

The Implications of God’s Infinity for “Open” Theism

Steve Lewis

*M.A., M.Min. candidate, Tyndale Theological Seminary
High Peaks Bible Fellowship, Parker, Colorado*

Introduction

Proponents of the “Open” view of God claim to believe in God’s infiniteness; therefore the implications of the infinity of God will be explored to determine whether they are consistent with the tenets of open theism. A proper definition of God’s infiniteness will be outlined, including the relationship of an infinite God to space and time. Open theism’s arguments for the temporality of God will be examined in light of God’s infinity, and evidence will be presented for the timelessness of God. Finally, this article will explore the implications that God’s infiniteness has regarding the debate about God’s foreknowledge.

Clark Pinnock, an advocate of open theism, acknowledges that no doctrine is more important than the doctrine of God. He states, “The concept of God is the most important topic in theology -- and the most mysterious. Dealing with it makes one aware of the limitations of our finite understanding.”¹ Pinnock is correct in this assertion, and it is important to understand that any concept of God can be viewed as an interdependent package of characteristics. One of the primary features of such a grouping of attributes is that it must be coherent and internally consistent. Ronald Nash explains this idea in the following words:

A concept of God may be thought of as a cluster or package of properties attributed to the divine being. The phrase *package of attributes* suggests that the properties attributed to God are tied together in some way. I can go still further, and speak of the set of divine attributes as a *logical package*, which is simply a way of saying that they must fit together logically; the entire cluster of divine attributes must be logically consistent.... With respect to any proposed concept of God, then, it is proper to ask if the various elements of the concept fit together.²

Nash goes on to say that some divine attributes will logically entail certain other attributes, and that “logical entailments between different attributes have the effect of producing different packages of attributes and thus different concepts of God.”³ Pinnock recognizes this when he states, “On the basis of divine revelation we strive for a biblically and conceptually sound understanding of God and of the package of divine properties that contribute to a coherent understanding. Each attribute needs to be explained coherently and the attributes together shown to be compatible with one another and with the vision of God as a whole.”⁴ Another openness author, William Hasker, says that his purpose is to “exhibit the rational coherence of the theology of divine openness.”⁵ These statements by two

¹ Clark Pinnock, *Systematic Theology, The Openness of God*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 101.

² Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 11-12.

³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴ Pinnock, 101.

⁵ William Hasker, *A Philosophical Perspective, The Openness of God*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 126.

advocates of open theism present an invitation to examine the coherence of their proposed concept of God.

Open theists do not reject all aspects of the traditional concept of God. They affirm God's infinity, His uncaused existence, His ontological independence from His creation, His act of creating the universe *ex nihilo*, and His capability to directly and supernaturally intervene in the created universe. By affirming these characteristics, the open theists attempt to clearly separate their view from that of process theology. Pinnock comments that open theists are seeking "a way to revise classical theism in a dynamic direction without falling into process theology ...without making God finite."⁶ [emphasis added] Also, Pinnock's previously quoted statement that dealing with the doctrine of God "makes one aware of the limitations of our finite understanding" contains an implied contrast between the infiniteness of God and the finiteness of His human creatures. Since the infinity of God is one of the fundamental attributes that open theists recognize and accept, it will be important to outline a proper definition of God's infiniteness.

Definition of God's Infinity

In its simplest terms *infinity* indicates that God is free from any limitations or boundaries. At its heart, the concept of God's infinity expresses the distinction between the Creator and the creature, as well as the unbridgeable ontological gap between God and man.

There will always be a difference between God and man. The gap between us is not merely a moral and spiritual disparity which originated with the fall. It is metaphysical, stemming from creation. Even when redeemed and glorified, we will still be renewed human beings. We will never become God. He will always be God and we will always be humans, so that there will always be a transcendence. Salvation consists in God's restoring us to what he intended us to be, not elevating us to what he is...God can never be completely captured in human concepts. This means that all of our doctrinal ideas, helpful and basically correct though they may be, cannot fully exhaust God's nature. He is not limited to our understanding of him.⁷

God's infinity was expressed in the following way by John Gill: "When we say that God is infinite, the meaning is that he is unbounded and unlimited, unmeasurable or immense, unsearchable and not to be comprehended."⁸ Louis Berkhof amplifies the definition by saying, "The infinity of God is that perfection of God by which He is free from all limitations. In ascribing it to God we deny that there are or can be any limitations to the divine Being or attributes. It implies that He is in no way limited by the universe, by this time-space world, or confined to the universe. It does not involve His identity with the sum-total of existing things, nor does it exclude the co-existence of derived and finite things, to which He bears relation."⁹ This points out the relationship of God to the created universe and indicates that derived, finite, and created things exist in a different way than does their Creator. Gill makes the following statement regarding the relationship of God to the dimensions of space and time:

⁶ Pinnock, 107, 117.

⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 317, 318.

⁸ John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*. (Atlanta: Turner Lassetter, 1957), 41.

⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1941), 59.

He is not a body consisting of parts; was he, he would be finite, for body or matter is a creature of time, and not eternal, and is limited to a certain place, and so not every-where....God is an uncreated Spirit, was before all time, so not bounded by it, and was before space or place were, and existed without it, and so not to be limited to it and by it. He is the “first Being” and from whom all others have their being: “Before him there was no God formed, neither shall there be after him; yea, he is the first and the last” (Isa. 43:10; 44:6).¹⁰

God’s relationship to space and time are important aspects of his infinity which will both be examined in view of their implications for the open view of God.

God’s Infinity as it Relates to Space

Regarding God’s infinity as it relates to the dimension of space Berkhof comments, “It may be defined as that perfection of the Divine Being by which He transcends all spatial limitations, and yet is present in every point of space with His whole Being....Heaven and earth cannot contain Him (1 Kings 8:27; Isa 66:1; Acts 7:48-49) and at the same time He fills both and is a God at hand (Ps 139:7-10); Jer 23:23-24; Acts 17:27-28).”¹¹ Additional biblical evidence is provided by Gill when he relates God’s infinity to His activity in creating and upholding the universe:

If God is infinite, that is, unbounded with respect to space and place, then he must be everywhere; and this is to be proved from his power, which is everywhere: as appears, not only in the creation of all things, as the heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth and the ends of them, and all that is in them; but in his providence, supporting and sustaining them; for not only the creatures have their being in him, and from him, and therefore he must be near them; but “he upholds all things by his power,” they consist in him, he provides for them, and preserves them all; and which is the argument the apostle uses to prove that he is not far from them (Acts 17:27-28).¹²

The actions of God in the creation and providence of the finite universe, therefore, illustrate the complete dependence of the spatial universe on the infinite God. Several additional insights are provided by Erickson as he clarifies the relationship between the infinite God and the universe of space which He has created:

God is not subject to limitations of space. By this we do not mean merely the limitation of being in a particular place -- if an object is in one place it cannot be in another. Rather, *it is improper to think of God as present in space at all....*God is the one who brought space (and time) into being. He was before there was space. He cannot be localized at a particular point....Another aspect of God’s infinity in terms of space is that there is no place where he cannot be found. ...The point here is that nowhere within the creation is God inaccessible. Jeremiah quotes God as saying, “Am I a God at hand...and not a God afar off?” (Jer. 23:23). The implication seems to be that being a God at hand does not preclude his being afar off as well. He fills the whole heaven and earth (v. 24)....God is not localized. He has not been left behind. He is available to us wherever we may be....He does not, however, move from one place to another as a sort of divine superman who flies at infinite speed. Rather, he simply has access to the whole of the creation at all times.¹³

¹⁰ Gill, 41.

¹¹ Berkhof, 60, 61.

¹² Gill, 42.

¹³ Erickson, 273, 274.

It is essential, then, to conceive of God as existing altogether beyond the realm of space, and yet being accessible to His creation at every point. An analogy has often been used to express this truth and, although the analogy has its limitations, it is nonetheless helpful when it comes to expressing the concept of God's perspective in reference to spatial relationships:

Augustine and Aquinas...referred to the example of an observer on a high hill, or tower who sees things going on far below him. Clearly, they thought, such an observer could be simultaneously aware of many different spatial relationships. He could perceive that B is in front of A and that C is behind B. Even if the observer were separated from the spatial points, he could know the spatial relationships occupied by the things below him.¹⁴

In an analogous way God, although existing beyond the realm of space, has the unique ability to oversee and act upon every aspect of His created universe. Understanding the truths of God's infinity in regard to space will be extremely helpful when it comes to grasping God's infinity in relationship to time.

God's Infinity as it Relates to Time

Regarding the dimension of time Berkhof comments, "The infinity of God in relation to time is called His eternity....Eternity in the strict sense of the word is ascribed to that which transcends all temporal limitations....His eternity may be defined as that perfection of God whereby He is elevated above all temporal limits and all succession of moments, and possesses the whole of His existence in one indivisible present."¹⁵ Gill also shows that a proper definition of God's eternity (infinity as it relates to time) must put God outside the realm of time.

Eternity, properly so called, is that which is without beginning and end, and is without succession, or does not proceed in a succession of moments one after another; and is opposed to time, which has a beginning, goes on in succession, and has an end: it is the measure of a creature's duration, and began when creatures began to be and not before, and is proper to them, and not eternity which only belongs to God.¹⁶

Robert Lightner cites several Scriptures that apply this definition of God's infinity as it relates to time, and he observes that, "Past, present, and future are our ways of speaking about our lives. With God, however, His life is not divided by segments of time. Though God is the author of time, He is neither conditioned nor confined by it (Gen. 21:32-34; Deut. 33:27; Ps. 90:2; 102:12)."¹⁷ Erickson provides additional insights explaining the relationship between the infinite God and the dimension of time which He has created:

God is also infinite in relation to time. *Time does not apply to him.* He was before time began. The question, How old is God? is simply inappropriate. He is no older now than a year ago, for infinity plus one is no more than infinity. He simply is not restricted by the dimension of time. God is the one who always is. He was, he is, he will be....The fact that God is not bound by time does not mean that

¹⁴ Nash, 75.

¹⁵ Berkhof, 60.

¹⁶ Gill, 45-46.

¹⁷ Robert P. Lightner, The God of the Bible and Other Gods. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998), 113.

he is not conscious of the succession of points of time. He knows what is now occurring in human experience. He is aware that events occur in a particular order. Yet he is equally aware of all points of that order simultaneously. This transcendence over time has been likened to a person who sits on a steeple while he watches a parade. He sees all parts of the parade at the different points on the route rather than only what is going past him at the moment. He is aware of what is passing each point of the route. So God also is aware of what is happening, has happened, and will happen at each point in time. Yet at any given point within time he is also conscious of the distinction between what is now occurring, what has been, and what will be. There is a successive order to the acts of God and there is a logical order to his decisions, yet there is no temporal order to his willing. His deliberation and willing take no time. He has from all eternity determined what he is now doing. Thus his actions are not in any sense reactions to developments. He does not get taken by surprise or have to formulate contingency plans.¹⁸

As with the infinite God's relationship to space, so His relationship to time is as the Creator to the thing created. Since God is infinite, He is completely free from any limitations that time would ordinarily impose on a finite being. God exists altogether beyond the realm of created time, yet He has access to the whole dimension of time in what we would describe as the "present" moment. Simply stated, God is not "in time" any more than He is "in space."

God's Temporality in Open Theism

Although they affirm God's infinity, open theists have difficulty with the ramifications of God's infinity with respect to time. For example, John Sanders describes the traditional theistic view of eternity in negative terms as God's abstraction from time and writes, "If God is immune to time then biblical personalism must be left behind."¹⁹ Clark Pinnock elaborates on this idea by saying, "If God did not experience events as they transpire, he would not experience or know the world as it actually is. If God's eternity were timeless, God could not be related to our temporal world."²⁰ Pinnock also asserts that God's timelessness "creates problems for biblical history, which portrays God as One who projects plans, experiences the flow of temporal passage and faces the future as not completely settled....A timeless being could not make plans and carry them out."²¹ Another open theist, Richard Rice, believes that God's ability to take action in a temporal world necessitates that God is "in time:"

To say that God acts, therefore, means that it makes sense to use the words before and after when we talk about him. God makes decisions and then he acts. He decides before he acts, he acts after he decides. This is so simple that it sounds trivial, but it points to a fundamental truth about God. Not only does he bring about change, but in a significant sense God himself experiences change. After God acts, the universe is different and God's experience of the universe is different. The concept of divine action thus involves divine temporality. Time is real for God.²²

Pinnock further clarifies the contention of open theism regarding God's temporality in the following unmistakable terms:

¹⁸ Erickson, 274-275.

¹⁹ John Sanders, *Historical Considerations, The Openness of God*. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 99.

²⁰ Pinnock, 120.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Richard Rice, *Biblical Support for a New Perspective, The Openness of God*. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 36.

I affirm that God is with us in time, experiencing the succession of events with us. Past, present and future are real to God. This underlies the biblical claim that God is an agent who works in history, who makes plans and carries them out, who remembers the past and gives promises about the future. God's eternity embraces time and takes temporal events into the divine life. The God of the Bible is not timeless. His eternity means that there has never been and never will be a time when God does not exist. Timelessness limits God. If he were timeless, God would be unable to work salvation in history, would be cut off from the world, have no real relationship with people and would be completely static.²³ [emphasis added]

In outlining the reasons that open theists view God as temporal, William Hasker contends that the traditional doctrine of God's timelessness is not mentioned or implied in all of Biblical revelation.

It may be worthwhile to state briefly the reasons for preferring the view that God is temporal -- that he lives and interacts with us through the changes of time. First of all, it is clear that the doctrine of divine timelessness is not taught in the Bible and does not reflect the way the biblical writers understood God. In spite of appeals by defenders of the doctrine to texts such as Exodus 3:14, John 8:58 and 2 Peter 3:8, there simply is no trace in the Scripture of the elaborate metaphysical and conceptual apparatus that is required to make sense of divine timelessness. On the positive side, the biblical writers undeniably do present God as living, acting and reacting in time.²⁴ [emphasis added]

Hasker's basic difficulty with divine timelessness seems to involve an inability to reconcile this doctrine with philosophical presuppositions. He states that "it is very hard to make clear logical sense of the doctrine"²⁵ and goes on to ask, "If God is truly timeless, so that temporal determinations of *before* and *after* do not apply to him, then how can God act in time, as the Scriptures say that he does? How can he know what is occurring on the changing earthly scene?"²⁶ These are questions that deserve to be answered. What needs to be emphasized is that the doctrine of divine timelessness is compatible with God's action upon and knowledge of the temporal details of the universe which He created.

Problems with the Temporality of God

Logical Problems with God's Temporality

If God is temporal, then He is not infinite with respect to time. If God is not infinite with respect to time then He cannot be infinite with respect to space either, because "according to the dominant contemporary scientific understanding, both time and space are correlative. It is the *space-time* universe. There is no time without space and no space without time. If so, then the logical consequence of affirming that God is temporal would be to assert that he is also spatial. This falls right into the lap of process theology, which [open] theists claim to reject."²⁷ If God is not infinite with respect to the space-time universe, then He is not infinite at all. This leads to the conclusion that God is a finite being; He is like us, only "bigger" somehow.

²³ Pinnock, 120-121.

²⁴ Hasker, 128.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Norman L. Geisler, Creating God in the Image of Man? (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997), 118.

Another inconsistency with the idea of God's temporality involves the two logical options for God's relationship to time: time would have to be either *inside* God (part of His essential nature) or *outside* God. If time is part of God's essence, then how could God be without a beginning? It is logically incoherent that God could have an infinite number of temporal moments, as Bob Struck demonstrates in a version of the Kalam argument:

Let's assume God does exist within time for the sake of argument. God would then live in a succession of time coextensive with His own existence, in other words, time extending into the infinite past. It would have to extend infinitely into past time because both neo-classical theists and openness theists believe God is eternal (of infinite duration), having no beginning and no end. But for any given point in time (P), (P) itself would be preceded by an infinite sequence of points in time before it could occur. Therefore, it would seem (P) would never occur because there would be no end to the infinite series of points in time preceding it. If we conceive of that particular point in time (C) when God created the physical universe, (C) also would be preceded by an infinite sequence of points in time and so would never occur. But it is self-evident that (C) did occur -- for here we are. Therefore, we must infer that all the points in time which preceded (C) must have occurred; and if they have occurred then there was not an infinite sequence of points in time which preceded (C). Yet we've already agreed that if God lives in time then that time must be coextensive with His existence which is infinite. So either the time within which God lives is infinite (and the physical universe would never come into existence) or God does not live in time.²⁸

This argument also demonstrates that if God were temporal then He Himself would have had a beginning, and this is contrary to the doctrine of God's eternity which open theists accept. The other logical option is that time exists *outside* God, and Norman Geisler describes the repercussions of this view for open theism (which he labels "neotheism"):

If, on the other hand, neotheism claims that time is "outside" God, then some sort of dualism emerges. For, if time is outside God, then we must ask whether time had a beginning or not. If it did not, then it could be argued that there is something outside God that he did not create, since it is as eternal as he is. And this...is a form of dualism where some reality eternally exists outside God that was not created by him. On the other hand, if time is outside of God and had a beginning, then it must have been created by God (since everything with a beginning had a cause). And in this event we are right back to the theistic position that time is created by God, and that God, as the Creator of time, is not temporal.²⁹

The view that God is temporal, therefore, is plagued by problems of logical inconsistency.

Confusion in Applying Human Language to an Infinite Being

Open theists, such as Hasker and Rice, often apply the terms *before* and *after* to God's experience, but this constitutes an error in the application of language to an infinite being. Douglas Kelly criticizes open theists for making such an error:

²⁸ Bob Struck, *Does God Exist Inside or Outside of Time*. (Unpublished manuscript, 2000, available at http://edgren.org/discuss/god_exist_time.html)

²⁹ Geisler, 119.

It seems to me that these “openness” writers have failed to think through the profound implications of the difference between created (finite) and uncreated (infinite) being. This failure to think clearly is manifestly demonstrated in their impoverished grasp of the relationship of language to being (i.e., epistemology). They seem to work on the assumption of the univocal validity of language for both God and man. That is, a word must mean for God the exact same thing it does for a human. For instance, “before and after” impose on God’s experience the same limitations they do on that of humankind. But one wonders how they could have neglected the church’s pivotal teaching on the analogical usage of language (i.e., that there are both similarities and differences when the same word is applied to created and uncreated being). A brief reading of a few sections of Saint Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* or perhaps chapter five of E. L. Mascall’s *Existence and Analogy* might have transformed their book. And long before Aquinas or Mascall, Saint Hilary of Poitiers (fourth century) wisely remarked (in *De Trinitate* 4:14) that human words are subject to God, rather than God being subject to human words (in the sense of comprehensively defined and thus limited by them). The human mind “must not measure the divine nature by the limitations of [its] own” (1:17).³⁰

It is important to keep in mind that the infinite God cannot be bound by the language of finite and temporal beings, especially in the complex area of His infinity with respect to time.

Confusion of God’s Actions with His Attributes

Many of the “openness” arguments for God’s temporality involve their denial that a timeless being has the ability to act in time; they say that a God who *acts* in time must *be* in time. This assumption, however, confuses God’s actions with His attributes. God has the attribute of infinity, and yet His actions occur in the temporal universe. The open theists seem to have no trouble believing that the infinite God created the universe *ex nihilo*, but does not this involve His acting in time without being a creature Himself? Why should an infinite God who can act in His created space-time universe be required to be temporal? Geisler further clarifies this important issue and provides a helpful analogy for understanding the relationship of a timeless God to the temporal universe:

The neotheist assumes that the cause of any temporal act must itself be temporal. But no proof is offered that this must be the case. The argument given proves only that the *effect* is temporal, not the *cause*. Indeed, classical theists have gone to great lengths to demonstrate that the cause *cannot* be temporal like its effect -- in both the Kalam original-cause and in the thomistic current-cause arguments. The cause is eternal and the effect is temporal. Or, the cause is infinite and the effect is finite. So, there is absolutely no reason to suppose that the cause of an effect in time must be temporal as the effect is....There is no reason why the Eternal cannot act in the temporal world. Just as all the radii of a circle are many and yet the center from which they come is one, even so God can have multiple acts in a temporal sequence without being temporal himself. Likewise, just as spokes move faster at the circumference, and not at all at the absolute center, even so God’s actions can occur in a moving temporal world without him moving through time. There is nothing logically incoherent about a timeless God acting in a temporal world.³¹

As Geisler has shown, there is no logical inconsistency in believing that the infinite Creator acts in the created space-time universe. There is nothing precluding Him from doing so. In fact, there are good reasons for believing that God’s perspective on time is much different than ours and yet this difference in

³⁰ Douglas F. Kelly, *Afraid of Infinitude*, *Christianity Today*, (Vol. 39, Jan. 9, 1995), 32.

³¹ Geisler, 97-98.

perspective in no way prohibits God's active relationship to every detail of His creation. Nash provides a slightly different viewpoint on the analogy of the circle given by Geisler:

While the points of a circle are related to each other in a particular order, all points maintain the same relation to the circle's center. The points of a circle can be interpreted as occupying the relationships of before, after, and simultaneous with. Even though point A might be prior to point B and B subsequent to A, both points occupy the same relation to the center of the circle. Using this analogy, the defender of timelessness might claim that though every temporal event has the same relationship to God's eternal present, God can still know that A comes before B and C comes after B. But obviously, no one living along the points of the circle, so to speak, could know what God knows from His position at the center of the circle.³²

This spatial analogy can certainly help us to understand the perspective which God has regarding time. Another helpful analogy involves the relationship of the author and the reader to a work of fiction:

Once the novel is completed, the author has a different relationship to the sequence of events in the novel than someone reading it for the first time. The reader encounters a series of events in chronological order. But there is a sense in which the author of the novel has a simultaneous overview of all the events. To the author, the entire book is in his present, in a manner of speaking. He could have written the end before the beginning. But in order to follow the story, the reader must read the book sequentially and thus perceive how what is future for the characters in chapter four becomes a part of their past in chapter six. Because two perspectives (that of the author and the reader) can be distinguished, two kinds of experience of temporal sequence exist....All of the analogies run into difficulty if pushed too far. But they all have one merit, namely, showing that some sense can be made of the claim that the same events can be viewed from such radically different perspectives that they must be described with different temporal predicates.³³

Reaffirming God's Timelessness

It is clear that the problems with God's temporality reaffirm the classical theistic position regarding God's infinity with respect to time -- that God is indeed timeless. Geisler summarizes the debate on the issue of God's supposed temporality in the following words:

Neotheism affirms that God created the entire spatial-temporal universe. But if this is so, then time is part of the essence of the cosmos. In short, God created time. But if time is of the essence of creation, then it cannot be an attribute of the uncreated -- that is, of God who is beyond time and the Creator of it. The Creator of time cannot be temporal, since time has a beginning and its Creator does not. For the principle of causality demands that everything that has a beginning (or comes to be) has a cause. The universe and time had a beginning. Hence, it must have a cause (i.e., God) who did not have a cause. This being the case, God is not part of the temporal order any more than the Creator is part of the creation; or, the infinite God is part of the finite world he made. Therefore, God must be the nontemporal Cause of the temporal world. The attribute of nontemporality is exactly what neotheists reject, yet it appears to follow logically from their own view of creation. So if neotheists would be consistent with their own position, they should accept classical theism's view of the nontemporality (eternality) of God.³⁴

³² Nash, 75.

³³ Ibid., 76-77.

³⁴ Geisler, 117-118.

In addition to the clear logical reasons for reaffirming God's timelessness, there is ample biblical support for the doctrine that God, as the Creator of time, is beyond time. In John 17:5 Jesus expressed the glory He had with the Father "before the world began." The apostle Paul described God's choosing those who are His "before the creation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4), and declared that God's grace was given in Christ "before the beginning of time" (2 Timothy 1:9). Hebrews 1:2 tells of God "framing the ages" (time), and Jude 25 proclaims that Jesus Christ was "before all ages." God has no beginning and no end, He exists beyond the limits of time, He is the Creator of time and is truly timeless.

Implications of God's Infinity for the Foreknowledge of God

Although he does not specifically identify his view on the issue of God's temporality in his book about God's foreknowledge, it is obvious that open theist Greg Boyd presupposes God's temporality as an underlying belief. Boyd argues that God does not know how the future will turn out, He sometimes regrets the decisions He has made in the past, He is often confronted with the unexpected, and He experiences frustration because His creatures choose unpredictable courses of action.

Those who oppose the open view of God on the grounds that it compromises God's omniscience are simply misguided. The debate between the open and classical understandings of divine foreknowledge is completely a debate over the nature of the future: Is it exhaustively settled from all eternity, or is it partly open? That is the question at hand, nothing else....If God does not foreknow future free actions, it is not because his knowledge of the future is in any sense incomplete. It's because there is, in this view, *nothing definite there for God to know!*³⁵

The implicit basis for such a statement is the foundational assumption that God is not timeless but is "in time" and therefore cannot know what the future holds. The argument proposed by Boyd and other open theists could be stated as follows: 1) God knows events as they occur in time; 2) The truth value of temporal events changes over time (for example, it is not currently true that the apostle Paul is living. This was true at one time in the past, but it ceased to be true on a specific day around A.D. 65); 3) Therefore, God must be temporal since His knowledge changes over time. This argument, however, involves a category mistake that is explained by Geisler: "An infinite, eternal God knows *what* we know but not in the *way* we know it. As an eternal being, God knows eternally. As temporal beings, we know temporally. Each being must know in the way he can know, namely in accordance with his own nature. For instance, neotheists believe that God is infinite. If so, then he must know infinitely. But we are finite and know only finitely. Therefore, God knows what we know only in a different way than we know it."³⁶ God is timeless and has a perspective that is completely different from that of His finite creatures.

The open theists' view of God's foreknowledge does not take into account the fact that the future consists of what is actual as well as what is possible. As an infinite and eternal being, God has knowledge of both aspects of the future. On this basis, Geisler challenges the open theists' supposition that there is nothing real or definite in the future for God to know:

³⁵ Gregory A. Boyd, God of the Possible. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 17, 16.

³⁶ Geisler, 98-99.

It is claimed by some that God can only know what is real, not what is unreal. And the future is not real. So, God cannot know the future. But the future *is* real. Reality is composed of both the actual and the potential. Potentialities are real. For instance, there is a real difference between the potential of dry wood, which can burn at normal fireplace temperatures, and wet wood, which does not have this potential. Likewise, humans have the potential to learn calculus, and laboratory rats do not. There is a real difference between the potential of steel to be made into an automobile and the potential of water for the same purpose. But if potentials are real, and the future is a potential that has not yet been actualized, then there is no reason why a mind that can know whatever is real cannot know the future....The traditional theist insists that by definition an omniscient (all-knowing) being knows everything that is possible to know. And the only thing that is impossible to know is an impossibility (e.g., an actual contradiction like a square circle). But the future is not an actual contradiction, otherwise it would not be able to materialize like it does. Therefore, it does not follow that God cannot know the future.³⁷

Logic does *not* dictate, then, that God cannot know the future: there *is* something there for God to know and He knows it in a different way than finite and temporal beings can know.

God's Foreknowledge and Determinism of His Creatures' Actions

Another issue raised by the open theists is that if God were able to know the future actions of mankind, then those actions could be considered predetermined, fixed, and in no sense the freely chosen actions of autonomous beings. This view, however, involves a mistaken understanding of God's foreknowledge.

Since God is an omniscient being, he knows with *certainty* what we will do *freely*. The fact that he knows "in advance" from a temporal perspective does not mean the event cannot happen freely. For God can know *for sure* that the event will occur *freely*. The necessity of his knowledge about the contingent event does not make the event necessary (i.e., contrary to free choice). It simply makes his knowledge of this free event an infallible knowledge.³⁸

God's foreknowledge of future human behavior does not necessarily exert a causative influence which overpowers the so-called free will of His creatures. The mere fact that God knows a future action will not cause that action to occur in violation of human choice.

When Mr. Brown sees Mr. Smith scratching his ear, Brown's perception of what Smith does obviously cannot have any *causal* influence on Smith's action. What any person perceives in the present is simple vision, a vision that cannot cause or make necessary that which is being perceived. Similarly, whatever God might perceive in the present would likewise lack any necessitating or causal effect on what He perceives. But because God is outside of time, is timeless, all of God's knowledge occurs in *His* eternal present. There is no future for God; there is no past for God. Everything that belongs to the human past and everything that will happen in the human future is, on this view of God, eternally present to God's consciousness. Technically, then, God does not have foreknowledge even though He infallibly knows everything that will happen in the future. But since His knowledge of the human future exists in His present, His knowledge does not cause or necessitate the future. According to Boethius: "this divine foreknowledge does not change the nature and property of things; it simply sees things present to it exactly as they will happen at some time as future events. It

³⁷ Ibid., 110.

³⁸ Ibid., 108.

makes no confused judgments of things, but with one glance of its mind distinguished all that is to come to pass whether it is necessitated or not”³⁹

God will bring specific events to pass by His own sovereign will, but His fore-knowledge or “pre-vision” of future events should not be viewed as exerting an inevitable causative influence and therefore as being deterministic. As Geisler has stated, “God sees (in his eternal present) the whole of time: past, present, and future (for us). But if God sees our future in his present, then our future is present to him in his eternity. In this way there is no problem as to how he can foresee free acts. He does not need to *foresee*; he simply *sees*. And what he sees (in his eternal now) includes what free acts will be performed in our future....God can know free acts without causally determining them.”⁴⁰

The Infinity of God with Respect to Knowledge

The One who created and sustains every detail of the universe is certainly able to know all things. Lewis Sperry Chafer maintained that the concept of “infinity” occurs three times in Scripture,⁴¹ and the one instance where it applies to God is in reference to His knowledge: “His understanding has no limit” (Psalm 147:5). The writer of Proverbs says, “The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good” (Prov. 15:3). In Matthew 10:29-30, Jesus affirmed that not a sparrow can fall to the ground apart from the will of the Father, and that God knew even the number of hairs on the disciples’ heads. The apostle Paul proclaimed the rich depths of the wisdom and knowledge of God by saying that His judgments and thoughts are beyond the capabilities of the finite human mind (Romans 11:33). The writer to the Hebrews clearly declared that, “all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). Erickson summarizes the biblical support for God’s infinity with respect to knowledge: “The infinity of God may also be considered with respect to objects of knowledge....We are all completely transparent before God. He sees and knows us totally. He knows every truth, even those not yet discovered by man, for it was he who built them into the creation. And he therefore knows every genuine possibility, even when they seem limitless in number.”⁴² It can be concluded, then, that God’s foreknowledge does not necessitate that the freely chosen acts of His creatures be viewed as completely predetermined. A proper understanding of the timelessness of God clears up the issues with which open theists struggle regarding God’s knowledge of the future.

Conclusion

The traditional or classical concept of God includes an interdependent “package of attributes” that is logically and theologically consistent and coherent. Open theists have attempted to modify specific characteristics within the traditional framework, and in doing so they have upset the balance within this harmonious grouping of attributes. It is not possible for open theism to accept the infinity of God while rejecting His infinity with respect to time. As has been clearly demonstrated, the open

³⁹ Nash, 52-53.

⁴⁰ Geisler, 111-112.

⁴¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Vol. VII*. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 199-200.

⁴² Erickson, 275.

theists' doctrine of God's temporality is fraught with logical inconsistencies which have devastating consequences for theology proper. It has been shown that it is simply impossible to "revise classical theism in a dynamic direction without falling into process theology...without making God finite."⁴³ It has also been established that it is impossible to accept God's creation *ex nihilo* of the space-time universe while rejecting His existence beyond the dimension of time. In order to be consistent with their own position, open theists are brought full circle to the view held by classical theists regarding God's timelessness and all that this doctrine implies.

⁴³ Pinnock, 107, 117.