so because God’s nature is expressed in and not defined by time.

I found that not only do these positions meet Hart’s objections, but they also allow for an orthodox Christology. Indeed there is a greater fidelity between Jesus’ life and that of God’s, including an account of how sorrow in the life of God would not threaten our salvation. Finally, this Christology was shown not to be Patripassian. In this way, as I have said above, my purpose in this thesis is fulfilled.

There are, however, a number of areas for further research. The most obvious stems from the fact that my account of chastened-passibility was concerned with answering only to objections of Jenson, Hart and Levinas. Providing a comprehensive account of the chastened-passibilist doctrine I have sketched above would allow not only for further exploration of the position’s orthodoxy, but might yield further resources in engaging with the difficulty and timely question of religious violence.

There is, along these lines, need for a fuller articulation of the area of soteriology and
*theosis*. Can we adapt all that Cyril and Maximus would want to say about *theosis* within a chastened-passibilist framework? If not, is orthodoxy sacrificed?

In adopting Hart’s position with regard to the absence of opposition between the infinite and the finite, the question of analogy is implicitly asked. How do these two realities relate? Since Hart’s account of analogy was found to be problematic, some account would have to be offered.\(^1\) Furthermore, there is the possibility that the real distinction and the notion of participation on which it depends cannot be adopted by a non-classical theist.

There is the question of God and Time. Are there implications deriving from adopting an a-theory of time which might impair creation’s independence from God? What, for example, would be the effect of Craig’s argument that God should be regarded as being a-temporal before creation?\(^2\) As seen in the engagement with Hart in this paper, such details can make a critical difference to the cogency of a position.

Plantinga’s notion of dependence was shown to have a potential difficulty accounting for God’s power over abstract objects. This would need to examined for similar reasons. This is particularly so as it serves as one of the key pieces of intellectual framework in my construction.

I have, therefore, accomplished what I set out to do at the beginning of this thesis, whilst opening up important avenues for further research. I have been able to offer an account of chastened-passibility which appears to provide a Christian answer to the post-phenomenological ontologies of violence, without either surrendering God’s form, or the world’s contingency. As such I believe that both it, and the further research arising from it, have some potential to be useful as part of the important and ongoing public conversation around religious violence.

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\(^1\) The degree to which Hart has successfully appropriated Nyssa’s thought on analogy, might be an interesting avenue of exploration insofar as it opens up yet another interlocutor.

\(^2\) See: Craig, *Time and Eternity*. 257
Chapter 5

Appendix A: Jenson’s Reading of Barth

Barth’s influence on Jenson is such that Jenson can see his project—at least in the early stages of his career—as the completion of Barth’s. I will here seek to evaluate the fidelity of Jenson’s reading of Barth. I do this not only to understand Jenson as interpreter—how Jenson’s distinctive concerns shape his reading of another thinker—but to help calibrate our reading of Jenson’s theological arc more generally. Both of these are important for making an internal judgement about Jenson’s work, and offer this in support of the above project.

For these reasons we will now engage in an evaluation of the fidelity of Jenson’s reading of Barth. Given the breadth of Barth’s thought and his degree of influence on Jenson a focused decision will need to made about where to focus our attention. For the sake of this thesis, there are two critical points: Barth’s understanding of ‘religion’ and Barth’s understanding of analogy and the relationship between eternity and time.

These points are key because Jenson’s project is counter-dependent on the definition of religion he reads into Barth. That is to say that his theological starting point is—seen above in section 2.1.2—an ‘anti-religious’ one, where ‘religion’ is what he understands Barth to be talking about in Romans II. Encoded in this understanding
of religion are the questions of analogy and time and eternity. These are, Jenson argues, relationships that Barth fails to articulate in a manner that is successfully anti-religious.¹ The shape of Jenson’s positive thesis regarding the relationship between time and eternity can be seen in his reaction to his understanding of Barth here, and the question of impassibility is a subset of this relationship. Evaluating these points will both further the internal critique and aid our understanding of some of the conceptual moves we will have to engage with in the external critique.

This evaluation will proceed by offering, where necessary, a more detailed survey of Jenson’s understanding of how the relevant concepts work in Barth—expanding on the above summary—before examining the work of Barth himself, and that of contemporary Barth scholarship.²

5.1 Jenson on ‘Religion’ in Barth

Let us first take a wider view of Jenson’s understanding of ‘religion’ in relation to Barth’s work. Jenson, as we have seen, relies primarily on Barth’s Romans II for his understanding of Barth’s notion of ‘religion.’ Jenson casts Barth’s work in Romans II in a Socratean light. In the same way that Socrates deconstructed the Athenian’s conception of the harmony of their historical expression of justice with that of absolute, timeless Justice, so Barth, working with a Kierkegaardian ‘infinite qualitative difference’ between time and eternity, deconstructs Christian religion.³ Just as Socrates’ dialectic “has recurred again and again to make inwardly impossible every new abiding city in which western man has tried to come to rest,” so Barth destroyed the ability for Christian religion to claim to be “faith in God.”⁴

How is this accomplished? Jenson argues that both Barth and neo-Protestant liberalism were working—despite the fact that Barth was seeking to escape neo-Protestantism

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¹See section 2.1.2.
²Due to the incredible volume of scholarship on Barth this examination of the fidelity of Jenson’s reading will deliberately engage only the most prominent and pertinent English-language Barth scholarship.
³Jenson, After God, 8.
⁴Ibid., 10–11.
after Safenwil—with a religious tradition inherited from Parmenides of Elea. The comparison of Barth’s work in *Romans II* with Socrates is not accidental: they are using the same inherent tension in a religious vision that is shared at the precise and critical point of the definition of time and eternity as *opposition* to one-another.⁵

Jenson understands Parmenides and the Greek philosophical tradition as religious thinkers. So too, the inheritance they bequeathed the western world is religious. It is worth pausing to survey his understanding of this inheritance given that this is the source of the ‘religion’ in Barth’s work.⁶

In Parmenides’ religious vision granted by the goddess in the early fifth century B.C.E. two dynamics were established in the western religious tradition: the positing of a timeless reality in which the tabescent and ephemeral character of life in time finds its simple inversion, and the capacity for *saving knowledge* of such reality.⁷ The goddess’ message is simple: time and death are illusory, and Parmenides must turn from that illusion to eternity. This “overcoming—or evading—death by positing a timeless reality set above our stories in time has remained the structure of what we have in the West called ‘religion.’”⁸

Parmenides, however, never says how such a turning to eternity is achieved. Here Socrates is the archetypal figure.⁹ While not endorsing a metaphysical system like Parmenides’ he constantly disclosed the insufficiency of the temporal manifestation

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⁶Jenson is deliberate in disqualifying any distinction between ‘philosophy’ and theology, and characterises philosophy as always ultimately religious. For a discussion in some of his most mature writing see: Jenson, *Systematic Theology vol. 1*, 9–11. I think the evident division of disciplines and difference of practise seen through history—from Tertullian through medieval period to modern times—falsifies this claim, even if the disciplines are sometimes directed at the same object, and can be complimentary. Interestingly David Novak—a Jewish theologian—in a piece interacting with Jenson’s work makes the point that theology is better positioned to recognise its historical rootedness than philosophy due to its basis in historical revelation. He then suggests that this gives the justification to reject the universal metaphysical pretensions of philosophy. The case is overstated—one thinks of the Pyrrhonian skeptical argument that we cannot know what is naturally good as demonstrated by disagreement over it—but history does indeed seem to belong to Christianity and Judaism in a way that is not necessarily so in philosophy. But, of course, any such line of reasoning presupposes an intelligible distinction between the two disciplines, as Novak himself argues. Novak, “Theology and Philosophy”, 45–6
⁷Ibid., 10–13.
⁸Ibid., 10–13.
⁹Ibid., 10–13.
of concepts like ‘justice’ and ‘beauty,’ and thus necessarily pointed his hearers to eternity. He also embodies how to go about this quest: at Plato’s hands in the *Symposium* Socrates becomes “the incarnation of the religious possibility.”¹⁰

This takes the form of turning from the temporal to the eternal. During the banquet Socrates gives an address on Eros (the banquet’s theme) wherein he suggests that Eros exists between time and eternity, divinity and mortality, and as such “is a ‘demon,’ an unstillable spiritual energy—for all value is in immortality, mortality is unfulfillment, and Eros is a child of both. In the grip of Eros, ‘the philosopher’ step by step abandons the temporal objects of his life to seek immortal values, until ‘suddenly he sees an amazing essential value …which always is and neither begins nor is destroyed.’”¹¹ It becomes apparent that by the end of the *Symposium* that Plato is portraying Socrates himself as Eros personified.

Finally, Aristotle is the provider of western religion’s God. Aristotle answers his own driving question “what is the being of beings?”—what it is in anything such that it is—by suggesting that it is the *changeless* in things that is their being. Aristotle further answers the question that Jenson identifies as the “hidden unrest in all Greek philosophizing,” namely: “can it be that all things pass away?” with ‘no.’¹² Thus, given that all things that are the direct object of our experience do pass away, Aristotle posits God as:

Absolutely present being, who fully satisfies Parmenides’ postulate. He is the purely Present to himself and all things, without past or future. He is the exemplary fulfillment of the meaning of all beings: never not to be. In him, the denial of death is triumphant.¹³

Jenson therefore summarises Barth’s definition of religion as “one or another attempt to evade the realities of time, a quest for eternity.”¹⁴ In Christianity, however, reality is apprehended as *history*. In Romans God is the justifier of the ungodly:

If I am justified as ungodly, then my life is a constant departure from

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¹¹Ibid., 10-13.
¹²Ibid., 10-13.
¹³Ibid., 10-13.
¹⁴Ibid., 7-8.
what I am towards what I am not yet. It is a choice for the insecurity of the non-given, for transcendence in time. Again, if I am justified as ungodly, then I do not justify myself, then the meaning of my life is essentially enacted as a conversation with one other than myself. Then life is inherently antiphonal. For I cannot live by what I am not yet except as I am addressed by one who is what I am not: the justification of the ungodly is necessarily communication. Self-transcendence in time and communication are exactly the two notes of all typical modern understandings of the historicity of human being. Barth has himself given as good a summary as any other: ‘The history of being begins, continues and is completed when something other than itself and transcending its own nature encounters it, approaches it and determines its being in the nature proper to it, so that it is compelled and enabled to transcend itself in response and in relation to this new factor.’¹⁵

This talk of the inherent antiphonality of life made transparent in justification is anchored in—or reveals—the freedom of God to be other than what he was in the past. God must be able to promise, and to justify “freely in defiance of the condemnation he has just spoken.”¹⁶ God must not only be able to promise but to defy himself. There is no way the events of the incarnation can be held together except as defiance in the future of a word spoken in the past.

When this understanding is mixed with ‘religion’ conceptual catastrophe ensues. Christian ‘religion’ is “a religion about an historical, temporal event.”¹⁷ This admixture mean that “God is to be at once God of history and changelessly eternal, he must be the God of past history. …He is the God who has a ‘plan’ of salvation, i.e., a fixed course set by past decisions and events. …Moreover the God of past history in the moralistic God, who holds us to what we have done and so are.”¹⁸ A changelessly eternal God cannot both condemn and then justify as the Christian God must.¹⁹

¹⁵Jenson, After God, 19. The Barth quote is from: Barth, KD III.2, 189. Jenson gives no date for this work.
¹⁶Jenson, After God, 22-3. Italics mine.
¹⁷Ibid., 19.
¹⁸Ibid., 22.
¹⁹Ibid., 22.
The understanding of history upon which this whole analytic rests is clearly that which Jenson articulates above as typically modern: history as self-transcendence. The problem, it seems, can be articulated in this manner: the events of the incarnation (and history generally) have no unity except in the future. An unchangeably eternal God would crack apart in the attempt to hold together the contradiction of condemnation and justification. Only the future can reconcile contradiction.

There are two strands to this reflection. A new state of affairs must be able to be come to pass (a promise fulfilled). The second is that, in the case of the incarnation, the promise involves a contradiction. Even if we attribute talk of ‘contradiction’ to hyperbole (and there is good reason, at least within God After God, to think that it is not), Jenson is, at minimum, referring here to self-transcendence. This is, of course, Jenson’s own analysis. That his analysis is, however, meant to be seen as a reliable guide to what is occurring in Barth’s work is seen by his closing summary of the chapter of God After God where this analysis is situated: “The plot of this history … matches exactly the dialectics of the Commentary on Romans.”

It is worth noting that, as will now become significant, the primary focus Jenson has here is time: Barth’s playing on the difference between time and eternity to deconstruct religion. It is because of this dialectic that Jenson argues Romans II was a watershed moment where ‘historical religion’ both reached its zenith and collapsed. Such is Jenson’s account of ‘religion’ in Barth: it is tied to a dialectic of time and eternity which cannot be truly joined to Christian faith. We will now explore Barth’s thought itself in order to establish the fidelity of this reading.

5.2 Jenson’s Reading of ‘Religion’

Let us begin with Barth’s definition of religion itself. Barth speaks of religion as the “last and noblest human possibility.” It is “the supreme possibility of all possibilities; and consequently grace … can never be a possibility above, or within,

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²⁰Jenson, After God, 23.
²¹Ibid., 7-19.
²²Barth, Romans, 240.
or by the side of the possibility of religion.”²³ Grace is “man’s [sic] divine possibility.”²⁴ Religion brings the knowledge that there is no further human possibility: “if God encounters and confronts men [sic] in religion, He encounters and confronts them everywhere.”²⁵ As McCormack writes radicalism “drinks the last drops of the religious possibility and in so doing, testifies to the negation of all human possibilities.”²⁶

Religion undoes itself: it “compels us to the perception that God is not to be found in religion.”²⁷ In being negated, therefore—in being the locus of judgement, in allowing itself to be negated—religion (which is also identified with the Church at this point in Barth’s thought) can also be the locus of revelation, pointing beyond itself.²⁸ Only in seeking to preserve itself does religion become that which Barth criticises.²⁹

What we have seen so far seems to sit well with Jenson’s reading. But we should recall that Jenson tightly binds this basic dynamic to the dialectic of time and eternity. As will soon be seen, Barth himself asserts that the time/eternity dialectic is simply a tool subordinate to his real concern which could be jettisoned. Let us turn to that concern.

One of the central problems that Barth tackles “both in Romans and the Church Dogmatics …was a problem he shared with modern theology generally, namely, how to speak of the ‘otherness’ of God without resorting to metaphysics.”³⁰ Or, to put it in another way: “how to understand the nature of, and the grounds for, human knowledge (in the strict sense of Erkenntnis of God).”³¹ Or put yet again differently, the relationship between Nature and Grace.

For Barth Nature and Grace cannot be co-ordinated, Grace is oriented to Nature

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²³Barth, Romans, 241-2.
²⁴My emphasis. ibid., 242.
²⁵Ibid., 244.
²⁶McCormack, Critically Realist Dialectical Theology, 284.
²⁷Barth, Romans, 242.
²⁸McCormack, Critically Realist Dialectical Theology, 285.
²⁹Ibid., 285.
³¹McCormack, “Readings of Barth”, 125.
only as miracle, a contradiction of human capacity.\textsuperscript{32} In Romans II God cannot be understood as a counter-pole to this world’s existence; our conception of infinity is simply the finite “stripped of all its limitations and projected on to a higher being.”\textsuperscript{33} As a projection, the infinite thus remains “inseparably bound to the finite as its antithesis. …God is the Eternal, not the Infinite; the Origin, not the First Cause set next to and in a series with other causes.”\textsuperscript{34} God is unknowable; “knowledge of God is possible only as a divine possibility (miracle!) and never as a human possibility.”\textsuperscript{35}

Yet in Jesus Christ God reveals himself.\textsuperscript{36} Barth writes:

If the power of grace were identical with what is usually understood by visible piety and observed experience the imperative—present yourselves not to the will of sin, but present yourselves unto God—would be meaningless. How can it be that sin will not continue to reign in the vast realm of human possibility, from which the whole world of enthusiastic religious exaltation of soul cannot be excluded? How is it possible for the man of the world to will the will of God, however pious he may be? How can what is finite, even though it be mounted upon the highest rung of the ladder of religion, comprehend infinity? \textit{Finitum non capax infiniti.} The religious man can, it is true, comprehend the conflict between his experience of grace and his proneness to sin; but what he understands is a conflict between one human possibility and another human possibility. We cannot, if we are honest, describe this conflict as the victory of grace. At best, the truth of God and the truth of sin are ever balanced against one another as ‘Yes’ and ‘No’. But this is no radical transformation of human existence from life to death and from death to life; and in this experience of conflict we are not existentially at God’s disposal; for the reality of God still remains something which is distinct from the reality of human \textit{lusts}, and the yearnings of religion are of the

\textsuperscript{32}Hunsinger, “Mediator of Communion”, 164.
\textsuperscript{33}McCormack, \textit{Critically Realist Dialectical Theology}, 247.
\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., 247.
\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., 248.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., 248.
same order as our sexual and intellectual and other desires.³⁷

Barth uses the time-eternity dialectic to drive this separation home. That, however, Barth sees the time/eternity dialectic as a tool with which to enforce the gap between Grace and Nature becomes clear in his response to Paul Althaus’ criticism of Romans II. Althaus maintained that Barth’s dialectic between time and eternity leads to a complete devaluation of history and an empty knowledge of God. Barth responds (in a postcard sent to Althaus) that the dialectic of time and eternity was merely “apparatus” and not his “real concern. …The time-eternity dialectic was not directly identical with the subject-matter to which he wished to bear witness. And because that was so, it could be dispensed with without real loss.”³⁸

It is clear that Barth’s understanding of his own work—or at least his intention—is that the time/eternity dialectic is subordinated to his concern with the relationship between nature and grace. That we have in Althaus another interpreter that understood the time/eternity dialectic to be central to Barth’s concern should give us pause before we suggest that Jenson had misread Romans II, however. Any reading is complicated by Barth’s use of Kierkegaardian ‘indirect communication,’ “which seeks not so much to convince the reader of an argument as it does to clear away obstacles to the Spirit’s work of making her to be a witness to the truth.”³⁹ It would perhaps be more accurate to say that Jenson has misread Barth’s intention rather than Romans II.

5.3 Jenson’s Reading of Time and Eternity

We have seen in section 2.1.2 that Jenson argues for a three-fold articulation of time in Barth (pre, post, and supra-temporality), a framework within which Barth argues for a “God-in-himself” as prototype of “God-in-his-revelation.”⁴⁰ These realities are

³⁷Barth, Romans, 212-3.
³⁸Karl Barth to Paul Althaus, undated postcard, postmarked sometime in 1924, copy in Karl Barth-Archiv, Basle, Switzerland. Cited in: McCormack, Critically Realist Dialectical Theology, 265-6
³⁹Ibid., 243.
⁴⁰Jenson, After God, 153.
joined by the Son as both electing God and elected man.⁴¹ But there is still a disjunction between them that Jenson argues is problematic. Let us now see the extent to which this is true of Barth’s work.

In the Church Dogmatics Barth criticises his own use of the time/eternity dialectic in Romans II:

> We were well on our way to … a reduction of God’s eternity to the denominator of post-temporality, the eternally future, [just] as the Reformers had that of pre-temporality and the Neo-Protestants of supra-temporality. …we had not seen the biblical conception of eternity in its fullness.⁴²

Barth is stressing that God’s eternity involves pre, supra, and post-temporality and, furthermore, that in seeking to reject neo-protestantism he ended up with a similar one-sidedness. In other words, Barth missed the real teleology of time.⁴³

So how does he come to understand the relationship between time and eternity? His discussion of time and eternity in CD II/1—the locus classicus of his discussion—is, at first glance, convoluted.⁴⁴ Barth first asserts that “time can have nothing to do with God,” before writing a few pages later that “God has time because and as He has eternity.”⁴⁵

In order to discern what is meant here, it is worth first paying attention to the fact that this discussion of time is found in the context of a discussion of “The Perfections of Divine Freedom,” and bearing in mind that the opening discussion of this entire chapter is “The Being of God as the One who Loves in Freedom.”⁴⁶ Barth’s own summary of this opening discussion is that “God is who He is in the act of His revelation. God seeks and creates fellowship between Himself and us, and therefore He loves us. But He is this loving God without us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in the

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⁴¹Jenson, *Alpha and Omega*, 86-94.
⁴²Barth, *CD II.1*, 634-5.
⁴⁴See the section entitled ‘The Eternity and Glory of God’ in chapter 6, section 31 of: Barth, *CD II.1*.
⁴⁵Ibid., 608-9; 611-12.
⁴⁶Ibid., 440; 257.
freedom of the Lord, who has His life from Himself.”⁴⁷ God’s freedom, the asymmetrical relationship between grace and nature emphasised in the above discussion of Barth’s understanding of religion, and God’s trinitarian being are all emphasised by Barth at the beginning of this long discussion culminating in an examination of time.

These, I would suggest, function as hermeneutical keys for deciphering Barth’s ensuing discussion of time. God’s eternity, Barth asserts, is “a quality of His freedom.”⁴⁸ Eternity must therefore, for Barth, ensure the preservation of God’s absolute freedom. Furthermore, “Eternity is God in the sense in which in Himself and in all things God is simultaneous, i.e., beginning and middle as well as end, without separation, distance or contradiction”⁴⁹

The thought-form which allows Barth to so directly identify God with eternity is, it seems, the Trinity. After Barth discusses three forms of eternity in God (pre, post, and supra-temporality), he says the following:

Pre-temporality, supra-temporality and post-temporality are equally God’s eternity and therefore the living God Himself …This is the last thing which we have to emphasise in connexion with the concept of eternity. Like every divine perfection it is the living God Himself. It is not only a quality he possesses. …It is not only a form of being in which He shares, so that it could belong, if need be, to other realities as well, or exists apart from Him in itself. …this radically distinguishes the Christian knowledge of eternity from all religious and philosophical reflection on time and what might exist before and after time. …The Christian knowledge of eternity has to do directly and exclusively with God Himself, and with Him as the beginning before all time, the turning point in time, and the end and goal after all time. This makes a complete mystery, yet also completely simple. In the last resort when we think of eternity we do not have to think in terms of either the point or the line, the surface or space. We have simply to think of God Himself, recognising and ador-

⁴⁷Barth, *CD II.1*, 257.
⁴⁸Ibid., 608.
⁴⁹Ibid., 608. Italics mine.
ing and loving the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. …eternity is His essence.\textsuperscript{50}

These interlocking factors shed light on the otherwise odd pair of assertions that “time can have nothing to do with God” and that God “has time.” In the assertion that time has nothing to do with God Barth is seeking to guard against any sense in which God is conditioned by time, that is, any sense in which his freedom is impinged by time:

It is quite correct, as in the older theology, to understand the idea of eternity and therefore God Himself first of all in this clear antithesis. …‘from everlasting to everlasting,’ which is so common in both Old and New Testaments, may be regarded as particularly significant. It can be taken to mean from duration to duration, that is, in pure duration. This is how God exists in distinction from us who exist from one time to another, but never in pure duration. …In this duration God is free. It is the principle of the divine constancy, of the unchangeableness and therefore the reliability of the divine being, which we previously recognised as the determination of His freedom. …God really is free to be constant. The reason why He is free to be constant is that time has no power over Him. As the One who endures He has all power over time.\textsuperscript{51}

On the one hand eternity is to be understood in antithesis to time to the extent that, while we find that all our experience is conditioned by time (wherein our past, present and future fall apart), God is in no sense conditioned or limited by temporal separation. But, on the other hand, there is beginning, succession, and end in eternity, which is the ground of time.\textsuperscript{52} So, in this sense, eternity is not the negation of time.

It is important, however, to distinguish this position from what is sometimes called omnitemporality or, put differently, infinite temporal extension. Barth instead affirms a more traditional sense of ‘pure duration.’ Thus eternity is a ‘pure duration’ that is neither conditioned by time nor the negation of time: “The theological con-

\textsuperscript{50}Barth, \textit{CD II.1}, 638-9.
\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., 608-9.
\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., 610.
cept of eternity must be set free from the Babylonian captivity of an abstract opposite to the concept of time."

The driving force of these assertions is revelation:

God has time because and as He has eternity. Thus He does not first have it on the basis of creation, which is also, of course, the creation of time. He does have time for us, the time of revelation, the time of Jesus Christ, and therefore the time of His patience, our life-time, time for repentance and faith. But it is really He Himself who has time for us. For His revelation as Jesus Christ is really God Himself. There is no place here for the reservation or secret complaint or accusation that basically and in Himself God is pure eternity and therefore has no time, or that he has time for us only apparently and figuratively. Those who do not have time are those who do have eternity either. In fact it is an illegitimate anthropomorphism to think of God as if He did not eternally have time; as if He did not have time, and therefore time for us, in virtue of His eternity.

God is, then, as creator, the ground of time, and has time but is not conditioned by it. Furthermore, God—in Jesus Christ—shows that “he was able Himself to be temporal.” When God enters time as Jesus Christ, he “masters time. He re-creates it and heals its wounds, the fleetingness of the present, and the separation of past and future from one another in the present. He does not do this in an alien and distant way, but as present Himself. Real created time acquires in Jesus Christ and in every act of faith in Him the characteristics of eternal life.” Barth is seeking, therefore, with the distinction between God being conditioned by and having time to ensure that God both has unlimited freedom and to guard against the notion that Jesus’ experience of time was somehow only figurative.

Barth then further elaborates his conception of eternity with the distinction between the pre, super, and post-temporal in God. God’s pre-temporality affirms that he is

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53 Barth, CD II.1, 610.
54 Ibid., 611–12.
55 Ibid., 617.
56 Ibid., 617.
before all things, and indeed that “in this time, before time, everything, including
time itself, was decided and determined, everything that is in time. ...in this pure
divine time there took place the appointment of the eternal Son for the temporal
world, there occurred the readiness of the Son to do the will of the eternal Father.”⁵⁷
The decision of election, and the obedience of the Son are thus the central content
of God’s pre-temporality.

God’s super-temporality (which Barth suggests might be better rendered “co-temporal”
or “in-temporal”) is used by Barth to emphasise the fact that God’s ‘pure duration’
assumes the form of a “temporal present” that, unlike in our experience time, does
not fall apart from past and future.⁵⁸ It seems that this feature of eternity as ‘temporal
present’ is ground upon which our temporal experience is both based and healed.⁵⁹
Once again, Jesus Christ is central in this form of eternity:

Because, in this occurrence, eternity assumes the form of a temporal
present, all time, without ceasing to be time, is no more empty time, or
without eternity. It has become new. This means that in and with this
present, eternity creates in time real past and real future, distinguishes
between them, and is itself the bridge and way the one to the other. Je-
sus Christ is this way. For it is Jesus Christ who in His person decides
what has happened and is therefore past, and what will be and is therefore
future, Himself distinguishing between the two.⁶⁰

God, finally, is post-temporal, the unsurpassable end and goal of all things:

Just as God is before and over time, so He is after time, after all time and
each time. We move to Him as we come from Him and may accompany
Him. We move towards Him. He is, when time will be no more. For
then creation itself, the world as a reality distinct from God, will be no
more in its present condition, in everything which now constitutes its
existence and being. And the same will also be true of man in his present

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⁵⁷ Barth, CD II.1, 621-22.
⁵⁸ Another source I will be quoting from later has ‘supra-temporality’ rendered in this way. To
avoid confusion I have simple adopted this less common rendition of Barth’s terminology here. ibid.,
621-22.
⁵⁹ Ibid., 626-27.
⁶⁰ Ibid., 626-27.

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existence and essence. For everything will have reached its goal and end. …Eternity is also this ‘then,’ just as it is the ‘once’ before all time and the ‘now’ over all time. …It is the perfection which remains, so that over and beyond it there is no new horizon. This perfection is God Himself in His post-temporality. …He is, therefore, the absolute, unsurpassable future of all time and of all that is in time.⁶¹

These three types of eternity are not to be taken as in competition, and none should be emphasised at the expense of the other: “we must emphasise this because, when our thinking is by nature systematic, it is so easy to be guilty of some kind of preference, selection or favouritism in this matter, and therefore of the corresponding omissions.”⁶² Once again, the basic thought seems to be a trinitarian balance between the three aspects of God’s temporality.

Barth’s understanding of time and eternity, then, comprises an attempt to speak of eternity as the ground of time—and therefore of Jesus’ temporal experience as an experience not illegitimate to deity—while maintaining that it is not conditioned by it. Hunsinger’s discussion of the ‘Chalcedonian’ and ‘Trinitarian’ patterns of Barth’s thought seem particularly pertinent here. The ‘Chalcedonian’ pattern “is a pattern of unity …differentiation …and asymmetry (the unqualified conceptual precedence of the divine over the human nature of Jesus Christ).”⁶³ The Trinitarian pattern is defined by Hunsinger as “dialectical inclusion” where “the whole is understood to be included in the part without rendering the other parts superfluous.”⁶⁴

It is on the basis of these patterns as they relate to time and eternity that Hunsinger critiques Jenson’s reading of Barth. Hunsinger calls Jenson’s reading of Barth a “strong misreading,” and writes that God After God is “perhaps the most provocative, incisive and wrong-headed reading of Barth available in English.”⁶⁵ Not all of Jenson’s reading of Barth is inaccurate: Hunsinger argues, for example, that Jenson puts his finger on the true import of (what Hunsinger calls) Barth’s ‘particularism,’ in af-

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⁶¹Barth, CD II.1, 629-30.
⁶²Ibid., 631.
⁶³Hunsinger, Read Karl Barth, Kindle loc. 1184.
⁶⁴Ibid., Kindle loc. 1190.
⁶⁵Ibid., Kindle loc. 259.
firming the “absolute priority of Jesus’ existence” as Barth’s key move. The ultimate problem, however, is that Jenson’s account of Barth’s understanding of the relationship between time and eternity is misleading. This occurs both in his construal of the time and eternity as antithesis, and in his understanding of the Christological link between the two.

Turning to the first of these issues, Hunsinger asserts that:

Time and eternity were allegedly conceived by Barth, early and late, as contraries, as time and timelessness, and also as distinct realities—rather than as merely two different aspects, dialectically related, of the same essential process. Actually, it is not entirely clear whether Jenson thinks Barth kept them as contraries (although his reading seems at times to imply it), for he surely knows that Barth carefully denied any such thing. Jenson fails to reckon, unfortunately, with the later Barth’s nontimeless, thoroughly trinitarian conception of eternity as a reality ontologically other than and transcendent (though inclusive) of time. Jenson has no interest in any such conception, however, since by his lights (or so it seems), everything but a merely analytical distinction between “time” and “eternity” (i.e., two names, one process) has to go.

Let us, then, review Hunsinger’s criticism. Both Jenson and Hunsinger, are clear that Barth posits a ‘God in himself’ as well as a ‘God-for-us.’ So the dispute does not lie there. It is rather the relationship between time and eternity that is at issue, specifically that Jenson’s claim that Barth conceives of time and eternity as contraries.

We have already seen that Jenson conceives of time and eternity as contraries in the Commentary on Romans, but we have not yet seen in detail how he argues that this

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66 Jenson, After God, 72. What Hunsinger means by particularism is “a motif which designates both a noetic procedure and an ontic state of affairs. The noetic procedure is the rule that says, ‘Let every concept used in dogmatic theology be defined on the basis of a particular event called Jesus Christ.’ No generalities derived from elsewhere are to be applied without further ado to this particular. Instead one must so proceed from this particular event that all general conceptions are carefully and critically redefined on its basis before being used in theology.” Hunsinger, Read Karl Barth, Kindle loc. 96.

67 Ibid., Kindle loc. 296.

68 See the above discussion of Jenson’s theology and: Jenson, After God, 154. For Hunsinger on this distinction see Hunsinger, “Mysterium Trinitatis”, 197.
continues to hold in the *Church Dogmatics*. He does this by first surveying Barth’s “basic move” in the *Church Dogmatics*, which he suggests is the reversal of the normal order of Neo-Protestant dogmatic inquiry such that “the event of Jesus Christ’s life, because it is the central event in the life of the eternal God, is the eternal presupposition of all else that happens.”⁶⁹

He then demonstrates the implications of this “basic move,” before seeking to address a series of related questions raised by this move.⁷⁰ These questions all centre around the question of the “vigor of Barth’s christological ‘is.’”⁷¹ How, for example, are the “historical events of Jesus’ existence” part of God’s eternal life without collapsing the distinction between time and eternity?⁷² Here, Jenson argues, Barth uses analogy to distinguish time and eternity.⁷³

Jenson is clear here that analogy is the “other side” of the time eternity dialectic.⁷⁴ Indeed Jenson asserts that the “formal structure” of Barth’s use of analogy, even in his mature thought, does not differ from either *Romans II* or “the tradition.”⁷⁵ He asserts that “analogy and dialectic are in no way opposing phenomena. They are two sides of the same phenomenon. The correspondence of the two parts of Parmenides’ revelation is exactly that of perfectly fitting antitheses.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, Barth uses the language of ‘image’ when speaking analogically and in Plato ‘image’ is a way of grasping the relation” between realities defined as the “opposition to each other.”⁷⁷

A brief excursus on the relationship between dialectic and analogy is worthwhile here. Dialectic does indeed entail bringing forth *contradiction* from established premises.⁷⁸ Yet analogy is very different to this.⁷⁹ Analogy is generally understood as occupying

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⁷⁰Ibid., 68–74.
⁷¹Ibid., 74.
⁷²Ibid., 73.
⁷³Analogy will be examined in section 5.1.4. below. The closeness of the relationship between it and time and eternity in Jenson’s thought means a small degree of redundancy is inevitable. Ibid., 74.
⁷⁴Ibid., 77.
⁷⁵Ibid., 77.
⁷⁶Ibid., 76.
⁷⁷Ibid., 76.
⁷⁸Smith, “Dialectic”.
⁷⁹For a discussion of Tillich, Soskice, Aquinas and Ricoeur—amongst others—on the differences
something of the same continuum as metaphor.⁸⁰ In other words, analogy concerns the commonality and distinction between different realities.

Take, for example, a Thomist articulation of analogy: it is the predication of a term across multiple things where the term’s meaning has both common and novel content.⁸¹ This means that one using analogical language must be first given the benefit of the doubt that they understand the realities so described as at least partly compatible, not as merely contradictory in the way of dialectic.

It is true that analogical language is used, in describing God, to describe a reality radically other than creation. It might be argued—as Duns Scotus does—that analogical predication fails to secure its aim by virtue of its denial that creaturely concepts as we know them can be applied to God.⁸² But the debate is sufficiently undecided that Jenson cannot discount the self-understanding of the those who employ analogy as quickly as he has.

If Romans II uses dialectic and the Dogmatics uses analogy, then Jenson’s too-close identification of the two might indicate that he has missed an important shift from the theology of Romans II (dialectic) to the Dogmatics (analogy). There is, in other words, more work necessary here for his reading to be persuasive.

Returning to the main line of argument, in the midst of this discussion Jenson cites part of the following passage from Barth:

> The usual way of treating the concept of eternity in theological tradition leads to the dangerous position that there appears to be no eternity if there is no time and if eternity cannot be non-temporality; and that there appears to be no knowledge of eternity except through time, in the form of a negation of the concept of time …But we know eternity primarily and properly, not by the negation of the concept of time, but by the knowledge of God as the possessor interminabilis vitae. It is He who is

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⁸⁰Within this overlap analogy can—at least in the modern discussion of it—be understood as more or less literal than metaphor. ibid., 126.

⁸¹Clarke, One and the Many, 45.

⁸²I.e. Where then does the analogous content come from, as creaturely concepts are all we know. See Ordinatio 1, d. 3, pars 1, q. 1–2, nn. 26–55) as discussed in: Williams, “Scotus”.

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…the pure present. He would be this even if there were no such thing as time. He is this before and beyond all time and equally before and beyond all non-temporality. …The theological concept of eternity must be set free from the Babylonian captivity of an abstract opposite to the concept of time.⁸³

Barth is clear that his construal of eternity is not controlled by the theological tradition but is seeking to reform it by basing his concept of eternity on the knowledge of God—not Parmenides. This seems to be at odds with the picture of Barth that Jenson is constructing. Here is how Jenson synthesises this passage with his own discussion:

If what happens with Jesus in time is the central event in the eternal existence of God, then that existence must be historical. God must have a history. God is not a timeless Being …Anticipating what we will develop later: God is not a thing but an event. And the event which is God is exactly the event of Jesus’ self-giving to his fellows.⁸⁴

In other words, Jenson considers Barth to have historicised eternity. Jenson goes on to say that “Barth’s later doctrine [of analogy] differs only—but this is a large ‘only’—in that analogy and dialectic both now become christology.”⁸⁵ Barth put Jesus Christ where “being-in-general” usually is placed.⁸⁶

We should immediately recall that Jenson’s fundamental criticism of Barth’s use of analogy is that in order to try and cut off any religious God, Barth postulates a “God-in-himself” as prototype of “God-in-his-revelation.”⁸⁷ This move, Jenson argues, leaves Barth with either an empty statement, or “some sort of comparison between God’s own characteristics and his temporal characteristics” which “can only be between timelessness and time …a timeless deepest reality of God”⁸⁸ The structure of Jenson’s thought therefore seems to be that Barth, in using analogy, continues to regard time and eternity as antitheses, despite Barth’s own intention and under-

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⁸³Barth, CD II.1, 611.
⁸⁴Jenson, After God, 72.
⁸⁵Ibid., 77.
⁸⁶Ibid., 77.
⁸⁷Ibid., 153.
⁸⁸Ibid., 154.
standing of his own work.

The shape of Jenson’s argument is telling. He develops an independent account of analogy—which construes analogy as dependent on an antithesis of time and eternity—and then judges Barth’s theology by that account. At the very least Jenson would have to do more than simply cite passages where Barth uses analogy. He would have to make the case that Barth’s use of analogy is vulnerable to the critique he is bringing. Jenson does not do this. He merely notes that Barth uses analogy and traditional terms like ‘image,’ etc, which Jenson then reads in the light of his pre-determined reading. Jenson appears, therefore, to be reading into Barth an understanding of the relationship between time and eternity and of analogy, rather than truly wrestling with Barth’s own understanding of his project.

If we now look at Barth’s *analogia fidei* we see that it originally had its home in a focus on theological epistemology and specifically how human words (scripture) point to divine reality, and therefore to how human knowledge corresponds to divine self-knowledge.⁸⁹ Barth is here seeking to work out an articulation of these issues that will not give the creature or language an innate capacity to bear revelation, but locate any such reality in God’s choice to use them.⁹⁰ Furthermore, Barth argues that any case of a creature or language bearing revelation not anchored in a concrete instance of God’s speaking becomes a general capacity.⁹¹ It is thus the instance of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ which must be the basis for analogy.⁹²

Barth does indeed, therefore, shift the basis for the concept of analogy from creation to revelation. And he does use traditional concepts like ‘image.’⁹³ But the driving force behind the formulation of the doctrine was the question of safeguarding the distinction between nature and grace in the context of theological epistemology, not time and eternity. Once again, Jenson does not deal with these issues. However, the question remains as to whether, despite the lack of anchoring in Barth’s own work, his critique still works against Barth’s construal. This will be examined immediately below.

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⁹⁰Ibid., 99.
⁹¹Ibid., 99.
⁹²Ibid., 99.
⁹³Ibid., 138.
It is clear that Barth is seeking to use analogy in a different manner to how Jenson is charging him with using it. What was at issue in this exploration is whether Jenson has shown fidelity in reading Barth. It is clear that he has not done so with regards to either the relationship between time and eternity in Barth or Barth’s understanding of analogy. Hunsinger’s first criticism is, therefore, sustained.

Hunsinger’s second criticism is worth simply noting at this point, as it leads to an issue was addressed in section 2.2.2 above and will be addressed in sections 5.1.4, and 5.1.5 below. Hunsinger argues that Jenson, as a Lutheran, reads the *communicatio idiomatum* into the unity of time and eternity in Jesus, in contrast to the reformed Barth’s intentions. When this is compounded with Jenson’s misunderstanding of time and eternity as opposition in Barth, it leads him to see that one side of the opposition must inevitably dominate.

When the Lutheran Jenson encounters the christological “is” (as in “God ‘is’ Jesus”), different bells go off than they would for the Reformed Barth. Identifying the divine otherness in so unqualified a way with the otherness of one human being from another, as occurs in the passage cited, would have been quite unthinkable for Barth. The Reformed theologian would want that christological “is” to denote an ontological difference in the midst of real though inconceivable unity. “Dialectical identity,” as perhaps rooted in some conceptions of the *communicatio idiomatum*, would be all too intelligible and would be thought to generate grave problems of its own—like the danger of seeing God more nearly as a “happening” than as a personal agent, or the danger of identifying the Creator with the creature. Analogical reference would be proposed—not with “pervasive ambiguity” and not requiring “a timeless deepest reality of God”—precisely as a device to prevent just such problems. …Particularism for Barth meant that the Incarnation was conceivable only in its inconceivability; that eternity had to be radically reconceived in incarnational and trinitarian terms, but without losing the ontological difference between Creator and creature; and that analogical reference by the miracle of grace provided a conception of theological language which allowed for both the necessary clarity and the necessary mystery,
for revealedness as well as hiddenness, in the doctrine of God.\textsuperscript{94}

That Barth rejected the \textit{communicatio idiomatum} is clear—at least in its articulation by “Lutheran sacramentology” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries wherein omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience are said to be communicated to the human nature—as is testified to by McCormack (whose own construal of Barth’s project is at critical points very different from Hunsinger’s).\textsuperscript{95} It does indeed appear, therefore, that Jenson has mis-read Barth on this level also. Yet the issues raised by foregrounding Jenson’s Christology will, as just noted, be dealt with below.

### 5.4 Jenson on Analogy in Barth

Jenson has stated that the theology of the \textit{Church Dogmatics} could be obtained by replacing the abstract eternity in the \textit{Commentary on Romans} with the second article of the apostle’s creed. Yet Barth’s whole thrust in his doctrine of the Trinity is that \textit{God} is revealed. This, Jenson argues, raises a set of related problems for Barth: how do eternity and history relate?

If Jesus’ history \textit{is} the eternal event of God’s being, what prevents the distinction between the man Jesus and God collapsing? Barth’s whole trinitarian thesis would be thwarted and any “talk of God is really superfluous.”\textsuperscript{96} Similarly if all history \textit{is} what happens in Christ’s history, is anything really distinct from God? If the ‘is’ is reduced to ‘very like’ Barth is back with religious theology.\textsuperscript{97}

The question, in other words, is whether Barth can protect God’s transcendence. As Jenson says “in each case, what is feared is the collapse of some \textit{duality} essential to Christian faith and thought. …Barth requires some way of distinguishing time

\textsuperscript{94}Hunsinger, \textit{Read Karl Barth}, Kindle loc. 310-16. The Jenson quotes are from: Jenson, \textit{After God}, 92, 154

\textsuperscript{95}McCormack argues that Barth’s theological ontology undergoes revision in CD II/2, one which receives its most mature expression in CD IV, wherein Jesus Christ becomes both object and subject of election. This raises the question of how, if McCormack’s thesis is correct, Barth’s rejection of the \textit{communicatio idiomatum} intersects with the ‘historicised Christology’ of CD IV. McCormack, “Revelation and History”, 33.

\textsuperscript{96}Jenson, \textit{After God}, 73-74.

\textsuperscript{97}Ibid., 74.
from eternity.”⁹⁸ The key move Barth makes to enable this is the use of analogy, which itself depends on the concepts of reflection and image.⁹⁹

This is a pattern of thought that Jenson locates in the “entire theological tradition” (where, as outlined above, he uses the term theological to encompass the western philosophical tradition).¹⁰⁰ The critical structure of this thought begins again with Parmenides.¹⁰¹

Truth lies only in the world of eternal being, yet an account of temporal reality is given Parmenides by the goddess by negation: “a true account of the false world can only be created by taking at every point the exact antithesis of the word of true being …The world of our temporal experience is at once the antithesis of eternal being and corresponds to it.”¹⁰² Plato took this fundamental structure and added in the notion of image: “the statue, for example, both is the woman of which it is an imitation and is not a woman.”¹⁰³

Jenson argues that Barth conceives of analogy as “a stuttering but unavoidable way” of saying certain theological pairs, such as “we are in Christ—we are not in Christ.”¹⁰⁴ The reason such an attempt is stuttering is that as creatures we are not partly like and partly unlike God, “but wholly like God and wholly unlike him.”¹⁰⁵ Barth’s use of analogy is the “other side” of the time eternity dialectic.¹⁰⁶

Barth’s analogies cannot, therefore, “be successfully concluded. …our knowledge of God by analogy succeeds just when we confess its failure, and so succeeds only by the justification of the ungodly. Particular analogies are alway true only in the future. Here, too, the dialectic is a movement with a goal.”¹⁰⁷ The “formal structure” of Barth’s use of analogy in his mature thought does not differ from either Romans II or “the tradition;” the twin pair dialectic/analogy have always been a part of Barth’s

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⁹⁸Jenson, After God, 74.
⁹⁹Ibid., 75.
¹⁰⁰Ibid., 75.
¹⁰¹Ibid., 75.
¹⁰²Ibid., 75.
¹⁰³Ibid., 76.
¹⁰⁴Ibid., 76.
¹⁰⁵Ibid., 77.
¹⁰⁶Ibid., 77.
¹⁰⁷Ibid., 77.
What Barth does is substitute the life of Jesus Christ for Parmenides’ eternal “being in general,” with the caveat that the only creature analogous to God is Jesus Christ, all others being “analogous to him.” As creatures we have no innate resemblance to God. But “we exist as reflectors of the occurrence of Jesus Christ …[who] redeems us from what we are in ourselves.”

This caveat is an important one. Analogy on its own is “a nearly empty concept.” It is merely a statement that a one thing is both like and unlike another thing. The heart of any doctrine of analogy is the explication of how this relationship is conceived. Barth sees in the ‘how’ of the old doctrine of analogy—the analogy of being—an “invention of anti-Christ.”

The logic of the old doctrine was that God, in creating, could not have done other than share his own perfections with his creation. If he did not do so, then “God would be seeking to realize a value external to himself, and not be God.” The fundamental resemblance between creator and creature is that the creator causes the creature’s being.

Thus God’s “primary analogous name” is then ‘Being.’ This, a concept otherwise empty except that it includes all that is, is given content by the convertibles: good-

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108Jenson, *After God*, 77. Consider also the following quote: “One of the very best studies of Barth is Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Karl Barth*. Nevertheless, he is directly and obviously mistaken in his main contention, that there is a turn from dialectic to analogy between the *Commentary on Romans* and Barth’s later work. As we have seen, the notion of analogy plays the same role, and just as importantly, in the *Commentary on Romans* as later. And for Barth then and later, just as for Plato, it is only because of the positive relation of time to eternity, called ‘image’ or ‘analogy,’ that there can be a dialectic at all. At this point, there occurred no change whatever in Barth’s thinking after 1920.” *ibid.*, 202, footnote 51.

109Though Jenson argues that Barth does not always understand the classical doctrine: “The classical doctrine does not say—as Barth sometimes supposes—that God and creatures resemble each other in that both share in Being. It says that creatures resemble God, in that creatures are beings and so share in Being which he does not share in but rather is.” *ibid.*, 77.

110Ibid., 78.

111Ibid., 78.

112Ibid., 78.

113Ibid., 84.

114Ibid., 85.

115Ibid., 85.

116Ibid., 85.
ness, truth and unity, “i.e., that if a thing is anything at all, it has a definable unity, and in that unity has value and can be known.”¹¹⁷ Thus by being able to say “God is Being” one can then “go on to say that he is Goodness, Truth and Unity.”¹¹⁸ Just here Barth’s criticism emerges: according to this reasoning the creature, in the unity of her being, possesses—outside of Christ—her telos and truth: “that in what we already are we have the future.”¹¹⁹

In the place of this doctrine Barth proposes the ‘analogy of faith.’ In order to understand how this functions a more detailed survey of how Barth understands the three ‘times’ in eternity—the pretemporal, the supertemporal and the posttemporal—is needed.

God’s decision of election is the prototypical and pre-eminent historical event. It is the principle, basis, origin, goal, possibility, essence, of all other history.¹²⁰ God’s eternal choice means that “the whole complex of history between God and man is real therein.”¹²¹ It is so in the eternal existence of Jesus Christ in the act of predestination, which is the ‘No’ and ‘Yes’ of Calvary. Humanity is therefore justified, and sanctified already—indeed the very possibility of humanity’s existence just is this event of election in which God joins sinful man to himself in Christ. Thus the history of salvation “stands in force from all eternity. It is the superior reality within which the whole temporal drama is played.”¹²²

Yet because just this choice is also God’s super and post-temporality Barth does not imagine a self-contained, eternal, salvation history. Jesus is the mirror of the eternal decree, but the very mirroring is itself part of the eternal decree:

We may summarise the distinction Barth makes here as that between the eternal Son who is also man and the man who is also the eternal Son. In both cases He is the man Jesus Christ. But in the one case we see Him as the eternal basis of salvation, in the other as the temporal reflection and

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¹¹⁸Ibid., 85.
¹¹⁹Ibid., 85–86.
¹²⁰Jenson, *Alpha and Omega*, 77.
¹²¹Ibid., 82.
¹²²Ibid., 83.
Yet the ordering is important: Jesus is the “sign and reproduction” of the eternal decree.¹²⁴ It is Jesus Christ that joins time to eternity. In our time “the man who is the eternal son” functions as the perfect analogy of God’s life, the revelation of the hidden God.¹²⁵

Thus, in the place of ‘being’ Barth substitutes the distinction between the hidden Father and his self-interpretation in the Son.¹²⁶ Barth preserves God’s transcendence with analogy.

But this use of analogy is a weakness in Barth’s theology. It grants his theology a two-sidedness: on the hand God is truly with us in an almost unprecedented way, on the other hand the whole history of salvation (and thus our history) can seem to take place in an eternity separated from our time. It should be noted that it is the capture of time by eternity that seems to happen, that it is not our daily concerns that are isolated from God, but our “actual concerns and possibilities which seem to float away from us with Christ, so that it is pure abstract spectator-ghosts that we are left behind to watch.”¹²⁷

Barth does not intend this capture and to “read his theology so” is to read it “wrongly.” But there is something in his thought that compels this reading.¹²⁸ Jenson is worth listening to at length here:

The difficulty is in the way Barth reckons with God’s transcendence. He wants to say that God is in fact what happens with Christ, that we are in fact actors in his story, that God’s Trinity is in fact his being Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer. But he also wants to proclaim the freedom and transcendence of God over against what he is for and with us. He thinks that to do this he must postulate a reality of God in himself distinct from God-for-us. But lest this God-in-himself become a different God

¹²³Jenson, Alpha and Omega, 90.
¹²⁴Ibid., 93–94.
¹²⁵Ibid., 86.
¹²⁶Jenson makes the insightful observation that Barth’s doctrine of analogy, just in that it seeks to grasp both Father and Son “is but a form of the doctrine of the Spirit.” Jenson, After God, 86.
¹²⁷Ibid., 152.
¹²⁸Ibid., 152.
behind God-for-us, and we be back in the situation of religion, God-in-himself is identified only as the prototype of God-in-his-revelation. All we are to say of God himself is that the revelation is his image. Time is the image of eternity—which means that eternity is simply whatever it must be if time is to be its image.¹²⁹

Jenson then argues that Barth’s postulation of a “God-in-himself” as prototype of “God-in-his-revelation” leaves Barth with either an empty statement, or “some sort of comparison between God’s own characteristics and his temporal characteristics.” This latter option can only be a comparison between “timelessness and time … a timeless deepest reality of God”¹³⁰ Barth has not found a way of maintaining God’s transcendence from the events of revelation in a temporal fashion.

Barth links God-in-himself and God-in-his-revelation—or atemporality and temporality—by analogy. But just this reliance on analogy is what makes his theology so “shifting.” Analogy—even more than is usual—has the character of ambiguity in Barth’s system. By isolating analogy from “its old metaphysical moorings, all assertions become uncontrollable. Always one ends by saying that what they mean depends on from which end you look at the matter.”¹³¹ By using analogy to preserve God’s transcendence Barth creates the possibility—against his own intention—of reading “timeless eternity” in his theology.¹³²

We now come to task of evaluating the fidelity of Jenson’s reading of Barth’s use of analogy.

5.5 An Evaluation of the Fidelity of Jenson’s Reading of Barth on Analogy

It is important to note what this section seeks to accomplish. What will be examined is the question of how faithfully Jenson has read Barth. The questions of the

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¹²⁹Jenson, After God, 154.
¹³⁰Ibid., 154.
¹³¹Ibid., 154. Italics mine.
¹³²Ibid., 154.
propriety of analogy in theology are explored in my interaction with David Bentley Hart.

Whilst Jenon’s critique of Barth is related to his *analogia fidei*, it is instructive to note that Barth articulates this doctrine in an attempt to articulate an alternative to the *analogia entis*, which Barth rejected. There is no single *analogia entis* that can be singled out as the statement of the doctrine, yet the form in which Barth meets it is that which is articulated by Erich Przywara.¹³³

Exactly what Barth knew of Przywara’s form of the doctrine, and how fair his critique of it is, are controverted questions.¹³⁴ But what is clear is that the fundamental question that Barth is dealing with is once again the relationship of nature to grace.¹³⁵ Creatures must have no innate capacity to bear revelation.¹³⁶

Barth and Przywara interacted on a number of occasions on the question of the *analogia entis*. Barth became increasingly hostile to the idea, and, in trying to understand Przywara via Augustine and Luther writes this:

Augustine also had attempted to find the uncreated Spirit in continuity with man’s [sic] created spirit …God is above the “spirit” of man …[but] he is primarily in the soul, its proper origin, but now forgotten, and very probably only to be recalled to memory when grace gives its aid …[but] The discontinuity between God the Creator and man, when one considers the relation of Creator and creature, must mean that between being Lord and being lorded over there exists an irreversibility such as excludes the idea of God as an object of whom, in Platonic fashion, we have a reminiscence as “Ancient Beauty.”¹³⁷

Barth is trying to hold continuity and discontinuity together in the doctrine of cre-

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¹³³See section 3.1.2 for an in-depth treatment of Przywara’s *analogia entis*.
¹³⁴See, for a good and brief overview of the complexities the introduction and conclusion from: Johnson, *Karl Barth*; White, “Introduction”.
¹³⁶Ibid., 96.
ation, but he rules out the possibility of God as an object of anamnesis. One can see the trajectory from Romans II continued here: there is no human possibility that can capture God. In his mature work this insight would be expressed as there being no sphere that is not founded on the event of God’s eternal decision in Jesus Christ. It is on this basis that he rejects the *analogia entis*.

Creation is not something that needs to be related to reconciliation, but the decision of election already undergirds creation. It is the “external basis of the covenant.” God’s act in creation cannot be viewed separately from God’s act in Jesus Christ. The act of creation establishes only the division between God and creation, but this division is the “way to the covenant.” Continuity is established by the concrete relationship that God enters into between himself and a human, which is the goal of creation.

The relationship between God and creation happens in Jesus Christ. Yet this relationship is indeed still *analogous*, one of correspondence.

In His divinity He is from and to God. In His humanity He is from and to the cosmos. And God is not the cosmos, nor the cosmos God. But His humanity is in the closest correspondence with His divinity. It mirrors and reflects it. Conversely, His divinity has its correspondence and image in the humanity in which it is mirrored. …Thus even the life of the man Jesus is under a twofold determination. …God repeats in this relationship *ad extra* a relationship proper to Himself in His inner divine essence. Entering into this relationship He makes a copy of himself.

This copy is not directly God. Jesus’ humanity “belongs intrinsically to the creaturely

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139 Thus the rejection is clearly in accord with Barth’s broader theological project, even if he has misunderstood what he is rejecting. Evaluating this, beyond the brief sketch of Przywara’s work above, is beyond the scope of this section. See Keith Johnson’s recent work for the case that Barth understood it correctly. See Betz’s work for the opposite case. Betz, “After Barth”; Johnson, *Karl Barth*.
141 Ibid., 205.
142 Ibid., *CD III.1*, 97.
143 Ibid., 97.
144 Barth, *CD III.2*, 207.
145 Ibid., 216–18.
The Father and Son have unity of essence, the Son and the human Jesus do not. The human Jesus would be lost, “absolutely threatened …if thrown back upon his own resources.” God is therefore not simply an object in history, but always the self-revealing subject.

It looks as though Jenson’s hesitation regarding the ambiguity of the relationship between time and eternity is vindicated, at least according to Jenson’s theological standards. Jenson wants to identify Jesus the human simpliciter as a member of the Trinity, and so these schema are completely unacceptable. It seems as though there is something eternal ‘behind’ Jesus’ history with us threatening to capture time. It is worth noting that von Balthasar (who is following Przywara) has a similar complaint: the worry that the space for creation was constricted by narrowing everything to Christology.

McCormack mounts a defence of Barth against von Balthasar’s criticism, making the case that there is genuine space for creation. He argues that God’s revelation meets:

Its goal precisely in this world, so that the human already is here and now what it will be eschatologically; not a creature absorbed into an all-consuming divine being but a truly free creature able to stand before God.

This defense will not work against Jenson’s objection. Unless Jesus’ election takes place in a manner such that there is no ‘behind’ history, such that Jesus’ birth in history is his birth in eternity, Jenson’s concern has not been addressed.

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146 Barth, CD III.2, 219.
147 Ibid., 219.
148 See the argument in: Johnson, Karl Barth, 214.
149 For a detailed discussion of Jenson’s Christology see section 2.2.2.
152 I’m not sure that it really works against von Balthasar’s either. The very language of ‘a truly free creature standing before God’ is election talk, the Son before the Father. That we find our freedom in Christ’s action does not address the fundamental question of what space having everything depend on this relation actually allows for creation. Can it be, in itself, good?
153 See section 2.2.2 for a more detailed discussion of this part of Jenson’s thought. Jenson, “Christ in the Trinity”, 67.
Jenson has not been completely accurate in his representation of Barth’s understanding of analogy, on this fundamental feature he has been correct. Jenson’s rejection of Barth’s *analogia fidei* has warrant when read against Jenson’s theological concerns: it has internal warrant.

We have seen, then, that Jenson’s reading of Barth does not do Barth’s work justice as a reading of Barth on the issues of time and eternity or analogy. Turning to the first of these issues, it is clear that Barth’s understanding of his own work—or at least his intention—is that the time/eternity dialectic is subordinated to his concern with the relationship between nature and grace. Given the complexity of Barth’s style of communication, it would perhaps be more accurate to say that Jenson has misread Barth’s intention rather than *Romans II*.

In terms of analogy Barth does indeed shift the basis for the concept of analogy from creation to revelation, as Jenson argues. And he does use traditional concepts like ‘image.’ But the driving force behind the formulation of the doctrine was the question of safeguarding the distinction between nature and grace in the context of theological epistemology, not time and eternity.

Jenson’s critique of analogy in Barth still ultimately works, however, given Jenson’s theological project. Unless Jesus’ election takes place in a manner such that there is no ‘behind’ history, such that Jesus’ birth in history *is* his birth in eternity, Jenson’s concern has not been addressed. Though Jenson has not been completely accurate in his representation of Barth’s understanding of analogy, on this fundamental feature he has been correct. Jenson’s rejection of Barth’s *analogia fidei* has warrant when read against Jenson’s theological concerns.

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¹⁵⁵See section 2.2.2 for a more detailed discussion of this part of Jenson’s thought. Jenson, “Christ in the Trinity”, 67.
Chapter 6

Appendix B: The Real Distinction and Participation in Thinkers from the Experience of God

Hart does not provide an account of the real distinction between essence and existence in his articulation of participation and the analogy of being. As the real distinction is a critical supporting component of his position I have attempted to discover the kind of articulation of participation that would be open to Hart, and what the consequences might be for Hart’s system. We turn to this task now.

In order to provide a map for this conceptual terrain I wish to briefly explore an account of the interaction between essence and existence in the work of an analytic philosopher arguing for the real distinction: William Vallicella. He offers a taxonomy of the various options for considering the relationship between an individual and existence.¹

Vallicella outlines three broad categories of theory of the real distinction: 1. “No difference” theories, 2. “Moderate difference” theories, and 3. “Extreme differ-

¹Note that Valicella’s project is the examination of the link between an individual and existence. This does not mean that his project and taxonomy are worthless for our present enquiry, but that it must be carefully considered before allowing it as a control through which to consider the wider question of a metaphysics of creation. Vallicella, Paradigm Theory, 1; 30-32.
ence” theories.² The means to understand these distinctions is via what I will call the ‘Vallicella Triple’ (VT). This is the prima facie difference between “an individual, its existence, and existence.”³

‘No difference’ (ND) theories suggest that “for any x, the existence of x is just x, which implies both that there is no difference between x and existence, and no difference between x and x’s having existence.”⁴ ND theories collapse an individual’s existence and existence into the individual, thus eliminating the difference in VT. This results in “radical ontological pluralism” as there is no common reality by which things exist.

It is worth noting that ND theories are correct insofar as they assert that existence cannot be an abstraction, and does indeed only ‘occur’ in that something exists. This does not mean, however, that the existent individual must be identical with its existence. For it might be true that “existence itself exists, and that contingent individuals exist in virtue of standing in some ‘relation’ to existence itself.”⁵ Thus x’s existence will not be identical to x, but will be a ‘relation.’

‘Extreme Difference’ (ED) theories remove one of the limbs of VT, namely x’s having existence. It affirms only the individual x and existence.⁶ This means that existence never belongs to individuals. Such theories are “eliminativist as opposed to identitarian.” An identitarian theory takes for granted the reality of x’s existence but explains it by identifying it with something else like “instantiation of an exotic haecceity property.”⁷ An eliminativist denies that existence belongs to an individual at all, and argues that it belongs only to “a property of properties (or cognate items).”⁸

‘Moderate difference’ (MD) theories are the most interesting class for Vallicella and the one into which all below theories will fall. Here he locates a number of theories,

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²Vallicella, Paradigm Theory, 30-31.
³Ibid., 31.
⁴Ibid., 30.
⁵Ibid., 31.
⁶Ibid., 33.
⁷Ibid., 34.
⁸Vallicella notes that the difference between eliminativist and identitarian theories is important, but some theories can present the possibility of interpretation in either direction. Identifying this and working out the consequences of both readings is important. Ibid., 34.
including his own “paradigm theory.”⁹ MD theories recognise that there is a difference between x and existence, and therefore between x and x’s existence. They therefore uphold VT. This is accomplished via a range of strategies, from various property theories of existence (where existence is a first or second-level property) to relational and monistic theories, and Vallicella’s own paradigm theory.¹⁰

This grants us some clarity of what is meant by the real distinction. Any theory of the real distinction must uphold VT: the distinction between an individual (essence) and individual’s having existence, and existence itself (in all thought below, God). We have also seen that one can uphold the real distinction (hold an MD theory) by a variety of strategies. This plurality does not bode well for our attempt to identify Hart’s own theory. Nonetheless we will continue our survey.

Given that we will be moving from the real distinction to participation in each thinker, one further piece of taxonomic data is useful. W. Norris Clarke surveys some of the possible ways of understanding participation. He argues that participation is generally understood as ‘participating’ in a common attribute. This common attribute varies: unity/goodness (Platonism), the act of existence (Thomas), absolute Spirit/consciousness (Hegel), different degrees/modes of matter (Marx).¹¹

With this foundational work complete, let us examine a few examples of how the authors Hart has pointed to work out the nature of existence in order to try and discern Hart’s position.

The contemporary American Thomist W. Norris Clarke uses participation as a means of solving the question of the one and the many.¹² For him existence simpliciter is a maximum, a plenitude, a boundless act that is—for all beings whose essence is not existence as with God—limited by essence.¹³ Essence cannot be something added to existence—as only that which already exists can be added to something—and it is primarily a limit or boundary of otherwise boundless existence.¹⁴ Each particular

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⁹Vallicella, Paradigm Theory, 31-33.
¹⁰Ibid., 31-33.
¹¹Clarke, One and the Many, 77.
¹²It is one option in a spectrum of solutions: radical monism, mitigated monism, radical pluralism, mitigated pluralism. ibid., 77.
¹³Ibid., 82-83.
¹⁴Ibid., 84.
is, if you will, existence minus essence, where essence is the “receptive capacity” of each particular, determining its mode of existence.¹⁵

The distinction between essence and existence should not, however, be taken in the Ockhamist vein where distinction is defined by the criteria of separability. Rather, essence and existence are distinct but inseparable as their nature as co-principles means that if they were separated they would no longer exist.¹⁶

This leads to the next point: the existence of a particular is a new act of existence. It is not God’s existence somehow divided up. Thus this existence exists only in the relationship with its own co-principle of limiting essence.¹⁷

Thus participation is—drawing on the distinction above—sharing in the common attribute of existence, but a sharing in “existence from God,” not in God’s own existence.¹⁸ This existence is analogically related to God’s existence, where the analogical relationship is one of ‘proper proportionality.’¹⁹

The analogy of proper proportionality is defined as a term’s application between analogates in its literal meaning, but “with a proportional difference as found in each.” Thus both human beings and God know, but “their ways of knowing are irreducibly different, based on their diverse natures.” Each being performs the act of knowing according to its nature. Clarke argues that this does not result in a univocal and equivocal component of analogy as “the similarity and difference pervade the whole being of the analogates at once.”²⁰ With regards to existence this would mean that God and created beings share an existence made distinct by their own natures.

We can now provide a fuller definition of participation: participation is each particular—with its own act of existence which is given by God—sharing in the existence given to all by God who performs his act of existence in a way irreducibly different from ours.²¹

¹⁵Clarke, One and the Many, 84.
¹⁶Ibid., 82-85.
¹⁷Ibid., 85-86.
¹⁸Emphasis mine. Ibid., 318.
¹⁹Ibid., 49.
²⁰Ibid., 49.
²¹Given that proper proportionality depends on the notion of the act of existence being performed
This provides a fairly comprehensible understanding of participation: that all things have in common an analogical existence, where existence is understood as a maximum, and in creatures has a limiting essence ‘subtracted’ from it. Does this work?

The key question for this system is, I would argue, whether existence is truly analogical, or simply a bounded form of an existence (univocally) identical with God’s. Let us examine this question. We will start with a relevant definition of existence (DE) given by Clarke:

Existence must be a \textit{maximum}, an all-encompassing plenitude, with essences serving as limiting diversifying principles within the fullness of existence itself, diversifying being by limiting it in different ways from within, partially negating the fullness of being by diverse, limited modes of existing. \textit{The relation of essence to existence can thus be only one of subtraction, not addition: Existence – essence 1, – essence 2, etc., each of which is a distinct partial negation of the total fullness of existence possible.}²²

Given DE we begin our analysis:

1. Let \( e \) be the existence of the concrete particular \( x \)
2. Let \( l \) be the limiting essence of \( x \)
3. \( x \) is, therefore, the unity of the ‘co-principles’ \( e \) and \( l \)²³
4. According to Clarke \( l \) \textit{limits} \( e \). This can mean at least two different things:
   (a) That the creation of \( x \) involves the coming-into-being of an existence \( e \) which does not have the potentiality to be ‘un-limited.’ In other words \( e \) could never (even logically) exceed the bounds of the form \( l \) it receives.²⁴

²²Second emphasis mine. ibid., 83.
²³See discussion immediately above.
²⁴In other words: i. \( e \) can only ever exist as the co-principle of \( l \) and cannot be co-principle of some other limiting form and still be \( e \). ii. As \( e \) it is not the instantiation of something that has the logical possibility to exceed the bounds it has as co-principle \( l \), but is the instantiation of an idea/form which has the potentiality only ever to be \( e \) as it is in relationship to \( l \).
But then $l$ cannot be said to strictly limit $e$ for:

i. Assume the following definition of limitation: limitation occurs when the potentiality of something capable of agency or causality (intrinsically or through the action of external forces) is inhibited.

ii. If $e$ does not possess the potentiality to exceed its bounds then $e$ is not limited by $l$, but merely demarcated.

iii. (a) would not, therefore, be acceptable because:

   A. Clarke clearly wants the language of language of limitation to be meaningful.
   
   B. *Contra* the language of DE, (a) cannot be understood as the *subtraction* of $l$ from $e$, as $e$ never had potentiality beyond its instantiation in $x$ for $e$ to have anything taken away.
   
   C. Given that both the language of limitation, and the language of DE cannot be satisfied by this approach I will conclude that—if my understanding of his work is correct—this is not what Clarke has in mind.

(b) That the creation of $x$ involves the limiting of a potentially unlimited existence.

i. Given the inadequacy of (a), we must accept this option.

ii. It might be argued than an intermediary option has been neglected: Why must $e$ be ‘potentially unlimited?’ Why not argue that $e$ has a limited existence, but that its potential exceeds $l$ while still not being potentially unlimited?

   A. In order for $e$ to be limited, and for the creation of $x$ to involve the genuine limiting of existence, $e$ must have greater potentiality than that allowed by $l$.
   
   B. Yet on Clarke’s system the only thing able to limit existence is negative limiting essence.

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C. If we call \( e' \) the fullness of existence that \( e \) was potentially capable of before being limited by \( l \), then when see that \( e' \) would itself have had to have some limiting essence placed around it, as only limiting essence can limit existence.

D. Thus \( e' \) would itself need to be conceived as possessing more potentiality that its actual limits, the fullness of which we might call \( e'' \), and so on \textit{ad infinitum}.

E. Minimally, then, there must—at some point in the creation of \( x \)—be the limiting of a potentially unlimited existence, or a vicious infinite regress. Thus (b) stands.

5. Given (b) the following difficulties arises:

(a) If \( e \) has unlimited potentiality, limited only by \( l \), then \( e \) without \( l \) would have been identical with God, who is the “\textit{unlimited act of existence}.”\textsuperscript{25}

(b) This means that \( x \)’s limited act of existence is \textit{identical} with some part of God’s infinite act of existence, which leads to metaphysical univocity, not analogy.

i. Clarke would, I think, respond by saying that \( e \) and \( l \) are co-principles that change the very nature of the existence bound to \( e \) and are only \textit{logically} separable (his analogy of proportionality).

ii. Thus the \textit{act} of \( e \)’s existing is inseparable from \( l \), which makes the act of existing unique.

iii. Thus \( e \) is, if you will, \textit{performed} according to \( l \) and only analogically like God’s existence.

iv. But recall that, according to Clarke, \( l \) doesn’t add anything to existence, but simply \textit{bounds} it.

v. Recall that bounded existence is a part of what would otherwise have been unlimited existence (4.b.). It has the potential to be unlimited.

\textsuperscript{25}Clarke, \textit{One and the Many}, 83.
vi. Recall that unlimited existence is the same as God.

vii. We must, then, say that $l$ holds $e$ back from being God.

viii. When we say $x$’s being is potentially God’s being we are talking about the difference between an unlimited existence, and a limited existence.

ix. We must, therefore, say that $e$ univocally represents a part of the unlimited existence which is the same as God.

A. Assume: (LL) Leibniz’ principle of the identity of indiscernibles.

B. Premise: Anything potentially identical to another object in the strong sense of identity implied by the potential for existence to be God is named univocally.

C. Argument: Consider the situation where somehow my 6 year old self was in a room alongside me. We would both share the same name univocally. Or, if one rejects the possibility of univocal names, certain definite descriptions could be used which would have univocal referent. In other words, while the 6-year-old version of myself would have limited potentiality compared to myself presently (it is only potentially identical), we would share a fundamental, univocal, identity that cannot be obscured by diminution. The import of this is that there can be identity only because there is at some point a chronological indiscernibility.

D. In other words, it might be objected that it assumes identity, that it is a petitio principi. But I would argue that the chronological continuity of identity is the only way to illustrate how potential identity works. For on LL anything absolutely identical is that thing. Thus if one imagined, say, a book and then tried to imagine a part of it that was identical to it—in the strong sense of identity at issue here—and was separated from it, one would be imagining falsely for it would just be that part. In other words the identity of the part presumes that it possesses the property
of being a part of a whole. Thus chronological change is our best tool as the premise already includes identity in the guise of potential identity.²⁶

E. On this basis I conclude that anything potentially identical with something already shares a univocal identity. For if chronological change is the best guide then such descriptions as “Matt was the one who” must also be true. This means that the identity includes identical temporal experiences.

F. For something to potentially be God it must somehow instantiate the whole of his life. Thus we end up with, if not pantheism, then the strongest possible identity between God’s existence and our existence. It is univocal.

(c) This seems to leave creation with the seeds of divinity and it offers a threat to the difference between God and creatures in this account.

6. The presence of univocity in speaking about our existence and God’s causes difficulty for Clarke’s system, but it is also something Hart would eschew. The question of how Hart would take the notion of our possessing the seeds of divinity needs further review.

Does this mean that there a problematic univocity in Hart’s system? We cannot make this judgement until we survey some of the other options for understanding the real distinction and participation which Hart points to. It is worth noticing, however, that Clarke’s definition of analogy is different from the analogy that Przywara defines and Hart appropriates. Perhaps it is because of such problems as we have seen in Clarke’s system that Hart rejects such a construal of analogy. The question will be how analogy, existence and essence relate for Hart. Let us, then, press forward with our survey of the thinkers Hart calls upon to see whether Clarke’s view represents anything like a consensus.

²⁶I am deliberately not engaging in issues of merism and continuity in change here. I simply assume that there is something which endures through time. Were the reader to reject this I think the only consequence would be the need to find different examples, as ultimately the issue is existence which I take to be non-material and therefore not susceptible to part-whole issues.
Barry Miller offers an account of the real distinction, and is unique amongst the thinkers that Hart cites because he works within the tradition of analytic philosophy. Within this tradition he follows Frege in suggesting that linguistic categories have "primacy" over ontological ones: "entities are apprehended via (the logical analysis of) language." His thesis is that—contra some of the most influential currents in analytic philosophy—not only are existence and essence distinct but that existence is a real first-level property of concrete individuals.

The tradition stemming from Frege and Russel holds that ‘exists’ is second-level predicate “Cambridge property of individuals.” In contrast to this Miller argues that existence is a real (not Cambridge), first-level property. Against the argument put forward by Frege, Russel and others—whereby existence cannot be a first-level property as first-level properties require the existence of the individuals they inhere in as a prerequisite—Miller argues that existence does not inhere in the individual and so need not be logically posterior to individuals. More specifically “an individual is not the subject in which its instance of existence inhere, but is that which bounds its instance of existence.”

Notice the language in this last quote. The individual bounds the instance of existence. Regarding the nature of a bound Miller has this to say:

Compared with what it bounds, a bound counts for very little ontologically, as is strikingly evident in the case of the bound of a block of butter. The bound contributes nothing at all by way of butter or any other material. Similarly, in the case of Socrates and his instance of existence, the bound (the Socrates element) contributes nothing at all by way of actuality, whereas what it bounds (his instance of existence) contributes all the actuality.

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27 Miller, Fullness of Being, 67.
28 A Cambridge property is a purely relational property, such as a door being 2 meters in front of me. A second-level predicate is one under which a first-order property can fall, in this case, Frege argues, saying simply that there is one or more of this first-level thing. ibid., ix-8.
29 Ibid., 19.
30 This shift from the language of ‘inheres’ to ‘bounds’ is an incredibly important ‘paradigm shift’ for Miller. Ibid., 20.
31 Ibid., 118.
Once again we have existence contributing all the actuality to a concrete particular; does this mean that Miller understands the bound as a limit in the same way as Clarke, making him vulnerable to the same critique? Let us turn to this question briefly.

The notion of quidditative content is found in the distinction between the ontological/existential “content of the instance of existence as contrasted with the quidditative content of the Socrates element.”\(^{32}\) Quidditative content is analogous to an architect’s or engineer’s plan which has no actuality or “ontological content” but nonetheless has content of some kind.\(^{33}\)

What does ‘content of some kind mean?’ The ‘Socrates element’—Miller uses the ‘Socrates element’ as a way of conceptualising the quidditative content of a particular being—has no ontological role, but does have a quidditative role: it marks out but does not actualise anything.\(^{34}\) Its “sole role is being a map of the reaches of its instance of existence.”\(^{35}\) It is, he says, like a stained glass window through which light shines, which ‘colourises’ the light, but has no actuality in itself. Thus when Miller speaks of ‘Socrates’ as a bound he means “Socrates with all his nonexistential properties.”\(^{36}\)

Miller, as we have seen, illustrates this by calling us to imagine a block of butter which has a particular shape. The butter is not in a container which would give it a particular shape, rather it has a bound which is “totally devoid of thickness.”\(^{37}\) The bound does have a function, however: they “individuate the blocks they bound.” This is what bounds are: bounds individuate while containers presuppose the individuation of what they contain.

There are two things accomplished by the ‘one role’ of the Socrates element, it has a ‘dual role’ within this one function.\(^{38}\) Socrates bounds his existence by not merely individuating it, but also determining the various limits to which his actuality can

\(^{32}\)Miller, *Fullness of Being*, 119.
\(^{33}\)Ibid., 120.
\(^{34}\)Ibid., 101; 128–129.
\(^{35}\)Ibid., 101.
\(^{36}\)Ibid., 102.
\(^{37}\)Ibid., 97.
\(^{38}\)Ibid., 100–121.
go (e.g. level of intelligence, etc).\textsuperscript{39} It both “marks out which virtualities of existence characterize his particular instance of existence” and “it individuates that instance.”

As individuator the bound Socrates—which is not a pre-existent reality but only the bound of Socrates’s instance of existence—is where Socrates’s properties are attributed. But this happens only \textit{by virtue of his instance of existence}.\textsuperscript{40} Thus one can say that Socrates’ instance of existence is “that by virtue of which …[he] is actually wise” where being wise is part of Socrates’ quidditative content.\textsuperscript{41} To sum up, the Socrates element has no ontological potentiality but is where, as individuator, the properties it maps are predicated by virtue of its instance of existence which is the only place of ontological actuality.\textsuperscript{42}

Miller has, therefore, carefully circumscribed the bound such that it has no ontological actuality, whilst still individuating and being the place of predication. He does this while avoiding the talk of ‘limitation’ that Clarke uses and indeed eschews any notion of the quidditative content or Socrates element subtracting from existence. This would, he argues, entail the pre-existence of the Socrates element, thus giving it ontological content.\textsuperscript{43}

Miller’s project appears to meet the critique we have levelled at Clarke’s project. But are there other objections that can be levelled against it? Let us look at the notion of

\textsuperscript{39}Miller, \textit{Fullness of Being}, 100-1; 121.
\textsuperscript{40}One of the reasons for this is that first-level properties cannot be predicated of an instance of existence \textit{simpliciter}. ibid., 124-126.
\textsuperscript{41}Miller makes the distinction here between potentiality and ‘virtuality.’ Potentiality language renders, as we have seen, his project vulnerable to Frege’s objection: the bound Socrates would then be understood to be something which has the potentiality to exist and this means that it must have some actuality prior to existence. Miller argues that language of ‘virtuality’ does not smuggle potentiality in. He demonstrates this by showing the logical distinction between two ways of understanding ‘can’ by taking the phrase ‘that by virtue of which Socrates is actual’ as ‘that by virtue of which Socrates can be actual.’ The difference between potentiality and virtuality is shown by noting that ‘can’ is (syntactically) opaque in this context, leading to the possibility of de re and de dicto readings of the sentence. The ‘potentiality’ reading of ‘can’ is the de re understanding of the sentence. This is rendered as: “whatever has Socrates’ instance of existence has that by which Socrates can be (i.e., has the potentiality to be) actual.” The ‘virtuality’ reading is de dicto: “that by virtue of which (Socrates is actual).” In other words ‘that in virtue of which Socrates exists \textit{simpliciter}.’ This shows for Miller: a. that potentiality and virtuality are distinct and b. the nature of virtuality. ibid., 124-27.
\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., 105-6.
quidditative content, or the ‘Socrates element.’

Let us quickly refresh the difficult concept. Miller has suggested that such content is akin to a plan or bound, which is neither outer layer nor container, and that it has priority over the instance of existence only with respect to individuation. In other words, as we have already seen Socrates’ actuality is dependent on his instant of existence such that his existence is “that by virtue of which Socrates is something rather than nothing.” But, by the same token, in no way must it be able to be said that ‘Socrates has the possibility of being actual.’

Let us then consider some blueprints: if we put aside their material nature do they in fact possess any ontological potentiality? I would suggest that, at minimum, blueprints perform speech-acts: build here and not there, build in this way, with these materials. I would further suggest that—when functioning correctly—these acts are authoritative. Plans authoritatively demarcate (certain aspects of) an object.

How is this authority enacted? If we think of a plan as a set of instructions, the answer must be that authority comes by way of speech-acts encoded by the author of the document. If we apply this analogically to the quidditative content of a concrete particular I think we would have to say that content carries the force of authority as God’s speech-acts.

Nicholas Wolterstorff’s discussion of the ‘counting-as’ connection between locu-
tionary and illocutionary acts might help this discussion. In certain circumstances, Wolterstorff says, an agent’s performance of a locutionary act counts as their performing an illocutionary act. Now, putting aside the technicalia of when this might apply to human agents, this seems an entirely appropriate way to speak of the locutions of an omnipotent God. The locution counts as the illocution. But if the bounds carry the force of authority, then they bear the weight of ontological actualisation, just what Miller does not want.

Miller has said that the analogy of a plan or bound only goes so far. What, then, might be disanalogous between a plan as we would normally conceive of it and the quidditative element—all Socrates’ nonexistential properties—which makes Miller’s logical formulae comprehensible? Let us say that in creation an intermediary plan carrying the weight of a speech-act is, on Miller’s analysis, a fiction. How, then, might we conceive of its existence?

Both act and author are one in the case of creation, with no external authority carrier like a plan defining God’s free act of creating. Let us say, then, any authority-bearing is simply a reification of the conditions of the givenness of the concrete particular. Notice that this means that existence must be something like 4.a. above: existence never has the potentiality of exceeding its bounds. We might call this a ‘soft’ bound as opposed to one which limits a potentially infinite form (a ‘hard’ bound).

Is a ‘soft’ bound reality only a reification? We must, I think, concede that it exists as an intention to create a creature of this shape in the mind of God. Does this mean that the quidditative element exists in some way before as pure form—one possessing the derived authority to shape existence—before demarcating an existent?

Miller grants that the quidditative content is logically prior with regard to the individuation of Socrates. So would God’s foreknowledge, or intention, of creating an item with a particular quidditative content be a problem for Miller? Maybe. Miller has so pared down the ontological status of the quiddiative element that it bears a striking ontological resemblance to the kind of abstract objects or divine ideas that might indeed precede any instance of existence. How are we to distinguish be-

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50See: Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 73.
51See my argument relating to the univocity of Clark’s understanding of existence.
52Miller, *Fullness of Being*, 99.
tween an object existing but “entirely devoid of all actuality,” from something like an idea?⁵³

Were we to characterise God’s creative intention as a map, an authoritative picture of what should be in God’s mind, then in creating Socrates the only transformation this map seems to have undergone is that it has gone from being bounded to bounding: its direct existential dependence is now on the particular instance of existence it bounds rather on God’s mind. In all other respects they seem identical: both are maps. It is just that at one moment it has not yet been used to build, if you like, itself.

If a case could be made along these lines, then it could be that Miller has an object existing with some kind of potentiality to exist before its particular instance of existence, which Miller has sought to avoid at all costs. In other words, I would suggest that there needs to be enough of an ontological gap between abstracta and Miller’s quidditative element for Frege’s critique to be answered. I am not sure Miller has left enough of this gap.⁵⁴

It might be that for God—as an omnipotent, spiritual being with an efficacious will—there is no gap between conception and creation such that the concrete particular immediately exists, and there is no abstract form in God’s mind (we might say that God’s intention has no intension but knowledge of its extension).⁵⁵ The form does not exist as an independent reality in God’s mind, but only knowledge of the concrete object itself.

This raises difficulties. If God’s creative intention has no intension except by extension, then God cannot have a creative intention without creating. God would actualise all his creative potential ‘at once’ so to speak. In other words we have arrived at something very like one of the characteristics of divine simplicity, along with its attendant problem: how can God be pure actuality with no unexercised potentiality?

It is noteworthy that Thomas, as a defender of divine simplicity, argues that God

⁵³Miller, Fullness of Being, 98.
⁵⁴This critique would need to be significantly developed, but to fill it out is beyond scope of this paper.
⁵⁵If we set aside spiritual beings then I think the concept of extension is helpful shorthand for ‘an extant concrete particular.’
knows all things by his essence, and not by anything outside of himself. This means that divine simplicity might not rescue Miller here, as the quidditative content would exist in God’s mind after all. Perhaps here, given that God’s knowledge by his own essence is complete, the knowledge of the object would be of the concrete object. But it is hard to see that an object in God’s mind is identical to the object actualised in the act of creation without jeopardising the doctrine of creation.

Perhaps we could modify the above to say that God’s creative intention has its intension only by his self-derived knowledge of the object’s extension. I am not sure this does the work necessary to remove all potentiality. This still seems to require some sort of enacting of a potentiality that is present only as a non-existent plan. Divine simplicity is a strange beast, however, so we will let this pass until we know whether it is reflective of Hart’s view.

There is also the question of what happens to God’s knowledge of things when they pass out of existence. Would the form exist without essence in God’s mind then, always with the potentiality to be recreated? Something like Boethius’ notion of God’s simultaneity in his possession of life and time might do the work needed here. Again we arrive at a key part of so-called classical theism.

Perhaps the fact that we have arrived at an understanding requiring something like classical theism should be taken as an encouragement that this counter-argument to our objection falls within the bounds that the above thinkers and Hart might find acceptable. What this shows is that the question of whether I can adopt real distinction in my constructive work is dependent on my evaluation of the question of divine simplicity.

Let us then grant that the notion of the quidditative content, or what I have called a

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57 For more on divine ideas and God’s simplicity see: ibid., 156–58.
58 This is true even if one affirms de dicto necessity along the lines of ‘necessarily if God creates x then x exists.’ For there still exists the logical possibility of it not existing, it is still accidental in and of itself.
59 It is likely that these ideas mutually intelligible, which is to say that simplicity does not give warrant to the real distinction. Rather, these ideas gain warrant as a set of beliefs that form a coherent whole which accomplishes the task of articulating a biblical doctrine of creation. Nonetheless, if I reject simplicity, this coherence is disrupted and decision must be made as to what can be salvaged from this belief system.
‘soft bound’ above, as lacking ontological potentiality is at least potentially defensible. One of the benefits of Miller’s understanding of the bound is that it does not pose the problems that Clarke’s does because Miller is not committed to the notion of bound as limit. It still might be that existence is potentially infinite for Miller as for Clarke, despite the fact that ‘limit’ is not used. We must ask, then, what Miller means by ‘existence.’

We are given a window into what Miller means when he outlines what kind of first-level property existence is. Miller first defines two possibilities: *tropes* and *individualised forms* (or what Miller will call property instances).⁶⁰

A trope is “a particular entity” which is the instance of a universal (e.g. wisdom), but in its particularity is distinct from the wisdom of other beings (i.e. Aristotle’s wisdom is different from Plato’s). Thus “universal’ Wisdom would be the set of all the wisdom tropes, and hence ontologically prior to them.”⁶¹ Tropes are themselves beings.⁶²

Property instances, by contrast, are not “beings in their own right,” or substances. A paper’s whiteness is genuinely particular, but inseparable from the paper: property instances are “quite inseparable from the individuals (primary substances) to which they belong and in which …inhere.” Unlike tropes, property instances need not be thought of as logically prior to universals, and, in fact, do not commit one to a particular understanding of universals.⁶³

Existence is a property instance, not a trope, as linguistically first-level predicates (which correlate with ontological first-level properties) are “incomplete expressions that cannot be isolated from the propositions in which they occur.”⁶⁴ Thus “first-level properties are incomplete entities.” This inseparability means it is a property instance.⁶⁵

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⁶⁰Miller, *Fullness of Being*, 70–74.
⁶¹Miller, *Existence to God*, 71.
⁶²Miller, *Fullness of Being*, 72.
⁶³Ibid., 72.
⁶⁴Remember that Miller is working on the presupposition that linguistic investigation is the ground of ontology. ibid., 73.
⁶⁵Miller defends this series of deductions in far more detail, for our purposes, however, we can skip over this detail. ibid., See the whole of chapter 3 in:
Particular instances of existence are conceived of only as incomplete entities. Existence cannot go beyond the limits of the bound, not because it is held back by the bound but because the bound is the limit of existence. This instance of existence is inextricably this-way shaped. Miller does not fall into Clarke’s difficulty.

We see from this that while there are some problematic elements of Miller’s work, they are at least potentially surmountable when understood against a background of divine simplicity. Participation—as sharing an existence separate from, but analogous to God—works much more clearly than in Clarke’s system. We will now turn to one last thinker, this time one not from Hart’s list, to see an alternate construal of the real distinction.

We will here spell out Vallicella’s own theory of how essence and existence relate. His paradigm theory (PT) is that: “Necessarily, for any contingent individual \( x \), \( x \) exists if and only if (i) there is a necessary \( y \) such that \( y \) is the paradigm existent, and (ii) \( y \), as the external unifier of \( x \)’s ontological constituents, directly produces the unity/existence of \( x \).” The ‘external unifier’ is necessary as explicating existence has the following difficulties: 1. “Any noncircular explication which presupposes that existence is a property of existents will fail to capture actual existence.” These theories are existentially neutral. Positing, for example, that “for any \( x \), \( x \) exists if and only if \( x \) is causally active/passive” doesn’t “capture actual existence,” as it “is consistent with the nonexistence of individuals.” Existential neutrality is only avoided when “a theory of existence …somehow invoke[s] or presuppose[s] something that actually exists.”

The way through this dilemma is rejecting that there is only a single mode of existence. Instead Vallicella posits a paradigm existent which exists necessarily and contingent existents which stand in relation to it:

Necessarily, \( x \) exists (in mode 1) if and only if there is a \( y \) (which exists in mode 2) such that \( y \) stands in \( R \) to \( x \). A theory of this form will avoid the dilemma. It avoids the first horn by not being neutral on the

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68 Ibid., 3.
69 Ibid., 4.
question whether any individuals exist. It does not attempt the absurdity of an existentially neutral account of existence. For the explicans asserts the existence of an individual y by relation to which all else exists. The theory of existence is thereby anchored in an actual existent. But because y exists in a different way than the individuals mentioned in the explicandum, there is no circularity, and the second horn is avoided.⁷⁰

Thus the fact that Socrates and the paradigm both exist is due to two facts: 1. The Paradigm’s existence is its self-identity. 2. Socrates ontologically depends on the Paradigm. In other words, Socrate’s existence “is not his self-identity.” In saying ‘Socrates exists’ and ‘The Paradigm exists’ ‘exists’ has a different referent in each case: ‘contingent-existence’ and ‘paradigmatic-existence’ between which there is “no common existence.” They exist differently: “although it is true that Socrates and the Paradigm both exist, the truth-maker of this truth is not the fact that they share the attribute of existence. This is because there is no shared attribute of existence.”⁷¹

The modal use of ‘existence’ means that an analogy of being is ‘baked in’ to Vallicella’s outline of the real distinction. Vallicella does not use this language, but were this to be expressed in terms of participation it would, I think, be that x’s participation in y is a participation in the unity of y, where unity is analogical.

Vallicella’s account requires a careful explication of what it means for properties to be unified (i.e. how they can be said to not exist and then exist in unification). Vallicella does this by arguing—in distinction from Miller—that existence is not a first-level property. What then is existence?

Vallicella argues that “Ordinary particulars are concrete (truth-making) facts, and their existence is the contingent unity of their constituents.” This is how existence belongs to individuals “without being a property of them.” Facts, in other words, are not ontologically brute (i.e. they cannot simply exist).

Facts are, rather, “broadly relational” (even monadic facts like a’s being F). Yet this

⁷⁰Vallicella, Paradigm Theory, 7.
⁷¹If they were said to share the same existence then Plato’s third man regress would beset this formulation. ibid., 7–8.
creates a difficulty:

- “(B) A fact is nothing more than its constituents”
- “(B) A fact is something more than its constituents, since it is the constituents actually united with one another.”

Vallicella argues that (B) is false, that the existence of constituents or a nexus of such does not entail that the fact exists. But (B) also seems false insofar as a fact is precisely the unity of its constituents that make up a fact, and thus a fact cannot be more than its constituents. The equivalent problem is an informative parallel:

- “(C) An existing (thick) individual is nothing more than that very individual. There is no difference between an existing \( x \) and \( x \).”
- “(C) An existing (thick) individual is something more than that very individual. There is a crucial difference between an existing \( x \) and \( x \).”
- But (C) can be denied and (C) affirmed by stating that, “existing Socrates is referred to an entity U from which he derives his existence.”\(^{72}\)

In other words, “Existing Socrates” is more in his dependence on U, than abstract Socrates. This is because Socrates “depends on the unifier U to be a fact at all.” The very possibility of facts depends on an external unifier. Individuals have existence, not as a first or second level property or as identical to the individual, but rather by their contingent unity which is external insofar as it is “distinct from the individual and each of its constituents.”\(^{73}\) To put it in words which Vallicella does not, this looks rather like existence as gift never fully possessed by the recipient.

What is clear is that this account of the real distinction requires that an abstract bundle of facts can be unified while its unity remains distinct from the individual. This is not immediately conceptualisable, but perhaps it is comprehensible in the way of Miller’s explication of the de dicto and de re explication of a sentence like ‘Socrates has existence.’ In other words one can say that Socrates ‘exists (as a brute fact)’ but not that Socrates ‘possesses his existence.’

\(^{73}\)Ibid., 1-2.
There is a metaphysical leap here, but I would argue that Vallicella’s is the most persuasive of the proposals so far. Treating being as composition of existence and limit—as do Clarke and Miller—seems to be fraught with difficulty. Treating existence as the unification of properties elides these difficulties, though it requires a metaphysical concession. Nonetheless, I would suggest that it is the least problematic concession so far.

It is worth noting that Vallicella’s theory requires something like divine simplicity because of the strength of unity required for the paradigm necessary-existent. It is a non-material being (a mind)—as a material being can be only a contingent composition—whose essence is identical to its existence.⁷⁴ There can be no composition, it “does not have existence; it is existence.”⁷⁵ It looks increasingly likely that the real distinction either requires, or is very difficult to extract from, a framework of classical theism.

It is also worth noting that Vallicella explicitly identifies his work as onto-theology. He argues that ontology, as studying existence, and not simply what exists is possible “only if existence itself exists as a paradigm existent. …That is to say, ontology, the science of Being, is possible only if Being itself occurs as a paradigmatic being. Heidegger is therefore wrong to maintain that ontology is possible only as phenomenology.”⁷⁶ Whether Vallicella’s use of analogy is sufficient to warrant Hart’s approval, despite the invocation of the term onto-theology, is an open question.

This exploration of thinkers working on the real distinction has shown that there is a variety of approaches taken to explicate just how the real distinction functions. With this comes a variety of understandings of what it means for us to participate in God’s existence. Furthermore I would suggest that the most plausible articulation of the real distinction surveyed above is in fact one not shown by Hart. This survey has shown us the possibilities of how the real distinction might be understood, but its very diversity has shown the difficulty in reconstructing Hart’s position.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 269.
⁷⁶ Ibid., 7.
Bibliography


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