AD FONTES

A JOURNAL OF PROTESTANT RESOURCEMENT

A DAVENANT INSTITUTE PUBLICATION ISSUE 3.1 • SEPTEMBER 2018

DEBATING THE SIMPLE GOD

JOSEPH MINICH

In the last few years, few issues have been more controversial among Reformed evangelicals than the debate over the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father.[1] To the extent that God's intra-triune life has been thought to be the foundation and model of inter-human relationships, many have perceived their various social programs (particularly in relation to the sexes) to be at stake, at times driving the debate's resolution in a particular direction. One meta-issue continually at the forefront in the debate over eternal subordination concerns the traditional doctrine of God's simplicity. In classical Christian theology, it is insisted that God is not composed of parts. The *simple* in *divine simplicity* is not *simple* as opposed to *complex*, but *simple* as opposed to *composite*. It is clear that, for instance, God is not a composition of soul and body. But from the classical theist perspective, the doctrine of divine simplicity goes further than this. God is also not composed of His attributes. They do not inhere in Him as accidental properties of a fundamental "God" substance. Rather, God's existence is simply *as* His attributes, which simply *are* Him, and which (then) are to be seen as diverse ways of naming all that is in God. What is more, since there is only one God who just is (for instance) His own will, it is problematic—from a classical perspective—to speak of the Son as "submitting" to the Father in the intra-triune life from eternity past. It is difficult to see how this would not imply a multiplicity of wills of which God's supposed "one will" is an amalgam.

Already, however, advocates of divine simplicity find themselves in the midst of exegetical and theological quandaries that need to be addressed. Most importantly, does this doctrine cohere with Scripture and its portrayal of God's participation in human history, especially in the incarnation? And even more obviously, how does such a position cohere with the doctrine of the Trinity? If God is absolutely and essentially "one," then in what way can we speak of the Father "not being" the Son, etc.? These twin concerns are perhaps the most common in Reformed evangelical circles. There are other concerns about the doctrine's coherence and implications as such. For instance, if God's will is essential to Him and God's will has always been to create, does this mean that creation is somehow "necessary," since God's being is necessary? Presumably we'd want to avoid that conclusion—but it is difficult to see how we might on this view.

Controversy over the doctrine was ignited afresh with the publication of James Dolezal's *All That Is in God* (2017).[2] Prominent theologian John Frame posted a several-part interaction with the volume on his website, making the case that Dolezal's efforts privileged the catego-

1. On which, see the insightful commentary of Alastair Roberts, whose blog series is linked here: "https://alastairadversaria.com/2017/06/26/the-eternal-subordination-of-the-son-controversy-11-concluding-reflections-part-2/."

2. I have reviewed the volume here, "https://calvinistinternational.com/2017/08/31/review-james-dolezals-god/."

ries of Greek philosophy over those of the Bible.[3] Lurking just beneath the surface of these different theological instincts are larger debates about the sources of theology, including the extent to which we can speak of a "natural theology," but within the Reformed community (especially in America) this is itself often intertwined with radically different evaluations of the legacy of Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987). This is not to mention disagreement over even larger historical narratives concerning the continuity (or lack thereof) between the Reformed tradition and the Medieval church.

In light of this, this year's themed editions of *Ad Fontes* seek to intervene into this conversation in a way continuous with last year's broader treatment of Christianity and philosophy in general. Last year's efforts, the results of which will be released in a book next month, seek to get at some of the issues of principle and method by means of which the particular issue in front of us might be negotiated.[4] But positive work is still very much in need of being done.

CORNELIUS VAN TIL

LURKING JUST BENEATH THE SURFACE OF THESE DIFFERENT THEOLOGICAL INSTINCTS ARE LARGER DEBATES ABOUT THE SOURCES OF THEOLOGY, ...BUT WITHIN THE REFORMED COMMUNITY (ESPECIALLY IN AMERICA) THIS IS ITSELF OFTEN INTERTWINED WITH RADICALLY DIFFERENT EVALUATIONS OF THE LEGACY OF CORNELIUS VAN TIL.

One would be forgiven, of course, for querying whether this is really the case. Much ink has been spilled on this doctrine, including recent historical, biblical, and systematic defenses.[5] Without a doubt, this work has been important. Our aim is to supplement such efforts by combining insights from several different disciplines in a single convenient place that gets at these issues from biblical, historical, systematic, philosophical, and pastoral theological perspectives. What is more, in each of these areas, we aim to extend the insights of our interlocutors by anticipating and addressing itches that many have not felt to be sufficiently scratched. In some cases, we will be covering well-trodden territory. In other cases, we hope to offer some fresh insight. Let us unpack some of the questions at stake.

Concerning the Bible, shouldn't we take the plain language of Scripture over against our theological constructs? For instance, the Bible clearly speaks of different divine attributes, sometimes right next to one another. Does our doctrine of God risk retrofitting Scripture to fit our theology? What is more, isn't the philosophical pedigree which would motivate us to do so one that comes from Parmenides and Plotinus rather than Peter and Paul? And would such philosophical categories even mean anything to Hebrews in the Ancient Near Eastern world? Apart from commitment to this philosophical construct, would we ever derive the doctrine from Scripture itself—even by good and necessary consequence—absent a pre-constructed, primarily Greek, philosophical construct? Does any biblical text actually prove it, or are we (at best) just demonstrating a "consistency" between the Bible and the doctrine? And if so, why should it be so central to Christian theology? But even beyond this, doesn't simplicity stand in tension with the classical Christian doctrine of the Trinity? And for all that, is the doctrine even coherent? Can we avoid making creation necessary? Is it rationally necessary or only probable? Are good answers available for the many philosophical objections that have been thrown against it? And finally, how does this matter pastorally? Or even more urgently, is it harmful pastorally? Does it so qualify God's being in His relationship to creation that we cannot take Scripture at face value and cannot know that any biblical portrayal of God is "true enough" to take comfort in it?

In the months to come and in the resultant volume to be published around this time next year, we hope to address all of these questions and more. We anticipate separate treatments of the Old and New Testaments, a treatment of the divine persons, several articles on the history, development, and diverse accounts of the doctrine within the classical theistic tradition, articles on its philosophical coherence and necessity, and articles on its relationship to other theological *loci* and its pastoral implications.

Our goal is not merely to defend the doctrine, but to appeal to and persuade the conscience of those who are reticent about it (as it stands in its traditional formulation). Of course, we will not persuade everyone, but we are confident that what we have to offer, in aggregate, *ought* to persuade our readers. The goal of this persuasion is not merely to resolve a point of technical, philosophical dispute. Rather, the goal is to cultivate the unity of the church in order that she might be aided in thinking clearly about God and the implications of the doctrine of God, and that she might be further united in common witness and worship.

Joseph Minich is the Editor-in-Chief for the Davenant Institute and a Ph.D candidate in the Humanities at The University of Texas at Dallas. He recently published Enduring Divine Absence: The Challenge of Modern Atheism. *More of his writing can be found at* Mere Orthodoxy *and* The Calvinist International.

3. See the helpful summary of Kyle Dillon, "https://allkirk.net/2017/12/01/roundup-on-the-frame-dolezal-dustup/."

4. See Joseph Minich, ed., *Philosophy and the Christian: The Quest for Wisdom in the Light of Christ* (Lincoln: The Davenant Institute, forthcoming).

5. Of particular significance is James Dolezal, *God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2011), Steven Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2015), and Jordan Barrett, *Divine Simplicity: A Biblical and Trinitarian Account* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017).

AUGUST GOD: NOTES ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONSTRUCTION OF "CLASSICAL THEISM"

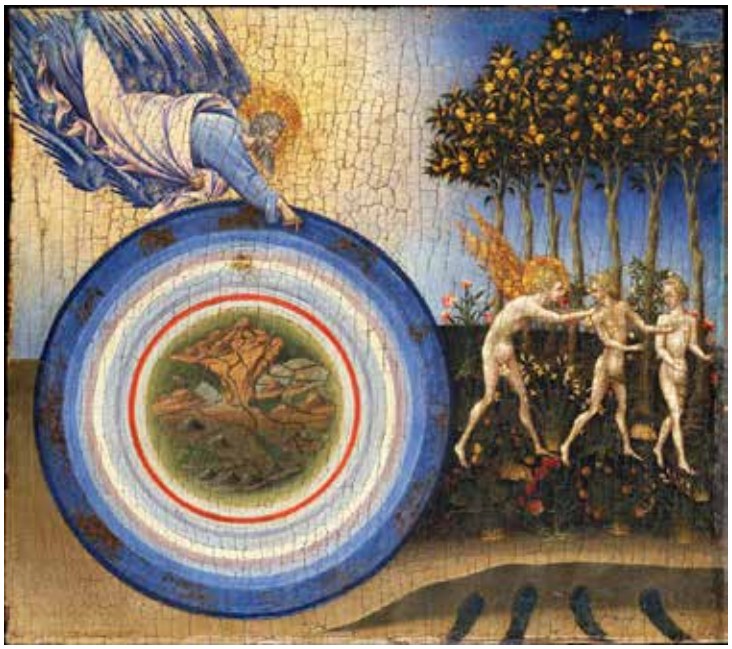
DERRICK PETERSON

Now, while genealogy is almost coincident with the Western tradition of discourse and their correlative forms of life and practice, I want to suggest that it gets greatly exacerbated in the modern period, such that just about no philosopher or theologian can avoid it: either plot a rival discourse on a line, or experience one's own discourses being plotted.

—Cyril O'Regan[1]

Those who narrate the story of God clearly wield no little authority. The same can be said for those who narrate the story of the doctrine of God.

—Kevin Vanhoozer[2]



THE CREATION OF THE WORLD AND THE EXPULSION FROM PARADISE
BY GIOVANNI DI PAOLO, 1445

Depending on whom you ask, "classical theism" will be either boon or bane to the Christian tradition. In the last century or two, the answers one gets have increasingly tended toward the latter. What happened? While defenses of something called "classical theism" are just as numerous as calls for its abolishment, I want to explore a slightly different approach. In this paper I want to point out some of the distortions that occur when a self-conscious canon of figures are collected and compressed into the "classical theism" category, which was actually coined as a term of polemic in the mid-twentieth century. While we can only look at a few features, I want to suggest these alterations and misrepresentations are not a haphazard collection of mistakes merely adventitious to the polemical use of the category "classical theism," but constitute what Cyril O'Regan (borrowing from Paul Ricouer) has termed in a slightly different context "rule-governed deformation."[3] This occurs because "classical theism" does not just attempt to name a doctrine or set of doctrines, but often promotes a particular historiography that gives shape to the history of ideas either tacitly or explicitly.

To claim this calls attention to one of the interesting but often neglected tasks involved in analyzing doctrines of God—namely, not just whether or not a particular claim or set of claims interpret Scripture, theology, history, and their interlocutors correctly, but *why* certain interpretations and misinterpretations happen when they do.[4] What we must be alert to is not just that in the course of critique many read Aquinas or Augustine incorrectly, but why these interpretations skew in the specific manner they have. Our argument in this paper is that the formative contexts of both the category "classical theism" and an attendant category "onto-theology," insofar as they are seen as historiographical lenses, can be shown to be at least partially to blame. Our argument can be viewed as a variation of other theo-historiographical attempts to undo, for example, Athanasius' rhetorical creation of "Arianism;"[5] urgings put forward by, say, Richard Muller's attempt to liberate the Reformed tradition and Calvin himself from the label "Calvinism;"[6] Bruce McCormack's work excavating Karl Barth from the umbrella of "neo-Orthodoxy"[7] or at a broader level

1. Cyril O'Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering: Von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity--Volume 1: Hegel* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2014), 50.

2. Kevin Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 82.

3. Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 44–45.

4. This essay can be seen as an extension of a previously published work of mine where I argue that the secret organizing principle to a great deal of twentieth century theology is a reaction to how neo-Thomism organized and codified much of the theological tradition. See Derrick Peterson, "A Sacred Monster: On The Secret Fears of Some Recent Trinitarianism," *Cultural Encounters* 12 no. 1 (2016): 3–36.

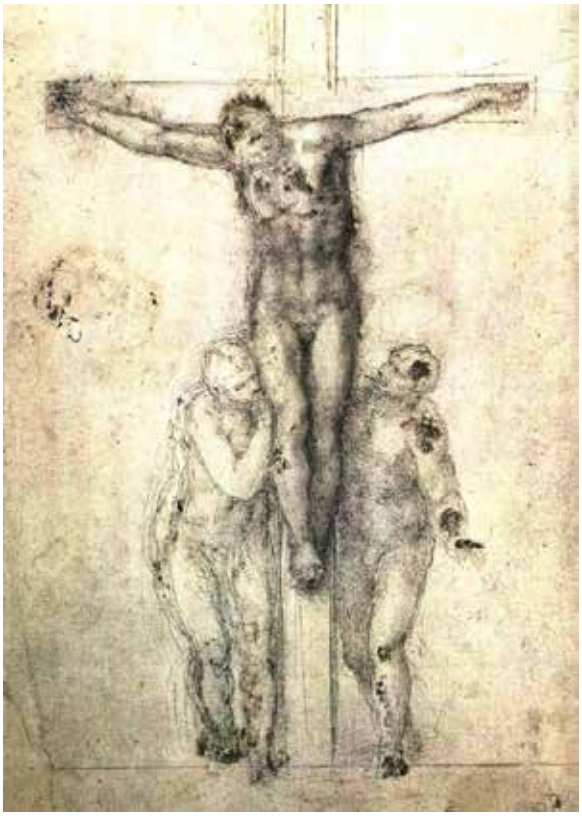
5. For example, see the essays in Michel R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams, *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993).

6. Richard Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 13–69.

7. Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Oxford: OUP, 1995); *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

recent scholarship's questioning the utility of understanding Christianity by way of discourse on "religion."[8]

In each of those instances, despite the variety of arguments and terrain covered, the claim is that the heuristic category in question (be it "Arianism," "Calvinism," "neo-Orthodoxy," or "religion") has taken on a distorted life of its own, and is expected to do conceptual heavy-lifting, when in fact it is the very thing in need of justification. Similarly, what I want to suggest is that while the labels "classical theism" and "ontotheology" ostensibly serve as historical designations often used to diagnose what went wrong with the tradition of theology, as a matter of course a large portion of the sequence is secretly running the other way around: already established constructive positions retroactively write the histories they are meant to overcome or emulate. This being the case often builds misrepresentations into the pictures of traditional thinkers as they are placed into their respective categories of "classical theism" and "ontotheology." As the philosopher Richard Rorty once humorously observed of Martin Heidegger, for example, his attempt "to write 'the history of Being' [was by] commenting on texts mentioned in Ph.D. examinations in philosophy in German universities early this century." As such, once one finds himself "in the aftermath of being enthralled by the drama Heidegger stages, one may begin to find it suspicious that Being stuck so close to the syllabus."[9]



CRUCIFIX, BY MICHAELANGELO, C. 1556

Likewise, one can paint a similar picture regarding the origins of the classification "classical theism." As Daniel Castelo puts it, particularly in reference to the debates surrounding the passibility of God: "Historical narrations of the shift [to a passible God] have ensued with the purposes of establishing some sort of continuity with the received tradition, but interestingly enough the assessment of the change has occurred *post-factum* to divine passibility's establishment as the biblical and conceptual norm." As such, says Castelo, "the impulse to affirm 'a suffering God' was often *applied to*, rather than *generated from*, the inquiry itself, thereby skewing the ensuing historical findings and reconstructions."[10] He concludes, therefore:

> [G]iven that "classical theism" is an anachronistic category of convenience for labeling different and distinct voices under one heading, the term fails to account for the multivalent ways in which divine impassibility functioned for numerous ancient writers and thinkers, especially those who were able to affirm both divine impassibility *and* the legitimacy and value of the incarnate Christ who suffered in the flesh…[I argue] that the category of "classical theism" [is] nonviable for contemporary systematics.[11]

Indeed, continuing along those lines, Paul Gavrilyuk thus concludes: "Patristic theology did not face a choice between the apathetic deity of the philosophers and the suffering God of the Bible, because these views of God represent questionable scholarly constructs, rather than the actual theological options available to the theologians of late antiquity."[12] While both Castelo and Gavrilyuk are referencing impassibility in particular, their judgments regarding overbearing scholarly anachronisms doing too much legwork are remarkably applicable to a broad range of problems affecting opinions on "classical theism"—and indeed our argument is that they are an integrated part of the very category itself.

It thus turns out that both ontotheology and classical theism as categories used to critique and reject (but also on occasion, uphold) certain theological and philosophical traditions rely on a prior move or sequence of moves in which a canon of interpretation has previously been organized and established as the field upon which battle is to be waged.[13] For example, as William Babcock has criticized, there persists a tendency in many textbooks—in particular when recounting the history of the Trinity—to break off after fairly detailed elaborations of Thomas Aquinas and medieval scholasticism, and pick up again immediately with Friedrich Schleiermacher. This, says Babcock, creates a false canon of continuity, making the claims of Thomas' supposed separation of the treatises on God as "One" and God as "Three" terminate fairly naturally in Schleiermacher's eventual supposed relegation of the Trinity to a mere appendix in his *The Christian Faith*. While both claims individually can be questioned as to their accuracy, the larger point Babcock wants to make is that "[this] typical pattern in historical studies … leaves blank the very interval that we most need to have filled-in if we are to gain some understanding of where and how this shift of sensibilities took place."[14] Just as with

8. Nicholas Lash, *The Beginning and the End of "Religion"* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 3–25; William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: OUP, 2009).

9. Richard Rorty, "The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres," in Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), 49–76 (quote at 71).

10. Daniel Castelo, *The Apathetic God: Exploring the Contemporary Relevance of Divine Impassibility* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 10.

11. Castelo, *Apathetic God,* 40–41.

12. Paul Gavrilyuk, *Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 172.

13. Helpful summaries on analytic theology can be found in Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Inquiring About God: Selected Essays vol. 1*, in Terence Cuneo, ed., (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), esp. 17–55; "How Philosophical Theology Became Possible Within the Analytic Tradition of Philosophy," in Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea, eds., *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 155–71. On Heidegger's narrative, a good place to start for our purposes is Wayne Hankey, "Why Heidegger's 'History' of Metaphysics is Dead," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 78 no. 2 (2004): 425–43.

14. William S. Babcock, "A Changing of the Christian God: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the 17th Century," *Interpretation* no. 45 (1991): 133–46 (quote at 135).

Castelo and Gavrilyuk, Babcock's general insight can be expanded to cover the entire historiographical field of discourse that has come to be associated with the category "classical theism."

Due to space limitations, we must confine ourselves to a brief investigation regarding the genesis of the category "classical theism," and the contexts that went with it but were often forgotten or overlooked as the category became naturalized in textbooks. We will also suggest a few distortions that occur in the historical tradition that appear to be byproducts of the category's origin. We claim no pretense to anything approaching exhaustiveness, nor indeed anything that might serve as a "monocausal" explanation for disconnects that occur when the tradition is critiqued under the category "classical theism."[15] Without evading the difficulties that "classical theism" was meant to display, our essay hopes to provoke a more general reflection on how and why the tradition often seems to be misrepresented.

I. CONSTRUCTING CLASSICAL THEISM

On or around 1950, the term "classical theism," was born.[16] As with many labels that end up sticking, this one was birthed as a term of polemic rather than praise. "Classical theism" was in fact produced alongside its twin, "neo-classical theism,"[17] and ironically, as it turns out, the slightly elder brother of the categorizations is the latter. As surprising as it might sound given its current ubiquity, "Process theologians seem to have coined the category *classical theism*, now so widely used as to seem self evident."[18]

AS SURPRISING AS IT MIGHT SOUND GIVEN ITS CURRENT UBIQUITY, "PROCESS THEOLOGIANS SEEM TO HAVE COINED THE CATEGORY CLASSICAL THEISM, NOW SO WIDELY USED AS TO SEEM SELF EVIDENT."

This coining didn't happen right away. Especially initially, process philosophy got off to a rocky start and had enough problems with its own arcane technical vocabulary, let alone how it codified traditional philosophy and theology.[19] Larry Witham humorously recounts a scene when Alfred North Whitehead began his 1928 presentation for the prestigious Gifford Lectures, which would later become his seminal book *Process and Reality*. The presentation was so maddeningly abstract that it soon scattered the crowds in Edinburgh, and "[Whitehead's] disconsolate wife was one of the six or so loyalists who stuck it out in the echoing hall [for the second lecture]."[20] Even one of Whitehead's associates, J. M. Whittaker, wrote of the lecture in a letter to another friend: "My father remarked to me that had he not known Whitehead well, he would have suspected it was an imposter making it up as he went along.… The audience at subsequent lectures was half a dozen at all, so I am told, for I fear that I myself was one of the backsliders."[21] To make matters worse, despite his serene brilliance, Whitehead was a notoriously careless editor of his own works. *Process and Reality* contained no less than two hundred errors when it went to print, many of which nested key ambiguities into the already jargon-heavy theoretical structure of Whitehead's thought. Even to this day critical attempts at reconstructing an error-free version of the text leave many expert interpreters at odds with one another regarding what he must have originally intended.[22]

Though it would only partially overcome these terminological hurdles, process philosophy went on to be one of the most influential philosophical and theological movements of the twentieth century, at least in America. Even up through the 1960s process philosophy and theology remained mostly an American phenomenon. The Munich theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg, who even relatively early in his career had gained a reputation for his voluminous reading, recalls to his surprise that his first encounter with Whiteheadian process philosophy came in 1963 as he took a stint as guest professor at the University of Chicago. "For the sake of my own intellectual survival," he recounts, "I had to come to grips quickly and intensively with the writings of the philosopher [Whitehead] who was at that time hardly known on the continent of Europe."[23] In part this American and European divide can be explained by the fact that Europe already had Hegel and the German Idealists. After World War I, and then again after World War II, Hegel and anything German became anathema in America, leaving room for a non-Hegelian philosophy that emphasized process and change (and in Whitehead's case, a hearty dialogue with the natural sciences).[24]

Whitehead took aim at rethinking in a comprehensive way the whole tradition of Western metaphysics—a footnote to Plato, as Whitehead's famous quip goes—and so the scope of his project along with his own idiosyncratic and inconsistent neologisms meant there was no singular, systematic entity like "classical theism" that emerged as a foil to process philosophy. Forging this foil was left to Charles Hartshorne—not Whitehead's successor per se, but a fellow traveler on the process path and an eventual colleague at Harvard. At the very least, even by 1953 with the increasing spread of process thought,

15. Other major factors—like covering ontotheology—will be added later as this essay is expanded in order to be published in a book scheduled to be out later in 2019 by The Davenant Institute.

16. A Google NGram search for publications in English shows little to no uses of the phrase 1949 and prior, with it suddenly popping into existence in 1950. While not ruling out prior occasional use, it does suggest a high probability that the term was not used earlier in a more systematic manner.

17. For a particularly engaging introduction to process philosophy, neo-classical theism, and its followers, see Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity 1950–2005* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 58–132, 190–268.

18. Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology Volume One: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 165n11.

19. Bruce G. Epperly, *Process Philosophy: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 10–11.

20. Larry Witham, *The Measure of God: Our Century-Long Struggle to Reconcile Science & Religion* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 4.

21. Quoted in Epperly, *Process Philosophy*, 11.

22. Bruce Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860–1930* (New Haven: YUP, 1979), 517.

23. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Atomism, Duration, Form: Difficulties With Process Philosophy," in Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 113.

24. Bruce Kucklick, "Seven Thinkers and How They Grew: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz; Locke, Berkeley Hume; Kant" in *Philosophy in History*, 133: "After the war, for Americans, Hegel became a silly, pompous, and *defeated* figure, unworthy of the great tradition. Indeed, the wonder is not that Hegel vanished, but that Kant remained." For additional comparisons between America and Europe, see Thomas Albert Howard, *God and the Atlantic: America, Europe, and the Religious Divide* (Oxford: OUP, 2013).

the term "classical theism" was apparently still so new that coeditors William L. Reese and Charles Hartshorne felt obliged to introduce it to their book *Philosophers Speak of God* by the phrase "what we propose to call 'classical theism.'"[25] As late as 1969, the Lonergan scholar Robert Doran, SJ in reference to one of Hartshorne's sympathizers, Schubert Ogden, still felt the need to qualify Ogden's philosophical approach to theology as an alternative "to what he [Ogden] calls 'classical theism.'"[26]

II. DEFORMATIONS (A): MONOPOLARITY

Classical theism is a broad church, one glossed by Reese and Hartshorne as "God as Eternal Consciousness, Knowing [But Not Including] the World," and was enumerated by a whirlwind tour through Philo, Augustine, Anselm, Al-Ghazali, Maimonides, Aquinas, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Channing, and Von Hügel.[27] As one might suspect given the potpourri of "classical theist" names just listed, while bearing some resemblance to the historical figures they designate, most are stretched rather thin to be included altogether under the logic of what Reese and Hartshorne pejoratively call "monopolarity."[28] Classical theism—and indeed classical panentheism—when considering binary (or dipolar) concepts like time and eternity, potentiality and actuality, or contingency and necessity, arbitrarily prefer one side of the polarity and demote or suppress the other, or so goes the argument. But this is surely a major moment of reductionism already. Such a simple engine is not able to drive the actual complexities of theological history, but only a parade float of pale effigies.

URIZEN IS DEPICTED IN WILLIAM BLAKE'S WATERCOLOURED ETCHING "THE ANCIENT OF DAYS," 1793

Reese and Hartshorne certainly do have an eye for historical detail when it suits them, yet here their figures are ciphers meant to display the austere internal logic of sets of ideas. In one sense this reflects the embedding of the whole process philosophical project in currents of American philosophy at the time—and particularly at Harvard where process philosophy was incubated—whose central idea was to "extract from experience a single set of abstract principles."[29] In addition—and quite ironically given its emphasis on change—process philosophy imbibed and represented the anti-historical tendencies in American analytic philosophy, where attention to history was often thought to lead to pedantry and lack of creativity, and should be studied "only to the extent that it could contribute to problems of current relevance."[30] As a tool meant for analyzing theological and philosophical history, the notion of monopolarity is a fairly explicit instance of both of these principles: an abstract concept has been extracted and is driving historical analysis in terms of a current problem. To be sure, thinkers like Origen or Anselm are noted to have occasionally glimpsed beyond what the veils of their metaphysics allowed them to see, but these are deemed sporadic and ultimately stillborn epiphanies.

Monopolarity as a gloss is seriously misleading not just in its generality, but specifically because it leads us to imagine that traditional theologians pictured God as a somewhat self-contained individual hovering in His transcendence over and above the world as a rather large (and no doubt grouchy) "superobject."[31] This interpretation creates the conditions for the neo-classical theistic correction in the direction of dipolar panentheism, or other similar varieties, attempting to correct this distant picture of God. Through the "ontotheological" critique of Heidegger (whose details must be left to one side in this essay for space considerations), a similar narrative is taken up and pressed onto the theological record. Robert Scharlemann portrays at length the existence of a bland and remarkably uniform theism, for example, one that confused God as a being among other beings and which found its deserved end in the Enlightenment.[32] Yet, if we maintain the notion of "classical theism" as referencing Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas for the moment, this is not at all classical theism but what Brian Davies has helpfully termed "theistic personalism."[33] For Thomas, as Rudi Te Velde puts it at length:

25. William L. Reese and Charles Hartshorne, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 2–4.

26. Robert Doran, SJ, "Schubert Ogden: The Problem of God and the Nature of Theology," (December 5, 1969): 1. Accessed August 15th, 2018. https://www.lonerganresource.com/pdf/books/14/07_Schubert_Ogden_-_The_Problem_of_God_and_the_Nature_of_Theology.pdf. It is unclear whether this was a published work, or something Doran used for classes. Either way the felt need to still self-consciously refer to "classical theism" as a categorization idiosyncratic to Ogden is striking.

27. Reese and Hartshorne, *Philosophers Speak of God*, 76–164.

28. For an early and fairly unrelenting use of monopolarity as a critique from one of Hartshorne and Reese's disciples, see Cedric L. Hepler, "The Death of Classical Theism: Divine Relativity," *Saint Luke's Journal of Theology* (April 1, 1968): 4–20.

29. Kucklick, *Rise of American Philosophy*, 519.

30. Kucklick, *Rise of American Philosophy*, 576.

31. "Superobject" is a term Colin Gunton uses to describe Hartshorne's understanding of God in Thomas Aquinas. See Colin E. Gunton, *Becoming and Being: The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 17; cf. Gunton, *Doctrine of God*, 1–23 for Gunton's survey of Hartshorne construal of "classical theism."

32. Robert Scharlemann, "The Being of God When God is Not Being God: Deconstructing the History of Theism," in Thomas J.J. Altizer, et. al., *Deconstruction and Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 79–108.

33. Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 1–21; cf. James Dolezal, *All That Is In God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), who uses the term "theistic mutualists" much to the same effect as Davies's "theistic personalism."

There is something in Thomas' conception of God as *ipsum esse per se subsistens* that does not fit very well into the picture of "classical theism." Classical theism, as it is usually understood, tends to view God as an absolute entity existing independently of the world. The theistic God looks more like *a* being, a "self-contained substance," above and apart from the world, than the pure actuality of *subsistent being itself.* From Thomas' perspective, this would mean that the independence of God, as over against the world of finite beings, is conceived wrongly. It is as if the character of subsistence, attributed to a theistically conceived God, is a logical expression by means of which we think of God as separated from the world, as a distinct reality, while Thomas intends to express by subsistence that the being of God is separated *through itself* from all other beings. The difference is crucial. For Thomas, God is not "separated" from the world as a subsistent entity conceivable apart from his causal relationship to created beings; it is as cause of all beings that God "separates" himself from all his effects by distinguishing those effects from himself. In this sense the "concept" of God is, in truth, the concept of the relationship of God and world, conceived as an ordered plurality of diverse beings, each of which receives its being from the divine source of being. For Thomas there is no way of thinking of God concretely outside this relationship. The independence, or absoluteness, of God characterizes the way He relates as cause to all other things; it is the independence of the perfect goodness of God, who is not under any obligation or necessity to fulfill himself by creating, but who acts out of his own goodness, establishing all other things in being by letting them share in his own perfection.[34]

CREATION OF THE COSMOS

III. DEFORMATIONS (B): DIVINE CAUSATION AND CREATION EX NIHILO

Immediately, however, this correction by Te Velde runs into another problem brought about by "classical theism" as a category—namely, regarding the notion of causality. Imagining the classical picture of God along the lines of a "superobject" puts God and creation on the same plane, so to speak, and creates a zero-sum or "contrastive" relationship between God and the world. This in turn puts additional and univocal stress on "causation"[35] in terms inferred directly from how we understand intra-mundane causality generally. Thus many process philosophers and theologians feel a pressing need to revise the conflict by targeting the ideas of omnipotence, causality, and creation *ex nihilo* (from nothing), allowing more creative freedom to the world; or by envisioning God's power less as domination and more as creativity; or by giving creation the capacity to affect even God; or a variety of other nuances.[36]

Of course there are a great number of factors that go into the felt need for such revisions. Our purpose here is again to point out how these revisions affect and are affected by historiography, and that is where many difficulties creep in.[37] As Fergus Kerr notes regarding interpretations on Thomas Aquinas in particular—though the insight can be expanded to other figures beneath the "classical theism" umbrella—it can often feel hopeless to sift through critiques of *ex nihilo* and the notion of causality because they are not only based on intrinsic difficulties with the ideas themselves, but rather (as we have been arguing in general) "conflicting interpretations of Thomas' view rooted in radically different theological expectations and suspicions."[38] The process theologian Catherine Keller's interpretations of traditional uses of *ex nihilo* are a case in point.[39]

Let us for the moment put aside Keller's claims that *ex nihilo* creation "depended upon Platonic metaphysics," and "locked into dogma a clean and simple form of Hellenistic dualism," both of which are bewilderingly incorrect—*ex nihilo* was alien to all forms of Greek Hellenism, and was formulated specifically to counteract gnostic dualism.[40] We can also grant her argument that *ex nihilo* is not straightforwardly demanded by a reading of Genesis[41] (something which few deny).[42] Yet, in many instances her critiques of traditional uses of *ex nihilo* as fundamentally domineering and falsely prioritizing causality only become under-

34. Rudi Te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The Divine Science of the Summa Theologica* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 172; cf. 85.

35. We can see fairly unsophisticated examples of this in how many so-called "New Atheists" and even some theologians handle the classical cosmological and design arguments. See Edward Feser, *Neo-Scholastic Essays* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2015), 84–192.

36. For example, see the essays in Thomas J. Oord, ed., *Theologies of Creation:* Creatio Ex Nihilo *and Its New Rivals* (London: Rutledge, 2014).

37. For help with such historiography, see Janet M. Soskice, ed., *Creation "Ex Nihilo" and Contemporary Theology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

38. Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 42.

39. Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

40. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 46.

41. Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 1–40. However, Ian A. McFarland makes the excellent observation that despite Keller's extensive and often illuminating exegesis of Genesis in an ancient near-eastern context, she nowhere brings John's gospel to bear on how we interpret Genesis, where Christ has brought "all things" into existence. See Ian A. McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 22.

42. This is, for example, one of the basic premises that drives Gerhard May's exploration of the early initial development of the doctrine. Keller acknowledges this, but disagrees when May argues *ex nihilo* was a *legitimate* development. See Gerhard May, *Creation Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of Creation "Out of Nothing" in Early Christian Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994).

standable if one has already adopted her solutions, which assume as their baseline something like Whitehead's reinterpretation of Western metaphysics through the lens of process philosophy.

Keller's idea that *ex nihilo* represents a domineering omnipotence and tyrannical causality which displaces or competes with created agency makes an *exact inversion* of how *ex nihilo* was traditionally understood: "Creation is not an exercise of divine power," as Rowan Williams helpfully summarizes some of the traditional views, "Power is exercised *by x over y*; but creation is not power, because it is not exercised *on* anything."[43] Or, in Sonderegger's terms: "Omnipotence cannot be a species or form of causality...the *relatio* of God to the world cannot be a species of a larger category [than God]...God is His own relation to the world; there is no other."[44] As will become more important in the next section when we briefly turn to "perfect-being theism" as a product of process theology, "power" is not an immanent attribute of God; God is not "power" *in se*.[45]

WITH THE NEW DOMAIN DESCRIBED BY "CLASSICAL THEISM," A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT GAME IS BEING PLAYED—ONE IN WHICH CAUSALITY HAS IRONICALLY ATTAINED A NEW TRANSMUTED PRIORITY IN TERMS OF UNDERSTANDING GOD'S RELATION TO THE WORLD, EVEN AS PROCESS THEOLOGIANS ARE OSTENSIBLY TRYING TO LIMIT ITS EFFECTS.

43. Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 39–40.

44. Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology Volume 1*, 178–79.

45. Gilles Emery, *The Trinity in Aquinas* (Florida: Ava Maria University, 2008), 4–9; 124; Timothy L. Smith, *Thomas Aquinas' Trinitarian Theology: A Study in Theological Method* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 126–29.

God's power and causation are not here items that compete for space in creation, but the grounds of possibility for all creativity whatsoever. In order to critique the classical notions of *ex nihilo* and omnipotence in this sense, one has to have already secretly switched the ontological domain in which those theological terms operated, and have them now operating in the same plane as created creativity and causality. By then, however, with the new domain described by "classical theism," a completely different game is being played—one in which causality has ironically attained a new transmuted priority in terms of understanding God's relation to the world, even as process theologians are ostensibly trying to limit its effects. As D. Stephen Long notes, "the ironic consequence of this revision...is that God [in process theology] is understood more in terms of causal power than God ever was in Thomas Aquinas."[46]

Historiographically, that God is taken to be power *in se* hints not only at a distortion of traditional claims. Further, it suggests as well that a post-Cartesian tradition of philosophy and theology is being illicitly read into Aquinas, Anselm, Augustine, and others, who are, in turn, then rejected based on this reading. We must for now abstain from investigating this alternative trajectory in which "God Exposes Himself to Causality."[47] For now, let us turn to Jürgen Moltmann as

46. D. Stephen Long, *The Perfectly Simple Triune God: Aquinas and His Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 185–86.

47. This phrase is taken from a section header in Jean-Luc Marion, "The Essential Incoherence of Descartes' Definition of Divinity," in *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*, ed.

additional evidence of this post-Cartesian tradition being read into the Fathers.[48]

III.A. EXCURSUS: JÜRGEN MOLTMANN AND *TSIMSUM*

The problems we have been describing are not limited to Keller or process theology. Many recent kenotic theologies, for example, must assume a similar type of contrastive transcendence in order for their ostensible solutions to operate:[49] "The 'mistake' I am attempting to expose," writes Sarah Coakley, "is the presumption made by modern philosophical analyses of *kenosis* that there is a necessity to bring 'divine' and 'human' characteristics into the *same plane* and make them into a 'coherent' package."[50] For illustration, we can turn briefly to Jürgen Moltmann, one of the most provocative and influential theologians of the twentieth century, to illustrate the extent of this problem. "The God of classical theism," he says, "is a god of the pagans."[51] Indeed the Fathers of the church merely "baptized Aristotle."[52] Early in his career, like many who take up the so-called "divergence thesis,"[53] clusters of historiography regarding Luther's supposedly revisionary christology, Moltmann turned to Luther's *theologia crucis* to identify a radical reorientation in our conception of God: "Christian faith effects liberation from the childish projections of the human need for the riches of God; liberation from human impotence for the omnipotence of God; from human helplessness for the omnipotence of God"[54]; it effects as well the very question: "Is Christian faith [even] applicable to the theistic concept of God?"[55] (The answer, as the reader no doubt has perceived already, is for Moltmann a resounding no.)

AS A MATTER OF COURSE HOWEVER, IT AGAIN APPEARS AS WE HAVE SUGGESTED THAT A LARGE PORTION OF THE SEQUENCE IS SECRETLY RUNNING THE OTHER WAY AROUND: MOLTMANN'S CONSTRUCTIVE POSITIONS RETROACTIVELY WRITE THE HISTORIES THEY ARE MEANT TO OVERCOME OR EMULATE.

As his thought developed, Moltmann's *theologia crucis* began to accrue its own speculative strain. In particular, Moltmann picked up the peculiar doctrine of *tsimsum* (or zimzum), taken from Jewish Kabbalah, and specifically from Isaac Luria, the sixteenth-century father of modern Kabbalism. Originally meant as a gloss explaining how God concentrated Himself in the Shekinah presence of the temple, Moltmann means it as a riposte to the tradition of classical theism's picture of God's absoluteness.[56] Here, God's "contraction" into himself before creation (as Umberto Eco once charmingly described it, it is the "deep breath" before God speaks creation) produces a roominess—indeed, an absence—in which to fit the world.[57]

Yet, curiously, just as in Keller, here if God must "contract" to allow "room" for creation "apart" from the classically theistic God's "immensity" (the scare quotes promulgate quickly at this point), then already the critique has misconstrued the classically theistic God's enormity along finitized, spatial lines (even where God is spoken of as infinite). Things become even murkier when later in his career Moltmann indicates he wants to go beyond the origins of *tsimsum* in Lurianic Kabbalah. To do so he places a heavier emphasis on the "nothingness" left behind after God's contraction, which becomes more and more reified in Moltmann's mind as the newfound space for creation. A "spatial" or pseudo-spatial interpretive spin on God's transcendence seems impossible to avoid.[58] Moreover, if "room" is left behind after God's contraction, this also leaves us with the bizarre connotation that some third medium contains both God and world, which is responsible for inscribing the inherent total limits that both can occupy simultaneously. This seems to follow even if we bracket out the bodily connotations of the idea for a moment, for Moltmann does not, unlike, say, Clark Pinnock, want to predicate a body of God *qua* God.[59]

Ostensibly, like Keller and Hartshorne, Moltmann's constructive positions are based upon his diagnosis of what went wrong with the tradition of theology. As a matter of course however, it again appears as we have suggested that a large portion of the sequence is secretly running the other way around: Moltmann's constructive positions retroactively write the histories they are meant to overcome or emulate. To put it so boldly is overstating the matter, yet there is little doubt that "Molt-

Amelie Rorty (Berkley: University of California, 1986), 298.

48. An attempt will be made at this when the expanded form of this essay comes out in 2019. Examples of some literature touching upon these transition that will be important to consider are Jean-Luc Marion, "The Idea of God," in Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, eds., *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy Volume 1* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 265–304; Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Michael J. Buckley, *At The Origins of Modern Atheism* (Yale: YUP, 1990).

49. Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 11: "Behind the problem, to which *kenosis* and the historicizing of God are offered as solutions, is the mistaken idea of God as a kind of being over against other kinds of beings."

50. Sarah Coakley, "Does Kenosis Rest on a Mistake? Three Kenotic Models in Patristic Exegesis," in C. Stephen Evans, ed., *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 246–65 (quote at 248n3); cf. "What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does it Not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian 'Definition,'" in *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 143–64.

51. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 215.

52. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 20–22.

53. "Divergence thesis" is a phrase used by David J. Luy, *Dominus Mortis: Martin Luther on the Incorruptibility of God in Christ* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), e.g., 61: "The 'divergence thesis' has at its axis the contention that Luther executes a substantive reconfiguration of prevailing medieval accounts of the hypostatic union. This claim is the operative premise for all subsequent tiers of analysis, because it furnishes the conceptual point of departure that establishes a critical divergence. It is the seam at which the fabric of antique metaphysics starts to tear apart, thus clearing space for a radically different alternative. Luther's 'new' Christology is the stone that disrupts the placid waters of late medieval dogma. The significance of the initial impact becomes clear only as its embedded implications radiate steadily outward, reordering the very nature of theology itself." For those unfamiliar with Luy's work, he is describing this historiography in order to refute it.

54. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 216.

55. Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 216.

56. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*: *The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 108.

57. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom,* 110-11; Jürgen Moltmann *God in Creation (The Gifford Lectures 1984–1985)* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 86–94.

58. Jürgen Moltmann, *Science and Wisdom*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 119–20.

59. Clark Pinnock, *The Most-Moved Mover* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 34. Cf. the work of Stephen H. Webb, *Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter* (Oxford: OUP, 2011).

mann's logic" to a large extent "depends upon a prior misidentification of the tradition."[60] For example, though Moltmann does have a penchant for selecting underrepresented voices, this does not yet amount to an explanation for why he has selected Kabbalah in particular, or why he combined this speculative strain with the often ferociously anti-metaphysical (or anti-philosophical) line of the *theologia crucis*. This selection and combination appears somewhat less *a la carte* when we recall that the so-called "divergence thesis" cluster of historiography (mis)interpreting Luther's Christology as metaphysically revolutionary, *and* the valuation of Kabbalah, both occur in Hegel.

As O'Regan puts it, "It could be said that Moltmann's very appeal to the Kabbalah in this context represents the strongest possible indication of his debt to Hegel,"[61] whose *theologia crucis* is purely speculative, and who in the first volume of his *History of Philosophy* finds elements of Kabbalah charming because they echo Hegelian kenosis. This, too, loops back into the alternative historiography that takes its departure through Descartes (and perhaps earlier voluntarism and other movements),[62] which deparature we suggested must be explored at the end of the last section. As Moltmann says "For it is only as *causa sui* that God can be *causa mundi*...The simple counter question is: can the omnipotent and omnipresent God have an 'outward' aspect at all? Is there an *extra Deum* for these *opera ad extra*?"[63] This is one of the initial questions that leads to Moltmann's *tsimsum* speculation. The significance of this sentence? *Causa sui* is not a name of God until Descartes (indeed, it is constantly lambasted through the tradition as self-contradictory, for nothing—not even God—can be the cause of itself);[64] Descartes however placed power and efficient causality amongst God's perfections as *causa sui*, and in this way changed the very playing field.[65] It is no coincidence that the ontotheological God that Heidegger chastises, the one before whom man can neither worship nor dance, is "the *causa sui*."[66] Whether he realizes it or not, Moltmann seems therefore to be viewing the whole tradition through a particularly modern lens.

GUSTAVE DORE'S ILLUSTRATION OF HEAVEN FROM DANTE'S *DIVINE COMEDY*, 19TH CENTURY

IV. DEFORMATIONS (C): PERFECT-BEING THEISM[67]

"Classical theism," and its twin "neo-classical theism," as categories are not only set up as contraries, but accomplish this by focusing primarily on the pressures internal to the coherence of a systematic concept of the divine essence, particularly in terms of the perfections of God.[68] In a curious inversion of the neo-Thomist historiography of the tradition, Aquinas is certainly seen as the apex of a series of thinkers who need little investigation other than reading how the Angelic Doctor purified them. But, against the neo-Thomists, this is seen as a pox on the tradition of theology! "Is this really the best that theism can do?" asked Reese and Hartshorne pointedly of Aquinas. "If so, how strong indeed would be the position of positivism, holding that the idea of God is a mere confusion of absurdity!"[69]

While the logic of perfection is present throughout the tradition, a particularly strong stress has been placed on it in so-called "Anselmian" or "perfect-being theism," since the late 1960s in part due to Hartshorne's influence.[70] While Alvin Plantinga is (not incorrectly) credited with sparking the renaissance of theism in American philosophy departments mid-century,[71] Harts-

60. O'Regan, *Anatomy of Misremembering*, 357.

61. O'Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering*, 359.

62. The movement—or loose coalition—known as Radical Orthodoxy is famous for the so-called "Scotus Story," in which transitions often blamed on Descartes, Kant, and other "modern" thinkers can be traced back to deformations and alterations in Duns Scotus and the Franciscan tradition generally. The name "Scotus Story" is the umbrella designation given to variations of this tale by Daniel P. Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity: A Critical Assessment of Radical Orthodoxy and John Duns Scotus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), vii. In the expanded version of this essay, it will be important to take such claims critically into account.

63. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 108.

64. See Marion, "The Essential Incoherence," for this judgment.

65. Jean Luc Marion, *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-Theo-Logy in Cartesian Thought*, trans Jeffrey L. Kosky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 106: "[Descartes] imposes on God not merely undifferentiated causality but efficient causality—in all its brutality." Cf. Marion, *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism*, 107–8.

66. Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference* trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1969), 56, 72.

67. This section is decidedly *not* a blanket condemnation on all forms of "Perfect Being Theism." It is to point out that we are, following Vanhoozer's apt insight, often dealing with "'Cartesian' rather than 'Anselmian' theism" (*Remythologizing Theology*, 99n.77).

68. For example, see Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1962), ch. 2.

69. Reese and Hartshorne, *Philosophers Speak of God*, 133.

70. For a good introduction, see Thomas Morris, "Perfect Being Theology," *Nous* 21 (1987): 19–30; Katherin A. Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

71. Kelly James Clark, "Introduction: The Letter of Confession," in Kelly James Clark, ed., *Philosophers Who Believe: The Spiritual Journeys of Eleven Leading Thinkers* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 1993), 8; Quentin Smith, "The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism," *Philo* 4 no. 2 (2005): 195–215; William Lane Craig, "God Is Not Dead Yet: How Current Philosophers Argue for His Existence," *Christianity Today* (July 3, 2008): 22.

horne is rarely given the credit he also deserves.[72] In part this is simply due to bad timing. While Hartshorne began speaking on the topic as early as the 1940s in a series of articles that later in his career culminated in two books devoted to the ontological argument, the explicitly modal reconstruction wasn't published until 1962, by which time Norman Malcolm had already come out with a similar version (this variation of the ontological proof is sometimes referred to as the Hartshorne-Malcolm argument).[73] Moreover, both of these attempts were published before modal logic became broadly reworked and accepted as plausible due to Saul Kripke's path-setting "Semantical Considerations of Modal Logic," in 1963 (written, it should be added, only a few years after Kripke was out of highschool). The fruitful metaphysical implications of this essay and others following it were swiftly set upon by Plantinga and ultimately ended up producing Plantinga's version of the ontological argument. The rest, as they say, is history. Yet the subtle reshaping of the tradition due to Hartshorne's use of "classical theism" and perfect-being theology should not be overlooked.

One of the most frequent criticisms of "classical theism" is that it is either "too philosophical" or that it relies upon the wrong philosophy. In that sense Hartshorne's unabashedly philosophical reading of Anselm and the notion of perfection in God as part of the context in which Hartshorne framed "classical theism"—and hence his view of the tradition at large—partially exacerbates this opinion as it builds it right into the category. For one, its stress on the logic of perfection in terms of the ontological argument swerves the tradition of "classical theism" right into Kant's criticisms, but perhaps not in the way one initially suspects. In fact, Kant notoriously switched around the logic of the tradition by making all talk of God via the so-called "cosmological arguments" deductively (and secretly) reliant on the ontological proof.[74] If Hartshorne's tradition of "classical theism" looks ready-made for Kant's criticism, it is because the category seems to have been built backwards through Kant. "The problem," says Christopher Franks, "is related to...the assumption that there is a tradition connecting … Aquinas [with what] can be called a tradition of 'perfect-being theism.' For Aquinas [however] God is precisely not *a* being. God's simplicity then, is not the simplicity of a perfect *being*."[75]

One can contrast Hartshorne's understanding of Anselm with Karl Barth's famous interpretation,[76] for example, in which the ontological argument is not based upon some logically neutral philosophical starting position, but is undertaken as a prayer unpacking theologically what it means to speak of God.[77] Of course, the extent that the patristic and medieval tradition can be designated "philosophical" as opposed to theological is an open question,[78] one that we do not hope to solve here. For our purposes however this is somewhat immaterial. What is important is that latent within the origins of "classical theism" as an interpretive designation, a subterranean decision for a more philosophical interpretation of the tradition, as well as a decision for an alternative philosophy, has been made. Here a fault line in the history of ideas is produced between "classical" and "neo-classical" theism. Of course, neo-classical theism can claim earlier precedents as a traditional alternative to the "classical" line. But our point here is that the designation "classical theism" in effect *also* builds a slightly alternative genealogy, choosing features that actually run in, say, Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Kant, and others, rather than Aquinas, Anselm, Augustine, or many of the Eastern Fathers. In this sense, for example, important historical transitions that Etienne Gilson famously termed the rising "essentialism"[79] in modern theology, or what Janet Martin Soskice has termed a movement "from the divine names to the divine attributes"[80] is glossed over by the singular and ostensibly historical category of "classical theism."

WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THAT LATENT WITHIN THE ORIGINS OF "CLASSICAL THEISM" AS AN INTERPRETIVE DESIGNATION, A SUBTERRANEAN DECISION FOR A MORE PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE TRADITION, AS WELL AS A DECISION FOR AN ALTERNATIVE PHILOSOPHY, HAS BEEN MADE.

For example, as Philip Clayton has pointed out in his magisterial study *The Problem of God in Modern Thought*, this philosophical reading uncouples perfections from theology and places an ultimately self-destructive amount of pressure upon philosophical intuitions about what a perfection is, and whether it can and should be attributed to God.[81] For instance, "what criteria will now decided which simple qualities should be added to the list of simple perfections and thus become attributes of God? Traditionally … the perfections were constructed theologically from a unitary notion of God, which served in large measure as the standard for knowing what to admit or not to admit as perfections."[82] Indeed, for Clayton, the story of modern philosophical theology "is a story of how two major strands of pre-modern thought about the divine—the divine as infinite, and the divine as perfect—became entwined, defined the agenda for modern thought in a form known as 'ontotheology' and then *separated again*, perhaps permanently."[83] For our purposes

72. As an exception, see Daniel A. Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

73. See the very helpful Steven M. Duncan, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion: Its History Since 1955* (Penrith, UK: Humanities E-Books, 2007), ch. 6.

74. See Matthew Levering, *Proofs of God: Classical Arguments from Tertullian to Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 138–39.

75. Christopher A. Franks, "The Simplicity of the Living God: Aquinas, Barth, and Some Philosophers," *Modern Theology* 21 no. 2 (2005): 275–300 (quote on 286).

76. Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum–Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of His Theological Scheme* (London: SCM Press, 1960), esp. 59–72, on what Barth takes to be the nature of the proof.

77. For a comparison of Barth, Etienne Gilson, and Henri Bouillard as they read Anselm's argument not for its validity, but in terms of *what* it is that Anselm is up to, see Vincent Potter, "Karl Barth and the Ontological Argument," *The Journal of Religion* 45 no. 4 (Oct., 1965): 309–25.

78. For a fascinating look at this question and how neo-Thomism has shaped our perceptions of it, see John Inglis, *Spheres of Philosophical Inquiry and the Historiography of Medieval Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

79. Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Rome: PIMS, 1952), e.g., 111–12,118–19, 124.

80. Janet Martin Soskice, "Naming God: A Study in Faith and Reason," in Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter, eds., *Reason and the Reasons of Faith: Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 241–54.

81. See the discussion in Philip Clayton, *The Problem of God in Modern Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 117–262.

82. Clayton, *Problem of God,* 258. Clayton is here referring to a tradition begun in Descartes and reaching its apex in Leibniz.

83. Clayton, *Problem of God*, xi.

this decoupling of a perfect-being theism from theology also begins to allow one to speak intuitively of what classical theism "must have thought" about God's perfections: namely, per our earlier discussion, seeing absolute power as an attribute or name of God. Yet, again, the catch-all category of classical theism systematically distorts a close textual analysis:

> God's essence is not defined as cause or power in the first eleven questions of the *Summa*. This simple point will have a crucial role…once cause or power becomes a name or attribute of God's essence, neither a speculative theology that addresses God's essence nor a practical theology that addresses God's relation to creation can be sustained. The two become collapsed into one.[84]

V. CONCLUSION

While a great deal more work must be done to extend this analysis, for now it seems certain that there are built-in historiographical and theological distortions (or, "rule-governed deformations") in the modern category "classical theism." When one pays attention to the hidden transitions *within* the often pejorative use of "classical theism," one makes a discovery akin to William Placher's famous observation—similar in nature to Gilson and Soskice—that "some of the features contemporary critics find most objectionable in so-called traditional Christian theology in fact come to prominence only in the seventeenth century. Some of our current protests, it turns out, should not be directed against the Christian tradition, but against what modernity did to it."[85] Despite the fact that Hartshorne "loved to trace the genealogy of ideas,"[86] and often skillfully (and with great humor) provoked a revisiting of many historical positions, classical theism as a category was used mainly as a thickly applied chiaroscuro by which the neo-classical position—and a panoply of similar positions—could shine all the brighter.

Derrick Peterson is Adjunct Professor of Christian History and Theology at Multnomah University and Seminary, and Administrative Coordinator for the Institute for Cultural Engagement: New Wine, New Wineskins. He is the author of the forthcoming work Flat Earths and Fake Footnotes: The Strange Tale of How the Conflict of Science and Christianity Was Written Into History *(Eugene: Cascade Books, Forthcoming) and blogs at agreatercourage.blogspot.com.*

84. Long, *Perfectly Simple Triune God*, 17.

85. William Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking About God Went Wrong* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 2; Nicholas Lash, "Considering the Trinity," *Modern Theology* 2 no. 1 (1986): 188, cautions us to understand that "between the thirteenth century and the end of the twentieth [stands]…*two centuries of modern theism*" (emphasis added). See the classic essay by David Burrell, "Does Process Theology Rest on a Mistake?" *Theological Studies* 43 (1982): 125–35.

86. Dorrien, *Making of American Liberal Theology*, 84.

THE DAVENANT INSTITUTE

WWW.DAVENANTINSTITUTE.ORG

2040 South St., Lincoln, NE 68502 • editor@davenantinstitute.org

Ad Fontes is a monthly journal published by The Davenant Institute. Senior Editor: Joseph Minich, Associate Editor: Susannah Black