

The Nature of Necessity: A Case for Classical Theism in Opposition to the Openness of God Model

Necessity as a concept is used in several ways but these ways can be primarily organized into either logical necessity or actual necessity. Logical necessity normally requires an argument with assumed premises to establish the logically necessary relationship of cogency. In such an instance “cogent” simply means that the argument is logically tight or logically necessary. Of course, this does not require that a cogent argument is compelling and thereby accepted by the reader, for the assumed premises of the argument may not be granted by the reader. With the granting of the premises such logical necessity has implications governing reality.¹ At times, something in the experience of reality logically necessarily requires there to be a particular being in reality. For example, Descartes’ maxim of “I think therefore I am” guarantees that for any experience of thinking or doubting that at least this thinker exists in reality as a thinking being. However, sometimes logical necessity governs reality without an experiential ground merely because the concept under consideration logically necessarily requires it to be so. For example, a square circle can never exist in reality for the concept is logically necessarily contradictory. The concept of square mutually excludes the concept of circle from describing the same object simultaneously.

The concept of actual necessity or modal necessity describes a being whose immutable existence is logically necessary and eternal. That is, such a necessary being must exist in reality if it exists at all. The four Aristotelian categories of modality include: impossibility (like square circles will never exist in any reality), possibility (might be existence or a potentially dependent being), actuality (happen to be in reality, or an actually dependent being, or a contingent or changing being), and actual necessity (must be immutable eternal existence). Each human has occupied both the category of possibility (as their parents contemplated their conception, birth, and the changes that would make to their family) and actuality (as they exist as a dependent happen-to-be-growing being now). That is, we are dependent upon our parents for our existence and such things as food and circumstances for continued growth in existence. Such categories as possible and actual would most likely have temporal sequence of: having possibilities change as events happen, being a particular way then being a different way. If such an actual being continued forever, as in everlasting life, then everlasting (continued temporal existence in which change would continue to occur) would be the appropriate description rather than eternal (existence outside time and sequence, with no essential change). An actually necessary being, if there is such a being, could not merely be a possible or an actual being, for it would not be in the same dependent kind of relationship or happen-to-be kind of existence or merely everlasting existence as these two categories imply. So, if an actually necessary being exists at all then it must necessarily exist in reality, and if not then, it could never exist for it would then be impossible. However, we can not merely assume or illustrate such a necessary being into existence, as though through some sort of a Platonism² we were guaranteeing an eternal form from our

¹ For a defense that the logically necessary is the real, cf. Douglas Kennard, *The Relationship of Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Biblical Theology, and Contextualization* (Lewiston: Mellen Press, 1999), pp. 42-43.

² The author acknowledges that the classical model of God as a necessary being emerged as a Platonic and Aristotelian concept among the fathers and scholastics of Christianity however this paper is an attempt to show that the concept should be maintained without dependence upon them. Actually, this author is far more indebted to Locke, Leibniz, Kant, Pierce, Wittgenstein,

belief or discursive reasoning. Furthermore, if we maintained such a belief about the existence of God by merely tradition, then such a basic belief could probably be strengthened by examining its rationale. This paper will explore this rationale by examining: 1) an ontological argument, 2) the nature of a maximally great being defended by this ontological argument, 3) a cosmological argument, 4) the nature of an actual necessary being defended by these arguments, and 5) a Biblical assessment of whether the God of the Bible is described by these philosophical concepts and arguments.

An Ontological Argument

An ontological argument is informed by a powerful concept like that of a maximally great being. For our purposes, a maximally great being will be defined as *that being which has the maximally great set of metaphysical attributes*. One implication from this definition is that such a being is not contradictory, and thus normally considered to be not impossible, for the concept underscores that each of the attributes in the set will mutually limit the other attributes of the set so that no grotesque (a being with one attribute in the extreme) or contradictory being will ensue. For example, omnipotence in such a maximally great being could not mean “all powerful” because omnipotence limits omnipotence in that he could not make a stone so large that he could not move it. Omnipotence for this maximally great being would mean that this being, if it existed, would have the maximal degree of power it is possible to exemplify including:

- 1) There are no independent externally determined constraints on divine power; there are no rival beings that could thwart a maximally great being.
- 2) All God’s internal attributes are fully empowered to perform all that is intrinsically better to have than to lack.

3) God is the sole source and continuous support of all the power there is or could be; all the power of every entity is contained within and derives from God.

Each of these premises is required from the nature of a maximally great being, if it is a being at all. Because we conceive of a matrix of attributes in the set of divine attributes, if there is such a maximally great being then these attributes will be fully empowered (2). Other beings, like ourselves, would be empowered fully from this maximally great being in such a manner that there would be no power which another being has that the maximally great being didn't source without diminishment to His own power (3). Therefore there can be no rival because all other beings are empowered by the power which they have ultimately from this maximally great being, if there is such a being (1). With attributes like this, a maximally great being would be incomparable, in that no other being could be favorably compared to this being. A maximally great being would always be superior. Thus there would only be one maximally great being as a monotheism. Furthermore, such a maximally great being would be a necessary being if he existed. For example, a maximally great being would not change, come into being, go out of being or depend on another being for its existence. If such a necessary being exists, he could not merely happen to exist or be potentially existent or be a dependent being. Therefore, a maximally great being is either necessary or impossible. With attributes like these, an ontological argument may be constructed following Al Plantinga³ as follows:

- 4) If a maximally great being exists, his existence is actually necessary.
- 5) If a maximally great being does not exist, his existence is impossible.
- 6) Either a maximally great being exists or he does not exist.
- 7) A maximally great being is either actually necessary or impossible.

committed to Biblical theology, which takes us in a very different direction.

³ Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 196-221.

- 8) A maximally great being is not impossible.
- 9) Therefore, a maximally great being exists as an actually necessary being.

Premises 4 and 5 reflect the modal options from the previous discussion of necessity. Premise 6 identifies that there are only two mutually exclusive options available: existence or nonexistence. Premise 7 replaces premise 6 terminology by the implications from premises 4 and 5. Plantinga affirms premise 8 as a basic belief, which is quite natural when we recognize that we do not normally consider a concept to be impossible unless it is shown to be impossible, and a maximally great being has already been shown to be not a contradictory concept. Provided the reader does not approach this issue with the bias of skepticism it is reasonable to assume that a maximally great being is not impossible as a being and not just a concept. Additionally, if any argument for God's existence is compelling for the reader (like the cosmological argument to follow) then such an argument could confirm premise 8. However, premise 8 does not need nearly so strong an argument as this, so I will explore two other arguments for premise 8 to help compel the reader to grant it within this framework.

Within the heritage of William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, an inductive argument for the nonimpossibility of a maximally great being following Clement Dore⁴ could be constructed as follows:

- 10) It is reasonable to consider that any concept that is internally consistent which is claimed to have been experienced is not impossible.

For example, if you walked into the local police station this Friday night and consistently claimed to have just had the experience of robbing the local convenience store, the police would assume that it is not impossible that you might in fact have robbed this store so they would usher you into the back room

for further questioning and probably call that convenience store to check out your story. Depending on how your story checked out with their investigation you would either be prosecuted or sent to a hospital to deal with mental issues. The police began to check out the story because they assumed that an internally consistent concept claimed to have been experienced is not impossible. However, to float this premise all that is needed is the first assumption that anything internally consistent that is claimed to have been experienced is not impossible. With this framework the inductive argument for premise 8 would be as follows:

- 11) A maximally great being is by definition internally consistent.
- 12) Isaiah 40-48 claims to have experienced a maximally great being under the rubric of incomparability.
- 8') Therefore, it is reasonable to consider that a maximally great being is not impossible.

This argument does not require Isaiah to be authoritative Scripture but merely a testimony of a claimed experience of an incomparable being. Labuschagne develops the ancient Near East concept of incomparability as essentially the philosophical concept of incomparability in his work *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament*⁵. That is, the philosophical concept involved in the ontological argument is also a Biblical concept. No actual or potential rival can be favorably compared to Yahweh, Who as sovereign is greater than all comers individually and combined (Isaiah 40:18-28; 41:4, 23-24; 42:5; 43:10-13; 44:6-8; 45:5, 21-22; 46:9-10; 48:12-14). It is Yahweh who, when talking with Isaiah, is reported to be always present to: be able to create, know history from its beginning, and predictively reveal the future because He continues to create history by bringing about His will. He has no rival. This incomparable Yahweh

⁵ Clement Dore, "The Possibility of God," *Faith and Philosophy*, 1 (1984), pp. 303-15, and "God, Suffering and Solipism" (Unpublished manuscript, 1986), pp. 3-42, 108-119.

is testified to by Isaiah as having talked with him and challenged him and others to take the incomparability of Yahweh seriously, putting away idols and holding to Yahweh alone as their sovereign. Isaiah's experience of such an incomparable being renders such a noncontradictory concept to be not impossible to be experienced. Therefore, an incomparable being is not impossible. Furthermore, the impossibility of such an incomparable being cannot be experienced, for with the concept of an incomparable being having freedom from contradiction such a claim would mean that a person is claiming to have experienced the full range of available experiences in the universe and concluded that such a being is not available to be experienced. However, such a claim to have experienced the full range of available experiences is essentially an omniscience claim, which itself is impossible for a finite human person to experience. Because the concept of incomparability is championing Yahweh as over all options, real as well as hypothetical ones, the concept of incomparability is essentially identical to a maximally great being. Therefore, premise 8 is affirmed; it is reasonable to consider that a maximally great being is not impossible.

A deductive argument for the nonimpossibility of a maximally great being is available within Plantinga's construction of possible worlds.⁶ A possible world is a logically possible state of affairs as indicated by freedom of contradiction both as a concept and with other constituents within that possible world. Nonimpossibility is normally defined as that which is logically conceivable without contradiction. However, since it has already been shown that a maximally great being is free of internal contradiction, the issue here is with regard to compossibility (whether this consistent concept of a maximally great being can be instantiated without contradiction with the truths which are conjunctively the case in all possible worlds). Plantinga defined a maximally great being as within each possible world but this is an arbitrarily weaker

⁵ Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1966).

⁶ Plantinga, p.218-19.

definition because like a necessary being a maximally great being will be a transworld entity if he exists at all. For example, a necessary being in possible worlds is defined as *that being, when considered from the standpoint of any possible world, is understood to immutably exist in any and all possible worlds.* Likewise, a maximally great being is defined as *the being, when considered from the standpoint of any possible world, is understood to have maximum metaphysical greatness in any and all possible worlds.* Therefore, if a maximally great being exists, then any proposed world which contradicts such a maximally great being is not even a possible world. However, Plantinga claimed that a maximally great being in possible worlds terminology does not require one to assume that a maximally great being must exist. He proposed that there are two options besides a maximally great being. However to make those two options in fact mutually exclusive options the definitions of maximally great being must be the same in all these options or they will not in fact exclude a maximally great being from nonimpossibility and actual necessary existence. The first alternative is no-maximality, defined as the claim that a maximally great being does not exist in any possible world. The second alternative is near-maximality, which is defined as a maximally great being exists in some possible worlds but does not exist in other possible worlds including the actual world. Plantinga correctly concludes that all conceptual options are included within these three mutually exclusive options: maximally great being, no-maximality, and near-maximality. This framework permits the following argument: The only available nonimpossible option is the one conceptually consistent and compossible option from the following fully inclusive and mutually exclusive options: a maximally great being exists, no-maximality exists, or near-maximality exists.

- 13) A maximally great being is by definition internally consistent.
- 14) No-maximality is internally contradictory when the meaning of maximally great being is clarified in the definition as follows: *the being when*

considered from the standpoint of any possible world, is understood to have maximum metaphysical greatness in any and all possible worlds does not exist in any possible world.

- 15) Near-maximality is internally contradictory when the meaning of maximally great being is clarified in the definition as follows: *the being when considered from the standpoint of any possible world, is understood to have maximum metaphysical greatness in any and all possible worlds exists in some possible worlds but does not exist in other possible worlds including the actual world.*
- 16) Because no-maximality and near-maximality are contradictory concepts they cannot meaningfully exist as states of affairs.
- 8'') With two of the fully inclusive and mutually exclusive options as contradictory, the only available option must be that a maximally great being is not impossible.

Therefore, a Maximally Great Being necessarily exists in reality. Premise 8 brought us to that conclusion, whether by basic belief, an argument from testimony or an argument from possible worlds. Additionally, if one grants the modality of possible worlds, then God knows all possibilities or counterfactuals as counterfactuals since this Maximally Great Being is a transworld Being.

The Nature of a Maximally Great Being

There necessarily exists a Maximally Great Being Who is defined by the maximally great set of attributes it is possible to have. Since the kinds of possibility include not just logical possibility but also actual or compossibility as well, then no proposal is credible in which this being entails a contradiction through internal (e.g. claims of contradiction within attributes) or external (e.g. claims of contradiction with the problem of evil) means. All such claims for contradiction with the Maximally Great Being are not even possible because the

transworld quality of the Maximally Great Being excludes them from all possible worlds. This means that the Maximally Great Being's attributes are those which when combined in a set are the maximum possible to exemplify as illustrated by omnipotence above (e.g. premises 1-3). The attribute of infinity, which would include transcendence, can describe these attributes by indicating that the Maximally Great Being is not limited by anything other than the necessary relationships among its own maximally great qualities.⁷

Such a Maximally Great Being would be imminently omnipresent and thus immaterial or spiritual as well. That is, the availability and accessibility of objects in the spatial-temporal world is a good trait making them useable to us. Likewise, the availability and accessibility of an imminent, omnipresent and everlasting being would be very fitting for the Maximally Great Being as well. However, the Maximally Great Being's omnipresence would be necessarily everywhere without variation or sequence. So such omnipresence would be nonbodily (i.e. spiritual) and immutably (i.e. eternal even though such a being might be glimpsed within creation as everlasting). So the spiritual and eternal omnipresence which the Maximally Great Being would instantiate would be exhibited in a non-spatial and nontemporal manner similar to another dimension beyond space and time. Perhaps Tillich's dimensional model for spirit as an imminent causal ground which creates and sustains the whole of creation serves as a paradigm for making sense of omnipresence of this eternal spiritual Being. That is, a person would not expect each location of the universe to contain an instance of the fullness of God but that God's fullness is present to each location in a continuous causal manner creating, determining, sustaining, protecting, relating, knowing from that perspective and recreating the whole of the universe into His kingdom.

⁷ Such a view would not entail infinite options, for possibilities are limited to that which is not contradictory to the Maximally Great Being, thus excluding the renaissance maximal possibilities which Leroy Howe suggests in "Existence as a Perfection: A Reconsideration of the Ontological Argument," *Religious Studies* 4 (1968):92-94. Additionally the concept of a process

Such a Maximally Great Being would be actually necessary, immutable, and eternal. This being could not come into being or go out of being for He would always possess the maximally great set of attributes. Likewise, this being would not grow or degenerate for He would always possess the maximally great set of attributes. Without change in these attributes He is immutable, without chronological sequence He is thus eternal. More on this later when a necessary being is unpacked after a cosmological argument is presented within this chapter.

Since such a Maximally Great Being is defined by His nature, in which the maximally great set of attributes is embraces meaningfully distinct attributes held together in a set, the concept of simplicity embraced within Platonic and Aristotelian Christianity is excluded as contradictory. That is, the following features of the Aquinas/Stump definition of simplicity⁸ would be excluded by the divine nature: “there cannot be any real distinction between one essential property and another in God’s nature” and “there cannot be a real distinction between essence and existence in God.” The meaningfully distinct attributes (such as God’s goodness and wrath, or transcendence and immanence) show the impossibility of the Maximally Great Being as this kind of a simple Platonized Christian god because such a simplicity view is contradictory.⁹

The Maximally Great Being is incomparable and thus monotheistic, with no individual or corporate rival. So dualism and polytheism is excluded. No Satan or group of humans could thwart the plan of this Maximally Great Being. That is, a Maximally Great Being could not be a part of a whole which is greater than the former Being alone, so He becomes the sole source and continuous support of all power and all beings who exercise power.

primordial nature would be excluded or severely limited to only those compossible possibilities to a Maximally Great Being.

⁸Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. I, Pt. 1, Q3, A7, and Eleonore Stump, “Simplicity” in Quinn and Taliaferro, *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), p. 250, and Stump and Kretzmann “Absolute Simplicity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 2(1985), pp. 353-81.

⁹The author has argued this in the chapter “A Few Philosophical and Biblical Theology Problems with Statements of the Trinity,” within this book, which is indebted to Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980).

Another way to approach maximal greatness is to recognize good traits among humans, and then maximally surpass these good traits to determine maximal greatness. In this process, humans make a good model since they are near the top of any list of naturally known beings that can vie for metaphysical greatness. So the beneficial or great traits that humans have (such as being personal in interacting with those around, knowing what is happening around them, empathizing with others, having a will to act, and doing good) can also be found in the Maximally Great Being. Furthermore, these human traits are surpassed by His maximal greatness, so that God would excel humans in manifesting such personal and good traits. This approach excludes noninteractive god concepts such as deism and a fully actualized Aristotelian god who does not feel and interact with those around him. Notice that this technique does not reduce to Feuerbach's anthropomorphized God concept because there is an argument to support the necessary existence of this Maximally Great Being; He is not merely a wish fulfillment. Such a maximally Great Being would be personal, communicating to others and receiving prayers as a meaningful communication from them. Since it is advantageous in communication to tell the truth, such a Maximally Great Being would be known for only telling the truth without any lie (e.g. Titus 1:2). Additionally, such a Maximally Great Being would be an empathetic, compassionate, merciful God Who purposes to protect and cultivate those He has chosen (e.g. Jer. 31:20; Hos. 11:8). As a result of protecting His own, there would probably be a place for a Maximally Great Being to express righteous anger against those who attempt to destroy those who are His (e.g. Nah. 1:2). Since this being is omnipresent, He would know everything that happens, feel empathy for all, and sovereignly act for the good of the whole creation. Such an interactive Maximally Great Being would be multiple persons, for in eternity before the creation the interactive communication, empathy, and love occurring would happen necessarily within Themselves. However, there is not enough here

to require that this configuration must be a trinity,¹⁰ though it may need to be more than two persons for the communal value of these attributes to be engaged. This would mean that creating would not be a necessary requirement for the Maximally Great Being but it would be a very natural choice on His part. With the act of creation would come continued involvement, so that the creation would reflect His qualities as it also shows forth the qualities of beings of creation as well.

A Cosmological Argument

Another way to argue for a necessary being involves the inductive, and thus not logically tight, means of the cosmological argument. However, this argument is often easier to follow because it starts with the experience of existence and floats its argument within empirical experience of creation. Additionally, unlike the ontological argument the cosmological argument has some evidence of its use within the Bible for purposes of fostering worship, gospel, and judgment. For example, Psalm 19:1 testifies to God's grandeur as known from the creation: "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands." Additionally, in a context of gospel proclamation, Paul develops a common ground with the Athenians between the rival Epicurean and stoic philosophies by appealing to the remembered experience of a plague being averted as pointing to a creator sovereign God Who is acknowledged by them but remains largely unknown to them as He is the One Who has resurrected Christ (Acts 17:18-31). This gospel was effective enough for some to come to a saving knowledge of Christ even though most seemed to reject it at the point of Christ's resurrection. For those who reject the gospel or who have never heard the gospel, God is still righteous in judging them with wrath "because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible

¹⁰ Contra Augustine, Anselm, Swinburne, et al.

attributes, His everlasting power and divine nature, have been clearly seen being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:19-20). In Paul's perspective, there is enough evidence in creation to point to God as an everlasting powerful and immortal being. The cosmological argument is one form in which this voice from creation is precisely heard.

The particular cosmological argument that is presented here is framed by three mutually exclusive options that cover the whole array of origins contemplated. First, 'Uncaused' beings are those, which are eternal and through this argument are seen to be actually necessary. Second, beings which are "caused by another" in this framework are contingent, with all the changeability and dependence of "happen to be" beings. Third, the option of being self-caused has in view a range of options like: Stephen Hawking's view that within an everlasting universe with imaginary time, the big bang brought about the expanding universe and positive time without outside cause, or microscopically Donald Sherburne's naturalistic process, or Fred Hoyle's continuous creation of Hydrogen molecules, or extreme forms of existentialism which see choice involved in creating one's own existence in the first place. From this framework the cosmological argument may be run as follows:

- 17) If any being exists, then it is either: uncaused, caused by another, or self caused.
- 18) Some contingent beings exist (e.g. I exist).
- 19) Contingent beings are not uncaused because they are dependent in their "happen to be existence" (e.g. I had a beginning and need food for growth).
- 20) Human experience indicates that non-existent contingent beings do not cause themselves to exist (i.e. you cannot be prior to yourself).
- 21) Therefore, contingent beings are caused by another (e.g. I have parents).
- 22) The cause for these contingent beings existing is either an infinite regress of contingent beings or ultimately a necessary being.

- 23) An infinite regress of contingent beings is unreasonable because the universe evidences a finite age from observations of its expanding nature.
- 24) Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that a necessary being exists, which we call God.

The weakest premise is probably premise 21 because the views of Hawking, Sherburne, Hoyle and extreme existentialists are not stopped by this popular human appeal. However this is not very significant because each option could be diminished. For example, most astronomers do not embrace Hoyle's view of continuous creation because they accept the law of the conservation of energy and explain hydrogen gas clouds in relation to the forming or exploding of a star. Carl Sagan popularized this view. Alan Guth of MIT extends this view in his conjecture which he calls inflation, namely that a propelled expansion of space smaller than an atom caused the creation of matter. Most existentialists do not develop these details but recognize that one needs existence in the first place for there to be meaningful choice to frame one's essence, and this argument is about explaining where this initial existence comes from. Hawking's basic belief entails an everlasting universe before the big bang which we know nearly nothing about. However, he has the assumption that the rules for our universe are so compelling that they or some aspect from the unknown universe could instigate the big bang without any further cause. The expanding universe known to human experience has no observed mechanism to explain the instigation of the big bang. Hawking's basic belief is for a claim of which he has no explanation of the process. Others, like Richard Gott and Li-Xin Li of Princeton, join him by mapping a model that permits the universe to become its own mother. Sherburne's naturalistic process denies the God of most process advocates and adds the personal quality of occasions, which is extremely foreign to most scientific microscopic analyses. These unusual modifications leave the group of adherents rather small. So perhaps a popular appeal is not hindered by the few

who would still slide through. For most, the verse sung in the "Sound of Music" still makes sense, "Nothing came from nothing, nothing ever could." Thus, premise 21 will hold for most; human experience indicates that non-existent contingent beings do not cause themselves to exist.

Premise 23 has within it the possibility of the cause for contingent being to be a set or nexus of contingent beings, but each set or nexus would then be dependent upon some contingent beings or set of contingent beings. Ultimately this sequence of causes for contingent beings or sets of beings is either an infinite regress of contingency or ultimately begun by a necessary being.

Premise 24 used to be a difficult chasm to close before the current big bang theory which has made this significantly easier for those who are scientifically inclined. At the turn of the century, Henrietta Leavitt recognized that the length of time it took to fix the image of a cepheid star on a photographic plate indicated the distance this star was from the earth. Edwin Hubble used this understanding to recognize that the more distant stars had a spectrographically redder Doppler shift of light, and thus an expanding universe. From this awareness, he proposed Hubble's law, which states that distance to stellar objects is proportional to velocity (i.e. twice as far away means twice as great a velocity). From these experimental facts the theory of the big bang is constructed. At least the expanding universe is scientifically observable, whether this means that the big bang occurred where this expanding universe originated or whether creation merely emerged as an earlier stage of this expanding universe is largely dependent upon one's presupposition for an old or young universe. In the early 1970's the theory of the oscillating universe was floated but it has few adherents today because there is rather broad agreement that the observed masses in the universe are rather small when compared to their high velocities and great distances. The oscillating universe also multiplies inexplicables such as: a mechanism for the repeated big bangs, how to turn a black hole of the big crunch into the big bang, how to overwhelm entropy that would then decay the oscillations so that

everlasting oscillations would be impossible, and the cause for the infused energy/matter which would then overwhelm entropy. A further nail in the coffin for the oscillating model is the recent study, by both the University of Berkeley and Harvard University comparing supernovae from one to ten billion light years away from earth, which seems to indicate that the universe is expanding at an increasing rate.¹¹

With an infinite regress of contingent beings as unlikely, then the best explanation for the existence of the expanding universe is an actually necessary being which we call God (premise 25).

The Nature of a Necessary Being

Both the ontological argument and the cosmological argument propose that an actually necessary being exists which we will call God. This necessary being is always existent immutably and eternally. This level of immutability and eternity means that there is no sequence within God. There is no chronological experience in order for God to not change from non-being to being in a certain way.¹² Furthermore, the knowledge He knows He has always known without variance. God would know all there is to be known for the whole of time as an eternally present experience, without change. However, this does not cause God to be opposed to the knowledge of His creation, for He would always know what every feature of the creation knows from the creation's perspective in space and time while also knowing simultaneously from His unique vantage point. For example, He would eternally know my knowing of the past and my fears of the future from my vantage point and the perspective of every created thing in

¹¹ As reported by Douglas Duncan, associate professor of astronomy at the University of Chicago, during "Odyssey" program interview on Chicago public radio station WBEZ Jan. 16, 1999 about 11 a. m.

¹² This means that the kenotic view of the divinity of Christ emptying Himself of His divine attributes so that He could become incarnate that Satori proposed in 1831 is excluded as well as the evangelical softened version of a willing nonuse of divine attributes which He continued to possess for both options describe essential change which is impossible for an immutable being. For a further discussion of this see Douglas Kennard, "A Few Philosophical and Biblical Theology Problems with Statements of the Trinity" in this book.

addition to His unique additional perspectives. So that in our Einsteinian relativistic universe we may have problems defending simultaneity of events but God would know simultaneity because He is not limited by our finite empirical ways of knowing. However, this does not render eternity to be static, for Boethius defines eternity in a more determining manner as the complete possession all at once of illimitable life.¹³ The complete possession is an atemporal sourcing that does not change and is not limited but brings about all that has changed in its expressions of finiteness. This means that eternity is the source for all power and life, as previously described under the section on omnipotence above. So eternity is not primarily to be known for its static comprehensive determining knowledge but for the life revealed to have come from God in His revelational creation. Because God initiates the whole of the creation including all of its details His knowledge essentially also determines choice. God's choices are eternal and essential to His nature without variance. To have God as an actually necessary being means His sovereign choice is set. This means that the level of necessity for God includes all of God's thoughts and sovereign choices eternally and immutably. God is not open in growing and gaining more knowledge and choosing in response to this knowledge. God's knowledge and choice would in fact be set within God's essential nature as determinative for the existence, essence, and choices the whole of creation makes.¹⁴ With God's knowledge and choice as essential to His nature, then there is no logical order in God either. This means that all the reformation options expressing the order of the decree would in fact be contradictory to God's essential nature. Additionally, conjectures about Molinist counterfactual possibilities informing God's foreknowledge before His choice would also be

¹³ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book V, Prose 6; and *De trinitate*, chapter 4 in E. K. Rand, ed., *Boethius: The Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1973).

¹⁴ For a further discussion of how the determining sovereignty of God and freedom of man fit in a non contradictory manner that consistently reflect the Biblical text see the paper by Douglas Kennard, "God's Sovereignty and Human Free Will," in this book. In that paper a compatibilism of Anselmic/Thomistic determinism with Edwardsian free will is defended.

contradictory to God's essential nature. There would not be a logical sequence within God Who simultaneously knows and chooses without sequence (i.e. eternally). This should not surprise us, for there are no Biblical texts that talk about any logical or chronological sequence within God of an order of salvation either; all these claimed texts at best indicate that when it comes to the application of God's choice out into the chronologically changing creation that such choice has a sequence of application for the recipient. For example, no texts that develop hypothetical counterfactuals (e.g. 1 Cor. 2:8) identify that God is somehow informed of these possibilities in order to choose. Such Molinism would imply a clear logical sequence if not chronological sequence in a Molinist God in which foreknowledge of all possibilities is the first step and God's choice (of the possible world, which will be the actual world) is the second step. Likewise, the order of the decree would have clear logical sequence if not chronological sequence. These sequential views of God's essence would be excluded by the affirmation of necessity. However, there is no problem in maintaining an essentially necessary God Who applies His decisions to the creation in a chronological or logical order. For example, there is a clear logical and chronological sequence in applying the divine election (*ekletois*) as foreknown, preparative sanctifying the person so that the outcome (*eis*) of this sanctification ushers in obedience and atonement (1 Pet. 1:1-2). At other instances of sequence of the application of salvation there is encouragement for the Christian who has experienced some of the salvation benefits, such as justification, who can be reassured that the other benefits, such as glorification, will also be his in time (e.g. Rom. 8:29-30). So the whole post-reformation discussion of the order of the decree and the order of salvation within God's essence was an unfortunate exploration that does not apply to this necessary, immutable, and eternal God. Any linkage of logical order or chronological sequence in such works of God is an expression of application order or revelation purpose. Any attempt to communicate eternal truths into a constantly changing environment such as the

creation will reflect them in sequential ways partly because of the sequential nature of the environment and partly to accommodate to our human understanding. For example, the textual sequences above convey that God graciously applies and guarantees the fullness of salvation to each Christian personally, which is a revelation purpose consistent with God's immutable nature. Any apparent change in God is actually the refraction of a changeless God through the lens of the changing environment for purposes of applying some benefit to the creation, such as salvation or the communication of certain select truths to a certain group in time. The fact that the truths of God are accommodated to the means of communication does not limit the truths of God, but the context indicates the primary hermeneutical purpose and how the descriptions of God are merely supportive of this purpose.

Biblical Assessment

In this section the philosophical model for God that has been explored will be compared to the Biblical presentation of God. To do this assessment the Biblical model will be unpacked and then compared to that of the previously explored philosophical model. Other issues could be explored in other papers but this section is limited to a Biblical assessment of this particular model.

The attribute of necessity is never referred to in the Bible however God is described as an immutable being, which is a major aspect of necessity. For example, James points out that in the context of temptation that the divine Father is the generous provider of every good gift and that He continues to give these good gifts without mixing any temptation or sin among these gifts (Jas. 1:17). So the Christian can reassure himself that God will continue to give good without any evil. Likewise, Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever as the everlasting king and focus for our faith (Heb. 1:12; 13:8).¹⁵ Additionally, God is

¹⁵ This means that the kenotic view of the divinity of Christ emptying Himself of His divine attributes so that He could become incarnate which Satori proposed in 1831 is excluded as well as the evangelical softened version of a willing nonuse of divine attributes which He

consistently described as the first and the last, identifying that God will continue from creation to the climax of history as the one Who engages in history to accomplish His purposes, especially blessing those who remain faithful (Isa. 41:4; Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13).

The attribute of eternity is never referred to in the Bible but God is described as an everlasting being, which identifies that God in the Bible is being described phenomenologically from the vantage point of how He is viewed from within the creation. So the same level of philosophical description need not be expected, provided the creation-based description approximates that of the necessary being. The words for “everlasting” in Hebrew (*‘olam*) and the Greek (*aiōnios*) both have a temporal meaning such as “from age to age” or “perpetual within time.” For example, the kingdom of God is an everlasting reign from age to age (Dan. 4:3, 34; 7:14, 18, 27; 1 Tim. 6:16). Furthermore, the Noahic covenant is an everlasting covenant as long as there are humans, animals, and rainbows (Gen. 9:8-17). Likewise the Davidic covenant is as everlasting as the sun and moon continue to shine (Ps. 89:2, 36-37). None of these texts address an eternal nonsequentiality beyond time but rather they support a continuous everlasting character. Within this creation-based framework God is viewed as everlasting (Rom. 16:26). Additionally, Christ calls his followers to everlasting life as opposed to everlasting judgment; neither option has an end (Mt. 25:41,46).

God’s omnipresence is claimed by a myriad of examples in the Bible rather than a universal statement. One of the most concentrated examples of these claims can be found within the hymnic part of Psalm 139:7-12. David asks where can he go from God’s controlling presence or Spirit that encircles him with His knowledge. In this omnipresence God is expressed as a spiritual Being. When David considers a range of hypothetical circumstances he reassures himself that he cannot escape God’s presence. David first considers a merism with the height

continued to possess. Both options describe essential change which is impossible for an immutable being. For a further discussion of this see Douglas Kennard, “A Few Philosophical and Biblical Theology Problems with Statements of the Trinity,” in this book.

and close proximity to God's throne room in heaven as compared to the deepest pit and furthest from this throne room. God is in both places and thus to be thought of as everywhere in between and thus throughout the creation. Poetically emphasizing this again, David considers travelling as fast as the dawn, which as a tool of God brings light to the creation isolating chaos to the dark of night. Then like *sheol*, the remotest part of the sea is deeply associated with chaos. However, God is not only present to these opposites of chaos conquest and chaos immersion but controlling throughout the whole of the creation by His presence as well. "Even there Thy hand will lead me and Thy right hand will lay hold of me." David contemplates that in the contexts of darkness and chaos that he will be overwhelmed by the forces of chaos and concludes that since God's presence is with him, even the darkest most chaotic environment is penetrated and brightened by the light of God. God's omnipresence, to be wherever David could think of escaping from God and of course to be wherever David in fact *is*, is profoundly reassuring of God's control and protection in his life. Such a view of omnipresence for God in a relativistic universe has implications on God's everlastingness, namely because space and time are dimensionally related, God Who is everywhere is also everywhen. This will be developed further in the chapter, "Eternity and Everlasting."

God is described at times with special local presence to portray some divine purpose with and in His creation. For example, the burning bush presents Yahweh as the God who always will be there to help in time of need and in fact was helping then by sending Moses back to lead Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 3:1-22).¹⁶ When the tabernacle is constructed according to the pattern, God indwells it showing His pleasure and glory to authenticate and lead Israel to the promised land (Ex. 40:34-38). Additionally, when God called prophets He sometimes

¹⁶ In Exodus 3:14 the verbal ideal of the name of Yahweh is either Qal imperfect, "I am Who I am" or existential presence to help or Hiphil imperfect, "I will be Who I will be" or promised presence to help; this is not a good passage to teach the eternal existence of God or aseity.

presented Himself to them in a vision (e.g. Isa. 6). Climactically, when the divine *logos* added humanity and walked among His creation, He was a concentrated expression of God through His humanity (Jn.1:1-18). These expressions are not excluded by God's necessity, immutability, and omnipresence, for God would have remained with these attributes without any kenotic diminishment or nonuse, but phenomenologically from the vantage point of the creation, the visual presence of God in these ways functions as a powerful accommodation of Himself to man to communicate truths about God that would probably not otherwise be grasped. However, these expressions of God within creation, and thus seen as locally and temporally present, go beyond merely that of communication, for God is also One Who engages in: creation, transformation of history, and reconciliation; the divine presence communicates and accomplishes His purposes within the creation. These dramatic engagements do not take away from the essential necessity, immutability or omnipresence but rather show God to be the gracious glorious God He is. Such engagement and compassion for creation would only be seen from the vantage point of creation as temporal locally present phenomena. While the shekinah glory was present in the tabernacle He was also present everywhere as David praised Him to be (Ps. 139:7-12). Likewise, while the grace and truth of God was expressed through the local presence of the divine Son Who fleshes out and explains God, the divinity of the Son is also omnipresent, for He does not change yesterday, today or forever (Heb.13:8; Rev.1:17).

God's omniscience is claimed in the Bible by a myriad of examples rather than a universal statement. For example, the divine speeches in Job barrage Job with an array of questions he cannot answer but presumably God can. However, probably the most concentrated section to examine the omniscience of God is in the hymnic section of Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18. David declares that God has carried out a complete investigation as in spying out the land or in a legal brief. This results in God's complete truthful knowledge as expressed through the merism of

God knowing his sittings and risings. As a merism God also knows all the other events, too. However, this knowledge reaches to David's internal thoughts as well, for perceived distance to God does not hamper God from knowing them all. Another merism shows that God knows David's path or way or plans of life and when David is resting from these plans. "God is intimately acquainted with all my ways." That is, all of David's action and behavior is truthfully known by God. God is not limited by knowing things only after the fact for He knows what David will speak before he himself does as an indication that God knows everything. In fact, God's knowledge is controlling because it so extensively surrounds David like a fortress (so high that David can't assail it or overpower it or, as we saw previously under the discussion of God 's omnipresence, David can't escape it either). Beneath the omniscience and omnipresence is the realization that God is the initiator, for God knows so well because He made David. God's creation of David involves weaving out the tapestry of his life while David was still in the womb. Because God's creating of David frames and fills out who David will become even while he is hidden from all others view, shows the extensive knowledge of the craftsman. God has blueprinted David's embryo and history before David had even begun any of them. God's knowledge is the initiating, creating, determining, and controlling thing in David's life and David lives out his life reflecting this condition of being so extensively known by God. These thoughts are too many to count about any one individual that David is overwhelmed by God's omniscience.

Job and Revelation especially portray God to be an omnipotent being Who has no individual or corporate equal and will thus accomplish His will in spite of all opposition. Biblically the concept of omnipotence is seen through the Latin *omnipoens* which reflects the Hebrew *shadday* and the Greek *pantokrator*. The rabbinic analysis of the word *shadday* is that it is composed of the relative *she* "who" and the word *day* "enough" or *shadday* "self-sufficient."¹⁷ More recently

¹⁷ Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 12a.

shadday has been connected with *shadod* "to destroy," hence the powerful destroyer. These meanings could fit in the context of Job (e.g. Job 5:17; 6:4; 8:3; 11:7; 32:8; 40:2) but not in the few texts of Genesis 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3 and Exodus 6:3 where the contexts for *shadday* are more of blessing and covenant. A widely held suggestion today is to connect *shadday* with the Akkadian word *zadu* "mountain," as God's abode. The *-ay* suffix would be understood as "of the" which has been demonstrated by Ugaritic. While this is possible, few *shadday* references have a mountain context and Job's *shadday* is the creator and enabler of all; if mountains are thought to be *shadday's* home then He is no localized deity but the One powerful sovereign to whom Job must submit. When the imagery transposes into the N.T. the *pantokrator* is the Almighty Who confronts John in vision destroys His opponents and brings in the kingdom (Rev.1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22). So the Biblical emphasis for omnipotence is that God is the creator, provider, covenant or conqueror, and establisher of His kingdom. Programs for evil will fail because the almighty God will establish His kingdom. There is no group of beings who can thwart Almighty God's plan.

Foreknowledge of God is a determined intimate knowledge of a person or event experientially prior to it appearing in creation, from the perspective of those in creation. For example, Peter uses foreknowledge as a parallel word to communicate a predetermined plan (Acts 2:23). Thus, foreknowledge is not God responding to human activity but rather God having determined an event, which, when seen from the perspective of the creation, appears to be known before it happens. This is how eternal omniscience would be perceived from the creation; technically God does not know in advance, He knows *outside* of time and sequence. So, foreknowledge is a metaphor that communicates features of God's eternal omniscience into a temporal creation so the creation might be encouraged by the sovereign intimacy of God. Peter elsewhere points to God's foreknowing Christ before the foundation of the world from the vantage point of the creation so

that in more recent times Christ appeared in the world for our sake so we would believe in Him and His redemption (1 Pet. 1:20). In this case the knowledge within foreknowledge is not an event but intimate personal and relational. Foreknowledge in these contexts simply would not make sense in a classical Greek, or Arminian, or Molinist way for here the person is known and the redemption is determined by God; God is not held captive by human initiation to bring about His plan for He is the initiator of redemption. The Father knows Christ essentially and eternally within the trinity. This trinity is emphasized within these contexts as seen in the description of the recipients and longer blessing in 1 Peter 1:2, 3-12 or in the foreordaining God who exalts Christ to be Lord enabling Him to pour forth the divine Spirit (Acts 2). This same trinity is intimately involved in the salvation of the Christian. For example, the election of those who become Christians is foreknown by the Father in eternity because the same contrast is made in 1 Peter 1:1-2 as is made in 1:20; the foreknowledge is an intimate determining aspect of divine omniscience recognized to be known from the viewpoint of the creation as prior but it is applied in the creation in time. In this case the election is divinely applied through the preparatory sanctifying of the Spirit which brings about the outcome (*eis*) of obedience and atonement. Notice that God is the initiator for the first act of obedience that identifies this person as within the atonement and which is brought about as a result of the divine election being applied by the Spirit.

God's sovereignty is Biblically claimed in countless ways. Yahweh is the king Who continues to reign overall while the earthly kings reign over miniature plots for a moment (Isa. 6). Yahweh presents Himself as a suzerain or great king though the form of documents of revelation (namely: Exodus-Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua 24). When suzerain Yahweh challenged Egypt, the most powerful nation of that time, Yahweh destroyed Egypt and their pantheon of gods in order to lead Israel out to the promised land. Yahweh is the incomparable One Who is superior to all and thus accomplishes His will of judging sinners and

rescuing those He has chosen (Isa. 40-48). As sovereign, Yahweh predicts and guarantees that the predictions will come to pass for there is no rival to God (Isa. 44:6-8). When the history of the world runs its course God's kingdom will again conquer, indicating that He continues to reign (e.g. Dan. 2:45).

God's sovereign choice includes everything within the decree as divine initiation determining what would come to pass.¹⁸ Paul in Romans 9 explains the process of God's determinism as dependent and initiated by Him so that the Christians do not have to fear being overwhelmed by evil. God overwhelmingly conquers for the Christian even as some are dying a martyr's death so their inheritance with Christ is guaranteed. God's purpose is initiated by Him in promise before any choice could be made by the participants "in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls" (Rom. 9:6-13). Since it is God's sovereign initiation which determines whether an individual or nation is saved and blessed or actively rejected for curse, the determinism of their fate is set without their works even though their works are involved in playing out the dramatic narrative. Quoting Malachi, 1:2 God declares "Jacob I actively loved, but Esau I actively hated" to indicate that the choice stands determined by God Who has set their fate. This is a harsh statement but is the only meaningful one to make sense of the question in the next verse, "There is no injustice with God is there?" (Rom. 9:14). God initiates and determines the action for such a question to be raised. God is the One Who has mercy or compassion to include in blessing so the choice does not depend on the will of man or the activity of man but on God as the initiator (Rom. 9:15-16). Options like Molinism or Arminianism do not reflect that God is the initiating determiner as this passage portrays. However, the determinism is not merely of the good of mercy but also the active curse as illustrated by the hardening of Pharaoh. The verse quoted in Romans 9:17 is the one in Exodus

¹⁸ For a further discussion of how the determining sovereignty of God and freedom of man fit in a non contradictory manner that consistently reflect the Biblical text see the chapter "God's Sovereignty and Human Free Will," in this book.

4:21 where God predicts and informs Moses that He has raised Pharaoh for this destruction in order to demonstrate His sovereign determining in the salvation of His people. This sovereign determining is the emphasis in the Exodus context as illustrated by the majority of instances in which God is declared to harden Pharaoh's heart (Ex.4: 21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 17). There are other verses in the context that could be taken as divine determinism but these listed unquestionably emphasize that God is the initiator and determiner of Pharaoh's fate. However, this determinism works compatibly with human choice, for Pharaoh is recorded as having taken an active hand in hardening his heart in a few instances as well (Ex. 8:15, 32; 9:34). In Paul's context the sovereign determinism is the feature being emphasized as well; "So He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires" (Rom. 9:18). Unless one recognizes this strong sovereign determinism as what is happening in this context, the next verse's questions do not make sense: "For why does He still find fault?" for "Who resists His will?" (Rom. 9:19). The answer keeps the determining initiative with God, "Who are you, O man who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?" (Rom. 9:20-21). In a similar context exploring the features of salvation, such as predestination accomplished within the heavenly benefits, Paul reminds his readers that God works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). This determinism is exhaustive and includes everything, for in this context the salvifically determined events are seen as within a greater context of the "all things" of God's sovereignty.

God can be viewed in this model as the continuous final causal ground for all existence and events. So God both determines and omnisciently knows (another divine initiating and determining motif) all the creation. God continues to sustain all the creation as well. In His active sustaining role God is better

understood as an efficient cause as well. More explanation will be provided on divine efficient causality in the chapter on "Sovereignty and Free Will."¹⁹ God will bring the whole of the creation within His goal, for as omnipotent and incomparable He is fully able, and as sovereign determiner He is fully willing to do so. God has no challenger who can thwart His plan.

This model handles the passages with which the openness model challenge us. Many of them have already been folded into the discussion however two texts in Genesis stand out as examples of openness challenge.²⁰ Genesis 6:5-7 presents an evaluation of humans prior to the Noachic flood that recounts Yahweh seeing man's wickedness to such an extent that He is grieved in heart and repents from His blessing to now destroy the world in judgment. Certainly, Yahweh is consistent with His nature in His blessing His creation until in their disobedience they transgresses His standard (e.g. Gen. 2:17; 3:14-20; 4:7-12). The text does not comment on this being a plan of Yahweh, for it leaves it as a description from the vantage point of the changing historical narrative and such phenomenological language is to be expected in a narrative account. Now that man's thoughts were only evil continually, God's destroying judgment is to be expected. The other account is in Genesis 18 where Yahweh appears before Abraham and takes him into confidence concerning Sodom and Gomorrah's judgment. In this context Yahweh engages in conversation with Abraham predicting that Sarah would bear a child within a year's time (Gen.18:10). When Sarah overheard this prophecy she laughed in disbelief and tried to cover it up but Yahweh knew and corrected her so that she did laugh, for nothing is too difficult for Yahweh (Gen. 18:13-15). Then Yahweh took Abraham into confidence about the judgment that He was about to accomplish (Gen.18:17). The interactive interchange that follows demonstrates that Abraham and Yahweh are both righteous. God is so committed

¹⁹ Cf. Chapter "God's Sovereignty and Human Free Will," in this book.

²⁰ Other examples could be given, such as 1 Samuel 15:11 which John Sanders develops in *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1998), but they can be answered in the same method as illustrated in the above examples by appealing to near contextual statements, such as 1 Samuel 15:29.

to the righteous that if there were ten righteous in the city then the whole city would be delivered (Gen. 18:23-32). By going down to Sodom to see if the conditions of Sodom were as bad as the outcry and then he would know shows Abraham and the readers that God is completely righteous so as not to destroy any righteous (Gen. 18: 21, 25; 19:13). God's accommodation of communication of Himself to metaphors of experiential knowledge serve a higher purpose in the passage of emphasizing God's righteousness. God's righteousness is further demonstrated by having not found ten righteous. The few righteous found were still saved while the wicked perished in the judgment God had purposed to bring about in the first place. The previous plan of God was accomplished and God showed Himself to be consistently righteous and compassionate at the same time.

The Biblical presentation of God is greatly analogous both to the philosophical description of the Maximally Great Being and an actually Necessary Being. Biblically and philosophically God is described as a monotheistic sovereign creating and determining Being Who is immutable, omniscient, spiritually omnipresent, omnipotent and incomparable. Apart from the philosophical view of an essential being (e.g. eternal) as compared to the phenomenological view of a Biblical sovereign (e.g. everlasting), the presentations are basically in agreement. There is also broad agreement with the personal attributes of the Maximally Great Being and that of the Biblical presentation of God as interactive, true, affirming, empathetic, compassionate and merciful in practical ways. Furthermore, each model compliments the other by providing a degree of precision that the other model lacks, while being amenable to it. For example, precision is provided by the philosophical model's universal statements as in the discussion of omnipotence above. Additionally, the philosophical analysis provides a tightness of analysis that can provide warrant to alternate worldviews. Likewise, the Biblical text is clearer than the philosophical with regard to issues like the trinity. The narrative and personal lives recounted

within the Biblical text as yoked with God makes the presentation often more vivid and personally compelling.