

ENERGETIC KENOSIS AS AN APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE  
IMPASSIBILITY

by

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## Abstract

Classical theism has long affirmed impassibility to be both a philosophically sound and scripturally warranted attribute of God. An affirmation of this attribute of divine *apatheia* is found in the works of theologians and philosophers of classical Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, over the last century, there has been a significant shift away from this tradition of divine impassibility. Divine impassibility has been challenged from many quarters, especially from Protestant Christianity, as a doctrine foreign to the scriptures of Abrahamic monotheism and philosophically incompatible with a scriptural conception of God as personal, reactive, and relational. Many of the critics of divine impassibility suggest that there is a dilemma for these monotheists: that God may be impassible and yet unable to engage in personal, *pathic*, or relational ways with creation as the scriptures of the Judaism, Christianity, and Islam suggest, or that God may indeed express some *pathos* and reactivity but may no longer be understood to be impassible. In this work, I argue that this dilemma is a false one and that a third way, or *via media*, is possible. In support of the proposal I offer, I provide a critical analysis of impassibilist and passibilist arguments on historical, philosophical, and theological grounds. I demonstrate that strong affirmations of either position (impassibilism and passibilism) are indeed untenable, and in their places I propose a model of divine interaction based on an energetic kenoticism. In the *via media* offered below, I argue that we may yet retain a robust notion of divine impassibility in the essence or *ousia* of God, while allowing for a fuller account of divine *pathos*, reactivity, and interaction with creation via the kenotic and self-limiting divine energies. In this way, we may retain many of the classical commitments regarding the nature of God and yet provide more room to speak to these scriptural accounts of God's interaction in the cosmos.

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my son, Emory Reid Compton. Your boundless curiosity and wonder remind me daily of why I do philosophy. The love of God is reflected in your constant compassion and care for all things great and small. May you live well.

## **Acknowledgements**

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*Supportavit enim mores tuos Dominus Deus tuus, quomodo si quis supportet homo filium suum. Igitur mores nostros supportat Deus, sicut portat passiones nostras Filius Dei. Ipse Pater non est impassibilis. Si rogetur, miseretur et condolet, patitur aliquid caritatis, et fit in iis in quibus iuxta magnitudinem naturae suae non potest esse, et propter nos humanas sustinet passiones. -*  
Origen of Alexandria<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For ‘the Lord your God sustained’ your ways, ‘just as if a man were to sustain his own son.’ Therefore, God sustains our ways, just as the Son of God carries our passions. The Father himself is not impassible. If he is asked, he has mercy and compassion, he ‘suffers’ some charity, and he comes to be among those things among which he cannot be, in view of the greatness of his nature—and he sustains human passions on our behalf. -Origen of Alexandria, 6<sup>th</sup> Homily on Ezekiel. (2014) Translated by Mischa Hooker in *Exegetical Works on Ezekiel*.

## Introduction

For all adherents of Abrahamic monotheism, be they Jews, Christians, or Muslims, the fact of God's interaction with and in the world is taken for granted. So also is the notion of God's transcendence as creator and sustainer of the cosmos. When these matters of traditional dogma are conjoined, these monotheists affirm the existence of a deity that is, in some way, both immanent *and* transcendent. The God of the Abrahamic faiths is both other ontologically (as creator and *ipsum esse*) and yet intimately involved in the affairs of humanity not only in knowledge and action, but also through an ongoing agapeistic concern for creation. Traditionally, these Abrahamic faiths have been distinct in this way, both by their careful rejection of a Greek philosophical conception of the divine, which would potentially remove God from the cosmos entirely, and by their rejection of pantheism or panentheism—the belief that the divine is identical with the world or that world is somehow properly part of God. But their distinctive nature is perhaps most apparent in the conviction that the divine has not only revealed itself to humanity but continues to care for it, through an 'immanent omnibenevolence,' through a relationship with humanity. This presents a unique and enduring problem for the philosophies of these faiths, especially in the tradition of classical theism. How could it be that this transcendent and self-existent being is capable, whilst retaining a certain set of traditional attributes, of interacting with and participating in creation? Or, more pointedly, how may we speak of God as both immutable and impassible, and yet engaging with creation in a manner described in the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in very *pathic* language? This is at least part of what may be called the 'problem of divine impassibility.'



It is striking that theologians and philosophers within the traditions of these faiths have all grappled with versions of this problem. One reason for this is two quite general features of these traditions of Abrahamic monotheism.<sup>2</sup> First, the scriptural data of these three faiths present the God of Abraham as involved with and caring for humanity in ways that seem to admit of a certain *pathos* in the divine. Second, these three faiths have historically all been subject to the dialectical trajectory of classical theism—a conception of God influenced by Hellenistic philosophy according to which God is, among other things, impassible. One aim of this study will be to examine the particular ways in which this dialectic has been expressed in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The rich and varied history of the problem of divine impassibility nevertheless suggests that, at its core, the problem is born out of quite general features of these faiths. This interestingly suggests the possibility of a satisfactory solution to the problem that may be at least compatible with all three Abrahamic traditions, and it is just such a proposal that I here mean to pursue.

We may get a sense of this problem by considering the following. It seems that on the one hand, for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, God is present unto creation in a moral and revelatory manner, admitting of something like a personal involvement with creation and, specifically, humanity. Each is, after all, a tradition of revealed or ethical monotheism. The scriptures of these faiths each gives witness to this portrayal of God as one whose immanence

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<sup>2</sup> I would here note that throughout this work I avoid the use of terms and phrases such as ‘Western monotheism’ or ‘the scriptures of the West’ where possible. Despite its traditional usage, it connotes a problematic Eurocentrism and is both historically and geographically inaccurate. The faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all find their origins, not in the West, but in the Eastern Mediterranean (and Arabia). While much of classical theism did indeed develop in Western Europe, major contributors to this philosophical and theological tradition may be found from Andalusian Spain to Persia and from Cairo to modern Iraq. In place of these terms and phrases, I have elected to employ ‘Abrahamic faiths,’ ‘revealed monotheism,’ or to simply specify the scriptures or traditions of these faiths individually. I am obliged to Rhiannon Grant for the helpful conversation that lead to this choice.

is expressed through apparently relational and personal interactions with creation. We then have an understanding of God as interacting with and in the cosmos.<sup>3</sup> In the scriptural witness across these traditions of Abrahamic monotheism, the God of Abraham is presented as uniquely intimate in this ‘omnibenevolent immanence,’ speaking with [his] creatures, revealing [himself] to humanity, expressing compassion, mercy, love, and hearing and answering prayers.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, to the question that will occupy this study, the scriptures regularly speak of God in a language of *pathos*, in which the actions of free creatures or states of affairs in creation seem to *affect* God in some way, wherein the divine is reactive to certain states of the affairs in the world or to the free actions of humanity, in a very relational and personal manner. Yet, on the other hand, the attributes of impassibility and immutability, especially as articulated within the tradition of classical theism, would limit our ability to speak meaningfully of God in this way or, rather, metaphysically constrain God such that much of this scriptural portrayal of the divine as interactional and reactive to creation may not be possible. In addition to the scriptural witness and its various and significant anthropopathisms, we may here also think of common religious intuitions such as the efficacy of petitionary prayer.

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<sup>3</sup> I am here aware that there are potential problems in speaking of discrete ‘attributes’ or ‘properties’ of God. In the scholastic tradition (and in much of classical Islamic *falsafa* and Jewish philosophy), the divine attributes are understood as in some way identical to each other, e.g. ‘God’s justice is God’s mercy,’ etc. and that these attributes are ultimately identified with the divine nature itself. In Islam there is a strong tradition of avoiding any real predication of attributes so as to preserve *tawhid*. Similarly, Maimonides, in his commitment to apophatic theology also argues that we should not speak of any positive attributes of God but speak only of what God is not. In a study such as this, however, language speaking of individual attributes is a necessary *façon de parler*.

<sup>4</sup> I attempt throughout to avoid gendered references to God except as they appear in primary sources or in references to those sources. Nevertheless, it is occasionally necessary as, in the context of the Abrahamic faiths at least, references to the divine are almost exclusively masculine. In philosophical discussions of God, I try to avoid these gendered references entirely.

This work is an attempt to offer something of a *via media* between the ontology of God as expressed in classical theism, with the attributes of immutability and impassibility, and various passibilists concerns' regarding the capacity of God to engage in reciprocal and personal interactions with humanity. I argue that there are indeed problems with this classical model of the divine, primarily in that it fails to account for this revelatory, interactional, and reactive understanding of God present in the scriptural witness of Abrahamic monotheism. Yet, I argue that many contemporary passibilist accounts, usually centred around a desire to preserve some meaningful sense of divine compassion, mercy, and love, often fail to appreciate both the nuances present in understandings of divine *apatheia* and justifications for predicating it of a transcendent creator. Moreover, I contend that these passibilist misunderstandings of *apatheia* often result in a distortion of the nature of God unacceptable to any tradition of Abrahamic monotheism or fail altogether to give a sufficient metaphysical account for these concerns. Many passibilist accounts, I argue, either provide an ontology in which there is no meaningful retention of divine impassibility whatsoever *or* they default to a 'scriptural theology' which may account for divine *pathos* but lacks any larger metaphysical structure accounting for how this divine *pathos* might be possible.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In what follows, I provide an account not only of various ways of understanding divine impassibility in the classical expressions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, but show how this affirmation of divine *apatheia* is born out of a 'shared ontology' constitutive of this tradition of classical theism. I have chosen to examine these worries within the tradition of classical theism rather than the broader category of Abrahamic monotheism for several reasons. Despite Judaism, Christianity, and Islam comprising this tradition of Abrahamic monotheism, there are nevertheless theological differences that make understanding these concerns under such a broad category problematic. It would be more accurate to think of this problem of divine impassibility as specifically concerned with expressions of classical theism as it represents a more unified tradition and a 'shared ontology' of the divine given, as I argue below, specific metaphysical commitments constitutive of this tradition.

Questions surrounding divine impassibility are not entirely new in philosophical or theological circles, but they have enjoyed a notable renaissance in the last century (Bauckham, 1984; Goetz, 1986). However, concerns relating to the doctrine have occasionally appeared prior to this recent ‘passibilist turn’ in theology and the philosophy of religion. The Christian Patripassianist and Theopaschite controversies represent very early attempts at this question of how or if God can be said to ‘suffer.’ While the impassibilist position enjoyed privilege from late antiquity through the mediaeval period in classical expressions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, modernity gave rise to a renewed questioning of this position ultimately leading to a near sea-change regarding this attribute. We are now witness to a ‘new orthodoxy’ of passibilist thought, as Ronald Goetz has called it, in which this *orthodoxie ancienne* of classical theism has been reappraised and, in many cases, rejected in its traditional forms (1986). Anastasia Scrutton notes this change and has remarked that part of what makes it most interesting is how ‘dramatic’ this turnabout was (2013, p. 866). A move away from a mostly settled matter of orthodoxy was wrought seemingly overnight, driven both by Jewish theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> cent. and largely Protestant Christian theologians. After a venerable dogmatic history, impassibilism has been in retreat and *some* form of passibilism has become common in much of theology and philosophy of religion. Goetz further notes that ‘rejection of the ancient doctrine of divine impassibility has become a theological commonplace’ (1986, p. 385). Various contributions of the last century have served to reinvigorate the problem and bring it to the foreground of contemporary philosophy of religion (Hartshorne, 1941; Moltmann, 1974; Goetz, 1986; Fiddes, 1988; Sarot, 1992; Schaab, 2007, et al.). Much of this recent interest in the problem has been motivated by the problem of evil and the perceived

failures of traditional theodicies, especially in the aftermath of the Shoah. While the philosophical problem of evil is of course also not new, it seems that events of the last century have increased its force and with that came questions concerning the impassibility of God.

Jürgen Moltmann's work *The Crucified God* is often cited as paradigmatic of this shift. He retells Elie Wiesel's experience of watching a young child die on the gallows in the concentration camp at Buna and being asked, 'Where is God now?' Wiesel claims to have heard a voice saying, '... he is here. He is hanging on those gallows' (1974, pp. 273-274).<sup>6</sup> For many, this image is taken as some proof of a *deus absconditus* or that for God's presence to mean anything, it must be expressed in some form of 'co-suffering' or communication of *pathos* with humanity.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps in some newer forms, this is essentially the same question as asked by the early Christian Patristians: in what way can we speak of the divine suffering or 'co-suffering' with humanity? This very radical notion of 'co-suffering' (*compassio, sympathos*) poses obvious problems for the classical understanding of the impassibility of God. That is, given the traditional affirmations of the doctrine of divine impassibility, how are we as witnesses or victims of great evil to understand the love and compassion of God that is central

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<sup>6</sup> Moltmann actually claims incorrectly that Wiesel was at Auschwitz rather than Buna during this episode. This error has been transmitted through various citations of Moltmann. Care has been taken here to avoid it. There has also been some controversy over Moltmann's appropriation of this event in the history of the Jewish people and his subsequent Christological interpretation of it. Various interpretations to Wiesel's account are, of course, open to us. But what can, I think, be rightly and respectfully taken from this is simply that any traditional view of the transcendent God of Israel must be understood in some new way. I thank Anastasia Scrutton for noting this error.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Rubenstein is perhaps the paradigmatic figure for this 'Death of God' theology following the Shoah. See *After Auschwitz* (1966). This latter view, that of God's 'co-suffering' is represented in much of the response to the Shoah, not only in Holocaust theology, but in liberal Protestantism as well. This move presumably seeks to give this suffering some meaning it apparently lacked and this meaning is had, as Moltmann and others would argue in a Theopaschite manner, by having God bear sufferings of the world very much with and alongside humanity.

to the theologies of these faiths or rather, as is my concern here, to speak to various scriptural accounts of God's sorrowing with humanity and being affected or moved by such evils?

In a form of the dilemma mentioned above, Moltmann presents the supposed problem thus: 'Were God incapable of suffering in any respect, and therefore in an absolute sense, then he would also be incapable of love' (1974, p. 230). That is, we must choose between a God who is impassible or a God who is love, but we cannot have both (1974, p. 222). The response then, not only by philosophers and theologians of process, such as Hartshorne, but also by others such as Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, and Paul Fiddes, has been to put forth various passibilist solutions to this perceived problem, denying that we can speak of divine *apatheia* in any classical sense (Barth, 1956-1975; Fiddes, 1988; Moltmann, 1974). While much of this 'passibilist turn' seems motivated by the problem of evil and suffering, it is not limited to that. Critical studies in Biblical literature have also played a role in revisiting this issue as have new ways of understanding modes of divine *pathos* (Brunner, 1949; Fretheim, 1984; Heschel, 1951, 1954, 1955, 1962). In sections below treating various passibilist approaches, I explicate how these perceived failures of traditional theodicies relate to and bear on the doctrine of divine impassibility as traditionally held, as well as how a revived attention to the *pathos* of God in the scriptures has gained more attention over the last century, largely through the work of Abraham Joshua Heschel (1951, 1954, 1955, 1962). That said, the problem of evil *per se* is not the focus of this work, but rather the problems inherent to conceptions of both divine impassibility and passibilist criticisms. Nevertheless, attention to some general motivations for these passibilist criticisms is necessary to understand exactly what seems to be at stake in the

debate between those who maintain the impassibilism of classical theology and its recent passibilist critics.

Here some comments on both *apatheia* and *pathos* are warranted. We may understand divine *pathos*, very basically and not exhaustively, as a state of being affected by some thing or some agent external to God or a state resulting from such outside affectation.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, impassibility, according to a fairly limited but common way of understanding it, would deny this possibility. We may perhaps then see some of this ‘problem of divine impassibility’ as, it seems, containing at least four aspects, each related and born out of this scriptural portrayal of God. The first is a straightforwardly *pathic* aspect—that of divine ‘suffering’ or passive emotional states. Is God able to experience states of being affected and having some ‘change of mind’ such that God would then be not entirely immune to outside influence? The second is an epistemic aspect of divine impassibility: what is the nature of divine knowledge and may it be said that God could ‘come to know’ certain things by the formation of propositions or acquire any experiential knowledge akin to that as had by creatures? The third, connected to those preceding it, is what we may understand as the aspect of divine benevolence: what may we say in light of impassibility regarding divine mercy, compassion, and love—all features central to the Abrahamic conception of God and ones which, in the manner we generally think of them, are both emotional and *pathic*—involving certain mental states evoked or conditioned by actions of other agents? Finally, we may speak of a more fundamental metaphysical aspect of

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<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, here and throughout this work I am taking *pathos* or *pathic* to mean any affectation *ab extra* which effects some change in God, epistemic, psychological, etc. and either positive or negative. In my treatment of the primary sources, I take care to attend to the specific understandings of *pathos* (and various terminology associated with it) employed by those authors. While we shall see that in classical theism it is largely thought of in negative terms, we may still discern this very basic mean of affectation *ab extra* that results in some movement or change in the divine.

impassibility in God's nature. Whatever we wish to say of the preceding three lines of inquiry will be informed by what we can we are committed to regarding the divine nature (e.g. as *essentially* impassible and immutable). Similarly, what we may wish to say of divine *pathos*, knowledge, compassion, mercy, love, etc. will inform how we understand or reevaluate certain underlying metaphysical commitments regarding an essential ontology of God. This more general metaphysical aspect of divine impassibility is, of course, closely related to the doctrine of divine immutability, insofar as classical theism has affirmed an unchangeableness in God, as consequent to divine eternity, simplicity, and *aseity*, and thus has excluded the possibility of any causal influence from without. These metaphysical aspects of impassibility may also include understandings of impassibility as transcendence and *autarkeia*.

What the four aspects mentioned above have in common is that they all bear on the capacity or incapacity of God to be *affected* and *change*, any predication of which would, it seems, introduce some *potency* in God—a conclusion largely rejected by the tradition of classical theism (*vide* Averroes, Maimonides, Aquinas). In what manner we adjudicate this question of 'suffering'—taken here in its older sense of simply 'being affected,' positively or negatively—has significant implications for any understanding of divine interaction with the cosmos and humanity. That God does, in fact, communicate with the cosmos is central to each of these Abrahamic faiths and a claim not to be given up, for the God of Abraham is one who both loves and knows creation and is one who has 'revealed [himself]' in various ways and at various times (Hebrews 1:1). Even with the philosophical and theological sophistication of classical theism taken into account, we are still concerned after all with the *revealed* monotheism of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Yet the mode(s) by which this interaction and



communication could occur, especially as they might reflect the scriptural witness, is a matter of no small debate, given certain metaphysical commitments traditionally held in classical expressions of these faiths. Yet, the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam do seem to presuppose some manner in which creatures affect God and that in *some* way the divine is passible.

Throughout the scriptural witness, the divine is presented as reacting to human activity, for example, ‘repenting that [he] has made man’ or learning something new, thus implying, at least on some plain reading, a change in God (Genesis 6:6; 22:12). If one does read these accounts and descriptions as indicative of some kind of *pathic* state in the divine, then an unqualified immutability (as well as impassibility) becomes problematic. This language of God as ‘repentant’ or ‘sorrowful’ over creation or discovering something previously unknown would likewise seem to imply *some* passibility or affectational capacity in the divine. Upon such readings, it would appear that divine epistemic states have changed so that certain emotional changes follow (here regret or sadness). It would then seem that we have a problem for unqualified immutability and, in that God has been affected by something *ab extra*, a problem for unqualified impassibility as well. With this in mind, may there be a way in which we might cautiously affirm much of the *pathic* language of God as indicative of real states in the divine and provide a better account of these scriptural portrayals? It is this question and the notion of a specific personal, relational, bidirectional capacity, or the possibility for a ‘reactive’ disposition in God that I explore throughout this study. Indeed, how one comes to settle these questions as to divine/creaturely interaction will determine in what manner one can speak of God being impassible and loving, transcendent and immanent, *a se* and autarkic and yet still

the answerer of prayers, one who takes mercy and has compassion, and is intimately present *with* creation.

Divine *apatheia* is, of course, the focus here with the crux of this worry being the compatibility of a classical ontology of God with the *pathic* descriptions of the divine found in revealed traditions of these faiths of Abrahamic monotheism. Certainly, the scriptures of revealed monotheism—the Tanakh, the New Testament literature, and the Qur’an—present God as having various emotional states often through the use of anthropopathic and anthropopsychic language.<sup>9</sup> These anthropopathisms and anthropopsychisms, I argue, do indeed tell us something significant about the nature of God and divine interaction with humanity and so ought not to be as neglected or minimised as they have been historically (*vide* Philo of Alexandria, Maimonides, Mutazilite Islam, et al.). Often, it seems, this scriptural conception of God has given way to more rarified metaphysical commitments regarding certain notions of divine perfection. In this, I argue, much of the revealed, personal, and reactive character of the divine is lost. Yet I do not mean to give further credence to this perceived ‘dilemma’ between impassibility and divine compassion, mercy, and love, nor do I mean to frame some contest between the ‘God of the Philosophers’ and the ‘God of the Scriptures’—a far too common rendering of these worries. The tradition of classical theism does indeed have a rather robust account of divine love, mercy, and compassion and various justifications for

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted here that while the concept of emotion, in modern usage, regularly denotes involuntary, irrational, and often corporeal feelings, understandings in the ancient world were much broader, including a great variety psychological states, both negative and positive. ‘Emotion’ is a rather modern notion and often fails to capture this range of states spoken of in ancient and classical literature. (Scrutton, 2011, pp. 12-13). Especially in my work with primary sources, I try to attend to this diversity of meaning. In general use throughout this work, I understand emotion simply as a various mental states (both positive and negative) that are often, though not always, the result of some external conditions. In this way, I connect various emotions in God to this affectational notion of divine *pathos*.

divine *apatheia* that should not be ignored. What it cannot provide for is this *pathic* and affectational character of the divine. Given this, I argue in the proposal provided below that we may, in fact, retain much of the classical divine ontology, including a qualified understanding of divine *apatheia*, and yet provide for a fuller account of those characteristics of ‘the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’ as an entity very much involved in the affairs of humanity through certain *pathic* expressions. Endorsing some possibility of ‘affectation’ or *pathos* in God, I show, does not require that we give up divine transcendence, *aseity*, or an ultimate divine control of the cosmos—each features necessary to preserving a proper ontological distinction between God and the cosmos and affirming the divine as creator.

These questions present particular philosophical problems and have evoked quite interesting solutions, both historical and contemporary. This present study is yet another foray into this debate. What is offered is admittedly speculative and bold in its scope. Yet given that this matter has been increasingly perceived as one of such acuity for theologians and philosophers in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, it seems to demand both a thorough examination of this supposed problem itself in addition to some contribution to the ongoing conversation concerning this classical attribute of God. In this study, both are offered. I outline various ways of understanding the problem, as I see it, both in its historical and philosophical details, and then examine historical and contemporary approaches to this matter, exploring traditional accounts of the doctrine and a variety of recent criticisms. I analyse various understandings of impassibility in the *loci classici* of three distinct traditions (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) of Abrahamic monotheism and recent passibilist criticisms. Importantly, I also examine the very *pathically*-laden tradition of understanding God in Rabbinic and Talmudic

thought, wherein I think there may be found an interesting ‘counter’ to the rationalist tradition of classical theism. I demonstrate what I see as the weaknesses in some contemporary approaches, then offer an alternative. While I do wish to present a solution to what I have called the ‘problem of divine impassibility’ that may be amenable to this ‘great tradition’—for traditional expressions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—my greater concern is to explore a solution that is philosophically viable *and* scripturally consistent.

Despite what is offered in this work and an admitted sympathy for passibilist concerns, I do not intend any wholesale endorsement of this ‘new orthodoxy.’ We may appreciate the gravity of these concerns (it is precisely these which motivate this study) and yet not demand that impassibility be quickly dismissed. Divine *apatheia* serves as a protection and guarantee of divinity itself, as a safeguard of divine transcendence, freedom, and moral stasis. I try then to avoid what I see as the most extreme errors in passibilist thought which result in God being collapsed into the cosmos and becoming yet another entity among others, however powerful or knowledgeable, and thus an unwilling patient of affectation. The passibilist accounts of process theism are of particular interest for contemporary philosophy of religion in that the very ontologies of God that are found in process philosophy and theology necessarily include passibilism in their conceptions of the nature of God. Such ontologies can be found in the works of A.F. Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, et al. An apparently essential passibilism is *built into* and *inseparable* from their conceptions of the very being of God (Hartshorne, 1941; Lee, 1974; Whitehead, 1960). I respond to several passibilist criticisms and argue that they are excusably, but inherently, misguided and ultimately lead to untenable theologies. In the place of various recent criticisms, I offer a modified view of traditional divine impassibility which may provide

for the ability of God to interact *pathically* and emotionally, yet not at the high cost of distorting the nature of God or giving up on impassibility altogether.

Much of attention in this work is given to parsing out the ways in which impassibility is used in classical theism and in what manner it can be rightly understood. This supports my contention that much of the supposed ‘problem of divine impassibility’ is based on this failure by passibilists to carefully attend to the various senses or connotations of divine *apatheia* (from the Hellenistic philosophers through the flowering of classical theism in the late mediaeval era). These resulting miscommunication of parties to the discussion then is due to their having in mind often very different notions of what it means for God to be impassible. It is this ‘talking past each other’ that results in what seems to be, for most passibilists at least, an inescapable dilemma or impasse. In much of the recent passibilist literature, the transcendence, freedom, and *aseity* of God is significantly harmed and thus, perhaps counterintuitively, the very capacity for God to interact meaningfully (and ultimately salvifically) with creation is destroyed; God is bound in various ways to creation and actually limited in any ability to freely and kenotically interact with creation. Only if *some* form of divine impassibility is retained can God then kenotically and from outside creation freely enter into ‘communication’ with the created cosmos. I mean here to provide a means by which we can retain an essential impassibility in God and yet speak more fully to this scriptural character of God as *pathic*, affectational, reactive, and personal. I am well aware that these are bold claims and a yet bolder task promised in response. Pursuant to this end, this work is divided and proceeds as follows:

*Chapter 1:* I explore potential understandings of divine impassibility and the various meanings this attribute may take, as well as motivations for predicating it of the divine. I trace its origins to notions of divine perfection found in Hellenistic thought, then show how these can be seen to inform the development of the classical theism, especially as they relate to divine *apatheia*. I provide an account of how divine impassibility may be understood as entailed by other attributes, such as *aseity*, immutability, eternality, and simplicity. Additionally, I show some ways these early understandings of impassibility and divine perfection bear on the development of a scriptural hermeneutic in classical theism which has sought to minimise anthropopathic and anthropopsychic descriptions God for the sake of certain metaphysical commitments. Finally, I begin to develop some initial concerns as to this trajectory of thought.

*Chapter 2:* Building from the foundations laid in chapter one, I attempt distil to some common themes found in the development of classical theism, exploring various accounts of divine impassibility (implicit or explicit) in the philosophical traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. I demonstrate that these common commitments to a philosophical ontology of God entail, in most cases, an affirmation of strong impassibilism. The classical Christian tradition, with its ample sources on understandings of *apatheia*, is examined from the patristic era through the mediaeval expressions of Scholasticism. Additionally, I offer some comments on the Chalcedonian definition and its contributions to an understanding of impassibility. Next, I explore ways in which divine impassibility may be understood to be *implied* by various metaphysical commitments found in the *loci classici* of traditional Judaism and Islam wherein direct references are often scarce.

*Chapter 3:* I survey various passibilist accounts, showing some inherent weaknesses and misunderstandings in current passibilist approaches, though noting some legitimate criticisms of classical understandings of impassibility. I examine general passibilist concerns found in Jewish and Christian sources, with a critical analysis of process and open theism. Particular attention is given to the works of A.J. Heschel in his attempt to reconcile certain Jewish philosophical commitments with the *pathic* nature of God found in the scriptures. Additionally, I attend to the Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition as it represents an interesting counter to the tradition of classical Jewish philosophy. Though passibilism has found little traction in Islamic thought, I entertain the possibility of such, drawing from Sufi and Hanbalite theology. Finally, I show some common themes in ‘passibilist’ thought.

*Chapter 4:* I outline various worries regarding both classical accounts of divine *apatheia* and many contemporary passibilist approaches. I argue that while traditional accounts largely fail both to give full voice to the scriptural *pathic* nature of God and to provide for a possibility of affectation in divine modes of interaction with creation, this does not require that we disregard divine impassibility *in toto*. I then present an approach to this problem of divine impassibility that avoids some of the pitfalls of an affirmation of strong impassibilism and yet does not abandon this traditional ontology of God altogether. I outline an essence/energies distinction and argue for a ‘kenotic passibility’ in the divine energies, which may allow some voluntary affectation in God, consistent with a scriptural and *pathic* conception of God, yet without violating the transcendence and *aseity* of the divine nature. Additionally, I employ

apophatic and cataphatic means of speaking of God in this way and provide an account of the relationship of God to time as it stands in this proposal.<sup>10</sup> I show that this model may retain much of what is warranted in a classical ontology of God, especially regarding some aspects of divine *apatheia*, and still provide a fuller account of the ‘revealed’ nature of divine *pathos* and divine/creaturely interaction.

*Chapter 5:* I provide a brief summary of that which has been developed in the previous chapter and attempt to show that this proposed *via media* has the potential to be incorporated into the theologies of Abrahamic monotheism in a way consistent with divine transcendence, *aseity*, and moral stasis, yet allowing for a fuller account of the *pathic* vulnerability of God as found in the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

*Chapter 6:* Finally, I treat some anticipated objections to this proposal and offer some comments in response while yet maintaining that, on the whole, this model is a plausible *via media* between the strong impassibilism found in much of the classical theistic philosophical tradition and various passibilists accounts as they bear on traditional conceptions of God in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

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<sup>10</sup> For the sake of clarity and precision in dealing with an already difficult matter of philosophy, I have throughout this work attempted to provide consistent terminology in my discussions of God and time. I employ ‘timeless eternality’ to denote that ‘Boethian’ view of God’s being properly outside of time in an ‘eternal present’ or from the vantage of ‘an illimitable life.’ When denoting an unoriginate and enduring existence of God *in time*, I speak of God’s ‘everlastingness’ or ‘sempiternality.’



I should here offer some comments as to the motivation for the scope of this work and its breadth and general interfaith approach. I survey accounts of divine impassibility across the traditions of Abrahamic monotheism and offer an approach which is, in many ways, dependent on certain theological features of each of these faiths. This approach, I think, need not be seen as incompatible with these respective faiths insofar as each understands divine impassibility and has, in its classical forms, endorsed this attribute of God. What I propose below is intended, if it is successful, to be at least amenable to the theologies of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, partly in that it addresses divine impassibility as coming forth from a ‘shared ontology’ of the divine such that, if there is indeed a problem of divine impassibility, it is a problem for the classical expressions of each of these faiths. I intentionally situate what I see as concerns regarding divine impassibility within this ‘great tradition’ of philosophical theology—the tradition of classical theism. Whatever we wish to say (or in fact may be unable to say) regarding divine *pathos* is governed by certain metaphysical assumptions *built into* classical theism as expressed in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and this ‘shared ontology.’ Many of these common metaphysical commitments which constitute this tradition can be found in across the *loci classici* of these faiths. There is also, I think, a similar scriptural conception of the divine in these religious traditions, in that God is expressed, most regularly, as *rachamin*, *rahman/rahim*, and *eleimon* and as one who is reactive and interactional with creation. Each is, after all, Abrahamic in its conception of God and the various scriptures depend on each other in interesting ways. When so seen, both a similar scriptural witness *and* common metaphysical commitments may be found. It is this that may allow us to speak of a sufficiently common ontology, such that if there is any problem with divine impassibility—in reconciling certain

philosophical commitments with a scriptural and religious understanding of God—it is present across these traditions. This is, in part, why I have elected to approach these questions divine impassibility with such breadth.<sup>11</sup>

Even if I am correct that there is a common basic ontology of the divine as expressed in classical theism that allows for this inquiry into divine impassibility, it may still be asked what would motivate this breadth. Why argue for a proposal potentially addressing all three great Abrahamic monotheistic traditions? Even if there is indeed a ‘problem’ or concerns regarding the attribute, this would not obviously demand a proposal that is ‘one size fits all.’ As it has been most helpfully pointed out by critics of this project, no homogeneity of theology or philosophy is a necessary condition for pacific ecumenical relations and so perhaps we ought to leave off at that—with each tradition providing particular solutions to these worries. The point is well-taken and certainly a more limited approach would not be in itself problematic. Still, we have seen throughout the history of Abrahamic monotheism, especially in the tradition of classical theism, a great deal of philosophical communication and borrowing across faiths. This ‘crosspollenisation’ has more often been the norm rather than the exception. This is by itself, of course, not a particularly interesting point of historical fact and one that gives no particular normative force to justify a broader approach. But what it does speak to is that where there have arisen common questions or problems in the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, this shared ontology of God has allowed for similar moves in response to these similar problems. This, at least, ought to give us reason to think there is possibly a solution, if not

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<sup>11</sup> I am here most obliged to Rhiannon Grant and Anastasia Scrutton for their helpful comments regarding the breadth of this approach and some of the difficulties of addressing impassibility across Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

shared then at least roughly compatible with the commitments of each faith in its classical expressions.

Certain fundamental questions in the philosophy and theology of these faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—have often been similarly answered. We need only look at something like the Scholastic tradition and how it influenced and was influenced by other traditions in theological and philosophical proximity to it. Of course, none of the writers in that specific period was working with ecumenical concerns in mind (it would be anachronistic to think so) but nevertheless those exchanges are, in the least, a testimony to the claim argued for above—a ‘shared’ or ‘sufficiently common’ ontology of the divine—that made these influences viable. While ecumenical concerns are not the primary concern in this project, it may yet be the case that given this ‘shared ontology,’ there may be similar worries about impassibility in all three monotheistic faiths such that addressing it as a common concern is not unwarranted.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, while it may indeed be that at least some of what is offered herein could come to influence how each faith reckons with divine impassibility (given its ‘conservative novelty’ and the diverse nature of its sources, it possesses such a potential), it ought not to be read as a proposal in exclusion to other ‘faith-specific’ approaches, e.g. the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ. I do not consider it a stronger proposal merely on the grounds of its ecumenicity, but rather that it addresses what I see as common problem for these traditions

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<sup>12</sup> In support of the possibility of such an undertaking and to the claim as to this relationship between faiths in the classical theism, Lenn Goodman writes, ‘The problematics guiding the demand for Greek, Persian, or Aramaic thought ensured that what was taken up would chime with the great issues of Hebraic thought as well. Not that all would agree in conclusions or underlying assumptions. There was not restriction to “own’s own paradigm.” But clearly all that was conned over, translated and studied was germane. Kindred issues would be debated, and old disputes continued in languages. So when the tradition came full circle and Jewish thinkers fell heir to Muslim thinkers ... what the Jewish scholars found was nothing foreign, but theories genuinely useful in in addressing Jewish problematics. For the ideas were rooted in Biblical categories [and] rendered vivid by Greek imagery ...’ (1999, p. 2)

and does so in drawing from a variety of sources across these traditions. Other than obvious impediments of scope and the task of a such a broad survey, it seems that there are no clearly prohibitive reasons not to propose an alternative solution to the problem of divine impassibility that has at least the potential to be employed across these traditions of Abrahamic monotheism.

Finally, it need be emphasised that this work is in no wise intended to be exhaustive; questions of divine impassibility can be approached from many directions, and so the initial survey of the concept will remain as directed as the subject itself allows. However, an account of understandings of divine impassibility is necessary in order both to fill out the landscape for this inquiry and to provide various pieces of the arguments I offer. Furthermore, lest I be accused of being uncharitable, I must admit that many of concerns of the passibilist and impassibilist philosophers and theologians whom I criticise are warranted and that even where there are misunderstandings of this attribute, they are excusable; the concept itself multivalenced, dependent in various ways on understandings of other divine attributes, and subject to different uses in different times and contexts. Yet it is this complexity and richness in the concept of divine *apatheia* that beleaguers and motivates enduring discussions of it. While an understanding of divine impassibility acceptable to all parties may be a chimeric goal, clarification of issues at play would alone go far in relieving at least some of the difficulties which beset those engaged in these discussions, even if the provision of a *via media* proves to be unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, there can be no progress at all without an investigation into the manner in which divine *apatheia* has been understood and employed and an attempt at articulating concerns that come from it.

## Chapter 1. The Doctrine of Divine Impassibility: Definitions, Origins, and Philosophical Foundations.

Throughout most of the history of both Greek philosophy and classical Abrahamic monotheism, the attribute of divine impassibility or *apatheia* has been assumed as necessary to a proper conception of the divine. Divine impassibility is an ancient doctrine philosophically, predating the theology of revealed monotheism and subject to varying uses across ancient sources (Gavrilyuk, 2004, pp. 25-36; Lee, 1974, pp. 28-30). Here I mean to explore various ways this attribute may be understood and to provide a general account of its origins and some motivations for predicating it of God. I argue here that this commitment to divine *apatheia* comes from certain ancient views of the *perfection* of the divine, and that it is this conception of divine perfection that has substantially informed the tradition of classical theism. This can be seen not only in the matter of divine *apatheia* and other classical divine attributes but in a more general ontology of the divine as well. Additionally, through tracing the origins of *apatheia* to Greek philosophical notions of the divine, I offer some comments as to the early relationship of Hellenistic thought with a developing revealed monotheistic tradition. I situate the nexus of contact between pagan philosophy and revealed monotheism in the works of Philo of Alexandria.<sup>13</sup> His contributions provide not only a bridge between these worlds, but also go on to significantly influence how this legacy of Greek thought is incorporated in the

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<sup>13</sup> The legacy of Philo of Alexandria is both complicated and fascinating. While his works were not largely accepted in the nascent tradition of Rabbinic Judaism of his time, he would stand as a significant influence on Christian theologians and philosophers that soon followed him in late antiquity. Through this preservation of his works, his thoughts as to the relationship between philosophy and theology (and, most notably, his allegoresis and use of figurative and metaphorical language) will then be revived, implicitly or explicitly, in the latter tradition of a developing classical theism—in his own Judaism, as well as in Christianity and Islam.

philosophical theology of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, especially in their classical expressions. I wish to suggest that, in the main, various understandings of divine impassibility are consistent with and necessary to a philosophically coherent ontology of God, and yet not one that comes without some warranted concerns. However, I begin here with some related questions, central to the current debate over divine impassibility and this study. What is meant by ‘impassibility,’ and whence does this notion come? Or, what are the various connotations of ‘impassibility’ or *apatheia*, what are its possible valences, and how may these be informed by a conception of perfection in the divine?

I have suggested above in my introductory remarks that much of the confusion in this debate is the result of the multivalenced and sometimes ambiguous uses of ‘impassibility.’ This must be addressed at the outset, not so as to determine some precise and univocal meaning, but to show the variety of connotations this attribute may take. Further, I argue below that any predication of divine impassibility is largely the result of conceiving of the divine as a *necessarily perfect being* which could admit of no passivity or potency. This very notion of ‘perfection’ should be more closely examined, as it will impact both what one will have to say about divine impassibility and divine ontology more generally. It will inform the way we may understand other divine attributes as constitutive of a classical divine ontology, e.g. *aseity*, simplicity, immutability, timeless eternity, etc. Therefore, I first begin with some investigation into various ways impassibility may be understood and then proceed to the question of divine perfection and its origins in classical Greek conceptions of God. In laying such a groundwork, we may then be better able to see how divine impassibility comes about in formative understandings of the divine in pagan philosophy, and later, how it is adopted and

developed in the tradition of classical theism. Finally, I explore some of this initial contact between Hellenistic philosophy of the divine and the revealed traditions of Abrahamic monotheism.

## 1.1 Understanding ‘Impassibility.’

I have spoken above synonymously of ‘impassibility’ and ‘*apatheia*.’ While they share meaning and have related etymologies that give light to the idea being put forth, there is still a lack of clarity across much of the literature, both ancient and modern, as to what exactly this attribute denotes and the way it ‘fits’ with other aspects of the divine. That is not to say that each author is entirely unclear in her use of the term, but rather there is often a lack in many authors’ works and across the corpus of literature of any consistent and agreed-upon definition of impassibility. This results in obvious problems for any furtherance of the debate. When there is this ambiguity present, debate on an already troublesome topic is made all the more difficult. Of course, we need not have only *one* definition of impassibility as we predicate it of the divine. It is indeed possible that the divine could be impassible in certain aspects and not in others, or in all or (less likely) in none. But it is the failure to attend to the various aspects of impassibility that has often, as I see it, led to counterproductivity. We must then first be clear in what various ways we may speak of divine impassibility. Do we mean impassibility in nature, in the divine will, in divine knowledge, in moral goodness, etc.? Or, perhaps, impassibility *in toto*? Here I wish to speak to some basic possible meanings of *apatheia* and its connection to ‘emotion.’ The various understandings of impassibility I offer here are largely based upon certain assumptions and ways of reasoning found in the tradition of classical theism which have their origins, as we shall, see in earlier Greek thought on the matter.

We can locate a general etymological definition in both the Greek and Latin: *a-pathos* and *in-passibilis*, wherein both *pathos* and *passio* are, straightforwardly, ‘suffering, or the capacity to suffer.’ With the Greek alpha-privative and the Latin negation ‘*in*’, we then come to an understanding that impassibility is, most basically, the inability to suffer or be affected. ‘To suffer’ here is best understood in the sense of ‘to be affected,’ a usage no longer common in English. It may mean merely to be affected *ab extra* without any of the negative connotations ‘suffering’ commonly takes. For example, I ‘suffer’ when I am happy or when I grieve, when I learn something new, or when some wrong is done to me—I am affected from without—something happens to me that changes a state of affairs concerning and intimately connected to me. Gary Culpepper expands on this range of how we ought to understand ‘suffering’ philosophically in this context (2009). He writes, ‘But “to suffer” has a second, broader, philosophical meaning that is not limited to the negative, defective, or painful. One can suffer good things as well as bad. In this second sense of the term, suffering is defined as “undergoing or enduring the action of another upon oneself” or “existing as the object rather than the subject of an action.”’ (Culpepper, 2009, p. 81) He goes on to comment that ‘passion’ and *pathos* are closely related and much of the Greek tradition considers ‘passion’ in strictly negative terms. Often this *pathos* or ‘affectation’ evokes ‘emotion’; I am ‘moved’ by some affectation from one mental state to another. In rational creatures at least, any *pathic* affectation is likely to result in some emotional change. Yet we may imagine that not all ‘emotional’ states, despite the etymology in play here (*e/motus*), would be brought about by *pathos* or affectation. In the divine mind, this most certainly seems right. God may experience certain states we may consider ‘emotions’ such as ‘unperturbed bliss’ or ‘joy,’ but these are not evoked by anything external



and, moreover, they may be in concert with will and reason. Thus while there is a connection, we ought not to equate *pathos* and emotion, or rather, we need not assume *all* emotional states in God are the result of some passivity. Let us hold with that for now.

We then have here the beginning of a basic understanding of *pathos* as affectation or some mental state resulting from this affectation. This may already give us some reason to think of impassibility as rightly predicated of the divine, inasmuch as we may think a perfect existence would not be subject to ‘being moved’ by anything outside it or ‘provoked’ into certain emotional states contrary to the divine will. We should be careful here not to understand *apatheia* as intending a kind of divine ‘apathy,’ despite the etymological connection. ‘Invulnerability’ is likely a better rendering and fits well with what has been stated above in relation to the notion of ‘suffering’—impassibility can be understood, in part at least, as denoting an imperviousness to external cause. This understanding of impassibility as ‘apathy’ or as some aloof and cold divine indifference is, as we shall see below in examining various passibilist criticisms, commonly assumed to be part of the meaning of impassibility. But this seems out of keeping with various historical understandings provided below. Still, we must keep in mind the role ‘emotions’ play in the debate over divine (im)passibility. Here again, while there is an etymological connection found in ‘*e/motus*’ wherein the root is clearly one of motion (or change), this may not require some *pathos*. We may be tempted to think of ‘emotional’ states as being necessarily *pathic*—as brought about by something external—yet it is not necessarily the case that they are, not in the divine, at least.

Anastasia Scrutton has done thorough work on understandings of ‘emotion’ as it pertains to the divine life and rightly points out that emotions or feelings, as we might

understand them in modern psychological parlance, are for the most part anachronistic translations of a *variety* of descriptions of mental states, some predicated of the divine mind (2011). We may now, under a very recent psychologised understanding of emotion, think that they would not be sort of thing a perfect divine being may be said to have. This seems to be due in part to a common modern understanding of emotions as unreliable, contrary to reason, or out of keeping with a kind of stability, something more akin to the ancient understanding of *passiones* or *perturbationes*. Still, it should be noted that emotions, even as we now understand them, are not all *necessarily* unreliable or unstable, even in creatures. Here emotions are assumed to have the possibility of a cognitive quality; that is, to express *some* kind of intelligence and relationship to value. We can imagine for human beings, and even more so for the divine, the possibility of an emotional stability, wherein one possesses control of certain ‘emotional’ states, or that emotions could be ‘rightly-oriented.’ Though for humanity, this may take will, training, and some knowledge of the Good. In God, it would presumably not require any such effort or will for control or stasis. Moreover, divine emotions would seem to require a constancy and intelligence. Thus, the question may not be so much whether or not God can have certain emotions (despite the potentially misleading use of that term). All theists, from Aristotle to modern passibilists, would affirm the *possibility* of something like ‘unperturbed bliss’ in the divine. Rather, the real question in play here is what sort of emotions an impassible divine being might be able to have as they relate to *pathos* (or how various mental states in the divine could result from affectation *ab extra*) and how our understanding of both the nature of God and impassibility bears on that understanding of divine mental states.

Certainly, even the strongest impassibilist would not deny that the divine is infinitely blissful, rationally contemplating the goodness of its own nature. Yet she may hesitate at any real ascription of ‘wrath’ or ‘pity,’ as such states could be understood to be *pathic*, due either to *passiones* and so impossible for a perfect divine being or due to some perturbing affectation ‘put upon’ God from without—things done unto God contrary to divine will (Gavrilyuk, 2004, pp. 37-46). Likewise, one may be tempted to deny these states in God in that they may indicate some lack. One could here, of course, argue the following: when God is ‘wrathful,’ this wrath is still consistent with a moral perfection, being ‘righteously wrathful’ (Gavrilyuk, 2004, pp. 51-63) Unlike human wrath or anger, it is not uncontrolled or misdirected, but rather rightly oriented and measured: a ‘sober’ wrath might be the idea here. One might even be hesitant to call it ‘wrath’ at all, as such is often irrational and a failure of excess in the virtue tradition of Aristotle. To the matter of ‘pity,’ perhaps God could, out of the divine will, freely *allow* some affectation of ‘pitiful states’ and respond to them rightly and with measure. Divine pity then may not be incompatible with some aspects of impassibility insofar as it is freely willed, *dispassionate*, and compatible with divine goodness. In either case—that of divine ‘wrath’ or ‘pity’—another possible move (and more traditional one) would be to speak of these as anthropopathic descriptions of different divine effects of a unified disposition towards humanity, wherein neither is properly affectational or any expression of genuine *pathos* in God. Thus far, we have explored the idea of *apatheia*, as not implying a kind of ‘apathy,’ but rather an invulnerability to outside affectation, an understanding that would seem to be entailed by not only a concept of divine perfection, but also by more specific commitments to *aseity*, simplicity, immutability and timeless eternity, as we shall see below.

Let us now examine further some ways in which impassibility (given its possible valences) might be predicated of the divine. I here refer to these differing modes of predication as ‘aspects’ of impassibility or *apatheia*. We may here assume impassibility *in some form* as a proper attribute of God and yet explore further the ways in which that this attributed is intended. First, we might say that God is impassible in some corporeal sense: that is, God is unaffected by any physical actions. Let us call this impassibility (A). This seems true in two ways, one most trivially. First, God being incorporeal could not, out of necessity, suffer any bodily affectation such as physical pleasure, hunger, somatic pain, etc. These are simply affectations that necessarily depend on the existence of some sentient *material* thing, and God is, as both the philosophical and religious traditions revealed monotheism would have it, entirely immaterial. This view of God as *asomatic* would seem to result from a commitment to both *aseity* and, perhaps more so, divine simplicity, at least of a spatio-temporal type, and each may be seen as following from a notion of divine perfection. God is incorporeal in being without any material composition. This is the trivial case. The second is more substantial, though related to the first. If, still in keeping with the philosophical and theological traditions of classical Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, we view God as the *primum movens*, *primum mobile*, and *actus purus*, then the divine is the primary cause of all motion in the cosmos, but not itself subject to any action or motion as it possesses no unactualised potency (Aristotle, 1941; Aquinas, 1964). This also may be seen as a consequence of the perfection of God and divine simplicity (here a metaphysical or property simplicity). Of course, it is not the case that *any* incorporeal entity is immune to affectation or motion; perhaps angels or other purely intellectual beings could be subject to motion or change, though not of a physical kind. Yet these purely

intellectual beings are creatures and, unlike the divine, possess potentiality and are contingent, and thus are subject to affectation and change. So, in the first case, we may say the divine is impassible at least insofar as any corporeal affection is concerned *and* impassible in that God is not animated or sustained by any other thing—the divine is *a se* and ontologically independent through necessity and *autarkeia*.

A second understanding of impassibility may be this: impassibility in knowledge, impassibility (B). If we take *pathos* in the sense outlined above as that of mere affectation, without any necessarily negative connotation, then any instance of a being ‘coming’ to know something is indeed a kind of ‘suffering.’ When we learn something new, there is a change in us. In many cases, this change is wrought by something external to us; there is some truth we now know that makes a claim on us. It affects us in the sense that what views we held before must be amended in light of this new knowledge or, at the very least the previous body of knowledge we possessed is expanded. Is it right then to speak this way of the divine? Clearly, both the issues of omniscience and immutability arise. One may protest and say not all knowledge is from without; indeed, one can come to know something about herself, yet this still presents a change in the entity in question and does not seem the sort of knowledge a divine being of the sort conceived in the philosophical tradition might have. God most certainly has self-knowledge, whatever that amounts to in the divine, but it is not something gained over time through some strange divine introspection. Relatedly, we ought to view, at least from the perspective of classical theism, divine knowledge is timelessly eternal. Without any temporal confines, we may say God knows all things purely and at once and could not possibly ‘come to know’ something as that would seem to require time and a change over time. If we are to speak

of omniscience, especially from the vantage of timeless eternity—that is God as knowing all things that can be known—perhaps we dodge the problem. No epistemic affectation is possible for the divine—God learns nothing, as there is nothing God does not already know *ab aeterno*. But this itself may raise troubling questions. If we maintain this kind of timeless omniscience for the sake of divine perfection, impassibility, immutability, and simplicity, then what must we say of the relationship of God with human action, especially along the lines of petitionary prayer or the scriptural portrayals of God’s knowledge or divine ‘consideration’ of certain matters? After all, the scriptures are filled with these *pathically* epistemic instances. God is presented as regularly offering conditionals, desiring one outcome over another, being ‘open’ to creaturely action in a manner to which this account may not be well-fitted. If God’s omniscience includes knowledge of the future (as many claim), we then may have concerns with human freedom and the efficacy of petitionary prayer. Even if we eschew embracing (fore)knowledge, with the implication it has of divine knowledge being in some way temporal, even a Boethian account (*vide* also Augustine, Anselm, Maimonides, and Aquinas) of a timeless eternity may not account for the entirety of this worry. Theologians in these traditions have given considerable thought to both these concerns, and each is addressed at some length below. Here is it necessary only that this one aspect of impassibility is elucidated, that of impassibility in knowledge, essentially the claim that there is nothing God ‘comes to know’ or learns, as this would cause the divine to endure some change or actualise some unrealised potential.

This brings us to a third and related aspect of divine impassibility: impassibility in will, impassibility (C). We can understand this aspect of a thelemic impassibility as the divine will not being subject to any change or affection from without or resulting from some conditional

and contingent state of affairs external to God. Why might thelemic impassibility be thought properly predicated of the divine? If God is, as a consequence of perfection, both omniscient and omnipotent, then it is difficult to see how in fact God's will could be other than it is, except by some divine counsel internal to God alone, or if that will was of a more general 'providential' nature, including in it the possibility of some affectation whilst allowing the actualisation of other possibilities. Still, against the background of perfection in *aseity*, *autarkeia*, and simplicity, it would perhaps be difficult to see how any external affectation could bring about such a change. The impassibility of the divine will is then entailed by immutability at least. If nothing external, e.g. epistemic states, some strong affectations, or moral temptation can befall the divine, then it does seem to follow that the divine will would be immutable. As the divine will is not subject to affectation as mine or yours may be, it is both impassible and immutable. In cases of the passibility and mutability of the human will, wherein we are subject to some *pathos* or external cause, these seem to result of the weakness and finitude of creatures—a composite and contingent nature. My will is thwarted by failings of the flesh, or my coming to know some fact in light of which I then change my designs, or I may simply lack the strength to exercise my will. These affectations that, due to other divine attributes consistent with perfection, do not obtain in God thus seem to make the divine will impassible. We then have a thelemic impassibility that is safeguarded by other features of divine perfection, certainly *aseity*, simplicity, and immutability, but also correlative or entailed attributes such as incorporeality, immunity to force (omnipotence), and omnibenevolence (immunity to evil). However, thelemic impassibility similarly presents difficulties for those of religious commitment or in attention to scriptural portrayals of the divine: once again the problem of petitionary prayer arises as well

as that of human freedom. The scriptures present often contradictory views on the will of God: speaking sometimes of its incapacity to be thwarted and in other places as affected by and responsive to various choices made by free creatures—mutable in response to states of affairs external to it.

Finally, there are several remaining ways in which impassibility may be predicated of God as I see it. There is impassibility in moral goodness, impassibility (D). We may think of this as consequent to omnibenevolence or equivalent to it, but it is worth parsing out further. We will see below how this sense of divine impassibility as moral incorruptibility was popular among the Stoics and, later, in classical expressions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (Creel, 1986, pp. 6, 117; Gavriilyuk, 2004, pp. 26-28). It is, of course, connected with our first aspect of impassibility above (A)—incorporeality and immunity to external cause or the actualisation of any latent potency. It is related to incorporeality in the sense that, as much of my *pathoi* are a direct result of my necessarily limited and creaturely nature, being bound in a body, the divine is not confined by such limitations. Thus, as I may act *passionately*, to use the phrasing of the ancient authors in speaking of those actions contrary to reason or resulting from some corporeality, because of my lust, thirst, hunger, etc. and so may be then led astray from goodness. God presumably is not and cannot be so led or moved by certain corporeal temptations. There are thus certain *pathoi* that are simply unavailable to the divine. Of course, not all *pathoi* (or emotions consequent to them) are clearly perturbations of the flesh nor are all entirely uncontrollable. So while perhaps not as immediately corporeal as hunger, these seem still to be a result of the contingency and finitude of our natures. But this moral impassibility need not be limited to talking about divine incorporeality. It may also be the case that the



unmitigated goodness of God, proper to the divine nature, safeguards against any moral deviation that would make the divine untrustworthy or unworthy of praise. It ensures the praiseworthiness in God at least insofar as moral rectitude or stasis is concerned. This concept of impassibility as moral perfection is also common in classical theistic accounts and is taken up further in the historical examination offered below.

Next, we have impassibility in nature, impassibility (E). This differs slightly from those aspects outlined above in its metaphysics, but there are connections. We may in fact view those aspects of impassibility outlined above as being entailed by what we can say of the God in nature, essence, or *ousia*. If we are to speak of divine impassibility in nature, it seems we are claiming that that which is essential to God is immune to change and external influence. Or, rather, that the divine cannot be other than what it is, especially not as a result of any external affectation. Under an Aristotelian anthropology perhaps, there are certain things that could befall me which would affect my nature *qua* human. If I were to lose all rational capacity or have it significantly diminished, then there would be a clear change in my nature per this anthropology. I would not longer be *fully* what it is to be human and thus would be, at best, deficiently so. Thus, if we conceive of God as, say, essentially agapeistic, then there is no possibility of influence, from within or without, that could conceivably alter that status; if the divine nature is goodness then it could not be other than the good. Furthermore, understandings of both divine *aseity* and simplicity would also provide for both immutability and an essential impassibility. Being necessarily existent or God being ‘the one that [who] is,’ the nature of God’s existence cannot be altered or subject to any affection. It is this conception, that of there being no difference in essence and existence in God, that will provide for much of what we will

see regarding both immutability and impassibility in nature within the context of both Greek philosophy and classical theism. The nature of God itself then prohibits certain things: the divine cannot be other than it is *in se* and cannot cease to be. Moreover, we may say that God, it seems, cannot act out of accordance with this divine nature. We have then here a hint at the *metaphysical* ‘stasis’ of Greek philosophy of the divine. This impassibility in nature, with any ‘contingent’ or ‘accidental’ properties of God removed (even if there is any possibility of such), is generally without debate. This impassibility in nature seems to follow most immediately from a concept of divine perfection. Again, the kind of ‘stasis’ here provided by this aspect of impassibility further ensures both the moral goodness of God and the trustworthiness of the divine will. For without impassibility in nature, it seems that the very concept of the divine itself would be evacuated of those features most constitutive of and necessary to it.

Lastly, there is the related aspect of impassibility as transcendence, impassibility (F). It could be assumed under (E) but is perhaps here worth discussing separately. Again, this has relations to aspects of impassibility described above and is also a favourite amongst defenders of impassibility in the tradition of Abrahamic monotheism. David Bentley Hart, in his essay ‘Impassibility as Transcendence: On the Infinite Innocence of God,’ argues that this impassibility of the divine is the very separation between the creator and sustainer of all and the created and contingent cosmos (2009). It is this divine *priority*, Hart argues, that is the primary motivation for understanding God as impassible. The divine is that which ‘freely gives being to beings’ and ‘imparts being to what, in itself, is nothing at all’ (2009, p. 302). It is perhaps this last aspect of divine impassibility that is both so misunderstood and thus subject to misplaced criticisms. Many passibilists’ accounts fail, I think, to give a fair treatment of this

aspect (F) and, given that, form their arguments against impassibility towards a straw man of the doctrine largely born from an understanding of *apatheia* as ‘apathy’ or an uncaring ontological distance. In fact, impassibility as transcendence (and in nature) is probably the most central and important aspect of *apatheia* in classical expressions of Abrahamic monotheism and one from which other aspects of impassibility may come. It is this sense of impassibility—that of God as ‘being’ beyond concepts and yet the source of existence—that may inform all the other senses of impassibility and, indeed, all the divine attributes. It touches, as one might expect, on the very concept of ‘godhead/godhood’ itself and on the nature of perfection and a perfect and necessary existence that tracks an essential ontological difference in God.

Furthermore, this aspect of impassibility (F) specifically is the fundamental motivation for much of the apophatic theology (*via negativa*) that features prominently in discourse on the divine in the Western Scholastic tradition, the Eastern (Palamite) tradition of essence/energy theology, and in the classical works of both Judaism and the *kalam* and *falsafa* of Islamic thought. This ‘deep’ understanding of impassibility as transcendence shows the limits of traditional cataphatic or positive theology, in that under this aspect of impassibility, humanity is necessarily limited in what it can predicate of the divine given its nature as ‘beyond being.’ What can be said with greatest clarity is what the divine *is not* or we may offer descriptions of the divine actions or effects in the cosmos. Lastly, one should note that the aspects of impassibility (A—D) seem to have to do with activities or *operationes* of God: willing, knowing, moral action, etc. Impassibility in the last two senses (E and F), in nature and as transcendence, speak to the very essence of God rather than action. This is a rough division, admittedly, but I think we may already have something to say of the essence/activities

distinction or an ‘essence/energies’ distinction I develop below. Furthermore, in the context of cataphatic and apophatic language, it seems the former may be used cautiously of the activities of God, but only the latter for essence or nature. This is also seen in the way that ‘names’ of God, in Judaism, Islam, and, partly, Christianity, often refer only to the *activities* of God, *not* the divine essence, which being transcendent, is also ineffable.<sup>14</sup>

As brief and limited as it may be, I believe what I have heretofore offered gives us some notion of some of the breadth of meaning *apatheia* may take as well as demonstrates the motivations for why it has played such a central role in classical theism. The various ways of understanding this attribute and how it may fit with a coherent ontology of God are, I think, much beholden to both various sophisticated Greek conceptions of the divine and to the tradition of classical theism. We may also see how such a theological methodology—one motivated by preserving a necessary perfection in the divine—would proceed. Such as it is, we have so far seen the components of very good arguments for endorsing divine impassibility even in its strongest forms. Even still, given what is largely a philosophically tidy account of this attribute, its relationship to other divine attributes and thus to the nature of God itself, one many still find some concerns as to its consistency with the scriptural witness, various anthropopathisms and anthropopsychisms, or to a coherence in light of the claims the scriptures make as to a reactive and affectational character in God.

In what follows throughout this work, I defend many of the aspects of impassibility as outlined above as necessary to a proper understanding of classical theism and of the divine

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<sup>14</sup> Throughout this chapter, I am indebted to the work of Richard Creel in using a schema similar to that found in his *Divine Impassibility* (1986) in order to provide a means by which to define and speak of various valences of ‘impassibility.’

itself. Each safeguards the divine itself against a kind of ontological violence often found in contemporary passibilist criticisms, perhaps most stridently in the process theism of Whitehead, Hartshorne, Cobb, et al. This is not to say, however, that I do not think there are some warranted misgivings with the doctrine, especially as they relate to this scriptural portrayal of God as both *pathic* and responsive to creation. As stated, the primary purpose of this study is to put forth a new way of understanding divine impassibility that conserves many of the interests of classical theism and yet can answer passibilist concerns about divine-creaturely interactions and thereby give a fuller account for scriptural presentations of divine *pathos*. Let us now turn to the concept of perfection and examine further how it informs and generates understandings of the divine attributes and, specifically, *apatheia*.

## **1.2 Impassibility, Perfection, and Divinity in Greek Philosophy**

In order to further fill out this general account of divine impassibility, I mean here to outline some ways various Greek philosophers developed this initial concept of the divine, its necessary perfection, and how this would seem to entail divine *apatheia*. Moreover, I show how this conception of *perfection* in the divine informs or constitutes how we may think of a general ontology of the divine and associated ‘attributes.’ This conception of ‘divine perfection’ is largely derived by an induction of contrast with the material world and human existence, consistent with Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic reasoning. Through the works of various philosophers in the Greek tradition, I show that this development of the concept of divine perfection seems to entail certain divine attributes that come to be adopted and developed by the philosophical theology of revealed monotheism. Among these attributes, one finds, quite early on in this theological tradition, divine impassibility or *apatheia*. One may trace the origins

of this concept of divine impassibility to Aristotle, if not Plato or earlier. This is to be seen, I argue, as consequent to the conception of ‘god’ that each of these philosophers puts forth. For Plato, ‘god’ or ‘the divine’ is variously identified with ‘the Good’ itself as both the source of and cause of the Forms, with the Forms themselves, or with the Demiurge (an intelligent creator). For Aristotle, God is the changeless, immutable, and incorporeal *primum mobile* or, better perhaps, the *primum movens* that stands as the first cause of the cosmos and which, though unmoved, is the source of motion in the cosmos (Aristotle, 1941; Bradshaw, 2004, pp. 24-44). As we shall see, versions of this Platonic/Aristotelian conception of divine perfection are taken up by later philosophers in this tradition: Epicureans, Stoics, and, very importantly for the development of classical expressions of revealed monotheism, the Neoplatonists (Gavrilyuk, 2004, pp.-21-46; Nagasawa, 2017, pp. 15-21).

We may then see the origins of various attributes of God or the divine as having their source in a commitment to this *perfection* of the divine. God is understood to be perfect in ways that contrast this divine existence with the finite and corruptible existence of things in the created or material world. For both Plato and Aristotle, our ability to conceive of this perfection is due to our perception of the nature of the material world or, to use Platonic language, the lower cosmos or lesser ‘souls.’ Through this means of induction by contrast, the divine is a negation of the finitude and transient nature of this informed and corruptible ‘world below.’ Divine perfection then becomes a summation of all that populates the *plenum* of the Forms, that realm of Ideas both eternal and immune to the affectations, contingency, and corruptibility found in this material cosmos. In the case of Aristotle, that perfect entity, unlike all things ‘beneath’ it, finds its source in nothing but itself, is moved by nothing, and yet motivates the

cosmos. In this section, I demonstrate some of the ways in which this idea of divine perfection is understood in contrast with the imperfect material world. The importance and influence of this essentially Platonic cosmology cannot be overstated even as it is modified by Aristotle and the later Neoplatonists. In fact, later critics of divine impassibility will levy the accusation that classical theism is committed to the preservation of a Greek philosophical concept foreign to the scriptural revelation of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. I argue below that this accusation is, while not entirely without warrant, often overwrought and fails to account for justified motivations in preserving the ontological ‘otherness’—transcendence and *aseity*—of the divine.

Still, when we return to this Platonic/Aristotelian understanding of perfection, the following becomes clear: in this particular view, perfection necessarily involves the attributes self-existence, eternality, self-sufficiency, simplicity, immutability, impassibility and perhaps others. Such attributes seem properly necessary to the divine life. It must be noted that much of this understanding of impassibility as perfection (for both Greek philosophy and later theological expression of revealed monotheism) is an *ontological* category. The perfection of the divine is not merely one of degree but of kind. As intimated above, it seems that what makes impassibility something that would be part of what it is to be a perfect being is that it is a *causal* and even *modal* notion: impassibility is a feature of a being who is both necessary and the primary cause of all contingent things. For in its necessity, it is causally and metaphysically prior to the cosmos and has no (nor could it have any) causal explanation for itself. This way of understanding impassibility as transcendence (both metaphysical and causal), in the aspects

of (E) and (F) outlined above, is central to much of what is found in both classical defences of the doctrine and in the various ways I employ the doctrine in this work (Hart, 2003, 2009).

Thus far we have spoken only of Plato and Aristotle. The works of these two philosophers are certainly our primary sources for the concept of divine perfection, but the beginning of this concept (and this mode of contrast) can be traced to Pre-Socratic thinkers as well. While much of the Pre-Socratic tradition was quasi-scientific and naturalistic—denying the role of the traditional Olympian gods of Hesiod as causes of natural events—there are present in their works theological ideas as to the cause of the cosmos and the nature of that cause. Xenophanes of Colophon, perhaps a teacher of Parmenides, flatly rejected the Homeric depiction of divine entities as morally unworthy and grossly anthropomorphic and anthropopathic (Curd, 2016; Gavrilyuk, 2004, p. 48). The gods of Homer were, for Xenophanes, too human in their passions. He sought, rather, to read in these *mythoi* an allegory of divine reality. Even as early as this Pre-Socratic era, we find the germination of both a Greek concept of divine perfection and a method of *allegoresis*. It seems Xenophanes provided something of an idea of divine transcendence by his insistence that the divine is beyond our ability to depict or conceive it, a very early instance of something like apophatic thought. Furthermore, Xenophanes thought of ‘one God’ as unmoving, yet acting only through the working on the divine mind or *nous*. This ‘god’ is unchanging and ‘agitated not at all’ and perhaps impassible (Curd, 2016). We have here, I think, a foundation for further Greek thought on the matter as the divine is moved from Olympus and the *mythoi* of Hesiod’s theogony and into a transcendent existence.



With Heraclitus of Ephesus, despite significant interpretive difficulties, we find interesting theological language as to the nature of the divine. Heraclitus speaks of an eternal *logos* which ‘forever holds,’ impersonal but providing a nomological order to the cosmos. Though Heraclitus presents what seems to be a pantheistic account of the cosmos, nevertheless there is this *logos* at its core, providing both a taxological and moral normativity. Again, we see a distancing of the conception of the divine from the human-like properties and behaviours of the Olympian gods to an eternal, impersonal, unchanging entity. It is also worth noting that later process philosophers and theologians, in their criticisms of the ‘static’ or ‘substantial’ theological metaphysics of Greek philosophy, will cite Heraclitus as a philosopher of ‘flux’ and draw upon his work. Yet it is sufficient here just to demonstrate the contribution of Heraclitus to the concept of divine perfection—unchanging, eternal, and rational. Additionally, with Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, we have the further development of the concept of a divine *nous*—a mind or intellect—rational and agential (Curd, 2016).

Under the Ideal cosmology of Plato and perhaps even *a priori*, it can be seen that a perfect entity would of necessity be possessed of such attributes as transcendence, ‘stasis’ reason, and an imperviousness to external cause.<sup>15</sup> Each of these attributes can be seen as features of perfection by way of contrast with the material world. As the material world is obviously corruptible, subject to change, contingent and complex, the divine then is removed from these ‘frailties.’ We find here a presaging of the ‘Great Making Properties’ employed in contemporary Perfect Being Theism and their mediaeval expression in the works of Anselm of Canterbury (we can conceive of some entity which lacks the apparent deficiencies of the

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<sup>15</sup> Anselm of Canterbury in his *Proslogion* argues that such a concept of perfect can be acquired *a priori* simply from the idea of God itself.

material world).<sup>16</sup> We must here imagine that a being or entity that relies on nothing but itself for its existence would naturally be greater, or more perfect, than those entities which find their ontological grounding in some other thing. Furthermore, that which is eternal is greater than that whose existence is merely temporal. Indeed, much of this does, as Anselm will later argue in his *Proslogion*, seem to stand to reason *a priori* (Anselm, 1965). Such attributes such as transcendence, *aseity*, immutability, and simplicity may plausibly be deduced from a conception of perfection. And we find the foundations of the conceptions of perfection, inchoate as they may be in some places, in the works of the Greek authors treated above.

Closely connected, of course, with transcendence, *aseity*, immutability, and simplicity comes the topic of this study: *apatheia*. In the Greek sources above, we have seen *some* reference to impassibility through a fairly consistent understanding of divine perfection. It seems then that impassibility will be necessarily entailed by, at least, immutability and *aseity*, as involving a self-sufficiency or *autarkeia* and thus an incapacity for change in the divine. The possibility for change must be seen, under these accounts, as a deficiency and so any affectation is impossible for the divine. Most famously, perhaps, these arguments are found in Plato's *Republic* (380—381) and Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (Book 12) (cited in Nagasawa, 2017, pp. 15-18). Both argue that any change is either for the better or the worse, morally, ontologically, etc. Here the problem seems obvious when understood under the aspect of perfection: certainly, a perfect being is not the sort of thing that could become less of what it properly is or be divested of some necessary attribute, nor does it seem that a perfect being could possibly increase

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<sup>16</sup>Anselm himself does not use the phrasing 'Great-Making' or 'Great-Making Properties' in his famous ontological argument in the *Proslogion*. Rather, they are an implication of the sort of conception of God he thinks all reasonable persons have: a being greater than which nothing can be conceived. Thus, this being must be possessed of the aforementioned attributes.

morally or ontologically. For the latter case, there would by necessity have been some prior lack or unactualised potency that the change would remedy, and any lack of either sort is not the sort of state one could rightly describe a *perfect* being as possessing. On Plato's discussion of this in the *Republic*, Yujin Nagasawa comments: '... it is impossible for a god to change into something better and more beautiful than himself because he does not lack and beauty or virtue. Yet it is impossible for a god to change into something worse or uglier too because, according to Plato, anyone who is already the "the most beautiful and best possible" would not want to become worse deliberately.' (2017, p. 16) Plato is worth quoting here in his own words:

Or is God simple and least of all liable to shed [his] own form? ... If anything left its own form, must it not be changed either of itself or by another? ... And is it not true that the best things are least likely to be changed? ... Sure God and all that pertains to God is in every way *perfect* ... So [he] can hardly be compelled externally to take on diverse shapes ... If [he] is altered ... it must be for the worse. For we cannot assume [him] to be lacking in excellence or beauty ... So even for God to wish to change is impossible. Being intrinsically good and beautiful, God abides forever simply in his own form. - *Republic*, 380d-381c. (Quoted in Goodman, 2018, emphasis mine)

The case runs similarly if we think further along the lines of ontology or existence. To employ the Platonic ontology, we may imagine entities being more or less Real. Of course, in this case, the argument may seem to be circular: a thing being more or less Real depends upon a certain conception of perfection which then, by comparison, determines that entity's ontological status.

Nevertheless, we can imagine easily how the argument from perfection would go: one could rightly infer from any change toward a more Real or substantial status that there was originally some lesser status or deficiency. This is, it seems, impossible for a being conceived as perfect. Furthermore, no perfect being could in any way change as so to become less than it was. In this case, it would no longer be (or never was) perfect. Aristotle expresses this Platonic conception of perfection in his speaking of 'a god' as a 'supreme excellence' incapable of

change (Broadie, 2009; Nagasawa, 2017, pp. 17-18). The Stoic school of philosophy, as well as later Neoplatonists, Proclus and Plotinus, mirror both this conception of perfection and of the essential immutability it entails. The Epicureans transmit a similar view of change and suffering. ‘The gods are,’ Epicurus writes, ‘strangers to suffering; nothing can cause them any joy or inflict on them any suffering from outside.’ (Festugière, 1995, cited in Gavrilyuk, 2004, p. 23) This problem of ‘change’ in a perfect being would remain, even if we suppose the possibility of some ‘self-willed’ change, but any cause, change, or motion *ab extra* certainly seems more acute in undermining ‘perfection’ if such a change is brought about from outside the divine itself—by some suffering, affectation, or *pathos*.

Here this connection to *apatheia* is clear: to suffer or endure some affectation, it would seem, implies necessarily change in the entity affected. Whether that affectation is positive or negative, some change occurs, and an initial state of deprivation is implied. Neither an initial lack nor any move toward a less good or less real state is consistent with perfection as here understood. Thus, it seems obvious why under this conception of perfection, impassibility would seem to follow from this conception of the divine: no entity possessed of all perfections could be or would will to be affected from without. We have thus far seen the connection between the perfection of the divine and the implied attributes of immutability and impassibility. Generally speaking, when we attribute impassibility to God or the divine, we claim that God is unaffected by external states. God is incapable of, at least against the divine will, ‘being moved by another’ (Culpepper, 2009, p. 81). We can, I think, proceed with this as a very basic definition of *apatheia* in Greek thought: the inability to be moved (affected) from without. The attraction of this concept is clear; as we have seen, *apatheia* ought to be understood

as an aspect of perfection in that it protects the ontologically independent and transcendent nature of God and while being entailed by immutability also preserves it. If God is perfect God's being, it is argued, the divine is necessarily unmoved by things without and unaffected by states of affairs in creation, the material world, or some *pleroma* of lesser entities in a hierarchy of derivative causes. For God to be otherwise in any way would threaten *autarkeia* and metaphysical 'stasis,' and thus render the divine 'less than perfect.' *Apatheia* then, as it may now be clear, seems to be necessary feature of divine perfection.

Yet we must here keep in mind the influence both Platonism and Aristotelianism. In this ontological dualism of Plato in which the 'world of Ideas' is populated by the Forms, wherein these Forms exist eternally and without change, these Forms can affect the material world (in which we dwell), but the reverse is not the case. The Forms, being perfect and as partially constitutive of their perfection, are unaffected by things of this world. With some similarity, so went the thought of Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*: the *primum movens*, being pure act and motivating the cosmos through various intermediaries, cannot without contradiction be itself moved or, as we may wish to say in this case, subject to outside causation of any sort (1941, Book 12). We should also see here a relationship between divine impassibility and divine eternality as both seemingly entailed by perfection. For us, as with the divine, (a)temporality and (im)passibility are connected. The temporal and contingent nature of our existence is, at least in part, due to our being passible and subject to change and affectation. While perhaps not all creaturely affectations come from without, our *pathos* finds its possibility in the nature of creatures as dependent and temporal. The cosmos is, after all, constantly in a state of flux, 'being and becoming.' In the case of humanity, we come to know things, we find out things we thought

we ‘knew’ were wrong, we realise (if we are wise) the limits of our knowledge.<sup>17</sup> Each of these ‘events’ is, of course, only possible within some temporal confines; each change or cause in us and the cosmos is defined by a temporally extended existence.

Why then are these attributes noted above thought to be *necessarily implied* by God’s perfection or, put differently, why would they follow from the conception of perfection? Perfection is, under the Platonic/Aristotelian understanding we have seen in the Greek tradition, a state of being, at least, *without deficiency*. To put the matter somewhat brusquely, if we were to deny impassibility as an attribute of God, then it would seem we affirm that there is some condition under which God would be affected or being ontologically dependent on some other thing. Of what manner might this affection be? Some extreme examples might be a change of the state of affairs in the world which affects God. Perhaps they affect him only epistemically. Even then we are faced with the conclusion that God has come to know something, with the consequence being that there was, in this acquisition of knowledge, an ignorance. God then must be said to be lacking in some way, and therefore God could not be rightly said to be perfect in his knowledge. Still, he would be, very likely, far more knowledgeable than perhaps anything else in the cosmos, but the difference would be only in degree rather than kind: quite a bit short, then, of being ‘perfect’ at least in this respect.

Furthermore, God has endured some change: a move from ignorance of X to knowledge of X. This would, in part, introduce some metaphysical or property distinction into the ontology of God (the possibility of accidents, perhaps). To go further, if events from without were other

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<sup>17</sup> It may be helpful here to note that when I mention ‘a difference not in degree but in kind,’ I have in mind a conception of the omniscience of God, not as some supercomputer which happens to have a record of and every fact, necessary and contingent, past, present, and future, but rather a notion of omniscience in which all of which obtains in the extant is contained within the mind of God, including contingent facts.

than epistemic, e.g. emotions that result from affectations (if we admit of God being something *like* a person), then God similarly changes. This would seem to open the possibility for creatures (of whatever sort we have in mind) having some *claim* on God; they possess a capacity to effect some change in the divine. God must then be said to be *vulnerable*. With this, God becomes more like us, capable of being *done unto* and not entirely in control and, it would seem, no longer ‘self-possessed’ or *autarkic*. This state would seem less than perfect; yet for many passibilist philosophers, this vulnerability is, in fact, something *needed* for true perfection in that it may be required for agapeistic interactions with creation. However, if we understand perfection simply as a state of being ‘without deficiency or lack,’ absolute fullness without change or need, we may see clearly how other attributes classically predicated of God seem to be implications of perfection; they flow from our understanding of perfection as found in this Greek philosophical tradition which, as we shall see, will in no small way influence the development of classical theism.

We have seen then, through these brief examples, both the importance of impassibility or *apatheia* for divine perfection and the close connections each of the divine attributes has with others. Given the way in which these attributes are connected, it is also possible to see why the idea of metaphysical divine simplicity is attractive—each attribute cannot be considered ontological distinct as some property of the divine but rather as a manifestation of a unitary essence—and that to violate any one of the attributes would likewise bring harm to the others and complicate further what we may be able to say of the divine ontology. What has been here provided is, I think, sufficient to show the importance of divine impassibility in maintaining a

coherent and ‘perfect-being’ ontology of God as well as to show the way it is entailed by and entails other attributes insofar as they can be understood as distinct.

### **1.3 Philo of Alexandria, Hellenistic Philosophy, and Classical Theism**

We have seen thus far the extent to which this notion of perfection informed the development of ‘Greek philosophical theology,’ that is, the Greek philosophical tradition insofar as authors within it sought to speak on the nature of the divine. This determinative and governing concept of perfection has also been shown to have informed not only this development of a Greek divine ontology but also how it bears on what ‘attributes,’ specifically *apatheia*, this ontology may entail and how they relate to each other. I now wish very briefly to examine how this philosophical tradition of Greek thought came into initial contact with revealed monotheism and would then go on to be incorporated as a diverse system of categories, concepts, and grammar in the theological and philosophical *apologia* of these faiths. The legacy of this proverbial Athens came to play a significant role in the development of classical theism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, offering theologians and philosophers ways to better articulate and systematise the dogmatic claims of their respective faiths. We can, I think, locate the beginning of this synthesis in the Hellenised Judaism of Alexandria, particularly in the work of Philo. We can then see this influence, largely mediated through Alexandrene thought, on the apologists and philosopher-theologians of patristic Christianity. Only later will this influence come to have significant impact on the classical expressions of Judaism and Islam, perhaps as early as the Mutazilite schools of *kalam* in Islam, but certainly by the age of Saadia Gaon and Al-Kindi in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.



These early philosophers of faith, with their commitments to the ‘revealed’ truths of their scriptures sought to engage with this philosophical tradition, with both apologetic and speculative aims in mind. While I provide below a more detailed account of this relationship of Hellenistic thought to the development of classical theism, especially as it may bear on divine *apatheia* and on a more general ontology of God as found in the *loci classici*, it may be helpful here to speak to the matter of some origins and initial interactions between these traditions. For Judaism and Christianity, as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries we can see the philosophers of these faiths attempting to reconcile the revelations of their respective scriptures with the truths of reason afforded through the Greek philosophical tradition. Or rather, to employ various modes of Greek thought in defence and articulation of these truths. This was, however, a project not without some controversy, as perhaps best expressed by Tertullian (155-240CE): ‘Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis? Quid academiae et ecclesiae?’ (Tertullian, 1870). However, most theologians and philosophers of Christianity and Judaism during this period did not take up this defensive posture towards ‘the Academy,’ but rather saw vast intellectual riches in the Greek tradition which could be employed with care for the defence of the faith and a better understanding of the divine and creation and, in the case of much of early Christianity, to show the *rational* nature of the nascent Nazarene faith (*vide* Justin Martyr/Justin the Philosopher).

Even Tertullian, despite his initial polemics against Greek philosophy, very much employs it in his own theological works. Many early theologian-philosophers, both Jewish and Christian, many of the Alexandrian tradition, took the view of the infamous and brilliant Origen of Alexandria in arguing that those of faith should take ‘the spoils of the Egyptians’ as the Hebrews had in the Exodus: take from the pagan tradition the vast wealth which could aid the

faith (Origen, 1867-1885). Still, the extent of this influence of Greek philosophy on the development of Christian and Jewish theology has been a matter of significant controversy in the last century. Perhaps most prominently, Adolph von Harnack offered his now famous ‘Hellenisation’ thesis, in which both Judaism and Christianity were radically transformed by a wholesale adoption of Greek thought and as a result of this, alien concepts such as divine *apatheia* became central dogmas despite their lacking sufficient scriptural warrant (Harnack, 1961). While Harnack’s case is overstated and lacking in both an understanding of early Judaism and Christianity, as we shall see below the legacy of Harnack still remains strong in many criticisms of divine impassibility. Often, contemporary critics of divine impassibility seem to work with tacit assumptions of Harnackian thought and uncritically suppose something of this ‘Hellenisation’ thesis. The facts on the ground, of course, are far less clear. We have seen above the differing views on Greek philosophy of two prominent theologians, Tertullian and Origen. Because Christianity quickly became a Greek affair insofar as some of its most influential early apologists were Greek and classically educated and also as Judaism had long been in contact with the Greek world, we may here want to frame the context of this ‘initial contact’ between Greek philosophy and revealed monotheism quite early. Far earlier, in fact, than its more obvious expressions in the heavily Aristotelianised and Neoplatonic philosophy and theology of mediaeval classical theism.

It is here that we ought to focus on the contributions and influence of Philo, the great Alexandrian Jewish philosopher and exegete (30BCE-50CE). His work largely inaugurates this enduring project of *reconciling* the wealth of Hellenistic philosophical truths (such as notions of divine perfection and *apatheia*) with the revealed truths of, in the case of Philo, the Torah.

This Philonian project of incorporation and reconciliation (or synthesis) will very much set the tone for the tradition of classical theism that follows, in its views of divine perfection, the proper attributes of God, and how these may be understood or informed by scriptural revelation, according to certain hermeneutical methods. The influence of Philo is difficult to overstate, despite his work being for the most part ignored by the developing Rabbinic and Talmudic traditions of his time. This failure to include Philo in the Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition is no mere oversight, but rather was the result of significant differences over how God ought to be understood. The irony may be that while Philo's work was largely ignored by his co-religionists in the growing Rabbinic tradition of his time and outside the rarified philosophical schools of Alexandria, his contributions were eagerly adopted by early Christian philosophers and thereby eventually transmitted into the classical theistic tradition. Philo's work will then come to have a significant place in both the metaphysics and hermeneutics of classical Jewish, Christian, and Islamic theology and philosophy.

The contributions of the Alexandrian represent a critical point of connection between Hellenistic philosophy and the theology of revealed monotheism and offer a vantage as to how this legacy will go on to inform the relationship between scriptural revelation and theological metaphysics in the classical theism. His work represents some of the first attempts on the part of revealed monotheism to engage with the Hellenistic legacy and so in this way Philo stands as a bridge between these two traditions of thought on the divine. Harry Wolfson has understood Philo as the 'first religious philosopher' who attempts to reconcile this God of the Torah with divine abstraction of Greek philosophy (Wolfson, 1948, quoted in Sztuden, 2018). It is fitting then to include some of his thoughts here as a connection between the general philosophical

account of divine *apatheia* provided above, with its origins in Greek thought, and the more specific treatment of this attribute and an ontology from which it comes in classical expressions of the theology and philosophy of revealed monotheism offered in the following chapter. Much of the philosophical speculation of Philo as it bears on the ineffability of the divine, God's simplicity and incorporeality, and a concern as to what can be said of the divine attributes presages in astonishing ways what can later be found with figures such as Maimonides, Averroes, and Aquinas, but even in the early schools of *kalam* in the Islamic caliphates.

We may be able to discern something of Philo's influence through the examination the various possible meanings of impassibility examined above, in that each seems to bear in some way on the manner in which classical theism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam will adopt Hellenistic categories or concept and modes of reasoning and employ them in the service of theology. The tradition of classical theism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam will come to conceive of God, very much like Philo, as a supreme and perfect existence. We must also note Philo's influence in the employment allegorical methods of reading the scriptures. He does this so as to avoid the predication of any real *pathos* in the divine, avoiding the 'idolatry' of anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms, and to provide a better philosophical account of the relationship between God and the world. Though as his critics will note, Philo's account of divine/creaturely interaction seems more beholden to Aristotle than to scriptures of Judaism. This specific influence must be kept in mind as we explore the way impassibility is said to 'fit' with the conception of God as a necessarily perfect existence *and* in the way this determinative conception may require us to minimise anthropomorphic and anthropopathic portrayals of God in the scriptures. The manifold works of Philo demonstrate both a deep interest in the nature of

God and the divine attributes and evince a thorough background in Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic thought. He was an astute exegete of Torah and sought to avoid there being any conflict between that which was accessible via reason to the philosophers and that which had been made known by revelation in the Torah, though this comes at notable cost.

Philo's theology could be called 'complementarian' for this reason. From both the Greek philosophical tradition and his allegorical readings of Torah, Philo emphasises the utter transcendence, ineffability, and self-existence (*aseity* and *autarkeia*) of God (Niehoff, 2018, pp. 209-224). Philo argues, very much like his pagan Greek predecessors, that God is simple and without composition, '[having] no wants ... being in [himself] all-sufficient to [himself]' (Wolfson, 1948, p. 203). Furthermore, Philo admits that this simplicity is necessary in that God cannot be composite as are contingent things and bodies (Sztuden, 2018). The influence of Plato and Aristotle is clear throughout the works of Philo and this creates some problems for him, despite his attempts to minimise them and render Torah and the Greek philosophical tradition compatible. While any thorough treatment of impassibility does not appear in the works of Philo, the implications of it are present in the philosophical theology he does offer. As later critics of the traditional attributes of God will cite, Philo treats anthropomorphisms or any interactions of God with the cosmos or humanity as they are portrayed in the scriptures as descriptions that are, much like Maimonides argues later, mere pedagogy in 'the language of men' (Gavrilyuk, 2004, pp. 42-44; Niehoff, 2018, p. 211). The emphasis on transcendence and self-sufficiency that Philo places on the nature of God seems to imply impassibility (he argues strongly for the doctrine of immutability as a consequent of God's Platonic perfection). God is, for Philo and later theologians of both Christianity and Judaism, *ὁ ὢν*, the 'the one that (who)

is' or the 'the existent one' (LXX; Neihoff, 2018, p. 213; Runia, 2009, p. 137).<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, between Plato and Philo this title takes either the masculine definite article or the neuter definite article in various places.

Philo's trouble in squaring the philosophical God availed to him by reason with the God revealed in Torah anticipates much of the later controversy central to this study. God is it seems, if described rightly by Philo, not at all like the *pathic* and emotional deity of the scriptures, or to that conception of God to which the *tannaim* and *amoraim* will hold so fastly, and so the Torah must then must be understood almost violently allegorically throughout, in that these descriptions of God track no real expressions of the divine nature.<sup>19</sup> Stephen Katz notes, 'The scriptural passages describing God in anthropomorphic and anthropathic terms, must, therefore, be understood as serving a merely pedagogical purpose aimed the spiritual education of men. Since God's essence is unknowable, all the predicates of God in Scripture describe Him only by what is known of Him through proofs of his existence and refer only to causal relation of God with the world.' (1977, p. 48). Despite Philo's efforts for a 'complementarian' approach towards Greek philosophy and his own Jewish piety, there are obvious worries in his work. His early expositions on the nature of God lead him to conclude that God is, as an 'entity,' completely 'other,' only to be spoken of in negative terms. In his insistence on avoiding any cataphatic predication of God and thus risking conceiving the divine in material and anthropomorphised ways, Philo states that 'God is beyond all quality' and even 'lacks any

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<sup>18</sup> Throughout the Septuagint (LXX), the Tetragrammaton is translated as *ὁ ὢν*.

<sup>19</sup> The *tannaim* and *amoraim* are those rabbis whose teachings and discussions comprise the Talmud. The *tannaim* (10-200CE) record much of the Oral Torah as contained in the Mishnah. The *Amoraim* (200-500CE) provided various interpretations which make up the Gemara. Together, their works are contained in the Talmud and represent the development of the Rabbinic tradition of Judaism and a significant and formative period of Jewish thought between Philo (1<sup>st</sup> cent) and Saadiah Gaon (9<sup>th</sup> cent.) (Katz, 1977).

quality' (Niehoff, 2018, p. 213). He also consequently hesitates even to call God 'good' in that he realises the danger of this, as humans are 'unable to think outside themselves.' Here, with his avoidance of calling God 'good' or identifying the divine with the good, Philo's emphasis on divine transcendence surpasses that of Plato, on whose work he heavily relies.

Philo's understanding of divine transcendence, as 'complete otherness,' is significant for the Judaism of his time (at least outside of Alexandria) and marks an important difference from the way the rabbis of the Jewish tradition speak of God. In this way, as we shall see, it stands in notable contrast to the developing Talmudic and Rabbinic tradition of his time. Still, that is not to say that Philo was alone among his fellow Alexandrian Jews in having such a view; it is merely to say that it is a very progressive and sophisticated reading of Torah informed heavily by classical thought. It also perhaps worth noting that Philo's knowledge of Hebrew was not strong and so he worked almost primarily with the LXX, rather than any Hebrew or Aramaic manuscripts of the Tanakhic literature. And, as we shall see, the Alexandrian translators of the LXX took much care in minimising *pathic* language of God. So while Judaism was already marked out for its strong monotheism and avoidance of even intellectual idolatry, Philo's embracing of negative theology and perhaps an understanding of impassibility as transcendence are still noteworthy (Niehoff, 2018, pp. 214-215). Of course, these developments also open his work up to the criticism of 'Hellenisation' and not without warrant, as he depends heavily on Platonic cosmology in his mistrust of the material and the dualism that accompanies his theology. Any portrayals of God as possessing human-like qualities are, for Philo, merely pedagogical, a mark of the condescension of God so that humanity might have some glimpse of the divine and must not be taken literally. Far earlier even than the criticism Harnack will

offer, Philo was criticised for various ‘violations’ of the revealed truths of Judaism: a denial of creation *ex nihilo*, his heavy use of *allegoresis*, and a denial that God ‘responds’ to the repentance of humanity or Israel.

There are, I think it can be seen, some possible problems with his project of synthesis and its ‘complementarian’ nature. Unlike Plato, in which we perhaps see shadows of the Real cast on the wall of the cave, divine transcendence for Philo does not even allow for the shadows to be indicative of anything veridical about the nature of God. For if they were, some human epistemic claim could be made of God, however poor, and this would violate divine impassibility—God’s utter transcendence. Philo’s overarching concerns seems to be to provide a philosophically cogent conception of the divine and through doing this, protect readers of the Torah from those most grievous sins of Judaism, idolatry and blasphemy, by insisting upon impassibility as transcendence, going even so far as to avoid speaking of God at all as the divine might be in essence. Charitably, however, concerns over Philo’s hermeneutics may be seen as in keeping with a very Jewish goal: defending monotheism and the unity of the divine.

Philo seems aware of these some of these issues, however, especially in this ‘distance’ he has placed God from creation. Under his theology of the divine *in se*, no genuine interaction with creation is possible, due to the essentially transcendent nature of God. He thus introduces his ‘logos’ theology as a potential solution to both the exegetical and philosophical problems entailed by transcendence and impassibility. While the concept of the ‘logos’ as an ordering, yet impersonal force within the cosmos was used by the Stoic schools, Philo is the first to introduce (and modify) it in revealed monotheism. The role of the ‘logos’ would, of course, become central to Christian theology very quickly after if not contemporaneously (or perhaps



both Philo and early Christianity draw from a common source). Philo's 'logos' plays an intermediating role between God and the cosmos, providing a means by which God can create, sustain the cosmos, and 'reveal [himself].' While he draws heavily from the Platonic tradition on the transcendence and impassibility of God, Philo adopts and adapts this Stoic concept of the 'Logos' to serve in something like a Platonic demiurgic capacity for his philosophical theology in Judaism (Niehoff, 2018, pp. 217-224).

I think it has been thus far sufficiently demonstrated the ways in which Philo of Alexandria incorporated various aspect of the Greek thought (before and contemporaneous to him) in order to provide what is likely the first venture of philosophy into speculations on the divine in revealed monotheism. Philo's intellectual legacy indeed casts a long shadow and we would do well to keep Philo in mind as we examine understandings of divine ontology and the divine attributes in classical theism below, as his influence there is, I think, quite clear. There is, it seems, much in Philo's treatment of the ontology of God and in his hermeneutical methods through *allegoresis*, that may afford us some understanding of later predications of divine *apatheia* and a strong tradition of minimising various anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms in the scriptures so as to maintain a more philosophically coherent understanding of God as ontologically other, transcendent, and, perhaps, most important for the development of classical expressions of revealed monotheism, one and simple.

#### **1.4 A Preliminary Defence of Divine Impassibility**

Above, we have seen both some theoretical understandings of divine *apatheia* as well as its origins in Hellenistic thought and incorporation into revealed monotheism through the works of Philo of Alexandria. Philo, I have argued, plays a critical role in this initial contact

between that Greek philosophical tradition and revealed monotheism, setting a course for the development of classical theism. In the subsequent chapter, I explore specific sources within the tradition of classical theism insofar as they may afford us greater understanding of this doctrine and a shared ontology constitutive of this tradition. Here, however, I would like to provide something of a preliminary defence for some possible motivations for affirmations of divine impassibility in the ontology of God in classical expressions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In doing so, I think we may be better able to see why and how divine impassibility has had such an important place in the divine ontology of this classical tradition as a safeguard of divinity and as entailed by various other metaphysical commitments comprising this common ontology of the divine.

Any cursory exploration of the tradition of classical theism or of traditional revealed monotheism more generally—in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—would show that each of these representative faiths has, for the most part, held to the attribute of divine impassibility. Despite the recent interest in passibilist thought in Christianity and Judaism, classical or ‘orthodox’ expressions of a divine ontology in these faiths include some endorsement of divine *apatheia*. Classical Islam, in its emphasis on the unity, simplicity, and absolute ‘otherness’ of God, can be seen also to assume impassibility as a necessary attribute of the divine. Within Christianity, we find that Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and those confessions of Protestantism which represent the magisterial tradition of the Reformation each takes impassibility to be part of a right conception of God and have held dogmatically to it.<sup>20</sup> Still, it

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<sup>20</sup> Here I mean not simply those historic confessions subject to civil authority in Europe, but rather the classical expression of continental Protestantism such as Lutheranism, Calvinism, Zwinglian thought, and the Anglican tradition.

must be noted that the relationship of Jewish theology with the doctrine of divine impassibility is less clear, not simply because of a great diversity of thought in Judaism, but perhaps more so because of the prominent role the Rabbinic and Talmudic tradition has in that faith. Rabbinic Judaism, as I show below in some exploration of ‘passibilism’ in this tradition, is not always thoroughly at ease or neatly compatible with the philosophical traditions of a classical and rationalist Judaism, perhaps as seen most explicitly in the work of Maimonides. Still, this classical Jewish philosophical tradition, from Philo to Maimonides, may certainly be taken to endorse the impassibility of God. Still, as we shall see below, the Rabbinic and Talmudic tradition is less concerned with providing a rationalist metaphysics of God and so tends to be more at ease with anthropomorphic, anthropopathic, personal and reactive portrayals of God in the Tanakh—showing less discomfort with God as *pathic*.

In the main however, we may still understand each of the faiths as taking impassibility to be, most basically, a necessary safeguard of the divine, as *inter alia* preserving the transcendence of the divine and the moral stasis of the divine will and providence. We have also seen above the beginning of the way certain theologian and philosophers of these faiths would draw upon classical Greek philosophical sources in their articulations of divine impassibility and in the development of a robust ontology of God—thus giving some ‘academic’ warrant and surety to the truth revealed in the respective scriptures of these faiths. In the following chapter, I provide a more thorough exploration of divine impassibilist as found in these various *loci classici* of the philosophical tradition of revealed monotheism, particularly in those authors representative of this tradition of classical theism. As I have mentioned above, very little in the way of *direct* treatments of divine impassibility are found in the classical Jewish

and Muslim philosophical sources. Rather, we must distil what we can from more general discussions of the divine ontology and the attributes of God. Through this, I think we may rightly be able to see that the divine ontology as articulated in the authors examined here would entail a commitment to divine impassibility.

The basic intuition toward supporting divine impassibility can be seen to be motivated by a central tenet of revealed monotheism: that God is the creator and sustainer of the cosmos, altogether transcendent, a provider of being and uniquely *a se*. God is, to use Tillichian language, ‘the ground of being’ upon which all other things in the cosmos depend (1967). All other entities owe their existence to God, and it is through the will of God that they ‘live, move, and have [their] being’ (Acts 17:28) God then, as this most supreme existence and ontological ground of being, is the cause of all other entities but depends on none. God is *ens a se* and *ipsum esse*. It would seem then that, given this central concept of God as creator and sustainer and from the more philosophical understanding of the divine provided above, that this may imply a certain one-directionality: God effects (efficient cause) and affects things, but the inverse is not clearly the case. As we examined some above, to conceive of God as subject to states of affairs in the world would render the divine, at least in some sense, less than *perfect*; there would be situations logically possible in which God could be affected contrary to will, thus making the divine more like creation than the creator who stands over and above all. Essential to this line of thought is the tenet of faith found, perhaps most obviously in classical philosophical expressions, in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that God is, and by definition must be, of a different ontological character than the cosmos. Unlike the craftsman or *demiurge* of Greek philosophy who orders the cosmos out of pre-existent matter, the God of revealed monotheism

is in no way ontologically related to the cosmos—creation is *ex nihilo* (or at least contingent even if eternal) and this transcendence over, above, and beyond the created world is part of what makes the God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam unique. Furthermore, this desire to maintain divine transcendence is, it seems, motivated by the need to retain a conception of a God who is in control or *autarkic*. Because of this, it is argued, the divine is infinitely reliable, trustworthy in a manner that creatures could never be, and not subject to change or any *pathos*.

Related to this notion of the trustworthiness of God, divine *apatheia* serves to demarcate the unique nature of God within this monotheistic tradition. Though language supporting the doctrine of divine impassibility (and immutability) may be exegeted from the scriptures of these traditions (it is far from clearly stated), philosophers of these faiths sought through their insistence upon upholding this doctrine primarily to distinguish the God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from that of rival (pagan) deities. That is to say, in emphasising the impassibility of God, these philosophers and theologians sought to distance their god from the world of gods which inhabited late antiquity and to make clear that one of the distinguishing features of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic god was a divine ‘distance’ from creation. This may seem a poor or odd formulation, but this ‘distance’ as provided by impassibility gives assurance that *because of this distance or transcendence*, God is not, in any involvement with the cosmos, motivated by selfish or malignant reasons; God is unmoved by any temptation towards self-serving or wicked purposes. The upshot then of the doctrine of divine impassibility is that God is not subject to the *passiones* or *perturbationes* which might wrongly influence divine interaction with creation. God then is motivated only by the divine nature and not from things without (at least not counter to the divine will). This provides then an immunity to temptation,

corruption, etc., which we do not enjoy. This distancing of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic god from the ‘passions’ all too common among the Greco-Roman deities should not be seen as a complete evacuation of all capacity of God to experience emotions, but rather the kind of impassibility endorsed by these faiths ‘makes room’ for affections *befitting* of God: selfless love, mercy, justice, etc. It needs also to be noted that in addition to distancing the personal God of monotheism from the very personal yet capricious gods of Olympus, this insistence upon impassibility also serves as a distinguishing feature against more philosophically respectable forms of Greek theism. If we take Stoicism as an example, we can certainly find significant portions of Stoic philosophy devoted to the impassibility of God, yet there is also the Stoic concept of God being *pneuma*—spirit, and thus ‘permeating’ the cosmos in a panentheistic model (Hallman, 1939). Both Origen and the middle Platonist Plutarch thought of the Stoics as predicating of God an unacceptable ‘mutability’ (Hallman, 1991).

This supports then the view that the concern on the part of classical theism to maintain the impassibility of God was to prevent any notion of mutability that would call into question God’s purpose, trustworthiness, moral stasis, and praiseworthiness. While the teachings of Plato and Aristotle (particularly the latter as he is first to speak of impassibility specifically as an attribute of God) provide a philosophical warrant and set of arguments for ethical monotheists, these are employed only as a supplement to what interpreters in these traditions have thought true of God as revealed in their respective scriptures. A final yet important note for the classical understanding and defences of divine impassibility: in all the talk of transcendence and ‘otherness’ there is a soteriological concern in play. That concern is, be it right or wrong, that only a divine being who is outside of the cosmos which is bound up in death, sin, and corruption

is truly capable of saving the cosmos. Anyone or anything within the created world is already very much part of the problem that needs solving; it is, then, only an entity removed from such affairs that has the ability and unmixed love for creation sufficient enough to effectively save the very cosmos it created. In this I think we may be able to see some very general motivations for divine impassibility and some ways we might further explicate its meaning. Moreover, we can see, I think, its origins in Greek thought and why a Hellenised Judaism and Christianity, at least, would seek to incorporate it as a necessary part of an ontology of the divine. With these motivations or reasonable justifications in mind, let us now look to these specific sources in classical theism so as better to see insofar as is possible both the employment of the doctrine and how it and various understanding of it fit within a classical monotheist divine ontology, informed by these concepts, categories, and grammar of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought.

## **1.5 Divine Impassibility and Some Initial Concerns**

Thus far I have provided an outline of divine impassibility, ways in which impassibility may admit of different valences or *aspects*, its origins in the speculative thought on the divine in Greek philosophy, and a defence of why impassibility might be thought of as a warranted attribute of the divine in classical expressions of revealed monotheism. We have also seen some account of that nexus between the pagan philosophical tradition and the revealed faith of Abrahamic monotheism through the works of Philo of Alexandria. In concluding this chapter, I would like to very briefly suggest some potentials worries regarding divine impassibility that may be present even here at the outset, despite the preliminary defence offered above. For, as we have seen, these early contributions of Philo were met with concern or disregard by his contemporary co-religionists outside of the Hellenised Judaism of Alexandria. This is

especially the case for those rabbis who will represent the tradition of the Mishnah and Gemara and come to define a kind of normative and ‘orthodox’ Rabbinic Judaism which developed mostly independent of the influence of Greek philosophy. We might consider some of those concerns here very briefly and how they may translate into ‘passibilist’ considerations now.

In this understanding of the divine introduced by Philo, we find an ontology of God substantially informed by certain understandings of perfection found in Hellenistic thought. In these contributions and in much of later classical theism as well, we are afforded a sophisticated and elegant conception of God as a perfect, timelessly eternal, and unchangeable being. If we imagine this project of Philo and his attempt to reconcile at least *some* of a Greek philosophical ontology of the divine with that of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the concerns of the *tannaim* and *amoraim* may become clearer. It is not at all obvious for the Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition, at least, that such categories and grammar of Greek philosophy as incorporated by Philo, can rightly capture any portrait of the God of Israel. While Philo’s divine ontology provides a conception of God as transcendent, immutable and lacking nothing in an eternal existence, we may think that this must come at some cost, especially when compared with that reactive, personal, relational, and *pathic* presentation of God found in the Tanakh (and later in the New Testament literature and the Qur’an, related as they are to the Torah). As we have seen some above and I will examine more thoroughly below, we may take impassibility to be entailed by these commitments Philo has as to the nature of God. It then becomes a worry how this immutable and impassible deity can be rightly said to be that God of Abraham found in the scriptures, in that unique character of the divine as intimately affected by the joys and sorrows of creation. Philo will, of course, have to rely heavily on allegorical and figurative methods of



reading the Tanakh in order to minimise the manifold anthropopathisms and anthropopsychisms described of God. While there must be certain limits on how we read these anthropomorphic and anthropopathic descriptions of the divine, Philo may go too far the other direction. While his insistence of the transcendence and unknowability of God does indeed prevent against any idolatrous imaginations or conceived of God ‘as a man,’ it may in fact deprive us of being able to speak meaningfully of this revealed deity and thereby take away what is unique in this God of Israel—a deity who is living, present intimately with creation, making covenants with his people, and rejoicing and sorrowing with them.

This is not, I would caution, suggested to endorse any *absolute* irreconcilability between philosophical theology, in its Hellenistic or classical theistic forms, and the ‘scriptural’ theology of, in this Philonian undertaking, the God of the Torah. To even present it as such already begs the question in a way. It is merely presented as a way of perhaps charitably understanding some of the initial concerns over Philo’s project of a synthesis of Greek thought with that God of Sinai who, very personally ‘will be who [he] will be.’ It is, in fact, not difficult to imagine that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is portrayed in way that almost *intentionally* resists such categories and philosophical speculation. As I have spoken to above, there is this scriptural portrayal of the divine that is very much reactive, personal, involved in the affairs of humanity and, in many ways, *pathic*. Unlike Philo and many of those who will follow him in the tradition of classical theism, the Rabbinic tradition which deliberately spurned much of what Philo offered sought to maintain a kind of felicitous paradox in being unable or unwilling to give a cogent philosophical account of God, maintaining a remarkable and admirable tension and interplay between God as the transcendent and unsurpassable *melekh ha-olam* and God as

immanent, *pathic*, often thwarted in designs, and given over to a *chesed* for humanity through the divine *shekinah*. And it may be just this tension or a failure to attend to the mystery of such a tension that gives rise to some concerns over divine impassibility and immutability and to a divine ontology that would necessarily entail such attributes.

Even still this should not lead us to discount entirely Philo's project of a Greco-Hebraic synthesis, much less to disregard the value it will have in classical theistic articulations. There are, as I have argued above, many quite useful concepts and modes of reasoning found in the Hellenistic tradition that may be carefully employed so as to better articulate an ontology of God in revealed monotheism. The various ways *apatheia* may be understood can indeed afford us quite precise and needful ways of expressing an ultimate divine transcendence, moral stasis, a surety of will, etc. We ought to be tempted here to think as Origen and imagine that the monotheists, possessed of the fullness of truth through revelation, should then with boldness take anything that is true and claim it as their own in order to give a 'ready defence of the faith.' Still, as the Rabbinic tradition illustrates so well and as we shall see further below, tensions may yet remain as to the manner in which one can incorporate these various categories, concepts and the grammar of Athens and Alexandria into the monotheistic tradition in such a way that we may better understand the divine and yet not rend or distort the scriptural portrayals of an often *pathic* and reactive deity. While we may well wish to predicate impassibility of God in nature and as a safeguard of divine transcendence, we may yet have concerns regarding *apatheia* as it may relate to immutability or to an unchangeableness in God such that expressions of a reactivity and personality may be hindered.

## Chapter 2. Divine Impassibility in Classical Theism

Above, I have discussed some of the role of Philo of Alexandria in laying the foundation for the development of classical theism through these initial engagements of Hellenistic Judaism with the Greek philosophical tradition. Here I wish to detail further the development of this tradition. I set forth this chapter with several goals in mind. Here I wish to explore what understandings, motivations and defences of divine *apatheia* may be present in the *loci classici* of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Through this, I wish to show that we may discern not only a common affirmation of impassibility in this tradition but also that this affirmation is found in a ‘shared ontology’ constituted by common metaphysical commitments. At a very basic level, I think it may be seen that each of these faiths, in their classical expressions, will deny that God is capable of being affected by anything from without. Thus, this is offered as an attempt to attend not merely to the ‘discrete’ attribute of impassibility or *apatheia*, but also to a broader understanding of *who God is* in this tradition, through some analysis of its incorporation of much of the Hellenistic philosophical tradition. I have provided above both some of this Hellenistic intellectual foundation that will come to be employed in much of classical theism, as well as an account of this first contact between pagan philosophical theology and the Abrahamic monotheistic tradition, through the works of Philo of Alexandria, that first philosopher to engage with revealed monotheism. Also, it may also be useful here to attend to the hermeneutical methods employed in both developing this ontology and in relating it (and the divine attributes constitutive of it) to the scriptures of the Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Naturally, any predications of divine *apatheia* (however that may be taken in various contexts)

have to be understood in light of this scriptural witness and so interpretative methods matter, as we see a continuance of something like this Philonian project of reconciling the revealed truths of these faiths with the reasoned truths of Greek philosophical theology.

In a way, this broad approach—that of examining *apatheia* within its context of a more general divine ontology and relationship to the scriptures—is helpful. While it may be tempting (were it even possible) in a study such as this simply to locate each and every mention of ‘impassibility’ or ‘*apatheia*’ in the *loci classici* of this tradition, this would not necessarily afford us any of the nuance, context, and access to valences of meaning I have set out herein to explore. Neither would it allow any possibility of both demonstrating some of what I perceive to be misunderstandings of this attribute on the part of some recent passibilist critics or in explicating ways in which we may predicate impassibility in one way and perhaps not another. Furthermore, however, this broader approach is driven by the sources available in this tradition of classical theism. While these *loci classici* of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam often provide accounts of a divine ontology of God, what can or cannot be said of the divine attributes, and to ways in which God may be said to relate to or interact with creation, it is not always the case that we may locate direct treatments of impassibility *per se* in these sources. Christianity, exceptionally, gives most specific address to this divine attribute for historical and theological reasons examined below. In the case of Judaism and Islam, however, matters are less clear. We are then left to discern what we can of how *apatheia* can be reasonably inferred from other metaphysical commitments as part of a divine ontology or how understandings of other divine attributes would entail impassibility. Thus, in many ways, this makes the attempt to understand impassibility *across* the tradition of revealed monotheism more difficult, but most certainly not

impossible and not without benefit. If there is, as I argue, something of a shared ontology of God that is largely constitutive of the tradition of classical theism, then understandings of impassibility are likely to follow similar lines of reasoning given other commitments. Here it is sufficient to offer the caveat that while in what follows we often have very clear treatments of the doctrine in Christianity, sources in classical Judaism and Islam require a bit more for an adequate analysis.

Furthermore, I would like to offer a few comments about the authors and sources selected here. Each is, I think, representative of what may rightly call the tradition of classical theism and the understanding of God such a tradition can be said to include or be defined by. Or, at least, each plays a seminal role in the development of that tradition. For the purpose of examining divine *apatheia* and its various understandings, it is warranted here to examine these sources within this tradition given that each is, for the most part, philosophical in nature and beholden to much of what we have seen above—the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic traditions—in which both the notion of divine perfection and concepts of impassibility and immutability may be found to have their origins. Still for the sake of brevity and to provide a coherent analysis of this attribute and its employment, choices must be made. The sources examined below are included for their prominence in the development or expression of this tradition and insofar as they may provide substantial material for an analysis of divine *apatheia*. Furthermore, some selected authors such as Gersonides and Ibn Daud are included not only because they meet these criteria but also because each offers interesting insights as to some ways of understanding other features of the divine that are employed in the proposal I offer below in this work. Still, an attempt is made to give full voice to each tradition within Abrahamic monotheism in its

classical expressions. Additionally, it must be noted that many strictly ‘theological’ sources are not here included. This is in large part because they concern themselves with expressions of the faiths, but not in an overtly philosophical manner, or in that they are driven more by apologetic concerns, matters of *sharia* or jurisprudence/law, or with *halakhic*/purity matters, and so, while important for the broader tradition of these faiths, do not offer the kind of philosophical theology necessary for an inquiry of this type. These various aims and caveats provided here should be sufficient for the task worked out below.

The examination of sources provided below are arranged by religious affiliation and traditions are arranged in a chronological order of the antiquity of their faith, with Judaism first, followed by Christianity and Islam. This is imperfect as there is often considerable overlap and mutual influence, yet some overarching *taxis* is necessary. I try to show these important interconnections across traditions as they give us a better picture of the development of this classical theism and to the prevalence of a shared ontology of God, which often includes either explicitly or implicitly commitments to divine *apatheia*. Amongst the authors whose contributions are analysed below are Philo, Saadiah Gaon, Ibn Gabirol (Avicebron), Ibn Daud, Maimonides and Gersonides in the Jewish tradition; within Christianity, I examine the contribution of patristic sources East and West, Melito, Justin Martyr, Origen, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine, and then explore the Scholastic tradition from Boethius through Thomas Aquinas. In Islam, attention is given to the Asharite and Mutazilite schools of *kalam*, Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi, and finally the works of Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Rushd (Averroes).

## 2.1 Classical Judaism and Divine Impassibility

In this section, I examine the contributions of classical Jewish philosophical theology to questions of divine impassibility, a developing classical theistic ontology of God, and to ways in which the divine and the divine attributes can and cannot be spoken of. I also further examine some of the role *allegoresis* will play in dealing with certain *pathic* presentations of God in the Tanakh. While we have seen above some of the work of Philo of Alexandria, I provide a further examination of his before moving to a somewhat interim period in Jewish philosophy before Maimonides (1135-1204CE). There is the temptation here to include Paul of Tarsus alongside Philo, as a Hellenised and classical educated theologian with clear commitments to 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Judaism and no mean philosopher, but in the order of things ‘the Apostle’ may be better included within the early Christian tradition and so is discussed in the subsequent section. I wish to situate these works as part of a development of ‘classical theism’ in the Jewish tradition—largely through the inclusion of the great Arabophone philosophers of the mediaeval era. Yet, there is a great diversity in Jewish thought, even in this period, especially as one finds occasional conflict between Rabbinic/Talmudic traditions and the more rationalist and Hellenistic traditions of the philosophers. This is by no means always a clear distinction. After all, Maimonides is ‘the Rabbi’ and yet the preeminent philosopher of his age and tradition. Yet we often find that the Rabbinic and Talmudic literature works are more ‘pastoral’ and oriented toward halakhic concerns rather than speculative and rationalist endeavours.

A final note as to the historical situation of the development of this classical theist and rationalist tradition in Judaism: notwithstanding the significant contributions of Philo and the heady philosophical environment of Alexandrian Judaism, there was a significant lacuna in the

philosophical tradition of Judaism from Philo in the 1<sup>st</sup> century until, arguably, Saadiah Gaon in the 9<sup>th</sup>. After the fall of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple and throughout the diaspora, the tradition of Philo and a Hellenised Judaism largely gave way to the development of Rabbinic tradition which was little beholden to the classical tradition of Greek thought. On this period of the *tannaim* and the *amoraim* from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, T.M. Rudavsky notes, ‘In all these works [the Rabbinic writings and the Talmud], we see little if any evidence that the rabbis had any intellectual contact with Greek philosophy [...] the rabbis do not develop a coherent philosophical theory or system as we find in the Greek philosophical tradition.’ (2018, p. 21) He further cites David Novak pointing out that the Talmud, like the scriptures, ‘does not even lend itself to ever becoming the object of philosophical meditation.’ (Novak, 1997, p. 64, quoted in Rudavsky, 2018) It is only eventually with Saadiah Gaon, largely born out of contact with Muslim *kalam*, that we find a reintroduction of Hellenistic thought into the philosophical theology of Judaism and this renaissance of Greek thought, revived from Philo, will come to have tremendous influence on any expression of classical theism in Jewish thought. The Gaon is the first (after Philo) to attempt anything like an incorporation of Aristotelian philosophy in a philosophical articulation of Jewish dogma. In Saadiah Gaon, we see the first (post-Philonian) expressions of some features of classical theism: divine simplicity, apophatic theology, and the idea of an absolutely supreme and perfect deity. Following Gaon (and Philo), this tradition will flourish in the works of Avicbron, Ibn Daud, Maimonides, and Gersonides.

### *Philo of Alexandria*

We have seen above the groundwork laid by Philo in his metaphorical, allegorical, and anti-anthropomorphic/pathic readings of the Tanakh. This philosophical milieu of Hellenistic



Judaism will come to be profoundly influential on early Christian readings of Torah and, as we shall see, on later mediaeval Jewish theology and philosophy. The Septuagint (LXX), which stood as the definitive Greek translation of the Tanakh for Hellenistic Judaism already, in its translators' decisions, shows a tendency to minimise anthropomorphisms. Paul Gavriluk argues that against the background of the Septuagint's translation and wide acceptance within Greco-Hebraic audiences at least at the time, Philo is well within an accepted tradition of Alexandrene or Hellenised Judaism—one both committed to the fidelity of scripture *and* to a philosophical soundness on matters of theology. His work is not, Gavriluk argues, evidence for some Harnackian hijacking of a pure Semitic theology by classical Greek influences, but rather a natural inclination towards a systematic and philosophical articulation of the faith (Gavriluk, 2004). Let us further examine the work of Philo as it may bear on an understanding divine *apatheia* and the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic passages in the Hebrew canon which may cause some preliminary doubt as to the *theological* soundness of this concept of the divine.

Philo rejects any literal understanding of the 'repentance' of God that 'he had made man' and likewise other passages which seem to attribute some *pathos* to God. Philo acknowledges, as we have seen, that while this language is present in the Hebrew scriptures, it is minimised in the LXX, wherein 'repented' is translated as 'considered' and 'thought upon'—though rendering the verb thus may still present a problem for impassibility as it related to divine mental states and omniscience, it nevertheless sanitised a quite *pathic* description of the divine (Niehoff, 2018, p. 211, Gavriluk, 2004, p. 44). Philo finds this to be a reading of the scriptures in keeping with right reason in that it does not portray God as deficient or as failing

in knowledge—that is, ‘God is not as a man’ but rather preserves divine power and transcendence (Numbers 23:19). Any notion of a literal repentance—*metanoia*—would necessarily involve a change of mind in God, with the divine changing from accepting creation to rejecting it regretfully. Philo sees this as out of keeping with the supreme power and *perfection* of God, in that it would contradict omniscience and make God ignorant both of the future actions of humanity and of God’s own response to those actions. The revelation as contained in Torah that God ‘repented’ is, Philo contends, a necessary anthropomorphism for those of little learning, but no *real* description of the divine. It is, at best, some poor analogue to human mental states. In addition to Philo’s rejection of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language save for its necessity in teaching the unlearned, he is emphatic that ‘negative qualifications’ be made for any understanding of divine attributes and actions described in the Hebrew canon (whether in Hebrew texts, of which he knew little, or the LXX). This affirmation of ‘negative’ descriptions lays the groundwork for a more thoroughgoing apophaticism that we see both in Christian theology and in later mediaeval Jewish and Islamic thought as well. This apophatic tradition laid down by Philo of Alexandria not only ‘safeguards’ the divine from creaturely ‘misunderstanding’ but also furthers this *via negativa* in attempts to describe the nature of God.

A primary source for impassibility, at least as transcendence, in the works of Philo is found unsurprisingly in his *Allegorical Commentary* (*Leg. Alleg.* I-III, 1993; Gavrilyuk, 2004, pp. 42-46, Runia, 2009). As we have seen above, much of the motivation for this emphasis on divine ‘otherness’ and transcendence and thus impassibility was two-fold but related: first, to remove the divine, who (which) is perfection itself from the realm of the corruptible material

(the influence of Plato, Aristotle, and Neoplatonism is here obvious). For Philo, his Alexandrene Jewish contemporaries, and classical Greek philosophy, involvement in the material world *necessarily* entailed finitude and suffering (*passio*). For to be intertwined in any way with the cosmos was to invite vulnerability and moral risk into the divine: an impossibility given the concerns Philo has. Second, the emphasis on transcendence is also motivated by the relationship between the material and the moral. Unlike the other gods of the Near East, for Philo YHWH is *not* like unto some sort of anthropomorphic demigod given over unto those passions that are found in material involvement. Any language about the divine found in the Hebrew scriptures which seems similar to that of descriptions of the gods of Greece and Asia Minor are mere ‘poetic myths’ akin to what we might find in Gilgamesh or the Enuma Elish (Niehoff, 2018, pp. 211-213).

In speaking of nearly contemporaneous Christian motivations for this sort of ‘protective’ language, James Keating and Thomas White write that when this philosophical language of God is employed, it was done so ‘within a distinctly theological context precisely in order to contrast the biblical notion of God with the mythological characteristics of pagan deities’ (2009, p. 6). Philo makes much of the ‘name’ of God—YHWH, translated into the as *ὁ ὢν*, a present active masculine participle, ‘the being one,’ or ‘the one who is’ (1935, *De Ab.* XXIV, 121, p. 61-61; Osborn, 2005, p. 114). This corresponds well to the translation of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton’s YHWH as ‘I Am’ or ‘I Am the One Who Is.’ Philo’s point here anticipates later claims and arguments in classical theism that the divine is being itself, *ispum esse*, that upon which all other entities depend for their subsistence. Philo writes that ‘God alone has veritable being ...’ (Philo, 1981, p. 132). Remarkably and, again, anticipatory of subsequent

theology on divine transcendence and impassibility, Philo hesitates even to call the divine ‘good.’ This is, of course, part of his apophatic approach, taken up later, most strongly perhaps, by Maimonides, who claims that the divine is ‘beyond all quality,’ lest we risk idolatrous anthropomorphisms (Niehoff, 2018, p. 213). Philo is quick to point out that the divine ‘resembles nothing among creation, but rather transcends them completely’ and that the divine is likewise ‘above all potencies’ (2018, p. 214).

What may we then deduce from this as to the question of divine *apatheia* and Philo’s conception of God? First, it seems Philo’s theology implies some impassibility (and immutability) given his dependence on Aristotelian and Platonic conception of the divine. God, for Philo, lacks potencies and is, though he does not explicitly state this, *actus purus*. Second, being wholly other ontologically and beyond even the description of ‘good,’ God is impassible in the sense of transcendence mentioned above. Given that YHWH for Philo has nothing in common with creation and thereby no interaction with it, it seems to follow that the divine is, by definition, impassible in nature, as Philo will employ the ‘logos’ as an intermediary. One may be quick to criticise Philo here, along the lines of it being either too ‘Hellenised’ or unfaithful to the scriptures of his tradition, and yet we must keep in mind the legitimate concerns Philo has in his metaphysics of God. His fidelity to Judaism and the Torah is without doubt. Why then does he take such apparently drastic steps in his conception of the divine? His concern is, as I see it, to protect God from misunderstandings of Torah which could lead to idolatry. The dual emphases on transcendence and ‘otherness’ are means by which, I think, the attributes of perfection—those things worthy of the divine—can be ensured. By moving God, ontologically, away from the cosmos, this makes the divine literally impassible to any sort of idolatry of the

imagination and emphasises the role of God as creator and sustainer. Similarly, it ensures the trustworthiness and praiseworthiness of the divine by removing divine concerns from anything corporeal. James Keating and Thomas White summarise the motivation and argument thus:

The classical doctrines of the impassible God can be seen (not exclusively, but above all) as teachings that were meant to safeguard the divine transcendence and its inalienable prerogatives. God in himself is unaffected by creation: we depend upon him, and not the inverse. Because he is not conditioned by anything created that might alter his identity, consequently, he cannot be said to suffer' (2009, p. 2).

This seems to track precisely the concerns Philo has, as well as those of theologians of 'transcendence' and 'impassibility,' who will follow him, not only in the Jewish philosophical tradition but in Christianity and Islam as well.

#### *Saadiyah Gaon*

Saadiyah (Sadya/Sa'id) Gaon (882-942CE) is among the Arabophone Jewish philosophers so important to the development of mediaeval Jewish tradition of classical theism.<sup>21</sup> His work picks up where the contributions of Philo leave off, and the Gaon almost singlehandedly brought Judaism into a renewed contact with the Hellenistic philosophy (Dobbs-Weinstein, 2003, pp. 122-126). Writing within an Islamic intellectual milieu (in Judeo-Arabic) and working as he did in the Jewish communities in Egypt and Iraq, there are striking similarities, perhaps unsurprisingly, with the Mutazilite school of *kalam* discussed below (Katz, 1977, pp. 48-50). The Gaon stands, as will those who follow him in this tradition, as both a committed rationalist and astute exegete of Torah. He betrays a notable Platonism, especially in his understanding of the soul and its tripartite nature, and Aristotelianism but is otherwise

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<sup>21</sup> 'Gaon' is a title indicating the 'president' or 'master' of several Talmudic academies in Babylon (Iraq). Though a 'rabbi' and 'gaon' of a Talmudic school, Saadiyah marks a notable break with his predecessors in his embracing of Hellenistic philosophy.

unremarkable in regard to any strong Hellenistic influence in his historical context when viewed alongside the philosophical developments in the Islamic world (Pessin, 2008). The Gaon does not, in any direct manner, discuss impassibility *per se* nor devote any of his many treatises and Biblical commentaries to it. What we can infer as to his views and contributions on this developing classical theistic view of God in Judaism must be discerned from more general works on the divine nature. In a manner similar to the concept of *tawhid* in Islamic *kalam* and *falsafa*, for the Gaon the *Shema* is taken as a necessary starting point for any understanding of the divine. This provides an inviolable rubric for how God is to be understood, primarily as an entity of absolute unity. That the ‘Lord your God is one’ is not taken merely to be a statement of monotheism over and against an historical and Biblical tendency towards polytheism, but as a deeper metaphysical claim, one of unity and simplicity in the divine.

Like the Islamic commitment to *tawhid*, God’s ‘oneness’ as expressed in the *Shema* is determinative of what can be said of God and the divine attributes. What can we then gather from the works of the Gaon as to the matter of divine impassibility, in the manifold ways that attributes can be understood? His *Book of the Articles of Faith and Doctrines of Dogma* is a warranted starting point as it stands as both his most thorough expression of Jewish philosophy and theology and is likely the first work of anything like a systematic treatment of Jewish dogma (1948). Expressing a view that will become definitive of Jewish rationalism, he writes that ‘the Bible is not the sole basis for our religion, for in addition to it we have the fountain of reason.’ (1948, 3:10, p. 174). He concerns himself in this work with a proper metaphysical treatment of the concept of God and, *contra* popular Plotinian influences in contemporary Islamic sources, argues strongly for creation *ex nihilo* against any emanationists theories (1948, 1:1-4, pp. 38-

83; Pessin, 2008). In his explication of God as creator, in both *The Articles of Faith* and his *Commentary on the Book of Creation*, his emphases turn quickly to the unity and simplicity of the divine and, furthermore, to God's necessary incorporeality (Katz, 1977). Saadiah Gaon wishes to provide an account of the nature and attributes of God insofar as reason and piety will allow. He follows Philo in emphasising the utter transcendence or 'unlikeness' of God with anything in creation, yet realises that certain divine attributes may be understood from revelation or through their effects in creation. The Gaon takes God's role as creator to imply three essential attributes, none of which introduces any plurality in God nor adds anything to the essence of the divine (1948, 2:1-2, pp. 94-99). They are merely analytic, given what he understands 'creator' to imply (1948, 2:4, p. 102). Interestingly, the Gaon distinguishes these essential attributes of existence, omnipotence, and omniscience from what he calls 'active attributes' (*te'arim*). These active attributes express further divine causality in relationship to creation. For the Gaon, these active attributes are found throughout the scriptures and are expressions of mercy, grace, vengeance, and jealousy (Katz, 1977, p. 49). These only obtain relationally and so could be seen as accidental, possible only because of God's relationship with the cosmos (1948, 2:11-12, pp. 122-131). Given a divine unity and attempt to avoid introducing any plurality in the God, it may be that these 'active' attributes are, while understood as distinct in effect by creatures, a unified 'affection' toward the cosmos, the means by which the divine communicates with the world and, specifically, humanity.

While the influence of Saadiah Gaon is significant for the development of a rationalist and philosophically-informed Jewish tradition, the Gaon does not yet go so far in the philosophy of religion as will his heirs. He draws much from the Aristotelianised Mutazilite school of

Islamic *kalam* in his careful articulation of the divine attributes, distinguishing the essential attributes from causal and active relational attributes with creation. Similarly, he expresses an early apophatic tendency wishing to predicate of the divine only what is absolutely necessary. Likewise, he attends little to any anthropomorphic or anthropopathic descriptions of God in the Tanakh, treating these as the perception of ‘effect’ from the divine, but far from veridical in any univocal sense. Notably, his discussion of God’s omniscience shows a commitment to a divine timeless eternity, a common feature in the classical theistic tradition. In manner strikingly similar to the Boethian conception of ‘an illimitable life,’ in 2.13 of the *Articles of Faith*, the Gaon comments that God ‘knows past and future both ... on the same level’ in, as Katz comments, an ‘single, eternal, and immutable act of knowing’ (1948, p. 132; Katz, 1977, p. 61). Yet in a manner prescient of future debates over human freedom and divine omniscience, the Gaon insists there is no causal necessity in this knowledge (Rudavsky, 2018, pp. 114-115). Still, he argues that this knowledge is *not* derived from temporal facts but is ‘essential’ to God, thus complicating this worry, but most certainly denying any epistemic passibility in the divine. Very little in the way of direct reference to divine impassibility is provided in his works, thus demanding that we infer what we can from his other commitments. He is, like Philo and the Mutazilites, insistent on the absolute transcendence and simplicity of God in the divine unity as creator, limiting as much as he can any predication of positive attributes of God and these being only three he thinks analytic to what it is to be a ‘creator’ (1948, 2:4, p. 102; Katz, 1977, p. 49; Rudavsky, 2018, p. 78). While he does admit of what seem to be accidental attributes in God, in the ‘effect’ the scriptural language bears out, these seem to be from a unified disposition toward creation that is ‘one-directional.’ Unlike the *tannaim* and *amoraim* of the era between



the Gaon and Philo, nowhere do we find any evidence that the Gaon gives much credence to the *pathic* descriptions of God as tracking any real affectation in God (1948, 2:8,10). It might be best said that his treatment of divine/creaturely interaction, the anthropopathisms in scripture, and his affirmations of purely active causal role in sustaining the cosmos and possessing full knowledge of it is indicative of some commitment to impassibility insofar as divine transcendence and epistemic states are concerned. We must then see Saadiah Gaon as carrying on that which was begun by Philo, despite the interruption of the interim Rabbinic era, and setting the stage for the development of a robust rationalist tradition in Judaism characteristic of the broad tradition of classical theism. What can be seen from the contributions of the Gaon are a clear commitment to the absolute transcendence and unity of God, an apophatic caution in speaking of the divine attributes, and, interestingly, a unity of essence and existence (presaging that found in latter Scholastic theology) (1948, 2:4, pp. 101-102). What then can we discern, if anything, of commitments to divine *apatheia* as found in Saadiah Gaon? We can I think infer much from the general ontology he provides. Even as he allows for accidental attributes (or even properties) these are purely relational and, being inessential, have no impact on the nature of the divine. This provides for *aseity* and transcendence and for divine freedom. Insofar as the accidental attributes, located in scripture as ‘jealousy, wrath, mercy, etc.’, these seem to be only human perceptions of a unified and one-directional disposition towards humanity, perceived as a plurality of manifold effects but being nothing other than the causal relationship of God to creation. It seems then that for the divine nature, we must regard both immutability and impassibility as rightly obtaining, only furthered by the Gaon

commitment to a timeless eternity in God. As we shall we with Avicbron, it seems right to affirm an impassibility in aspects A-F.

*Solomon ibn Gabirol (Avicbron)*

Ibn Gabirol (Latinised as Avicbron or Avicbrol, 1021-1058CE) was likely of Spanish Jewish origin and wrote primarily in the same Judeo-Arabic of his intellectual forebear, Saadiah Gaon. He comes to us as both a poet and philosopher of religion, largely influenced by the Neoplatonic tradition. Unlike Philo, his knowledge of liturgical and scriptural Hebrew was tremendous, and this mastery is evinced in his poems and the scriptural references they contain. His works were quickly translated into Latin and would come to influence the Western Scholastic tradition. His magnum opus, the *Mekor Hayyim* or *Fons Vitae* (Psalm 36:10) was well-regarded among the Schoolmen and themes in it closely mirror concerns found in the works of Augustine and Boethius (Katz, 1977, pp. 49-50; Dobbs-Weinstein, 2003, pp 127). Interestingly, this work, arguably his most philosophical, makes no reference to any Jewish texts, appearing then to be a work of a purely speculative philosophy of religion (Katz, 1977, p. 177). Avicbron's work as a philosopher stands in stark contrast to his contributions as a poet, wherein the latter expresses a mystical rejoicing in the *shekinah* of God. His philosophical corpus and particularly the *Mekor Hayyim* show very little of this intimate religiosity.

Even in comparison with the concern for divine unity found in the works of Saadiah Gaon, the Neoplatonic influences present throughout Avicbron's work mark a notably stronger emphasis on divine unity and negative theology surrounding the mystery (*sod*) of the divine essence (Pessin, 2016). In an early reflection of later Scholastic thought, Ibn Gabirol says of the divine nature that we do not nor cannot know 'what it is' but only that it exists (*MH*, 1.4; Katz,

1977, p. 49). Furthermore, and of direct bearing on this study is Avicbron's emphasis that the divine nature, while admitting of no plurality or distinct attributes, is moreover 'without any change' (Klausner, 1925). He does not elaborate on this in the *Mekor Hayyim* so it could speak to immutability or impassibility. Most certainly it speaks to the transcendence and ineffability of the divine nature. Consistent with an emanationist Neoplatonism, Avicbron argues that a 'spiritualised matter' serves as an intermediary between the absolute and the cosmos. This 'spiritualised matter' arranged sometimes in a hierarchy of being, though not clearly of Aristotelian causation, sometimes finds expression in the divine will. Avicbron seems here to be of two minds as to means by which the absolute and transcendent God may interact with the cosmos, or at least his picture is not entirely clear. In this transcendence, the creator is absolutely external to time yet works in it. In 5.37 of the *Mekor Hayyim*, Avicbron says that 'the First Author achieves its work outside time.' Yet his emanationist schema is here problematic. He wants all things to be born out of the divine essence—consistent with his Neoplatonism—but also there is also the desire to have an ontological difference and distance between God and the world, primarily in his emphasising God's necessity and atemporality.

But these emanationists commitments confound his attempt to give an account of the divine will and the freedom it ought to have. On the one hand, this divine will must have its origins in the divine essence or nature but cannot be essential lest free expression of divine activity be hindered. He speaks of the divine activity as coming from the divine essence but in some way distinct from it (*MH*, 5.37; Rudavsky, 2018, p. 148). There is an interesting dipolarity here or even something of an essence/energy distinction though not clearly of Aristotelian origin. The divine essence is inscrutable and ineffable, while the divine will is expressed in

terms of activity relating the divine essence to the cosmos and perceived through effects in the cosmos.<sup>22</sup> The divine will (occasionally identified with the wisdom or word of God) serves as an energetic mediator between the absolute and the cosmos. But there is clearly a notable tension here between the necessitarianism of his emanationist thought and his speculations on the thelemic aspect of the divine. And despite the speculative aridity of *Mekor Hayyim*, Avicbron still wishes to maintain that it is, after all, the God of Israel of whom he speaks, despite the impersonal presentation of God in this work. Joseph Klausner speaks to this worry for Avicbron, in his wanting to maintain a certain Neoplatonic emanationist schema but still provide for the kind of *activity* and freedom the creator of the world and God of Israel ought to have:

...Gabirol was not able to come to terms with this passive emanation, and he sought to discover a kind of emanation in which God would still play a sufficiently active role, so that the emanating divinity – the God of Israel – would be a living God, and would also be the God of the world, from whom everything proceeds, and who would be conceived philosophically in the same way as in the Torah, a divinity without any corporeal aspect. This God must be a Fountain of Life, an ever-gushing spring, whose living waters do not cease even for an instant, and at the same time He should be abstract and spiritual like the light, which though it has no material substance, nevertheless is felt through its pure activity. “For with You is the fountain of life; by Your light do we see light.” (Psalm 36:10) (1925, quoted in Avicbron, 2005)

Still, even in this ontological sustenance provided by the divine essence, that ‘fountain of life’ and unceasing light, and expressed through the ever-active divine will which vivifies and animates the cosmos, there is little in the way of either any ‘personal’ aspect to the divine nor

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<sup>22</sup> Hasdai Crescas, in his *Or Adonai*, will go a bit further in his understanding of the essence and attributes or actions of God. He will speak of the divine essence as ineffable and unknowable, but of various attributes and action positively. Attribute such as existence, eternality, and unity, however, must be understood only apophatically. And he will yet maintain that this distinction introduces no plurality in God and divine simplicity in essence is preserved. (Katz, 1977, p. 53)

does much in Avicbron's philosophy give room for a clear identification this Absolute with the personal and revelatory God of Israel. Perhaps it is unfair to look for such. After all, Avicbron wishes to give a thoroughly philosophical account of God and being in the *Mekor Hayyim*. In doing so, however, there is a clear difficulty in seeing any connection between this absolute and the revealed God of the Tanakh. His dependence on Neoplatonic sources, while providing for an elegant and Plotinian metaphysics, gives us very little in the way of being able to speak *theologically* of God. In many ways, this may be another similarity between Philo and Avicbron: in his emphasis on the utter transcendence and mystery (*sod*) of God and through his dependence on apophatic language, there is a concern of a basic agnosticism here. The divine is ineffable, shrouded in this mystery, and so beyond any category of even generic designation. While this protects God from any anthropomorphic or anthropopathic idolatry, it also excludes much possibility to speak of God at all, except as a necessary source of being and an active creator and sustainer of the cosmos. Interestingly, also like Philo, the work of Ibn Gabirol would only later come to have any influence of the development of classical theism in Jewish thought, but his impact on Christian philosophy, particularly on Scholasticism through his *Mekor Hayyim* (*Fons Vitae*), was significant. In his time, however, he was largely ignored by his co-religionists, both those of more Rabbinic/Talmudic commitment and by contemporaneous Jewish *falasifa*.

To the matter at hand, that of a developing classical theist ontology and the attribute of divine *apatheia*, what may we gather from the work of Avicbron regarding this? Despite language of a potency in the divine will, Avicbron is adamant that no change is possible in either the divine essence or the divine will. He sees this as consequent to both the utter

transcendence of the divine and to its timeless eternity or, like Saadiah Gaon, ‘illimitable’ existence. Being entirely without time, no change is possible. Neither is any change possible in that God is no composite substance; there is no plurality in God. It seems from these commitments that we can infer at least a divine immutability, as a consequent to the divine *aseity* and eternity and to God’s being of no material substance. Despite overarching Neoplatonic influences, these claims seem largely within the scope of Aristotelianism and Avicbron does cite Aristotle limitedly in the *Mekor Hayyim*. Despite the introduction of a ‘spiritual matter’ and the active will as intermediaries between the absolute and creation, it is reasonable to infer both an immutability and impassibility in essence and will (*MH* 4:1, Rudavsky, 2018, pp. 147-148). This is only strengthened by Avicbron’s apophatic commitments and his Philonian disregard for any anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language. With this addition of a timelessly eternal knowledge, we may cautiously affirm that Avicbron’s ontology of the divine would include impassibility in senses A-F described above.

#### *Abraham ibn Daud*

Despite the references we find to Aristotle in the otherwise Neoplatonic work of Avicbron, it is with Ibn Daud (1110-1180CE) that we find the first expressions of committed Aristotelianism in rationalist Jewish philosophy. Of course, both the influences of Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism will come to play significant roles in the development of classical theism, yet it is Ibn Daud who is first to engage most fully with the Philosopher, making ‘much more use of Aristotelian arguments and principles than his predecessors’ (Fontaine, 1992, quoted in Rudavsky, 2018, pp. 38-39). *The Exalted Faith* (*Sefer ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*) is arguably his most thorough philosophical contribution (1986). In his introduction

to this work, Ibn Daud lays out a primary concern he has of reconciling divine necessity with human freedom, though commenting that this is part of a larger concern of the reconciliation between philosophy and *halakha* (religious law or Torah obedience) (1986, pp. 38-42). This is most interesting for our study in that Ibn Daud seems quite concerned with the matter of reconciliation and acknowledges some tension between these two ‘masters,’ wherein one is the scriptures and the other is science or philosophy. This concerns him deeply in that he comments that ‘the only way to favour one of them is by transgressing the view of the second’ (1986, p. 224). Rudavsky notes that this comment is directed particularly at she who would wish to ‘reconcile a rational conception of the deity with images given in Scripture.’ (2018, p. 66).

Perhaps Ibn Daud sees with greater clarity an underlying tension between the scriptural portrayal of God and the deity as proved by philosophy than did his rationalist forebears. In an attempt to legitimate his project, and with perhaps a nod to Philo and the work of the Alexandrian Jewish community, he claims that Judaism was always philosophical and that this current situation of a torn loyalty between these two ‘masters’ is a result of a neglect of *kalam* in Judaism. Still, despite acknowledging this apparent tension, Ibn Daud does not find philosophy incompatible with the Jewish faith and, moreover, thinks he can give voice to the truths of Judaism through this growing popularity of Aristotelianism especially among Muslim thinking contemporaneous to him. His comments and arguments as to the nature and existence of God are deeply indebted to the work of Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and, though such is alluded to in the works of Saadiah Gaon and Avicbron, Ibn Daud employs the arguments of Avicenna to demonstrate the necessary existence of God though showing the unity of essence and existence in the divine and contrasting this with the possible and contingent such as it exists in all other

things save God (1986, pp. 142-143; Rudavsky, 2018, pp 150-151; Fontaine, 2020). In this rather rough argument he provides in *The Exalted Faith*, the unity of essence and existence and therefore God's necessity excludes the possibility of any 'cause' on or in the divine (1986, pp. 140-145). While initial impressions might lead us to think Ibn Daud more sympathetic to a *religious* or *theological* account of Judaism, his work actually shows forth a more rarified and philosophical tendency. For example, he avoids referring to God as 'creator' as his even his rationalist forebears did, speaking of God only as that which is necessarily existent or as, unsurprisingly, a 'first mover' (1986, pp. 79-82). Given this unity of essence and existence and divine necessity, we have a clear ontological distinction of God from the cosmos and perhaps the strongest affirmation so far in Jewish rationalist of divine *aseity*. For Ibn Daud, this clearly means that the divine can depend on or relate to nothing for its existence.

To the attributes of God, Ibn Daud goes further than what we have seen in attributes offered by Saadiah Gaon. He posits that there are seven: unity, truth, existence, omniscience, will, omnipotence, and being, though he maintains, with typical apophatic caution, that these ought to be employed only negatively and, drawing here from Aristotle and in anticipation of Maimonides, in the manner of homonymity or analogy (1986, pp. 148-155). He sees each of these attributes, though finding analogous instantiations in creation, as necessary to *what* it is to be this divine necessary existent, yet through the limitations of our reason can be understood only through divine cause in the world. (Katz, 1977, p. 51) Ibn Daud, with the exception of his heavy employment of Aristotelian and Avicennan thought, is largely unexceptional in the context of the development of both a Jewish rationalism and the tradition of classical theism. His arguments for a unity of essence and existence are clearly important, though the substance



of their influence will come to Christian Scholasticism largely through Islamic sources themselves, rather than through Ibn Daud. His affirmation of divine necessity and *aseity* as well as his apophatic approach to the divine attributes, which he insists imply no plurality in God, are consistent with this developing tradition. Yet, there is still a quite notable and far-reaching contribution made by Ibn Daud which he mentions in his introduction to *The Exalted Faith*: that of the worry of divine necessity and something like human libertarian freedom.

Ibn Daud was innovative in his treatment of this matter of divine knowledge and human freedom and wished also to preserve, as he saw it, genuine possibility in human action. Wishing not to limit divine omniscience severely, Ibn Daud argued that God did indeed have knowledge of all possibilities (for God had made them so) but left it open to humanity which of those many possibilities would obtain through human freedom (1986, pp. 248-250). This seems like a volitional limitation freely undertaking by God in order to provide the possibility of full human freedom. Similar to the consequences of the philosophy of the later Gersonides, it seems that there is at least the possibility some epistemic ‘affectation’ in God. What is most interesting here is not so much the possibility of epistemic affectation, but rather that God would *freely will* some self-limitation for the sake of human freedom. We may see this as a way of thinking of some sense of voluntary passibility found even within an otherwise ‘classically theist’ philosophy. Still, Abraham ibn Daud seems largely to affirm the full complement of understandings of impassibility as found in classical theism (A—F) but offers quite interesting contributions on the possibility of some sort of compromise to epistemic impassibility (E)—knowledge. Interestingly, modern open theists will often make appeal to both Ibn Daud and Gersonides as having given early expression to their worries and proposals.

### *Moses Maimonides*

Moses ben Maimon (1135-1204CE) is perhaps the most well-known of the mediaeval Jewish theologians and takes a place alongside Aquinas and Averroes in the tradition of classical theism. His work offers exceptional insight into the question of divine impassibility in classical Jewish thought and, unlike other representatives of the tradition of Jewish rationalism here examined, we need not depend on as much on inference from other metaphysical commitments to produce an adequate witness to this attribute. Maimonides provides references to many aspects of impassibility as it is possible to understand it and, moreover, his account of a divine ontology provides further material for this study. Maimonides also speaks clearly to questions of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic scriptural language along with providing an account of a thoroughgoing apophatic theology. His *Guide for the Perplexed*, is examined as it a sufficient resource to the task at hand and shows his attempt to further synthesise and reconcile philosophy with the revelations of the Tanakh (1956).<sup>23</sup> The *Guide* (*Moreh Nevukhim*) is systematic in its approach, and its breadth is comparable only to the *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* by John of Damascus or the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas. The *Guide* is distinctly Aristotelian and yet dependent on much of the Islamic *falsafa* prior and contemporaneous to it. Furthermore, it will heavily influence the *Summa Theologiae* as we shall see below, though it was and remains a work of no small controversy.<sup>24</sup>

We should first note that Maimonides takes up not only the hermeneutical approach provided by Philo of Alexandria in his method of *allegoresis* but also a philosophical

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<sup>23</sup> All citations of Maimonides in this section (pp. 91-105) are taken from *The Guide for the Perplexed* (1956) and noted in-text by page number.

<sup>24</sup> His heavy employment of Aristotelian sources, his dogmatic emphasis on the incorporeality of God, and his speculation about creation have all been sources of controversy concerning *The Guide for the Perplexed*.

commitment to divine perfection as well. His readings of the Torah are heavily allegorised and metaphorical and, like Ibn Daud and Avicenna, he employs the concept of ‘homonymity’ as taken from Aristotle’s *Categories*. This concept will inform both his exegetical methods and what he can say as to the nature and attributes of the divine. For Maimonides, some notion of divine perfection begins with divine incorporeality. This indicates an essential difference between God and creation and furthers the ‘unlikeness’ of God to anything in creation. It is because of this fundamental unlikeness in the divine that he believes the notion of homonymity is necessary for reading the scriptures: ‘When persons have received this doctrine [incorporeality], and have been trained in this belief, and are in consequence at a loss to reconcile it with the writings of the Prophets [those passages which are anthropomorphic or anthropopathic], the meaning of the latter must be made clear and explained to them by pointing to the homonymity and the figurative application of certain terms ... ’ (p. 50). The emphasis on the incorporeality of God features heavily into Maimonides’ understanding of the divine and subsequently to his insistence on homonymous readings of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic presentation of God in the Torah. First, we can locate a basic affirmation of impassibility in Maimonides’ understanding of divine incorporeality. Any reading of God as corporeal (or composite) would be to mistake the divine as passible. Maimonides writes:

... knowing that God is incorporeal, He is never subject to external influence, *as passivity implies change*, while God is entirely free from all change, and that He can be compared with no being besides Himself, [yet] the words of the Prophets are true, and difficulties met with may be explained on this principle [homonymity] (p. 50).

We may see several crucial things in play here. Like Philo, he believes the plain words of scripture to have been written for the unlearned and that those who are ‘sufficiently intelligent’ will understand them as figurative descriptions for God who is, as First Principle, unified, and

not subject to motion, incorporeal. This incorporeality of God goes further than that aspect of impassibility as incorporeality, however. It is not simply the case that being incorporeal God has no *pathos* or passivity related to material existence, but also that divine incorporeality implies total immunity to external influence and change. We have then the connection between incorporeality and impassibility and dual assertion of both impassibility and immutability as a consequence of this.

Related to this affirmation of the impassibility of God is language concerning the knowledge of God and his hearing of prayer. Following in the same Philonian hermeneutic as we have seen above, when God is said to have ‘heard’ the prayers of humanity, Maimonides notes that this too must be understood homonymously. Maimonides states that it should be rightly understood as ‘God perceives.’ While this removes us from worries about corporeality and idolatry, it could still imply the human-like action of perception and, perhaps, learning something new—a violation of divine omniscience. We may understand this ‘perceiving’ as thoroughly *active* and not temporally ordered—that is, that God simply and eternally perceives all there is to perceive, but not sensibly. This divine perception, according to Maimonides, is not passive, for only corporeal perception is passive and receptive. Human perception differs from that of the divine in that it is ‘passive, receiv[ing] impressions from without’ (p. 63). While this brings God into connection with creation, this ‘perception’ in no way reciprocal with no real action of petitionary prayer in any temporally-bound way. Divine actions such as ‘perception’ are considered by Maimonides to be emanations, akin to but not entirely like Plotinian emanations (p. 62). These are not passive emanations as was Avicbron’s worry, but actively born out of the divine nature. Interestingly, Maimonides goes on to argue that all these

things follow from understanding the divine as a *perfect* being, recalling for us where we began with Philo and the influence of Greek notions of perfection that I have argued figure heavily in the tradition of classical theism. This perfection is expressed in *aseity* and *autarkeia*; Maimonides states that ‘the Creator is not in need of anything for the continuance of His existence, or for the improvement of his condition’ (p. 62). Certainly, this seems incompatible with passibility insofar as God is *a se*.

We may rightly infer, I think, the Maimonides endorses divine impassibility from his perfection. I think it right to understand these claims as attributing impassibility (A); being incorporeal, God is immune to any physical causation. Any scriptural language that reading seems to indicate *pathos* or passivity must be read homonymously as Maimonides emphasises. Thus, we have then a sense of impassibility as a result of divine perfection (which includes a necessary incorporeal existence). We may further understand this impassibility in aspects (E) and (F): in nature and transcendence. Concluding his comments on incorporeality and the homonymity of scriptural language he states, ‘He does not possess any such forces, that is to say, He has, besides His Essence, nothing that could be the cause of His action, His knowledge, or his Will’ (p. 62). Also, as his essence is transcendent and wholly ‘other,’ God ‘is not affected by external influences, and therefore does not possess any quality resulting from emotion’ (p. 71). It seems here that Maimonides may perhaps be thinking of the passivity of external influences as either a moral risk or a threat to divine bliss, hence the exclusion of ‘emotion’ (pp. 76-78). It may wrong to conclude that Maimonides would exclude all emotion from God, but perhaps only those that may result from *pathos* or affectation and then would imply ‘movement’

or passivity. Finally, Maimonides notes (again in line with his thought of the divine as absolute perfection):

... for all passiveness involves change; and the agent producing that state is undoubtedly different from the object affected by it; and if God could be affected *in any way whatever*, another being beside Him would act on Him and cause change in Him. (p. 78, my italics)

Thus, when the above is taken cumulatively, we have Maimonides arguing for a very strong form of impassibility, encompassing, it seems to me, aspects of impassibility (A—F). He goes so far as to state that when God is said to show or have mercy on creation, this is not meant to indicate a passivity in God as if the action of any creature evoked some emotion in the divine (which would be a change), but rather that God is ‘not influenced by a feeling of mercy’ (p. 76). Even still, God acts mercifully towards creation with ‘real affection ... for the benefit of pious men’ (p. 76). Moreover, in the same passage (1.54) of the *Guide*, Maimonides writes:

Similar acts, when performed by us, are due to a certain emotion and tenderness called mercy and pity. God is, therefore, said to be merciful: e.g., ‘Like as a father is merciful to his children, so the Lord is merciful to them that fear Him’ (Ps. 103:13); ‘And I will spare them, as a man spares his own son that serves him’ (Mal. 3:17). Such instances do not imply that God is influenced by a feeling of mercy, but that acts similar to those which a father performs for his son, out of pity, mercy and real affection, emanate from God solely for the benefit of His pious men, and are by no means the result of any impression or change ... God is therefore called, because of these acts, ‘jealous,’ ‘vengeful,’ ‘wrathful,’ and ‘keeping anger’ (Nah. 1:2) that is to say, He performs acts similar to those which, when performed by us, originate in certain psychical dispositions, in jealousy, desire for retaliation, revenge, or anger: they are in accordance with the guilt of those who are to be punished, and not the result of any emotion: for He is above all defect!

Maimonides seems to be treating emotion in this case as involving passivity or imperfection. Relatedly, as it would denote some affection from without, it is denied of God. This is to say that God is not, for Maimonides, ‘moved’ to any act nor do these various ‘emotions’ track different and changeable mental states in God. While no external influence can move God to

mercy—the divine is not pitiful or pathetic—Maimonides yet states that there is ‘real affection’ towards creation. If we understand an overarching understanding of impassibility as ‘safeguard’ against the passions (here understood as negative emotions or outside affectation), this seems consistent. Maimonides goes on to further this idea, arguing that God can indeed show mercy, anger, jealousy, etc., but *without passion*. This is perhaps a moral aspect of impassibility: performing certain actions or being disposed in a certain way yet without corruption, e.g. anger without wrath. It seems this is the move Maimonides wishes to make. God, he argues, being ‘above all defect,’ acts ‘moderately and in accordance with reason’ (p. 77). Given that no action of humanity can evoke these responses, it seems here that Maimonides understands God as, in light of omniscience, anticipating the actions of all men from a vantage of eternity, an ‘illimitable life,’ and thus acting in accordance. Thus, we then have no conditional activities of God: nothing like ‘if X, then Y’ or action of any temporal sequence, as the scriptures might easily lead us to assume. All commitments found so far are commensurate with Maimonides’ understanding of the divine as *actus purus*; possessing no unactualised potency, a critical concept of Aristotelian origin that will be most thoroughly articulated by Aquinas. Thus far we have seen, I think, much of a commitment to the impassibility of the divine. Whatever scriptural language may be indicative of *pathos* or passivity must be read figuratively and through the lens of metaphor.

Let us turn now briefly to the discussion of what can and cannot be said of the divine. Maimonides argues that positive attributes include in them a *description* of the entity of which something is attributed, an understanding we have seen above. This presents problems for assigning affirmative attributes—positive claims—to the divine. First, the *essence* of God

cannot be described, as it cannot be known by any contingent intellect. Second, Maimonides argues that descriptions are often given employing the *parts* of things or of what composes a thing, e.g. a human is both rational and an animal. As the divine is, as a feature of perfection, entirely simple, no description of this kind can be made. Finally, Maimonides states that descriptions often involve ‘qualities,’ with the divine having none. Here, Maimonides understands ‘qualities’ as, very basically, accidents. Accidents, of course, have no part in the divine essence and so the divine essence is without quality. A very similar conception is found in the Mutazilite denial of divine attributes. For to employ positive descriptions of the divine using qualities would presume that God is a ‘substratum of accidents’ (p. 70). This substratum worry is found also in the *Mekor Hayyim*. It is for these reasons that Maimonides, following much of the Aristotelian categories here, rejects any positive attribute of God.

I have spoken of ‘divine attributes’—impassibility, omniscience, omnibenevolence, etc. It may be tempting to think of these as individual and separable, that is, that one can speak of the divine power as separate from divine goodness and so on. Here, Maimonides (like Aquinas) is very helpful. Maimonides resists the language of attributes because of its *accidental* and divisible connotations, concerned additionally as others have been with plurality and composition in the divine nature. What are often referred to as divine attributes are then, for Maimonides, not discrete attributes at all. For if they are of the divine essence, then they cannot possibly be accidental, and so cannot be ‘attributes’ as he understands them. Impassibility, omniscience, omnibenevolence, etc. may then be essential properties of the divine: ‘every positive essential attribute of an object either constitutes its essence—and in that case, it is identical with its essence—or it contains a quality of the object’ (p. 70). The latter, as we have



seen, cannot be the case; therefore, we must entertain the possibility that these divine attributes are essential properties of God. But Maimonides warns against this for the reasons outlined above. Given that attributes cannot be accidents of the divine essence, can we say anything of the essence of the divine? For Maimonides, the answer is clearly in the negative. God is above all description and any attempt at positive attribution endangers the oneness and simplicity of the divine essence. At least two things, Maimonides argues, follow from this: first, no cataphatic language can be used in speaking of the divine and, second, that any language of the divine is referential to divine *action* and not *essence*. If we can speak of the essence of God at all, we must do so only in apophatic language. This move also incorporates the figurative and metaphorical readings of the Hebrew canon as described above. To say that the divine exists necessarily is to make some claim about the divine essence, yet Maimonides would have us take care even in this. We must be careful not to understand the divine as some entity that exists and to which attributes are then added in description. Being is understood, in the manner of Ibn Daud and Avicenna, as homonymous.

Furthermore, we must take care in not understanding the divine existence as anything like the existence of things we know. The divine essence does not exist as yet another ‘entity’ among others. Indeed, the divine essence exists as an ontological category altogether unique and different from the existence of created things. We see here the aspect of impassibility (F) as transcendence, as ontological ‘otherness.’ This radical transcendence of God in essence forces us then into silence or apophaticism; in the latter case, we can only make as to what God is not. For to do otherwise would both call into question the unity and simplicity of the divine essence and tempt us toward unacceptable anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms and thus,

idolatry. Therefore, when we may say that God ‘lives,’ Maimonides would warn us, again, not to think the divine life is anything akin to a creaturely life—finite, contingent, something that once was not and sometime will cease to be, but rather that God endures essentially and is dependent on nothing for that existence. Similarly, if we are to speak of the goodness of God, we ought rather to understand the divine as having no lack in moral perfection, lest we think of the divine as some sort of supernatural instantiation of virtue.

The second implication of this way of thinking mentioned above is this: any language of the divine attributes are descriptions of divine actions as we experience them or as revelation relates them to us, that is, as effects. God *acts* in the world in such a way that we understand as good; divine omnipotence is a description of the powerful *actions* of God in the world. By working this way, Maimonides is able to preserve revelation, speak adequately of the divine, and preserve divine transcendence. Furthermore, Maimonides here speaks of the ineffability of the divine essence, but human access to divine action. This is similar to the essence/energy distinction mentioned above and we also found some hint of it in Avicenna. For Maimonides, the essence of God is ineffable and impassible, inaccessible to human apprehension. Yet the divine can be known through the activities of God in the world. Yet this does not introduce any ontological distinction between the essence and actions of God. The actions of God ‘emanate’ from the divine essence and are the effects of ‘of one simple faculty’ (p. 73). Thus, God remains simple and yet can effect various results: ‘the attributes express different acts of God, but that difference does not necessitate any difference as regards Him from whom the acts proceed’ (p. 73).

Maimonides then presents us with several aspects of impassibility. The most prominent is impassibility (F), impassibility as transcendence. The divine essence is impassible in that it is beyond human comprehension and ontologically other. Additionally, in his insistence on *allegoresis* and a metaphorical and figurative hermeneutic, Maimonides seeks to preserve divine impassibility through incorporeality, will, knowledge, and nature/essence (A—E). This general and strong account of impassibility depends also on Maimonides' distinction between the essence of God and divine action, for in the former God is altogether removed from the world and yet in the latter, God is knowable and immanent. Our knowledge of divine attributes (actions) makes no claims on the divine essence, which is impassible, but insofar as the divine can be known it is only through these actions, by which God 'apprehends his creatures' and 'express[es] relations' with them (p. 74). Maimonides's emphasis on the impassibility of God is further shored up by his employment of the Aristotelian understanding of potentiality (a move similar to that of Aquinas). As the divine possesses no potentiality and is pure act, God cannot be said to be passive. Potentiality, it seems, is necessary for passivity. Maimonides writes:

... all perfections must really exist in God, and none of them must in any way be a potentiality ... nothing can be predicated of God that implies any of the following four things: corporeality, emotion or change, non-existence—e.g. that something would be potential at one time and real at another—and similarity with any of His creatures ... he who is ignorant of the latter cannot really understand the defect applied in emotions, the difference between potentiality and reality, the non-existence implied in potentiality, the inferiority of a thing that exists *in potentia* ... (p. 78).

Thus, we see Maimonides following a similar path as the Greek tradition regarding divine perfection. Any potentiality in the divine indicates some lack or deficiency, and this is impossible for a perfect being. Potentiality would also be a necessary condition for passibility or passivity and so, being absent in the divine, any change, emotion, or 'suffering' is impossible.

Emotion here is presented as clearly negative, perhaps not solely due to any content or orientation of a particular emotion, but because perhaps because emotion itself seems to imply some change and vulnerability, as we have entertained above. Therefore, his account of impassibility takes a strong form wherein divine communication is ‘one-directional’ and any scriptural language that suggests otherwise must be understood in light of this philosophical conception. For after all, ‘the Torah speaketh in the language of men,’ in anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms not indicative of anything of the divine essence which remains ineffable (pp. 34-54).

#### *Gersonides*

Within this brief survey of Jewish expressions of classical theism and this rationalist tradition, we ought to include Gersonides or Levi ben Gershom (1288-1344CE). Gersonides warrants some comments here in that, in addition to his notable mathematical and cosmological works, he wrote extensively on the philosophy of religion and was an astute interpreter of Torah. Furthermore, his most famous work, *The Wars of the Lord* (*Sefer Milhamot Ha-Shem*), stands as an interesting counterpoint to the heavily Aristotelianised theology of Maimonides (1984-1999). While Gersonides provides no small amount of criticism of this feature of Maimonides’ work, his own contributions betray clear Aristotelian influence, though not in the exact ways as is found in Maimonides (1987, pp 107-115). While far from providing the references found in the *Guide*, Gersonides gives us some insight into classical Jewish thought on divine impassibility, especially as it may be understood in relation to divine knowledge and in scriptural interpretations of the divine attributes. In many ways, Gersonides’ work follows that of Ibn Daud given their shared concerns over the compatibility of omniscience with human

freedom. Again, like Ibn Daud, Gersonides' views on divine knowledge also influence and anticipate claims of open theism and allows for some examination of a notion of an epistemic (im)passibility. Gersonides argues that while God indeed knows all the choices one may in the future have, he does not know which choice one will make. The possibility of real contingency is then preserved, he thinks, and with it, human freedom. Gersonides seems to be trying to find some middle ground between an Aristotelian understanding of divine knowledge in which particulars are unknown and the thoroughly particularist divine knowledge Maimonides argues for (1987, pp. 92-106). The latter, it seems to Gersonides, would imply an unacceptable necessitarianism, even if it is known from a timeless eternity (1987, pp. 92-97). This concept of a limited divine knowledge has features very similar to later Molinist thought and Gersonides provides it as a means, in his view, of preserving a robust account of human freedom (Pohle, 1911). It thus allows God, within limits, to be 'affected' epistemically, though not straightforwardly against his will (Gersonides, 2009).

Gersonides is not only exceptional in this view of divine knowledge. Quite interestingly, he stands against the committed apophaticism of Maimonides. Gersonides argues that the *primary* meaning of attributes or descriptions we would wish to ascribe to God is found in the divine itself and that our description, poor and often ill-formed are but *secondary* to the instantiation of these descriptions in the divine (1987, p. 107, 115). For Gersonides, when we say that God is wise, we do not mean that God merely shows some activity of wisdom or an 'effect' thereof or that in speaking of divine wisdom what we actually are affirming is something like, 'there is no ignorance in God.' Rather, Gersonides says we can say perfectly well that God is wise; it is a properly predicated *positive* divine attribute that has its fullest and

primary expression in the divine. Our wisdom and the poor understanding of it we have are due to our being able to comprehend only some derivative meaning of 'wisdom.' With worries that a Maimonidean apophaticism would lead to a complete unintelligibility of God and, at worst, an agnosticism, Gersonides argues the divine is indeed intelligible, though not exhaustively so (1987, pp. 107-115). Given the 'revealed' nature of the God of Abraham, Jews (and monotheists) may in fact speak positively of the divine in that God is made known through divine revelation and presence in the cosmos. While supporting this claim of the clear and unequivocal meaning of divine attributes as found in scripture, Gersonides argues that we can derive much what we can say of the divine through reasoning both *a priori* and *a posteriori* (1987, pp. 114-115). Still governed by the determinative principle of the oneness of God as found in the *Shema*, Gersonides argues that these various positive attributes, given that they are present through the Tanakh, allow us to speak of the divine and yet in no way necessitates any plurality in God stating, '... not every proposition in which something is affirmed ... implies a plurality of that things.' (1987, p. 112).

What then to the matter of divine impassibility can we discern from Levi ben Gershom and *The Wars of the Lord*. First, it seems that some epistemic passibility is perhaps possible under his understanding of divine omniscience, though this is not thoroughly explored in the *Wars*. More interesting perhaps is Gersonides openness to speaking positively of God and the manner in which he relies on the scriptures to do so. While he largely fits within this tradition of Jewish rationalism with its commitments to divine unity, incorporeality, *aseity*, and perfection, Gersonides has greater ease with revelatory descriptions of God than do Maimonides or Avicenna. While still very much within this classical theist tradition, the novelty

and boldness of Gersonides mark him out as a figure perhaps standing somewhere between Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition and the heavily rationalised Aristotelian/Neoplatonic philosophy of his fellow philosophers and coreligionists.

Here I would conclude this brief survey of classical expression of Jewish thought. We have seen a significant continuity in this tradition, and from it we may discern some common commitments to a divine ontology and to how that ontology would imply, as I have argued, and endorse of divine *apatheia*. Philo of Alexandria and Moses Maimonides stand perhaps as most prominent representatives of this tradition and their influence on the development of classical theism should not be understated. Both will have, in their own ways, significant influence on the classical Islamic traditions of *kalam* and *falsafa* and on the development of Scholastic theology. Still, we see the role of lesser-known philosopher-theologians in this tradition of Jewish rationalism and their connections to both Philo and Maimonides. Ibn Daud and Gersonides here ought to be recognised, not merely for their own contributions to the development of this tradition, but also for their interesting discussion of divine knowledge and human freedom.

Still, we may see that these authors examined above shared a remarkable similarity in their conception of divine ontology, dependent as they are on each other. This ontology, as we have seen, will largely endorse not only a radical transcendence of the divine, but also a timeless eternity, immutability, simplicity, and fundamental *activity* in God. In the case of this last feature, that of pure *activity* in the divine, we may say that this alone would admit of no latent potency or passivity in God. And it may be that this denial, even dependent as it is on other metaphysical commitments we have seen in this tradition, would thereby deny the possibility

of any *pathos* in God—no affectional mode of being by which the divine is temporally-affected by human actions or affairs is the cosmos. It is perhaps this feature that is most important for this study. Still, we ought to keep in mind the tradition of the *tannaim* and *amoraim*, the Rabbinic and Talmudic tradition, which while not always contrary to Jewish rationalism nevertheless shows a great scriptural sensitivity regarding divine/creaturely interactions and will, often scandalously, admit of a significant *pathos* in God.

## 2.2 Classical Christianity and Divine Impassibility

As this chapter in its entirety is dedicated to a critical survey of the accounts of divine impassibility as they appear in the classical traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, we now turn to the tradition of classical Christian theology and philosophy. We may examine its role within this development of classical theism and, insofar as it does, I mean here to explore what expressions of divine *apatheia* are found in this tradition, particularly in the motivations for affirmations of impassibility and valences of its use. Unlike with Judaism and Islam, there is no difficulty in locating sources within the Christian tradition which take up directly the matter of divine *apatheia*. In fact, in the classical Christian tradition, there is a certain difficulty almost opposite to that as that found in the *loci classici* of Judaism and Islam. Instead of a paucity of sources offering any direct treatments of impassibility, there is a veritable trove of selections dealing with this attribute. While they are sometimes couched within more general discussions of an ontology of God, it is not necessary to rely on inferences from other metaphysical commitments to acquire a fairly clear understanding of divine impassibility within the Christian tradition. We are able to deduce a general picture of understandings of impassibility and the various motivations for predicating it of God. The challenge posed then



is in both the selection of sources and in exercising a kind of economy in this specific survey of the Christian tradition and its understanding of divine *apatheia*.

Given the abundance of material on divine impassibility found in this tradition, it would not be difficult, conceptually, at least to devote an entire work to divine impassibility in Christianity alone. Such works are present and are of great aid in this study (Gavrilyuk, 2004; Keating and White, 2009; Mozley, 1926). Yet here we need go only so far as to generate a sufficient understanding of divine *apatheia* in this tradition and, moreover, examine its relationship to a classical ontology of God and the development of classical theism. As such, choices must be made, again for the sake of brevity, and so what follows is presented as sufficiently representative of this tradition, from the patristic age through the classical theistic treatments of this attribute in the mediaeval era. From even this early period of the post-apostolic fathers, the question is taken up and we see accounts and defences of it well through the development of Scholastic thought and into the mediaeval era. While these sources are abundant in classical Christianity both East and West, the most systematic discussion of divine *apatheia* is likely that found in the work of Thomas Aquinas through the methodology of Scholasticism. As alluded to in introductory comments to the analysis provided in this chapter, there seem to be fairly obvious reasons for this felicitous provision of sources in Christianity, given certain dogmatic claims of this faiths and potential problems that then arise from those.

Christianity was, of course, born into a theological and philosophical world already filled by Hellenistic thought. While nascent Christianity was indeed a mostly Jewish sect of a diverse 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Judaism (yet even there is the influence of Hellenised Judaism), by at least the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christianity had evolved into an almost wholly Greek affair,

availed of a Semitic/Hebraic scriptural tradition and the wealth Greek philosophy. No few of its greatest apologists and philosophers were well-versed in classical thought and the categories, concepts, and grammar of a Hellenistic philosophy which I have argued played a crucial role in the development of classical theism. It is unsurprising then that this Greek philosophical grammar would be commanded for articulations and defences of the faith. As noted above, there is a second and perhaps more pertinent reason that divine impassibility would occupy various theological discussions in Christianity and from remarkably early on: the fundamental dogma that God suffered in the flesh. This most radical claim demands an account, and even insofar as it is a *mysterion*, it may still be articulated as the limits of reason allow. And so it was defended, in this milieu of Greek philosophy, and impassibility was very quickly employed as a safeguard of divinity; vouchsafing not only the divine nature of Christ but also the transcendent divinity the God the Father (ὁ θεός). Additionally, it is also worth noting that unlike the more complicated cases of Judaism and Islam, Christianity in its formative period was never *removed* from this Hellenised world and thus it very quickly adopted a means of doing philosophical theology much beholden to the tradition of Greek metaphysics.

#### *The Patristic Era: East and West*

The early Christian church insisted upon the impassibility of God (Pelikan, 1971, pp. 52-54). This early affirmation of divine impassibility seems to have been (and remains so) a concern both metaphysical and moral—that of distancing the divine ontologically, preserving divine transcendence, and thereby removing the divine from any possibility of creaturely corruption. Far from being an entirely alien Greek innovation imposed upon the Christian faith, this doctrine was found in the theological philosophy of Hellenistic Judaism to which

Christianity is most certainly related, not only in the development of a divine ontology but in hermeneutical matters as well. As to the matter of divine *apatheia* as dogma or doctrine, the issue arose in a variety of settings in the early church and through the age of the ecumenical councils. The question of divine impassibility simply cannot be separated from this developing Christology, soteriology, or the debates and formulations of Trinitarian dogma. Let us turn to the first direct treatment of the issue by the early church—the Patripassian controversy. This ‘heresy’ of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century is traditionally attributed to one Sabellius of Rome who taught a Trinitarian dogma at odds with the proto-orthodox teaching and the later Nicene affirmation. For Sabellius and others (Praxeas and Noetus), the divine was essentially modalistic (Compton, 2010; Mozley, 1926, pp. 28-34). Modalism, most basically, is the claim that the divine is expressed in various (three) modes or *prosopa* (faces or masks). Instead of, as the later Nicene formulation would have it, that of there being a union of three distinct entities sharing a common nature, modalists would claim that there exists but one divine being who at various stages in the divine economy *appears* as the three persons of the Trinity. Thus, it is the one God who comes as spirit to comfort his people, and it is this same God who is crucified, dies, and is buried (Compton, 2010).

Furthermore, it is this same God, not some eternal Logos existing as a distinct divine entity, that is incarnate in Palestine. It seems much of the motivation for this schema of understanding God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit was motivated by a desire to preserve the unity of the divine, that is to retain as strongly as possible the monotheistic character of Christianity and still account for the divine actions of Christ and the Holy Spirit as related in the early texts of the faith. Sabellius found himself excommunicated by the pope of Rome due to his teachings

and Praxeas, a famous follower and author of modalistic theological texts, became the polemical target of Tertullian, the great Latin theologian of North Africa. Tertullian, from whom we know most of this controversy through his work *Against Praxeas*, argues for the distinct existence of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit as *personae* not merely *prosopa*, thus laying the groundwork for later Trinitarian developments (Compton, 2010). However, at the heart of this debate is not just a distortion of Trinitarian teaching, but rather the nature and attribute of the divine itself. If the modalists are correct in that it is God the Father who takes the form of Christ in the Crucifixion, then we must say that God the Father himself suffered in the flesh and was tempted in all ways. Or if the modalists wish to hold to their schema and retain the impassibility of the Father, then Docetism is a natural consequence. Wanting to avoid the Docetic understanding of the Crucifixion, the modalist authors must, therefore, predicate suffering of the Father himself (when he is in the ‘form’ of Christ). This is problematic for the nascent church at large for various reasons. It is contrary to many passages of scripture that speak of Christ/the Logos and Holy Spirit as distinct entities with agency (both interacting with the Father with simultaneity). Also, as Tertullian emphasises in *Against Praxeas*, the divine economy is distorted, thereby removing the begottenness of the Son and the procession of the Spirit. Finally and most importantly for this study, despite its purported safeguarding of monotheism, Sabellianism (as it was known in the East) or Patripassianism (its more common name in the West) exposes the Father himself to suffering (*patri-passio*), a conclusion unacceptable to many in the early church for various reasons, though namely for transcendence and moral incorruption (Compton, 2010; Mozley, 1926, p. 30).

In addition to the Patripassianist (Sabellian) controversy, the early church also faced other threats to and debates surrounding divine impassibility in slightly different forms. There was also a movement known now as Theopaschite Monophysitism. In its Trinitarian formula, it differs significantly from the modalist Sabellian claims but results in much the same problem for the proto-orthodox theologians of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries of the Common Era. For monophysitism roughly, the claim was that of Christ having only a divine nature; his human nature is swallowed up in divinity upon the Incarnation so as to make it the case that Christ is indeed fully God but in no wise fully human, despite appearances and actions to the contrary. On this account, it has features similar to modalism in that the Divine ‘puts on’ a human form or only seems to (Docetism). The implications this has for divine impassibility are clear. In the case of the modalism, it is the Father himself who suffers upon the cross. For Theopaschite Monophysitism is not the Father who suffers, but the divine Logos. For the Theopaschites, the traditional Trinitarian formula is upheld (though still in rough form as the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople had not yet adjudicated the matter), but ‘the divine’—in the form of the Logos—is subject to passion (Gavrilyuk, 2004, pp. 4, 19). In this case, similarly, it is not only bodily affectations via pain, temptation, etc. which violate divine impassibility, but presumably death also. This latter issue was most troubling, perhaps on a mere metaphysical level. Supposing even that the matters of pain and temptation were no problem for the divine, certainly it seems death would be.

We have here then two forms of passibilism in the early church, both of which were treated as heretical. Why they were treated so by the proto-orthodox or pre-Nicene church is complex. It does not seem to be that case that a mere violation of divine impassibility was the

sole problem. It was the manner in which the violation of divine impassibility corrupted the developing concept of Trinitarian thought and Christology. While a desire for God to ‘truly suffer’ alongside humanity may have been motivational in these early heresies (by making the divine subject to the cross, either in the form of the Father or the Logos), the opposition to them may also have been motivated by a desire to make real the sufferings of Christ—to make his passion *sympathos*. In the denial of a true Incarnation—features of both Patripassianism and Theopaschite Monophysitism—Christ’s human nature is but a façade. It is a mask (*prosopon*) for the Patripassianists and altogether absent for the Theopaschites. In the latter case, it seems adherents must either accept a form of Docetism, a treatment of the Crucifixion in which Christ is said only to have appeared or seemed (*δοκεῖν*) to suffer or embrace a strong violation of divine impassibility. Yet we find in none of the proto-orthodox writings any denial of the very real suffering of Christ (and so in God as well in some sense). The strong reactions to Docetism make this apparent. But herein is the very problem for the early church. When Cyril of Alexandria affirms that the ‘impassible God suffers’ he is not merely putting forth some nonsensical contradiction. Rather it seems to be both a paradox and a matter of significant philosophical debate and effort which the early church is forced to work out in some manner. That Christ was both fully divine and yet suffered is a claim central to the message of Christianity and one that would not be abandoned. Resolving this in a philosophically satisfactory manner is another issue and one that is taken up in earnest throughout much of the work of the apostolic and Nicene fathers and the ecumenical councils.

The apostolic father, Melito of Sardis, makes this claim and concern clear. In speaking of the Crucifixion, he does not hesitate to claim that ‘God suffered by the hand of Israel’ and

that ‘the impassible suffered’ (quoted in Hart, 2003, p. 356; quoted in Mozley, 1926, p. 9). Yet in a fragment of his writings, Melito is found to be already laying the groundwork for the ‘diaphysite’ (Christ having two natures—divine and human) orthodoxy that will follow him. He writes, ‘the same person being God and at the same time also a perfect man, gave us a pledge of his two substances’ (quoted in Mozley, 1926, p. 9). The word Melito chooses here for ‘substance’ is, unsurprisingly, ‘ousia’—a term for the concept of nature or substance that we have seen above in Aristotle’s work and one not uncommon to the Greek philosophical vocabulary. At best here it seems that Melito has in mind the later doctrine of a *communicatio idiomatum* to explain how the two ‘natures’ or ‘substances’ related to each other in one singular person. Thus, Melito goes to great lengths to both affirm the real suffering of Christ but nevertheless to protect the transcendent impassibility of God. Whatever Melito wants to say about how these two ‘natures’ relate in the person of Christ he is nevertheless committed to divine impassibility. *Contra* the ‘Hellenisation thesis’ of Adolph von Harnack that we explored above, Melito and his contemporaries are far too concerned in their emphasis on the reality of the Crucifixion of this *Deus homo*, Christ, to be plausibly accused of seeking some Greek synthesis. In describing the similarity in tone of Melito to the work of Ignatius of Antioch (35-107CE), Mozley, in his famous survey, *The Impassibility of God*, notes that whatever can be said of the early Christian apologist any ascription of a foreign Hellenisation is unwarranted (1926, pp. 10-11).

Our next witness to the tradition of impassibility as found in this patristic era is Justin Martyr (or Justin the Philosopher, 100-165CE). We are left his *Apologies* that show a more subtle treatment of the issue of divine impassibility that we can perhaps find in Ignatius or

Melito. Justin is, by all accounts, a formidable philosophical mind and seeks throughout his work to make Christianity ‘respectable’ or ‘rational’ to his pagan critics. These *apologia* are no intentional distortion of the Gospel in order to comport better with the Aristotelian, Neoplatonic or Stoic philosophies of his day, but rather exegete the content of Christian teaching in order to demonstrate its philosophical grounding, coherence, and reason (Behr, 2001, pp. 93-110). Justin seeks to establish the Christian faith as a ‘philosophical school’ worth noting and contrast it with the myriad of Oriental cults with which the Greco-Roman world was so familiar. Still, Justin shows similarities in the doctrine of God between the Platonic and Aristotelian schools and his own Christian faith. Among these are the doctrines of the divine being both impassible and *atreptos*—unchangeable (Mozley, 1926, p. 11). Of course, this commitment to both divine impassibility and immutability must be reconciled in some manner with the deity he is defending—the Crucified One. Unlike any Hellenised conception of the divine in which an attribution of personhood or personality was avoided, Justin cannot, of course, avoid this conclusion, as the scriptures speak of this deity of the Jews as very much like a person. Yet unlike the ‘personal’ gods of classical and late antiquity, the deity of Judaism and Christianity is both personal and impassible.

This is striking in that it seems, in the history of religion and philosophy up until that time, this conjoining of personhood and impassibility in the divine was not seen before. It affirms some of what we have seen above—that the Judeo-Christian tradition offers a concept of the divine that includes both the ability to love as a person would but without the moral failings that beset creaturely persons. We have then a picture of a divine being who can and does, in some manner, care for humanity and will express love for it and yet remain unaffected



by the passions which limit the moral excellence and praiseworthiness of other ‘personal,’ Olympian-like deities. This God, the Father of the Crucified One, desired and desires eternally, Justin asserts, to *share* in and *participate* in the passions or sufferings of his creatures but in a manner that is therapeutic and dispassionate (Gavrilyuk, 2004, p. 51) Thus he denies there being any possibility of passion in the divine nature (ὁ θεός). This conclusion, it seems, must be due to Justin’s conception of divine perfection *and* his understanding of the therapeutic nature of the Incarnation. It seems again an instance of ‘only an impassible God can save humanity’; only a deity that cannot be mired in the passions of corruption, contingency, and degradation can save ‘from outside’ this earthly vale (Hart, 2009; Weinandy, 2001, 2009).

The problem as we have seen it so far seems to be this: the various authors of proto-orthodox or proto-Nicene tradition wish to both fully safeguard the impassibility of the divine nature and yet also be able to claim that this Christ who ‘died and was buried’ is fully divine, possessing the same status of divinity as God—consubstantiality. Theopaschism and Patripassianism both expose the divine nature to the vulnerability of the creaturely world with its contingency, corruption, temptation, and death. This is, of course, an unacceptable conclusion. For many, though not all, of the same reasons that passibility was rejected as a properly divine quality among the Greek philosophers, that is, as consequent to perfection, it is similarly rejected by both the early Christians and the Jewish authors contemporaneous to them (*vide* Philo). As we have seen above, asserting passibility or the predication of *pathos* of an entity was to claim that it was vulnerable to change, instability, and material corruption. The divine nature, whether conceived in Greek, Jewish or Christian terms, is *inter alia* transcendent and incorporeal and so cannot be subject to affectations of the world. Additionally, as we have

seen, for Christian and Jewish conceptions of a deity that is morally perfect and therefore worthy of worship, any predication of passibility would potentially associate God with moral failing or temptation. Knowing that God is morally perfect and that the *passiones* are generally affectations of a morally negative kind, it follows then that God cannot be in any way subject to *pathos*.

Tertullian, the great theologian of North Africa, argues that the divine nature must necessarily be independent of all that is corruptible and so any ‘feelings’ that we may wish to predicate of God must also be free of corruption. Interestingly, this would allow for such ‘emotions’ as ‘unperturbed bliss’ or ‘joy’, but it cannot allow for any *pathos* in a negative sense or effected from without. Notwithstanding his later heterodox affiliations with the Montanist sect, Tertullian is perhaps best known for his quite orthodox work, *Adversus Praxeam* or Against Praxeas. While the identity of this Praxeas is unknown, the text makes him out to be a Roman teacher of modalism. What Tertullian offers as a rebuttal to this teaching is a substantial and articulate model of the Trinity and the divine *economia* whose treatment of divine impassibility is heavily informed by the philosophy of the Stoic schools. Tertullian does indeed speak of divine ‘feelings’ and emotions, but these have the character of the Stoic sage: these feelings and emotions are expressed with full control, that is, with *apatheia* (Mozley, 1926, pp. 38-39). Tertullian writes that the divine ‘alone is happy in view of his incorruptible nature’ (quoted in Mozley, 1926, p. 38). Mozley further notes that in Tertullian’s attempt to account for the apparent *pathos* of God found in scripture, Tertullian considers them ‘expressions of God’s moral energy in its outgoing toward man’ (Mozley, 1926, pp. 38-39). And given that these moral energies have their origin in perfection, then by necessity they are without moral

or epistemic failing. Tertullian's Christological and Trinitarian solutions maintaining the impassibility of God differ slightly from the patristic theologians discussed above. For Tertullian, the Father and his divine nature (he who is properly called God) is removed from any direct metaphysical involvement in the Crucifixion. After all, Tertullian famously alleges that his opponents have 'crucified the Father,' a conclusion incompatible with his commitments to the divine impassibility. However, he must still speak of the true divinity of the Son or Logos that is present in the Incarnation and Crucifixion. Any passibilist events that might threaten the transcendence and perfection of the divinity the Father are transferred to the Son. Yet it seems here that the problem has only been moved. Tertullian still wishes to maintain the full divinity of the Son and yet not allow any corruption to affect it. He, like many of the early fathers, will put forth mysterious and seemingly incongruent statements such as 'the Son of God died.' And yet he must here, in anticipation of later Christological debates, predicate suffering of the *human nature* of the incarnate Logos. To do otherwise would, it seems, bring the impassibility of the divine nature back into question insofar as the Logos is fully divine.

Let us now examine the theological and philosophical school of Alexandria, characterised in the Christian tradition by its two most prominent thinkers, Clement and Origen (Kelly, 1978, pp. 153-158; Osborn, 2005, pp. 19-24). On the issue of divine *apatheia*, we see much here in common with the traditions of Philo and Plotinus, as representative of the Hellenised Jewish and the Neoplatonic traditions respectively. As we have well seen above, notable features found in Alexandrian theology and philosophy, for both Judaism and Christianity, are the strong tendencies to invoke metaphor and employ allegory in reading the scriptures, to emphasise the spiritual over the material (a consequence of some Neoplatonic

influence), and to employ negative or apophatic language in reference to the divine (Kelly, 1976, pp. 70-72; Osborn, 2005, p. 91). As we saw above with Philo of Alexandria in his readings of Torah, there are similar hermeneutical moves made among Christian theologians of this school in the early church. Strong emphases are placed on both divine transcendence and immutability. Clement, in his *Stromateis*, strongly endorses the *via negativa* regarding the divine nature or essence, arguing that we should in some way attempt to conceive of the divine, though knowing ‘not what he is, but what he is not’ (quoted in Mozley, 1926, p. 54). It seems then for Clement that any knowledge of the divine essence is possible only through negation; only by contrasting the divine existence as ontologically distinct from creation and thus denying of it our categories which are conditioned by our creaturely state can we then say anything meaningful at all of God. When Clement gives treatment to the so-called *pathos* of God, or anthropomorphic and anthropopathic descriptions, as one might see upon a literal reading of the scriptures, he insists all should to be read allegorically. As his metaphysical presupposition is that of divine transcendence and incorporeality, he can admit of no *pathos* in speaking of the divine. God is, for Clement, ‘one and immutable,’ wholly ‘without passion, anger, and desire’ (quoted in Mozley, 1926, p. 55). It is helpful here again to keep in mind that Clement likely has the ancient view of *passiones* in mind—actions discordant with reason and morally imperfect. Thus, it may be then that Clement can admit of divine interaction with the world but qualifying that any of action as being ‘passionless,’ not subject to passivity or external cause (Osborn, 2005, p. 238-241). Thus, God is still able to forgive sins, have mercy, etc. but without corruption and so is able to do so with perfect equity and love and without favouritism or injustice.

Still, it seems also that Clement must admit that such actions as having mercy or forgiving sins are not properly ‘responsive’ or ‘reciprocal’ but perhaps a basic and eternal disposition towards creation. That is, it cannot be the case under Clement’s understanding of divine simplicity and impassibility that a human may sin unbeknownst to God and then God reacts in a merciful way. It must be an eternal and unchanging disposition toward creation rather than a ‘reaction’ predicated upon certain behaviours of humanity. We then have a picture of God who is impassible metaphysically in transcendence and incorporeality and is dispassionate (morally perfect) in disposition towards humanity. Regarding the Crucifixion, it is hard to see how Clement’s theological commitments to impassibility can remain intact if he wishes also to affirm the reality of Christ’s suffering. Clement, in keeping with the tradition of the authors cited above, does not espouse any sort of modalistic position or some latent Docetism, but rather affirms the real presence of the divine nature in the Logos as incarnate. How then can Clement speak of the Crucifixion while retaining his strong view of divine impassibility? His move is perhaps unsurprising but has some interesting features. The divine nature in Christ is wholly removed from any carnal affectation (due to its being impassible in nature) yet the divine nature cultures or habituates the assumed human nature towards a kind of similar impassibility. This impassibility of the divine nature as it is found in the incarnate Logos provides the soul of Christ with a kind of Stoic *apatheia*. This then trains (and heals) that human nature which the Logos has put on toward dispassion, rightly ordering its faculties and enabling human nature to exist without ‘passion’ in the morally negative or uncontrolled sense. Nevertheless, Clement does seem to come up short in his view of the full humanity of Christ, at least insofar as the later Christological debates would judge. Clement argues that the entire person of Christ, both divine

and human, was ‘altogether impassible, and into him no movement of passion could find its way, neither pleasure nor pain’ (quoted in Mozley, 1926, p. 57). It is easy enough to see here why later readers who are rightly concerned with the capacity of the divine to participate in human experience may take issue with Clement’s Christology. It does seem that his philosophical commitments to divine impassibility simply make it the case that any attribution of human feeling is impossible even in the Incarnation.

Origen of Alexandria is a perhaps more interesting case as he attempts to deal with the question of divine impassibility within the Christian tradition and with Christology in particular in mind. His presuppositions are similar to that of Clement: the divine nature is essentially impassible as a consequence of divine perfection (Mozley, 1926). Yet Origen attempts to deal with the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic features of God as found in the scriptures. In perfectly Alexandrian fashion, Origen directs his reader to seek out the ‘spiritual’ meaning beneath these crude, literal readings. He is, in many ways, following Paul in arguing that the ‘veil’ must be lifted from the Torah in order to reveal its spiritual interpretation (2 Corinthians 3:15-17). Only with this veil removed can Torah then be rightly interpreted. Indeed, the scriptures do seem to show the divine as subject to *pathos*, yet this is due, according to Origen, of remaining on the surface of the letter and failing to discern the spiritual contents of revelation. Origen counters critics who would allege that this Judeo-Christian deity seems very human-like and *pathic* and so unworthy of philosophical consideration. He argues that God as perfection is possessed of both transcendence and impassibility as this can be known through proper reasoning and that any illumined reading of scripture would never ‘ascribe human passions to God’ (quoted in Hallman, 1991, p. 43). Yet Origen, unlike Clement, is apparently more

committed to the very reality of the suffering of Christ as a united entity containing both human and divine natures in the Incarnation.

It is, however, unclear whether Origen can have it both ways, and he indeed seems to offer incompatible positions on the matter. While in many places throughout his best-known philosophical works, *Contra Celsum* and *De Principiis*, he strongly affirms the doctrine of divine impassibility, in others, he is nevertheless insistent that the ‘passion’ of Christ was borne in his entire person and by both his human and divine natures. This proposition then has implications for what we can say of the divine nature of the Father regarding the suffering of Christ. Though Origen does not conflate the ‘persons’ of the Trinity, as did the modalists and Patripassianists, he does speak of the Father as suffering in some way in his homily on Ezekiel (Hallman, 1991, p. 41). He first speaks of the compassion and pity of Christ and then, by natural extension of the divine nature, of the passibility of the Father:

What is that passion that he suffered for us? Love is passion. The Father also himself, and the God of all things, longsuffering and very pitiful and compassionate, does not he in some way suffer? Can you be ignorant of this that when he deals with human things, he suffers a human passion? ... Therefore, God endures our ways inasmuch as the Son bears our sufferings. The Father himself is not impassible. If he besought, he is pitiful and compassionate, he suffers something of love, and in those things in which because of the greatness of his nature he cannot subsist he shares and because of us he endures human suffering (*Homily on Ezekiel*, quoted in Mozley, 1926, pp. 60-61).

Origen himself seems quite clear on the trouble of the issue at hand and speaks variously of it throughout his corpus. Both his training in classical Greek philosophy and his adherence to a certain view of God’s perfection—and impassibility—are apparent here and we are left with little settlement on the issue from Origen, yet we can see that he is keen on affirming both the radical love of the Incarnation and the impassibility of the Father.

Within this Alexandrian tradition of Christian philosophical inquiry, we may find an interesting dialogue bearing on the issue of impassibility. It is a treatise by Gregory Thaumaturgus (213-270) in which the issue of impassibility, in both nature and will, is discussed with a certain 'Theopompus' in his *On the Impassibility and Passibility of God*, which survives only in Syriac (Mozley, 1926, pp. 63-73; Pelikan, 1971, pp. 52-53). The treatise itself is magnificently rich in both its treatment of impassibility as it relates to the affirmation of the incarnate and crucified Christ and in its discussion of the relationship between the divine will and the divine essence. Gregory also argues strongly therein for divine simplicity, which he sees as having importance for the question of impassibility and the possibility of *pathos* or passivity in Christ (Hallman, 1991, pp. 46-49). Theopompus puts the question of divine impassibility as it relates to Christ in a very direct manner. He realises that this developing Christian orthodoxy does not wish to deny the full divinity of Christ and affirms that this divinity is 'from the Father' and the Son shares in this divine nature. Theopompus then asks Gregory whether or not it would even be possible, given divine impassibility, for God to suffer if he desired to. Put differently, if the suffering of God did occur and was necessary for the salvation of the cosmos, how do the divine essence and will relate to one another in this respect? If God is impassible in his essence, is his will such that this essential impassibility could be overcome for the sake of the cross? Gregory responds that if God cannot do whatever his will demands then 'we should have to say that the will of God was subjected to his nature.'

This is an interesting assertion on its own as it seems to presage certain latter mediaeval debates of divine freedom and voluntarism. It seems that Gregory here is willing to entertain the possibility that divine freedom could allow God's willing of something contrary to his



nature (in this case, impassibility). Theopompus remains undeterred however and reformulates the question by asking whether it is not the case that God is ‘prevented by himself from undergoing suffering since he is always that which he is ... ’ (quoted in Mozley, 1926, p. 64). Theopompus here seems to be tracking the idea that the nature of God is determinative of what the divine can and cannot do and that it seems possible that the very divine essence itself is such that no passibility can be admitted, for it would require a change in God. Theopompus then proceeds more boldly in asserting that it may be the case that the divine nature is such that it is determinative of the divine will: ‘that the nature of the impassible God is more powerful than his will, even though he is God’ (quoted in Mozley, 1926, p. 65). Gregory then seems to become clear on the problem and deftly provides an answer of sorts through reorienting the understanding of ‘passibility.’ He provides an account of *passio* that seems to allow it without violation of the divine nature. According to Gregory, *passio* is only a defect when it has no good end or is not willed—when it results in some evil or in the result of involuntary vulnerability.

Thus, Gregory is seeking to establish some sense in which ‘suffering’ can be said to be in accordance with the divine nature. He seems to be assuming here that divine impassibility includes such things as transcendence and metaphysical priority and that the kind of ‘passibility’ wrongly predicated of God would be that which God himself does not choose or will and that which is not of some beneficial *telos*. Gregory then thinks that the *passio* of the divine in Christ is not violative of divine impassibility in that it was a) willed by God and freely taken on and b) for some *telos* which is in keeping with the divine nature (the salvation of the cosmos because of the agapeistic character of the divine). Gregory writes that ‘in his suffering,

[that] he shows his impassibility' (quoted in Mozley, 1926, p. 66). He seems to be making that case that impassibility is only violated if 'suffering' is contrary to the divine will. Thus, we may still be able to predicate impassibility of God in that, though he suffered in Christ, it was not a suffering that showed susceptibility to outside force, but rather was freely undertaken. It seems here then that Gregory is understanding impassibility also as being immune to external influence against the divine will, a very basic definition of *pathos* with which we have been working throughout. This would not preclude suffering that is freely undertaken through kenosis and for some good.

Gregory's understanding of impassibility in this treatise is most certainly worth noting. Again, it seems he wishes to affirm that the divine nature is indeed impassible where impassibility is understood as transcendence and metaphysical priority. Yet he is subtle in his understanding of the straightforward aspects of impassibility as 'immunity to suffering.' He argues that impassibility, as it is related to suffering, is not merely immunity to *any* suffering or affectation, but rather immunity to any affection contrary to the divine will or 'forced upon' the divine from without. Suffering that is freely undertaken seems, then, for Gregory, to be compatible with the divine nature's impassibility. This seems to be a logical consequence of impassibility as transcendence: nothing can be 'forced' upon God as the divine is beyond the creation and its vulnerabilities and contingencies. Yet Gregory does not think the divine nature precludes a kind of kenotic passibility. Similarly, God's 'suffering' in the Incarnation is meaningful and salvific for Gregory precisely *because* it is an 'impassible suffering,' one borne without moral failing and for the good of creation. Gregory writes, '[the divine nature] displays its changelessness when it is tried by suffering' (quoted in Mozley, 1926, p. 68). Along this

same line of thought, Gregory asserts that it is again *because* of God's impassibility that Christ may suffer death and yet be victorious over it. The impassibility of the divine nature both provides a surety against any moral failings and the means by which the suffering cosmos can be redeemed: only one outside the vale of creation can enter into it and without corruption save by partaking in it.

Gregory's work is adequately representative of early patristic thought on divine impassibility within the Christian tradition. The discussion certainly becomes more interesting (and complex) through the Trinitarian and Christological debates of the councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon, which continued to struggle with concept of the person of Christ being fully divine and yet, in some manner, suffering (Kelly, 1978; Pelikan, 1971). In countering the Arian threat and its claims of some origination of Christ and a consequent denial of what would become the *homoousion* position. The severe threat posed by Arianism forced the early Christians to provide some coherent account not only of Christ being no creature, but to more fully emphasis his divinity—Christ's consubstantiality and coeternality of the Logos with God (ὁ θεός). In so doing, the fathers of these councils strengthen the position of divine impassibility, arguing that it was only the human nature of Christ that was subject to suffering, and that the divine nature remained, as it was of 'one essence with the Father [God]', without passion and necessarily so.<sup>25</sup>

Again, the tradition seems to present an understanding of impassibility that is concerned both with the divine transcendence and an understanding as the 'passions' as actions contrary to reason or 'sinful.' Both Stoic and Neoplatonic influences are clearly seen here in the ideas

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<sup>25</sup> *Vide* the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, 325-381CE.

of *apatheia* and *metriopatheia* as being morally proper orientation or disposition, certainly for the sage or virtuous human, but necessary for the divine (Pelikan, 1971, pp. 52-55). For to predicate any passibility to Christ insofar as his divine nature was concerned was to make him a creature—something contingent and dependent on God and thus not properly divine. So, any apparent ‘passions’ found in the scriptures of Christianity or in hymns and liturgies must speak of the human nature of Christ. Thus, it was through this crucible of the Arian controversy that Christianity both reaffirmed its commitment to divine impassibility and found a means in which Christ could be conceived of as one person existing in two natures—only one of which could admit of any *pathos*.

I would here conclude this treatment of patristic contributions to the question of divine impassibility with Augustine of Hippo (354-430). Augustine will come to be easily the most influential of the fathers in Western Christianity and will substantially inform much of the Scholastic tradition which I examine below. Augustine clearly thinks that there is some aspect of mutability and *pathos* in the Incarnation, but views this as consistent with an eternal ‘patience’ for humanity borne out of the perfection of the divine. God may only ‘humble himself’ if the divine is indeed beyond any involuntary humiliation. The notion of voluntary passivity or vulnerability is clearly present, but it is just that—voluntary as a consequence of God’s mercy for creation. Following in the same line of thought as is found in the diaphysite definition of Chalcedon, Augustine affirms that the Word (Logos) itself remains unchanged despite the Incarnation. God in the divine perfection is essentially immutable and impassible and so that divine nature present in Christ (eternally begotten of the Father) would be also. In addition to humanity having no ‘claim’ on God or denying any involuntary vulnerability,

Augustine also sees *apatheia* as immunity to moral corruption (Hallman, 1991, pp. 111-118). Furthermore, any references to God's wrath, repentance, jealousy, etc., Hallman argues, must be, for Augustine, separated from any literal or anthropopathic reading. This, of course, is nothing particular to Augustine; Origen insists on a similar hermeneutic consistent with that emphasised by Philo and present in Alexandrian Judaism. All anthropopathisms are ultimately expressions of a unified constancy of will, moral stasis, and divine patience; not reactive in any temporal sequence to changing states of affairs in creation, but expressions in 'the language of men,' to employ the latter Maimonidean phrase, to convey the divine perfection, justice, moral immutability of God (Hallman, 1991; Lister, 2013, pp. 105-106).

What then can be said of divine, compassion, or love? Anticipatory of what we shall see with Aquinas, when humanity comes to exist, God becomes 'a lover of mankind,' but this a nominal or logical relation—it involves a change in humanity but no change in God who is eternally loving regardless of any external object of the love (Hallman, 1991). In a thorough treatment of Augustine's view on these matters in *Thinking Through Feeling*, Anastasia Scrutton notes that while *passiones* maybe morally negative as *perturbationes*, and thus ill-fitting of God, emotions *per se* are not. This we have seen above in entertaining various possibilities of divine emotion that need not include the valence of change or motion (*e/motus*). Divine emotion as it relates to love is possible, yet it must come from *caritas*, rather than cupidity—a love that is properly oriented and incorrupt (Scrutton, 2011, pp. 38-39). Nothing of what Augustine has to say on these matters is particularly surprising and is largely consistent with the patristic witness prior to his work. He does, however, quite helpfully provide a distinction in between *passiones* and *affectiones* which is later taken up by Aquinas and depends

on an Aristotelian anthropology. This is then applied to what we can or cannot say of God: *passiones* are inappropriate for the divine as they at least contrary to reason and ‘movements,’ but certain *affectiones* may not be as they are possibly reasonable and freely willed (Scrutton, 2011, pp. 34-48). Still, this commitment to divine perfection and transcendence is well in keeping with the theological inclinations of those in the faith who precede him. Further citations of patristic sources are possible, of course, in the ample resources on impassibility available even early in the Christian tradition. J.K. Mozley provides much more from this era, and Caleb Little offers a fine discussion of *apatheia* in a few early Greek fathers, primarily Athenagoras of Athens and Irenaeus of Lyons (2016). Further inclusion is unnecessary as what has been provided should be more than adequate in showing common commitments of these proto-orthodox representatives of the Christian faith: divine perfection, the transcendence and the moral incorruptibility of God, a stasis and constancy in will, and affirmations of impassibility and immutability which shore up and safeguard these commitments.

### *The Scholastic Tradition*

While the Scholastic tradition is most commonly associated with the contributions of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) or ‘Thomistic scholasticism,’ its origins in the Christian tradition begin with Boethius and its methodology mirrors much of what is found in the tradition of *kalam* in Islam and Judaism. Both Scholasticism and *kalam* draw from Aristotelian and Neoplatonic sources to articulate and defend claims of these respective faiths.<sup>26</sup> Much like the

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<sup>26</sup> Though I have above noted this distinction between *kalam* and *falsafa*, in connecting the former with Scholasticism it is helpful to note their methodological similarities. Oliver Leaman notes, ‘The term *kalam* means “speech” or “conversation”—it is based upon the idea that truth is found via question and answer process. Someone proposes a thesis, and somebody else questions it, this form of disputation being apparent in the grammatical structure of the works of *kalam* themselves.’ (2002, p. 10)

overlap seen with *kalam* and *falsafa* in Islam, Scholastic authors will go beyond theology at times to more speculative matters of philosophy, but not the degree found in the rationalist traditions of Judaism and Islam. For several reasons, this tradition is particularly helpful in the inquiries occupying this study. In ways not found in the Christian East, despite earlier and more thorough access to classical sources, Scholasticism represents a clear and systematic attempt to give intellectual voice to the dogmatic claims of the faith, and so it is often the case that treatments of such questions explored herein can be located with relative ease and accessibility. Furthermore, Scholastic authors, particularly Aquinas, evince clear knowledge and access to Jewish and Islamic sources and so connections between lines of thought may be more easily seen. This is particularly important if we wish at all to speak of a development tradition of classical theism, a ‘common ontology’ of the divine, and similar ways in which these faiths have approached questions of divine *apatheia*. To the matter of Byzantine contributions: I do offer some remarks in the conclusion of this chapter, but Byzantine theology is treated more directly in exploring the Palamite essence/energies distinctions incorporated in the proposal offered below.

First, we should attend to the work of Boethius (477-524CE), the Roman aristocrat, philosopher, and Latin translator of the works of Aristotle. The contributions of Boethius to questions of divine impassibility (and immutability) are intimately related to his worries about God and time as found most prominently in his *Consolation of Philosophy* (1936). This connection should be unsurprising in that, as we have seen, both passivity and mutability (as modes of change) depend on time following Aristotle’s understanding in the *Physics* (1941). In the orthodox tradition of his forebears, Boethius affirms both immutability and impassibility

as natural perfections of God, thereby excluding any contingency or possibility of change and difference in the divine. This is most clearly related to the developing concept of divine simplicity which is found almost ubiquitously across the tradition of classical theism in the West (the Palamite ontology being perhaps an Eastern exception). Again drawing upon our conception of both a spatio-temporal and metaphysical (property) simplicity, a perfectly simply being could by necessity undergo no change as there are no parts (properties or composites) which admit of any prior or future potentiality (Leftow, 2016). A perfectly simple being ultimately has no mode of being which would admit of change and most certainly not *pathos*. To the matter of God and time, given that for Boethius God is ‘outside of time,’ the divine admits of no temporal succession and as such this necessarily excludes change and hence any real passibility or passivity. To the matter of divine/creaturely relations, as discussed above in our treatment of Augustine, Boethius, in his *De Trinitate*, denies any essential change or affection in God insofar as the divine relates to creation. In a manner quite similar to Augustine, any ‘change’ is a change in humanity: we are affected by becoming the beloved of God, but the divine, as immutable and eternally timeless is not (Boethius, 2004, IV-V). While Boethius provides little in the way of discussion of divine emotion or the possibility of *pathos* in God, his contributions on immutability and the timeless eternity of God may tell us much. We have seen their relationship both here and above. To the matter of divine love and mercy, it seems an affirmation of the constancy of divine goodness. As God has, being ‘outside time,’ access to all human choices and events, divine compassion, mercy, love, and justice are likewise immutable and could be in no way ‘reactive’ in any temporal sense to the choices of humanity



or to contingent events. This certainly provides for a thoroughgoing affirmation of impassibility (A-F) and provides for moral stasis and transcendence in God.

Next, Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109CE), in his exploration of perfection in the *Proslogion*, indeed attributes impassibility as a necessary feature of perfection, but like other classical, patristic, and mediaeval philosophers we have examined, views it as a preventative qualification against ‘negative emotion’ or ‘negative’ movements of the divine mind (1965; Davies and Leftow, 2004). Later in the *Proslogion*, Anselm seeks to reconcile the mercy of God with divine impassibility and notices, quite obviously, a potential concern (at least from a human perspective). For humanity, it seems, cannot be merciful without some *pathos*. Humans are merciful in part largely because they can imagine or in fact, have felt whatever state of affairs prompts them to have mercy or pity. As Anselm wishes to protect God from any negative feeling—*pathos* in the sense of a true feeling of loss or sorrow—a different account is required. Anselm argues that while God does not in fact ‘feel emotions’ of sorrow or loss, his governing love disposes him towards creation in such a way that humanity ‘feels’ the ‘mercy’ of God even though it is not a mercy conditioned by fellow-suffering. Brian Leftow (2004) notes that while, for Anselm, God cannot in truth ‘feel sorrow,’ his inner state and the divine disposition coming from it to humanity is nevertheless felt and identified by humanity as ‘mercy.’ That is to say, it involves no true *pathos* in the divine, but it still is perceived by us *as if* God had such ‘feelings.’ God, as Mozley notes, feels no effect of humanity’s suffering, yet man is the beneficiary of whatever the ‘mercy’ of God feels like to humanity (1926). In an oft-quoted passage from the *Proslogion*, Anselm writes:

But again, how art thou at once compassionate and impassible [*misericors/impassibilis*]? For if thou art impassible, thou canst not suffer with others, and if thou canst not suffer with others, thy heart is not wretched out of sympathy for the wretched—but this is what being compassionate means. Yet if thou are not compassionate, whence does such a great consolation come to the wretched? (*Proslogion*, VIII)

The question asked is easy enough to follow. How can one be said to compassionate if not through sharing the suffering of others? Anselm is perhaps more reserved on this matter than Augustine. While we ‘feel the effect of [divine] compassion, [God] dost not feel emotion.’ I am not sure Anselm wishes to deprive all emotions of God, however. It seems that when he writes ‘*tu non sentis affectum*,’ what he is denying is some temporal affectation of suffering in the divine. But this does not for Anselm prevent us from speaking of God’s ‘compassion.’ Though presented anthropopathically, God’s compassion actually consists in ‘sav[ing] the wretched and spar[ing] those who sin ...’ (*Proslogion*, 8). It seems that for Anselm part of the difference in this divine compassion and the compassion we may experience as humans is that, because it is not of an affectational nature, it can be not only purer but voluntary as well. So while God is not subject to *pathos* properly, the divine may yet show compassion or mercy through the effects of love. Largely consistent with what has been seen above, there is careful work done by the authors discussed here to avoid any real predication of passibility (moral or otherwise) of God, thereby protecting the perfection of the divine nature.

I would like finally to turn to that paradigmatic philosopher and theologian of Christian classical theism in the West and of the Scholastic tradition, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). I think we may say without controversy that not only does Scholasticism but Western Christian theology in general find its high-water mark with the works of Aquinas. Much of the material previously examined (and to be examined in the subsequent chapter on Islamic *kalam* and

*falsafa*) is brought together in Aquinas who offers what is perhaps the first systematic works on Christian theology in the West. In the East, one may cite the earlier *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* by John of Damascus, but that work differs significantly from both the *Summa Theologiae* (ST) and Aquinas's earlier work, the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (SCG). The work of the Damascene does not follow the same pattern of *kalamic* reasoning, nor does it draw from nearly the breadth of sources found in both *Summae* of Aquinas. For this study, both of these works of Aquinas are invaluable resources as they give thorough treatment to the matters at hand. Both *Summae* have gone on to influence, not only the further development of Roman Catholicism, but also the traditions of the Reformation in their continental and magisterial forms. The *Summa Theologiae*, in the systematic fashion typical of Scholasticism and *kalam*, offers much on these matters of divine impassibility and immutability: how it can be said that God loves and what can be said of *pathic* or emotional states in the divine. Similarly, the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, though written for a wider audience as an *apologia*, also affords us insight on these matters. More interestingly perhaps, the contributions of Aquinas represent a particular trend of Aristotelianism, largely mediated through Augustine, that offer much in the way of material on, not only divine impassibility, but related concerns as well: divine simplicity, the identity of divine attributes, and God as *actus purus*. Furthermore, Aquinas is deeply influenced by his predecessors in Jewish and Islamic *kalam* and so clear connections comprising a larger trajectory and this common ontology of classical theism may be seen.

Thomas Aquinas will give a similar account for a reconciliation of the apparent attributes of perfection with the nature of God. Of Thomas Aquinas, we can certainly say that he endorsed divine impassibility, but in what ways? Emotions, as we commonly conceive of

them, are not outright denied as being available to God, yet we must be careful here. Certainly, ‘emotions’ such as bliss and joy cannot be denied of God, yet many other affectations commonly thought of as ‘emotional’ must, according to Aquinas, be denied of the divine, e.g. the *perturbationes* of *pathos* that Scrutton identified and *passiones* (2005; 2011). Likewise, sorrow and anger, related as they are for Aquinas, are also denied of the divine in that each would at least imply some imperfection (*ST*, 1.20.1; 1.19.11). Descriptions of God’s anger should be taken as the ‘effects’ of a just punishment (*ST*, 1.3.2). Furthermore, Aquinas argues for divine impassibility in senses B and C (epistemic and thelemic—knowledge and will) in the *Summa Theologiae* (1.14.15, 1.19.7). Of course, those affectations proper to a corporeal existence are categorically impossible for God insofar as the divine is essentially without a body. If we wish to speak of impassibility in the divine nature, we must keep in mind Aquinas’ active/potential distinction (taken from Aristotle and slowly developed through the contribution of Jewish and Muslim scholars preceding him) as found in the *Summa Theologiae* (1.3.1; Davies and Stump, 2012, pp. 74-76). For as God possesses no potentiality in being *actus purus*, no passivity may be admitted metaphysically, for passivity requires potentiality. Thus, beings with greater actuality (and, therefore, less potentiality) are less susceptible to passivity or *pathos* (Scrutton, 2011, p. 49).

Again, emotions must be considered here. Not all are excluded from the divine life; only those which are either related to corporeality or which, if not corporeal but rather intellectual, are ‘contrary to reason’ or inconsonant with a perfect moral goodness. Scrutton outlines this distinction, going back at least to Augustine if not earlier, between *passiones* which are involuntary, erratic, or ‘passionate’ and ‘affects’ which can be in accordance with reason and

present no threat to divine perfection (2005, pp. 175-177; 2011, pp. 50-51). In the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, we find much of the same reasoning both to a divine ontology and to the divine attributes. In the *SCG*, we see an affirmation of both immutability and impassibility in that God ‘has no potency—that is, no passive potency.’ (16.6) Given this, any *passiones* must be excluded, and so mercy and compassion insofar as they are dependent on some corporeality or composition are impossible for the divine. Yet both compassion and mercy are not absent in God as they are shown through their ‘effects,’ under a more general account of divine goodness which ‘takes away the miseries of men.’ (*SCG*, 91.15-18)

What here can we say of (im)passibility insofar as it relates to expressions of divine compassion, mercy, and love? Does Aquinas’s view essentially follow that of those authors discussed above in that divine love and mercy are eternal dispositions? It largely does. The helpful distinction employed here between ‘appetites’ is part of an anthropological/theanthropological model taken from Aristotle. ‘Sensitive appetites’ are necessarily dependent on corporeality and the ‘passion and emotions’ of the sensitive appetite involve changes in bodily affect. In the divine, these are impossible in that God is incorporeal. But Aquinas allows for love, delight, or joy insofar as they are the product of will (*actus voluntatis*) and are of the ‘intellective appetite’ which is in God not bound to any corporeality. Thus, that God is both loving and possessed of joy are not denied by Aquinas, but he distinguishes these ‘emotions’ as are they are present in God and present in creatures (*ST* 1.20.1). For creatures, love is responsive to an external goodness, requiring potentiality and dependence, things impossible for a God who is timelessly eternal, *as se*, and *actus purus*. Thus, expressions of compassion, mercy, and love in the divine are not the result of being ‘moved’

by anything external but is rather are expressed in the granting being to creation and agapeistically sustaining it and in a constancy and stasis of love.

Insofar as love is the product of will and cognition and uncorrupted by corporeality, it can be expressed ‘dispassionately’ as it is in God (*ST* 1.20.1). Thomas Weinandy offers this account: ‘Aquinas, in denying passion in God, is simply denying of God the passible, and so changing, process which is inherent within human passion. Thus there is not passion in God, *not* in the sense that he does not love, but because, being pure act, there is no need for an arousal of the will to love the good ...’ (2000, pp. 126-127, emphasis mine). God’s love then, for Aquinas, is pure and constant, being unaroused and not some actualisation of potential as it is in humans. Neither is it corrupted by *passionate* bodily affectation or change. Human love, by contrast, is externally conditioned and can (and often does) involve passion. Much like Anslem (and Augustine), divine compassion and mercy are not wrought as affectations from without but are rather the ‘effects’ of divine love. Sorrowing or grieving (*tristor*) over the misery of another is ‘no attribute of God, but rather to drive it out ...’ (*ST* 1.21.3). So again, while we cannot say that in any literal sense that God experiences sorrow, as that may indicate some lack, but rather that the constancy of divine love is experienced as compassion and mercy by creation in measure of its ‘effect’ (*effectus*).

Discussions of the mercy of God in both *Summae* also reflect a similar constancy of will and is not some temporal ‘remitting’ of any previous judgement. It is then not any motion contrary to a previous disposition (*ST* 1.21.3). Divine mercy then is a valence of his justice and does not involve ‘compassion’ in the sense of being ‘moved’ or effected from without, but rather is expressed through his preservation of creation as its First Cause (Davies and Stump,

2012, pp. 168-170). Moreover, God's mercy (while not a passion *per se*) is like divine 'wrath' or 'sorrowing,' it is the varied and manifold experience in humanity of an 'effect.' We can then, I think, attribute to Aquinas affirmations of divine impassibility in all senses outlined above (A-F), in moral stasis, thelemic inviolability, and in nature as pure actuality, etc. Again, any language of *passiones* must be understood here again in the Greek and patristic sense as described above: movement of the mind or soul contrary to reason, discordant with a perfect divine goodness, or connected in some way with corporeality. For God then, such *passiones* cannot obtain but reasonable 'affects' and 'emotions' very well could given the determinative *arche* of divine perfection. Again, as we have seen in the works of many classical theists of this era broadly and not only in the Christian tradition, an emphasis on a proper hermeneutic in order to maintain 'divine dignity' (*dignus deo*) and not compromise divine perfection. As we have seen above, common language of wrath, anger, and repentance are taken to be necessary anthropopathisms born out of a gracious condescension for humanity. What must not be read in these passages in any *pathos* that would indicate motion, potency, lack, or moral failing in the divine. Thus, for Aquinas and the authors we have examined back even to Philo of Alexandria, to say that God 'sorrows' would be problematic in that it would indicate some longing or betray a moral weakness (some imperfection) for which divine perfection and bliss would not allow. Similarly, repentance is not to be understood as a change of mind (*metanoia*) or an expression of regret, as both would be indicative of either divine mutability or the epistemic imperfection. Divine impassibility, for Aquinas, is *inter alia* protective of divine transcendence (the ontological necessity and independence of God) and of a divine moral stasis,

trustworthiness, and this provides for the expression of an unsullied goodness as God relates to creation.

While further sources both in the Scholastic tradition and in the tradition of Christian classical theism could be explored, what has been provided above should be quite sufficient for us to obtain not only an understanding of divine *apatheia* across the ‘orthodox’ sources of this faith, but to gather some picture of a divine ontology as well. It is quite apparent, I think, that affirmations of impassibility have been the consensus within this tradition from the early patristic era through mediaeval contributions. We have seen what seems to be an affirmation of a strong impassibility—in most cases in aspects (A-E). This inquiry into *apatheia* has also afforded much in the way of what we may say of a divine ontology in Christianity and its relationship to the broader tradition of classical theism. In the main, divine perfection, simplicity, and a timeless eternity of God have been affirmed, as well as the related commitments to transcendence and *aseity*. It may also be clear here there is a notable trajectory of thought from Philo, through the early fathers, and into the age of Scholasticism. Furthermore, we can see clear connections with earlier and contemporaneous philosopher-theologians in the rationalist tradition of Judaism. Below I further fill out this account of divine *apatheia* and a classical theistic ontology of the divine thought examine various sources in the Islamic tradition—both in early *kalam* and later *falsafa*. Next, some further comments as to the natures of Christ are offered as they are found in the definition of the Council of Chalcedon. As we shall see, this is necessary for such an inquiry as the hypostatic union of the divine and human in Christ is often taken as the very nexus for expression of the impassible sufferings of God.



## 2.3 The Chalcedonian Definition and Divine Impassibility

No study of divine impassibility, in Christianity at least, may ignore the contributions of the Council of Chalcedon (451) to the development of an orthodoxy Christology and the way in which the divine and human relate and are united in Christ. This concern bears directly on conceptions of *apatheia* in early Christian thought and its understanding as a necessary safeguard of divinity. Moreover, both defenders of impassibilism in the Christian tradition and later crucicentric/staurocentric passibilists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century will cite the Chalcedonian definition either with approval or concern. Thomas Weinandy, in his defence of the doctrine of divine impassibility, affirmed the ‘passionate action’ of the Trinity but asserts that Christ suffers only in his human nature (2000). Moltmann, on the other hand, will clearly oppose it in arguing not only that Christ suffers in his divinity, but that the divinity of the Father is involved in this *pathos* (1974). Part of why this diaphysite or Chalcedonian conception of the natures of Christ is so important is that it is often appealed to as an ‘orthodox’ account or solution to worries about the capacity for God to suffer with humanity. Of course, this co-suffering is brought about centrally in and through the cross. Some of the controversies motivating the calling of the council and its proceeding were the debates between Nestorian parties and those who espoused a monophysite position. In giving a charitable account of each, we may say that in the former, there was a strong desire to emphasis the human nature of Christ—that Christ’s humanity was united to his divinity but in a manner that would allow the free use of language such a human in X, but divine in Y.

While in many ways, this protected the divinity of Christ which had previously been defined as ‘consubstantial’ with the Father, it allowed, at least in the judgement of its critics,

for there to be insufficient union in *one person* in Christ. Thus Nestorians could say that while Christ in his divine nature was ‘eternally-begotten,’ the virgin bore only his human nature—as *Christotokos* but not *Theotokos*. While indeed allowing for a clear delineation of those things predicable of God and those things only predicable of humanity, it introduced an unacceptable division into Christ, thus allowing him to be spoken of as, in many ways, *two* persons—united in some way, but clearly distinct in predicates and operations. Thus it became possible perhaps, under more extreme forms of Nestorianism, to speak of the ‘the man Jesus’ and the ‘divine Christ.’ In strong opposition to this was the party of Eutyches, who espoused a particularly extreme form of monophysitism yet argued their position was warranted in both Christ’s ‘consubstantial’ nature with the Father and in the patristic witness, usually citing Cyril of Alexandria who spoke of there being one nature (*physis*) in the incarnate Christ. While most certainly protecting and giving a high view of the divinity of Christ, several concerns emerge. What can we say of Christ’s salvific assumption of human nature or what may be said of very human—finite, frail, and contingent—language describing Christ? More worrisome perhaps, is that if Christ is of one nature—wholly and only divine—then what can be said of his passion? The conclusion for critics of this Eutychian position would argue that it, as we have seen, above would lead to a crucifixion of the divine itself, a clear problem for commitments to an *apathic* deity, even *if* it is not in the person the Father.

In the growing turmoil of the controversy which had waxed and waned for some time, the council was gathered to give a united voice to this Christological question—to provide an adequate theanthropology. Through the deliberations of the fathers present, it was determined that there was, in fact, *one* person in Christ, but composed of *two* inseparable and complete

nature—divine and human—through a *hypostatic union* and *communicatio idiomatum*. The payoff for such a formulation was seen to be that we may speak of there being one subject, Christ the incarnate Logos, and yet account for those things divine and those things human, but not in such a way that, in Nestorian fashion, would introduce division. As was the case with the majority of councils, there were unsatisfied parties. The Cyrillian party noted that this appeared to be merely a more subtle form of Nestorianism in speaking of two *physes*. What matters in regard to divine *apatheia* was that this council sought a way to carefully articulate the divine nature of Christ as being truly present in one subject and yet avoid any offensive or indignant predications of the divine nature. The result then was the possibility of speaking ‘Christ crucified’ or ‘the suffering of God’ insofar as each speaks to a single subject with an indivisible unity of nature. Yet care must be taken here—in a manner the Cyrillian party would point out as sounding very Nestorian—to predicate only divine things of the divine nature and only human things of Christ’s humanity. But it could still be said that *as one subject* one could affirm both, but with these qualifications. Aquinas in commenting on this distinction of natures but the unity of a subject writes in the *Summa Theologiae*, ‘Similarly, with the mystery of the Incarnation, we say that the Son of God suffered, but we do not say that the divine nature suffered.’ (3.16.5)<sup>27</sup>

What assessment should we make of this in this inquiry into various understandings of divine impassibility and the relationship these understandings have with a classical ontology of God? First, it seems that the motivations and understandings of impassibility at play among the fathers of Chalcedon are largely consistent with the patristic witness, especially those

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<sup>27</sup> ‘Et similiter in mysterio Incarnationis dicimus quod Filius Dei est passus; non autem dicimus quod divina natura sit passa.’ *ST*, 3.16.5

Alexandrian sources. Impassibility is clearly presented as a safeguard for the true and ‘consubstantial’ divinity of Christ. Any impassibility attributed to the divine nature of Christ would be that same impassibility attributed to the divinity of the Father. Wherein we may locate a point of connection with and possible answer to any worries about God ‘sharing’ in human suffering, at least for Christianity, would be in this *hypostatic union* and *communicatio idiomatum* in the divine and human natures of Christ. The council affirmed both the full divinity and full humanity of Christ and in this union of nature and exchange of properties, we may indeed say ‘God suffered’ or that ‘God was subject to *pathos*.’ Yet in this affirmation, we must add the necessary qualification outlined above: only in the human nature of Christ was any *pathos* present. The divinity of Christ, despite its union to human nature in his person, must remain untouched so that it may vivify or *deify* the common human nature borne by Christ. Thus we *cannot* say that God in Godself suffered even with this unity. Yet divine *pathos* in Godself is exactly what Moltmann, Lee, Fiddes, and other crucicentric/staurocentric passibilists would wish to affirm. But the traditional definition will not allow for this, nor can this give answer to any common problem of impassibility as it may be found across traditions of Abrahamic monotheism, particular to Christianity as it is. Thus even if this *hypostatic union* could give us a nexus of divine suffering, even within Christianity it may not give a full account to the range of divine ‘affectation’ as, say, the Tanakh seems to present. The Hebrew scriptures are, after all, the scriptures for Christianity as well and in them we find ample anthropopathic language. While we may here wish to say that any of the divine suffering in the ‘Old Testament’ may be accounted for via the Cross, this would seem to lead to further Patripassianist concerns, at least for orthodox Christian accounts.

A possibility would be to employ this *hypostatic union* as account for all theophanies in the ‘Old Testament.’ That is, when God is ‘seen,’ it is an eternally incarnate Christ who is, in fact, made present. There may certainly be something to this, but it still does not account for what seem to be true expressions of *pathos* in the Hebrew canon nor could it. Even if we were to take up this idea of an ‘eternally incarnate Christ’—that wherever the divine is said ‘to suffer’ in the Hebrew canon this is predicated of Christ—it could still only apply to the human nature in that hypostatic union and would then give no further room for speaking of any *pathos* in Godself or in *ó θεός*. This, I think, may be the worry we ought to have in speaking of the Chalcedonian definition as a solution to the problem of impassibility as I understand it. Insofar as the bearing of humanity’s suffering can be said to be communicated to the divine in the Incarnation, it still does not give full account to the character of God in the scriptures as *pathic* and ‘vulnerable’ to creation in many ways, feeling sorrow at the failures of humanity, etc. While my concerns here are not limited to Christianity in that I wish to give a fuller voice to the *pathic* nature of God in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, even were I confining these concerns to Christianity alone it is not clear that this union of natures can account for the range of *pathic* expression of God (the Father or *ó θεός*) in the scriptures. That is, if we wish to give a full account for something like this reactive and personal presentation of God in the Judeo-Christian scriptures—as being genuinely affected by human action or states of affairs in the world, then it is not clear that the Chalcedonian definition would help us. We would, it seems again, have to argue that any *pathic* claims made of God in the Tanakh are, in fact, instances perhaps of an ‘eternally incarnate Christ’ who through his human nature alone is affected by human activity and in this expresses some *pathos*. Even still, we would not be able to say of any Tanakhic

expression of divine affectation that the divine is the subject of any change or affectation as God. If the concern then is to give greater voice to this reactive, personal, and *pathic* presentation of God in the Hebrew scriptures, then it does not seem obviously the case that the Chalcedonian formula as traditionally (and rightly) understood would aid us in any significant manner.

## 2.4 Classical Islam and Divine Impassibility

Any examination of the concept of impassibility in the Islamic tradition must be understood in light of and through the central Muslim doctrine of the *tawhid* of God—the absolute and ineffable oneness of God (Campanini, 2008). This oneness is not merely an emphasis on divine unity set in some sort of polemical context in contrast to Christian Trinitarian claims (though it occasionally took that form), but a thoughtful ontological point of reference in understanding, insofar as it is possible, who or what God is. By way of this doctrine of *tawhid*, I provide below an historical sketch of the work of various Muslim theologians and philosophers as that work bears on divine impassibility and the nature of God generally and examine some of the claims and arguments these works contain. This affirmation of *tawhid*, at least as it is developed by the *mutakallimun* and *falasifa* is a metaphysical claim denoting not only a radical monotheism and this ‘oneness’ of God (that the divine has no partners), but is moreover a commitment to divine perfection, transcendence, *aseity*, and simplicity.

As with the *Shema* for Judaism, it is this principle which will govern anything we may say of the divine. Also like the *Shema*, it is not of course presented as so philosophically rich in the scriptures themselves (in the Qur’an), but rather these implications of *tawhid* are carefully drawn out through *kalam*. We must here recall that *kalam* stands between the traditions of the

*ahadith* (the sayings of the Prophet) and the later speculative work of *falsafa*. This *kalam* tradition, as we have seen, bears a close methodological relationship to Scholasticism, in that it sought to defend and articulate dogmatic truths of the faith through reason and the employment of various classical sources. It is then this tradition of *kalam* that we ought first to examine before moving to the contribution of later philosophers of Islam. While explicit references to impassibility *per se* are difficult to find in the theological and philosophical corpus of classical Islam, this emphasis on divine transcendence and *aseity* can tell us much. Also, other metaphysical commitments related to and entailed by *tawhid* offer us a way to see that divine *apatheia* would be implied by these commitments. Again, any questions of impassibility in Islam (or any divine attribute) must be understood as inseparable from or entailed by this doctrine of *tawhid*. For the most part, a rejection of any anthropomorphic or anthropopathic language is clear in the *loci classici* of Islam, and any of this language as it appears in the Qur'an is often taken to be metaphorical or analogical, as a means for the believer to apprehend *something* like God, yet while carefully avoiding idolatry. In fact, many Islamic theologians were quite insistent upon a substantial employment of apophatic language in describing God so as to protect divine transcendence and this ontological distinction from creation. Therefore, much like in our inquiry into the classical theism of Jewish thought, we must infer where we can the possibilities of affirmations of *apatheia* from an Islamic ontology of God.

First, it is worth noting that despite there being few if any direct quotations of the Tanakh or New Testament literature in the Qur'an, it is most certainly a *biblical* work in that it stands in a clear relationship to the revelation of the Torah (*Tawrah*) and the Gospel (*Injil*) and admits as much. For this study, this is important for several reasons. First, it will be of no surprise that

the scriptural portrayal of God in the Qur'an is strikingly similar to that found in the Judeo-Christian scriptures. Again, it is not accidental that Islam is considered both a 'revealed' and 'Abrahamic' faith. In a plain reading of the Qur'an we find the image of a deity who is one, who creates and sustains the world, and yet also is intimately involved the well-being of humanity. Allah is 'merciful and compassionate,' a just judge, and a hearer and answerer of the petitions of humanity. Allah desires worship and exhibits an obvious 'jealousy' not unlike that found in the descriptions of God in the scriptures of Judaism. Likewise, God in the Qur'an is presented as a deity of some *pathos*—angry, vengeful, merciful, and compassionate, and as responding to various events within time and being affected by them. In significant ways, the task for theologians and philosophers in the classical Islamic tradition differs little from what we have seen in Judaism and Christianity: developing a coherent ontology of God whilst accounting for various anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms in scripture. Furthermore, these same *mutakallimun* and *falasifa* will employ similar strategies in accomplishing this end, from minimising this *pathic* portrayal of God to employing various classical sources to develop a rationally defensible theology. What we see then is not only a very similar portrayal of God as found in the Qur'an when compared with those portrayals in the Judeo-Christian literature, but also the development of a common ontology of God through shared commitments, reliance on similar classical sources, and through the 'crosspollenisation' of the tradition of classical theism.

Before beginning our examination of *kalam*ic sources, a few general comments about the 'character' of God in Islam, or an Islamic concept of God, is perhaps here warranted. Both the scriptures of Islam and Muslim theologians will insist that as 'none is equal to [him]' and



that creaturely concepts cannot apply and thus an apophatic approach is common (Qur'an 42:11, 112:4). Additionally, the metaphysical priority of God is made clear. God depends on nothing for its existence and 'neither begets nor is begotten'—an emphasis on the necessity of being of Allah and a clear denial of the Christian Trinitarian conception of the divine (Qur'an 112:3). Allah is also both 'living' and 'self-sufficient.' That God is 'living' would come to be understood philosophically as being akin to the Thomistic concept of the divine as *actus purus*—fully actualised and possessed of no potentiality—a pure activity of God sustaining the cosmos and willing all that is. This divine 'self-sufficiency' can also be seen as an affirmation of transcendence and non-dependence, that Allah is *a se* and *autarkic*. Additionally, while there are affirmations of 'attributes' of God, there is a concern similar to that we have seen in Judaism in avoiding having these attributes denote or introduce any plurality in the divine or as expressing any accidental properties.

#### *Mutazilite and Asharite Kalam*

Let us here begin with the early Islamic schools of *kalam*. This tradition is a fairly early attempt in Muslim theology to provide not only an *apologia* for central tenets of the faith but attempts to give rational justification for these dogmata. Very much like Scholasticism, as I have argued, the *kalam* tradition works from certain accepted truths in Islam and defends them in a rationalist and methodical manner. Unlike the later tradition of *falsafa*, it largely avoids speculative thought and engages heavily with Quranic sources. One of the first questions that appears in this tradition is what we can or cannot say of God and the divine attributes. With an eye to the presentation of God in the Qur'an and *ahadith*, the *mutakallimun* concerns themselves with exegesis and the development of an Islamic conception of God. Like the rabbis of Judaism

and fathers of early Christianity, they are presented with a scriptural conception of God that is in no way systematic and contains both anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms. Moreover, there is an insistence on the oneness and uniqueness of God who is, despite these descriptions, quite unlike humanity in many ways. So the *mutakallimun* engage in a kind of Islamic midrash over what we can know of God, how we are to understand Quranic descriptions of the divine, and what the divine attributes might be.

There emerge three prominent schools of *kalam* though here I will examine only two as they are most influential and provide more in the way of material germane to the questions we have before us—the Mutazilite and Asharite schools. The so-called ‘traditionalists’ which precede the advent of *kalam* give very little either way as to the nature of God, other than *tawhid* and an essential ineffability, but otherwise go no further, largely unconcerned with a definitive philosophical treatment of the divine attributes, etc. and are more devoted to matters of ethics and piety. It is only with the rise of the *mutakallimun* that we see a first attempt at something like a philosophical theology in Islam (Ali, 2016, p. 895). A theme that is shared in these schools of *kalam*, or rather, a common problematic for each is how to speak of God’s nature and attributes coherently and cogently whilst avoid cruder anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms found in the Qur’an. There is the related concern of course of *preserving* that most sacred of books and not evacuating it of all revelatory meaning through these descriptions of God. Though not yet as heavily influenced by the traditions of Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism as Islamic *falsafa* will be, there are traces of the kind Philonian worries we’ve seen above: a desire to affirm God’s transcendence and self-sufficiency, but still avoiding a Maimonidean agnosticism or denying the veridical nature of revelation altogether. It is

noteworthy that the Abbasid caliph, al-Ma'mun, in the 9<sup>th</sup> cent. was perhaps the first of the caliphs of the *ummah* to fully embrace an incorporation of Greek rationalism and science into his court and broader Muslim society. And it is under al-Ma'mun that we see the first real contests among these emergent schools of *kalam* and their disputations over the nature of God and the divine attributes.

We must imagine this against the background of both a 'traditionalist' view and the contributions of Ibn Hanbal (780-855CE) who is both within this older 'traditionalist' school and makes early contributions to *kalam* (Peters, 2003, pp. 235-236). For Ibn Hanbal and the 'Hanbali' school of theology, the divine attributes of God as found in the Qur'an should be spoken of as real and having their proper expression and subsistence in the actions of God (Elias, 2010, pp. 165-166). Often accused of an unacceptable 'literalism' by later Mutazilite and Asharite critics, Ibn Hanbal sought to maintain the *tawhid* of God while yet allowing for positive language regarding the divine attributes. He treated the various anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms in the Qur'an and *ahadith* as indicative of these various attributes, though 'ambiguous' in their language. Largely skeptical of a growing introduction of speculative Greek philosophy in the theological tradition of Islam, Ibn Hanbal rejected apophatic methods and the increasing tendency toward *allegoresis* in exegesis of the Qur'an (Heer, 2009). While desiring still to maintain the oneness, transcendence, and uniqueness of the divine, the 'Hanbali' school wished to avoid going as far as recent theological innovations might have allowed for. There was notable reaction to Ibn Hanbal's positive language of God and his ease with various anthropomorphic and anthropopathic description of God. Largely, both the Mutazilite and Asharite schools (though often opposed to each other) were united in a rejection of this kind of

‘literalism’ of which they accused the Hanbalites. The Mutazilite would take an extreme position in contrast to Ibn Hanbal in denying any positive knowledge of the divine and endorsing a strong apophatic tradition. Likewise, they would reject any interpretation which potentially likened God to humanity. Under the aforementioned caliph, al-Ma’mun, the Mutazilite position would become, albeit briefly, the orthodox dogmatic school of Muslim theology (Rudavsky, 2018, p. 26).

This is unsurprising given the Hellenophilic commitments of their patron, the caliph. Under the governing principle of *tawhid* and perhaps no little influence from Greek sources, the Mutazilites wished to affirm a radical transcendence of God, avoiding at all any human comprehensibility of the divine nature. This school of Islamic thought was perhaps most extreme in its refusal to countenance any anthropomorphic predication of Allah. For the Mutazilite school, al-Ashari writes, Allah is one and without equal, a being of pure wisdom, will, and existence. God is ‘... wise, powerful, and living but not like the wise, the powerful, and the living’ and ‘[any] human quality that might imply contingency cannot be attributed to him’ (quoted in Campanini, 2008, pp. 75-76). This mode of apophatic theology which sought to emphasise the radical ontological otherness of Allah was known as *tanzih* or ‘removal,’ thus ‘removing’ Allah from ‘any compromise or contact with reality’ (Campanini, 2008, p. 76). Insofar as one might be tempted to say Allah has any contact with the world, the Mutazilite school claimed *ghayr al-ashiya*—a complete otherness is a relation to the world. Concerns over this approach, though perceived as warranted in light of Ibn Hanbali views, came from al-Ashari (874-936CE) in that this view went too far, leading to an extreme agnosticism and ‘distancing’ of God from the cosmos and human interaction. The Asharite school then sought to find some

middle ground between the ‘traditionalists,’ with their positive language of God and comfort with *tashbih* or anthropomorphic/anthropopathic language (Heer, 2009, p. 10). Moreover, the Asharite school found significant worries with the perceived *ta’til* of the Mutazilite. *Ta’til* or the ‘stripping’ of God of all attributes, a radical apophatic theology, it was argued would lead to an unacceptable ineffability of God not even allowing us to speak of the divine as ‘existing.’ Mutazilite *kalam* was strongly countered by the Asharite school, especially regarding negative theology, which sought to preserve the inscrutability and transcendence (impassibility) of Allah. The Mutazilite understanding of *tanzih* was rejected as going too far in the way of denial of speaking of God resulting in, as the Asharites saw it, some sort of atheism (Campanini, 2008). For if there is a deity that we neither can know nor speak of, is this not essentially a denial of divinity itself? Though initially more comfortable than the Mutazilites with the anthropomorphic and pathic language in the Qur’an, the Asharite school eventually developed a more metaphorical hermeneutic of Quranic exegesis which, in their view, was in better keeping with *tawhid*. Though the Asharites had a similar concern for *tawhid*, *tanzih*, and the transcendence of God, they argued that while God’s essence could not be fully known by human reasoning, language of his attributes does give *some* knowledge of the power, justice, and knowledge of God such that we can speak of the divine, though cautiously (Heer, 2009). In this way, the Asharite situated themselves between the ‘traditionalists’ and their perceived problematic literalism and a radical Mutazilite apophaticism and agnosticism as to knowledge of God.

What can we gather from this brief examination of early Islamic *kalam* as to an understanding of divine *apatheia*? Clearly, we have both a commitment to a radical

transcendence of the divine and to concerns as to the divine attributes introducing some plurality in God, a worry we have seen above in our survey of mediaeval Jewish contributions. Similarly, we see a developing concern over the reliability of scriptural anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms and what they can tell us of the relationship of God to creation. The Asharite sought to preserve this transcendence of God but not eliminate all meaning from the plain language of the Qur'an. If there is anything close in these contributions to an understanding of the impassibility of God, it is an impassibility in the transcendence of God and in the otherness of the divine nature. That is, in the independence of the divine, a non-contingency, and *aseity*. This is, as we have seen, a possible valence of impassibility—impassibility in nature and impassibility as transcendence. This emphasis on the otherness of Allah shows the importance of monotheism within Islam and the doxological language of divine otherness found in the Qur'an and Sunnah. However, telling a cogent story about God's communication or interaction with creation seems problematic under this view, in that even this early there is a strong privileging of God's transcendence over the kind of reactive and *pathic* immanence common in the Qur'an. There are clearly early influences of Greek thought in the metaphysics proposed by the Mutazilites as well in their opponents among the followers of al-Ashari. Yet it is only as we transition to the *falsafa* of al-Kindi and al-Farabi that we see a clear rationalist and Hellenised influence (Campanini, 2008; Kassim, 2000; Leaman, 2002; Netton, 1982).

#### *Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi*

Here I would like to turn to two of the earliest of the mediaeval philosopher-theologians of Islam, Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi. It should be mentioned that much of what we may discern about the nature of God and the divine attributes in *falsafa* is largely had through various proofs

for the existence of God, though there are other topics that afford some insight such as the nature of the divine will and accounts of creation. We should begin here with Al-Kindi (800-870CE), an avowed Aristotelian and ‘philosophers of the Arabs’ as posterity will call him (Adamson, 2020). Al-Kindi is widely credited to be the first in Muslim philosophy to engage thoroughly with the Hellenistic tradition and incorporates its various concepts and grammar. While his work overlaps with that of the *kalamic* schools, Al-Kindi is better classified among the *falasifa* due to his unapologetic dependence on Hellenistic thought and the varied and speculative nature of his works. Perhaps most notably for the development of classical theism and a rationalist tradition in Islam, Al-Kindi’s *On First Philosophy (Fi al-Falsafa al-Ula)*, a work modelled on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle, provides our first full account of divine simplicity in Islam (1974; Adamson, 2020). In articulating the position, as consequent to the eternality and absolute *tawhid* God, Al-Kindi emphasis the *activity* of God both as the agent of the cosmos (to which all other entities are only derived or ‘metaphorical’ agents) (1974, pp. 112-113). This activity and oneness of God, in a transcendent perfection, admit of no ‘movement (change),’ ‘relation’ or any accidents (1974, pp. 67-68). Under this description, we seem already to have the grounds for not only a spatio-temporal simplicity but a metaphysical simplicity as well as an early concept of God as *actus purus*—admitting of no potentiality.

This is arguably due to a clear Aristotelian influence, but it is notable in that Al-Kindi believes he can begin with the oneness of God and deduce similar Aristotelian conclusions. It may be unfair to attribute this line of reasoning to the influence of Aristotle, but it does seem consistent with a common notion of divine perfection as we have seen in Hellenistic thought beginning with Philo and adopted and developed through the tradition of classical theism. Al-

Kindi will, however, break with the Philosopher and with many of his fellow *falasifa* in arguing against the eternity of the world (1974, p. 72). While no Muslim *mutakallim* or *faylasuf* would deny a contingency of the cosmos and its dependence on a creator for its subsistence, there was and would continue to be heated debate as to the temporal or eternal nature of this creation. In a rather tortured rendering of Aristotle's own argument against actual infinities, Al-Kindi applies this to time to establish its finitude and thus creation *ex nihilo* in which time as a feature of the cosmos, comes into being (1974, pp. 74-75). Aside from these theological and philosophical speculations about the nature of the cosmos, the theological philosophy of Al-Kindi largely aligns with the Mutazilite *mutakallimun* of his time, in his denial of any attributes in God and his emphasis on an absolute oneness and transcendence (1974, pp. 104, 111-113; Janssens, 1994). He does not, however, seem to go so far as the alleged *tanzih* of the Mutazilites, though this is perhaps due to his more obvious philosophical concerns rather than theologically driven commitments to avoiding *tashbih*.

Al-Farabi (870-950CE) bears similar theological commitments as expressed by the Mutazilites and is most certainly as much of *faylasuf* as Al-Kindi. While the latter will take the appellation of 'first philosopher of the Arabs,' Al-Farabi will come to be known as the 'Second Master,' with the first being, of course, Aristotle (Leaman, 1985, p. 17). Al-Farabi will combine Aristotelian thought with some Neoplatonic influence, with the latter expressed in his emanationist theories that are then transmitted to Avicenna (Haq, 2014, pp. 50-51). Al-Farabi's apophaticism is as strong as anything found in al-Kindi and perhaps even as strong as his Mutazilite coreligionists, though he does speak positively of God as 'knowing' and 'existent' (2007, pp. 88-93). Al-Farabi, in fact, does not even refer to God as 'Allah' but rather references



the divine only the 'First Being' in obviously Aristotelian terms (Campanini, 2008). For Al-Farabi, as with Al-Kindi, both following Aristotle, there is no potentiality in the divine and nor are there any causes which can affect God. Anticipating and influencing Avicenna's identification of essence and existence (taken up later in Jewish and Christian classical sources), Al-Farabi argues that any 'attribute' of existence is inseparable from essence in the divine (2007, p. 89). Essence and existence coincide uniquely in God, and all other things that exist have their existence only through derivation (2007, p. 91). Moreover, God exists 'perfectly' and subject to no corruption or comparability with anything in creation (2007, pp-88-89). As mentioned, Al-Farabi will differ from Al-Kindi in rejecting a 'temporal' creation *ex nihilo* in favour of a Neoplatonic or Plotinian emanationist view. This is perhaps due to his emphasis on the activity of God and the overflowing of the divine being, such that any 'temporal' creation would require some change in God even if only relational or nominal. More likely it is due to Al-Farabi's view of divine thought in which God, in meditating on the divine being itself, necessarily brings forth existence to other things given the divine nature as existence itself (2007, pp. 83-84).

Regarding any attribute of impassibility, are there metaphysical commitments in these early *falasifa* that may allow us to infer something of *apatheia*. It seems that the emphases on the ontological *activity* of God and any lack of potency would preclude the possibility of passivity and hence any *pathos*. So also would commitments to divine perfection and incorruptibility, it seems. Likewise, a timeless existence (of which a lack of potency would be consequence given these various Aristotelian influences) would likewise exclude passivity in God. We may also imagine that this common emphasis on the radical transcendence of God (in

a very Mutazilite fashion) would similarly require a significant ontological distance between God and the cosmos. It is noteworthy then in these various emphases on transcendence and *tawhid*, little is made of divine immanence except by way of provision of being. This must be seen in *some* contrast to the revealed nature of God in the Qur'an. It is likely that we may infer a general affirmation of divine impassibility from the ontologies of God found in both Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi. Finally, I would like to turn to those three *falasifa* most influential in the development of classical theism in not only Islam but in Judaism and Christianity as well, as each will go to influence both Jewish and Christian conception of God in this rationalist tradition.

*Avicenna, Al-Ghazali, and Averroes*

In concluding this section on an Islamic philosophical conception of God and divine *apatheia*, we must examine the contributions of Avicenna, Al-Ghazali, and Averroes. Each relates to each other interesting ways and, moreover, will come to influence the Scholastic tradition (particularly Avicenna). Avicenna or Ibn Sina (980-1037CE) initiates this apogee of an Islamic golden age of philosophical theology. His work, *The Book of Healing* (*Kitab al-Shifa* or *Sufficientia*) is perhaps our best source for his views on a divine ontology (2005; Gutas, 2016).<sup>28</sup> It is notably Aristotelian, influenced heavily by the works of Al-Farabi, and yet displays clear Neoplatonic features. While volumes could be devoted to his works on necessity and contingency, existence and essence, and his remarkable argument(s) for the existence of God, we may here confine ourselves to what we may gather as to general ontology of God as

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<sup>28</sup> I treat here primarily the last section of the *al-Shifa*—*The Metaphysics*. It provides the most ontotheological content of the *Kitab al-Shifa* and contains the rudiments or structure of Avicenna's famous 'Proof of the Truthful' (2005).

found in his works and how this may bear on the question of impassibility. Like Al-Farabi, Avicenna, though largely an Aristotelian, does endorse an emanationist account of creation as an overflowing of the being of God (2005, pp. 291-298, 335; Gutas, 2016). Compared with any other *falasifa* in the classical tradition, Avicenna expresses the most emphasis on the *active* nature of God. This is seen through his concerns with the realisation of any possibilities (contingents which are ‘necessary by way of another thing’) and in his emanationist and occasionally quite necessitarian account of the order of the cosmos (2005, pp. 30-32, 299-307). While he does not go so far as some earlier *mutakallimun* in denying secondary causality, he does worry on it but relies upon it for the maintenance of human freedom *and* as a means to explain the presence of evil in the world.

Similar to those authors we have examined above, and in a thoroughly Aristotelian manner, Avicenna insists on the absolute simplicity and activity of the divine. Much in the same fashion as the Mutazilites, he will avoid the predication of any *discrete* attributes to God given the possibility that they could be understood as accidental or contingent thus threatening the unity or *tawhid* of Allah—rendering God composite (2005, pp. 273-283). In his ‘Proof of the Truthful’ or *Burhan al-Siddiqin*, his most famous and influential argument for God’s existence, we find perhaps the best expression of Avicenna’s concept of God (Lizini, 2020). This argument and the ontology of God contained in it would be highly influential among, as we have noted, later Scholastics, namely Aquinas, and for Maimonides as well. God, in this proof, is that necessary cause upon which all contingents events or entities depend and are explained by. Given this metaphysical and causal priority, God must be both without any cause (as necessary) and immune to any external cause or explanation (2005, 29-34, 273-278). The immateriality or

incorporeality and simplicity of this ‘Necessary Existent’ seem straightforward given the Aristotelian framework within which Avicenna is operating. Yet he goes further in trying to identify this ‘Necessary Existent’ with the deity of the Qur’an, and it is this move that will come under the harsh scrutiny of the far more traditional and *kalam*ic Al-Ghazali (1963). While still within an Aristotelian metaphysics, Avicenna may be able to speak of this first cause as an intellect, agential, and even ‘good’ as a means by which other entities are moved, but he employs clear Quranic descriptions beyond this in a way that perhaps the argument does not provide for. That is, as al-Ghazali will mercilessly point out, it is further from a ‘Necessary Existent’ to Allah as found in Qur’an than perhaps Avicenna realises (1963, pp. 80, 121, 176, 185). Or rather, that Avicenna has this demonstrable proof of a ‘Necessary Existent’ and wishes to identify it with Allah, but the scriptural witness is less clear that he would like. While showing a certain apophaticism, Avicenna will nonetheless employ not only these Quranic descriptions but will explain that as a proper ‘cause’ of the cosmos, God must be also omniscient and omnipotent (2005, pp. 21, 290). Still, with some charity for Avicenna, in much of his ‘ontotheology,’ his purpose is rationally to demonstrate the existence of God and in so doing does not work within a traditional *kalam*ic style.

Al-Ghazali, while he may be considered rightly a *faylasuf*, represents a markedly more traditional and *kalam*ic position than do Avicenna or Averroes, yet he is no reactionary. While Al-Ghazali does not oppose outright the employment of any Greek sources or categories of thought in defence of the faith, he does judge that much of the increasingly popular *falasifa* is more indebted to Aristotle or Plotinus than to the revelation of the Qur’an (Hasan, 2013). So it not *per se* the usefulness of Hellenistic thought that he opposes but rather the way he perceives

it to have eclipsed the unique revelatory nature of Islam. For Al-Ghazali, the scriptures should be the starting point and governing dicta for any project in *falasifa* and he will argue that, at least since Al-Farabi, this more traditional *kalamic* methodology has been slowly replaced by a philosophical theology that bears more in common with a Plotinian emanationism than the character of God as revealed in the Qur'an. It is largely these concerns which dominate his most famous and influential work, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahafut al-Falasifa)* (1963; Campanini, 2008, p.19). Rather than allow certain philosophical presupposition to dominate, Al-Ghazali argues that we should begin with the Qur'an and various passages in it that describe God and subject those to 'demonstration'—a methodology similar to that as found in Scholasticism (1963, pp. 9-10). Yet if the literal meaning cannot withstand reasonable 'demonstration,' then other meanings should be sought out as nothing is in the Qur'an which is without purpose for the believer (1963, pp. 234-235).

Despite their significant disagreements, largely over conceptions of divine creation, Ali Hasan notes that both Al-Ghazali and Averroes will have this hermeneutical and 'scholastic' methodology in mind (Hasan, 2013, p. 142). Thus, in many of cases of anthropomorphic descriptions, Al-Ghazali will admit that 'demonstration' shows they must not be literal and so must then signify some other meaning (1963, pp. 233-240). Despite the 'sufficiency' for faith that the Qur'an provides, it nevertheless admits in the text that it contains both 'clear' and 'ambiguous' passages (Qur'an 3:7). In a notable break with both the Islamic Neoplatonic tradition prior to him and with the works of Averroes, Al-Ghazali has deep concerns over this emanationist schema (1963, pp. 12-51). First, he thinks it would deprive God of freedom to create and, in this 'hyper-transcendent' characterisation of God,

would strip (*ta'til*) the divine of all positive attributes, thus makes God merely 'metaphor.' (1963, pp. 61-66; Hasan, 2013, p. 144). Al-Ghazali, in keeping with his concerns over the works of *falasifa* and his own traditionalist leanings, wishes to retain some way of speaking of God meaningfully, without an extreme apophaticism and to be able to speak of God in, at least, analogous ways.

Averroes, who is often pitted against the positions of Al-Ghazali, will argue for this more common Neoplatonic conception of the divine, which while distancing God from creation, does lend itself to a pure transcendence (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, 2002). Yet the concerns are, as Al-Ghazali points out, how we may both meaningfully speak of God in any way the Qur'an portrays *and* how we can have any conception of divine freedom (1963). Regarding what we can say of the divine nature and divine attributes, In his work on the *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, Ali Hasan argues that Averroes will argue that God has no deficiency and is unaffected by anything (2013, p. 146). Furthermore, we cannot ascribe emotions to God in any sense in which they might obtain in humanity. In a manner similar to Aquinas, Averroes argues that attribution such as anger, love, or hate *cannot* be understood to involve any imperfection or lack or that they evince any affectation by something external. In speaking of these concerns for perfection and *aseity* in God, Ali Hasan notes that 'preserving God's transcendence and immutability motivates Ibn Rushd's treatment of the divine attributes more generally.' (2013, p. 146) Anything we wish to predicate of God, positively or negatively, must be governed by these commitments. And so, an unchangeableness and impassivity in God are required. Yet Averroes, in some commonality with Al-Ghazali, will argue that Quranic anthropopathisms are not entirely

without meaning but that they must only be understood in a cautious and analogous manner (1921, *vide* Intro. & Prob. 5, 2007, pp. 314-322; Hasan, 2013, p. 142). Furthermore, Averroes is quite concerned with the nature of divine knowledge in that if God were to know all particulars and there is human freedom, this cannot admit of anything like knowledge or perception as we know it in that it would violate the *unchangeableness* of God (2002, *vide* Disc. 11 & 16). Unlike various Scholastic solutions to this problem, Averroes attempts to solve by speaking of differing modes of God's knowledge of universals and of particular contingents (1921, *vide* Prob. 3)<sup>29</sup>. While Al-Ghazali is clearly more *kalamic* and traditional in his mode of understanding the divine, he still shows a notable influence of Greek philosophy. Though with Averroes, this influence is clearer and even concerning. Again Ali Hasan notes that, 'to many, [Averroes's] God is too transcendent, too far from the descriptions given Him in the Qur'an and the tradition [*sunnah*]' (2013, p. 150). Of these three great *falasifa*, I think we rightly infer, given other states metaphysical commitments, an endorsement of divine *apatheia*, quite probably in all sense outlined above (A-F).

This overview of various *mutakallimun* and *falasifa* tells us much on ways of understanding the divine in Islam and its role in the development of classical theism. First, we may see an initial tension between more traditional *kalamic* schools of Islam and later

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<sup>29</sup> *Vide* also the First Discussion of 'On the Natural Sciences' in the *Tahafut al-Tahafut* (2002). In the edition of Averroes' *Incoherence* used in this work, the text is divided into sixteen 'discussions' with his work 'On the Natural Sciences' appended and including four 'discussions.' The *Tahafut* is herein referenced according to this schema. In the *Kitab Fasl al-Maqal* (1921), the text is organized into five 'problems' and is referenced according to this schema.

*falsafa*. While this tension comes nowhere near the contrast we find between the Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition and Jewish rationalism, there is the sense that, for the *mutakallimun* and Al-Ghazali later, the *falasifa* go too far. This may be seen in concerns that, in especially the works of Avicenna and Averroes, God is transcendent and unknowable in a way out of keeping with Quranic revelation. Next, in common with both the developing classical Christian tradition and similar to Jewish rationalism, we may have something of a ‘shared ontology’ of the divine despite the diversity of these works. Moreover, we find the implications of a common commitment to divine impassibility, largely centered around an eternal transcendence of God and an unchangeableness or impassivity in the divine, such that God cannot be affected *ab extra*. While language of divine love, compassion, and mercy are present, both in classical Islamic sources and in the traditions in Judaism and Christianity, they are expressed in the mode of a divine constancy, rather than any temporal reactivity or ‘change’ in the divine in reaction to the mutable affairs of creation. Similarly, we see that certain metaphysical commitments are determinative of how we are to understand the Qur’an and that despite its various anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms, we must first attend to this perfection, transcendence, and unchangeableness in God and, consequently, these passages must be read in light of those commitments. This serves both to preserve the unique character of the divine *and* to prevent against any idolatry of the imagination in likening God to humanity, a most grievous sin for Islam.



## 2.5 Common Themes and Potential Problems

In concluding this survey of the place of divine impassibility in classical theism, it may be helpful to consider some common themes in this tradition and in the sources examined. More precisely, several questions arise. What may we distil from features of this tradition insofar as they may inform any predication (explicitly or implicit) of divine *apatheia*? Or, rather, what can we say generally of this shared ontology of classical theism—in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—such that divine *apatheia* would seem proper and necessary to a right conception of the divine? I think it can be seen that there is something like a common ontology of God as represented in various the *loci classici* explored above. This ought not to be particularly surprising as each faith worships the revealed ‘God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,’ and each, in its classical expressions, has drawn from common sources in Hellenistic thought to better articulate philosophically a cogent and coherent divine ontology. Additionally, we might here further explore that which has been suggested above in inquiring as to what may be some potential concerns regarding divine impassibility in classical theism. First, I will attend to this initial line of inquiry—that of some common features of this ontology and, as I see it, a common witness to the matter of divine impassibility.

First, I think we must note a certain tension in the much of this tradition and its representative authors in maintaining both a fidelity to the scriptural witness and in developing this philosophically rigorous ontology of God. We can think of this as, in part, a continuation of that which was begun by Philo of Alexandria—a project of reconciliation and synthesis. And yet one not as naively understood as Harnack would have it, that is, of an uncritical adoption of Greek thought such that the character and uniqueness of these Semitic faiths was bereft of some

original purity, but one that is undertaken to bulwark and give voice to the revealed truths of Abrahamic monotheism. Still, this underlying tension between revelation and the philosophy offered in support of it cannot be ignored. Each of the scriptural revelations of these faiths offers a conception of God that is, *prima facie*, quite personal, *pathic*, involved in and reactive to the affairs of humanity and the cosmos. And yet we must not forget that it is the very same Maimonides who, whilst arguing for a strong *via negativa* in theological discourse, will call upon Hashem who cares for orphan and widows, or the same Averroes who will draw heavily from the *Metaphysics* and yet daily utter the *bismillah*, and the same Aquinas who provides copious commentary on the scriptures who explores the nature of causes and *actus* and *potentia*. It remains the case, however, that we can discern a common manner in which this tradition will largely come to embrace not only a Philonian rejection of anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms as found in the scriptures but, moreover, to argue very similarly for the use of apophatic language in speaking of God. So there seems to be a theme common across the works of philosophers in this tradition: finding a balance between fidelity to revelation and giving a robust account of metaphysical concerns through, in a manner we might think determinative of this tradition, a generous employment of Hellenistic categories, concepts, and grammar, very much taking from the pagans ‘spoils’ so as to aid the faith.

Relatedly, there seems to be a common commitment from very early on to a specific notion of divine *perfection* put to work in this tradition of classical theism. I have demonstrated the origins of this line of thought in Hellenistic philosophy and what it provides in ways of the thinking about God. This understanding of divine perfection comes to be expressed in and through the development of classical theism—it is explicit in the Scholasticism of the Christian

West, in the rarified and heavily Aristotelianised philosophy of Byzantine Christian thought, and implicit in the *falsafa* of Judaism and Islam, particularly in works of Maimonides and Averroes. This methodology, both theological and philosophical, of something like earlier forms of Perfect Being Theism will inform much of what we can or cannot say of God, in light of this commitment to divine perfection. Moreover, it seems that many of the philosophical or metaphysical claims that constitute this classical divine ontology can and should be seen through this lens of this notion of perfection and how it is understood. While Philo seems to be the first to put this methodology or determinative principle to work in his synthesis of Greek thought with his understanding of God as revealed in Torah, this notion of perfection may also be inferred from the works of the *falasifa*.

Informed by or related to this notion of perfection, there are yet further metaphysical commitments that we might discern as common to this classical theistic tradition that will necessarily entail, not only divine immutability, but *apatheia* as well. Among these, we should include divine transcendence and *aseity*, divine simplicity, and *autarkeia*. Each is, of course, related to the other(s) as we have seen with all divine ‘attributes’ and collectively come to constitute a divine ontology that is not only philosophically articulated through these concepts, categories, and grammar of Greek thought but through this common commitment to an understanding of divine perfection as well. From very early on—in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, we have seen in both the *kalam* and *falsafa* of these faiths, a commitment to divine incorporeality. This is relatively uncontroversial, I think, and clearly amenable both to a reasonable understanding of the scriptures and their uses of metaphor. After all, very little in the tradition of revealed monotheism would deny this. Rather, we ought to look more closely

as what has been judged to be entailed by or bound up with the incorporeality of God and, moreover, divine *aseity*. First, and related to both God as incorporeal and *a se*, there is of course an understanding of spatio-temporal simplicity—that God is not composite as material things would be nor, as creator of both time and space, necessarily bound by these creaturely features. This affirmation of incorporeality and a spatio-temporal simplicity seems to run together. God is neither bound by that which is created nor, consonant with divine perfection, transcendence, and *aseity*, dependent on some prior cause that would explain any such composition.

None of this, it seems, is either philosophically or theologically (scripturally) problematic. As we shall see, even in the most anthropopathic expressions of the Rabbinic and Talmudic tradition, there is no denial of an ultimate supremacy and transcendence of God. We may also see how a commitment not only to divine perfection but to those features which may be understood to follow from it—incorporeality, *aseity*, and a spatio-temporal simplicity—would seem to entail divine eternity and one of not merely infinite temporal duration but of a *timeless* mode of being. Despite concerns over how we may speak of divine action *in time* we also see throughout the tradition of classical theism a general consensus as to this timeless eternity, and reasonably so. For if the divine is both transcendent and simple, bound in no way to creaturely modes of being, this temporal simplicity in God would not admit of some infinite extension across and within time. It is clear here, I think, as to how these aforementioned ‘attributes’ or ways of conceiving a divine ontology largely present in the tradition of classical theism would be sufficient to entail both divine immutability and impassibility. Under this notion of divine perfection and a ‘fullness of being,’ it seems, while not impossible, unlikely there would be any motive internal to the divine to change nor, given the ontological

independence of *aseity* and transcendence, God would bear no relation to the world such that any cause *ab extra* could be of any effect. Moreover, if divine simplicity is not merely spatio-temporal, but also of a metaphysical mode (property simplicity), then a further shoring up of what we have seen thus far seems right; God is incomposite even in nature, such that no accidents come to inhere in the divine nor would it be possible for there to be any divine in division in will, knowledge, action, etc.

It is here, however, that we come to perhaps the strongest expressions or most notable feature of what seems to be entailed (collectively or cumulatively) by the above: the divine as possessing no *potency* or unactualised potential. Here we move away from the generally Neoplatonic influences that may be seen in this treatment of the conception of the divine and divine perfection as provided above and into a thoroughly Aristotelian mode of philosophical theology. The careful articulation of causes found in the *Metaphysics*, but also in the broader Aristotelian corpus can here be seen. We may, of course, speak of the understanding of causes generally, but most germane to this feature of classical theism, at least at its highwater mark in the West through the work of Thomas Aquinas, is the argument from a first or necessary cause and an unmoved mover. For Aristotle and in the monotheistic *falasifa* who will depend on his work, any *potentia* must be realised by some prior cause in order for it to obtain. In God, of course, unlike the various and manifold lesser entities in some hierarchy of being or, for our purposes, a contingent, temporal, and finite creation, there can be no latent or unactualised properties or potencies. For to predicate such would require there be some *act* or *actor* independent of or ontologically prior to God—some greater thing possessed of all actuality

which could energise such potencies. Of course, this will not do in the case of that first cause or that transcendent and *a se* creator and sustainer of the cosmos.

This Aristotelian legacy need not be minimised as to both its role in the development of classical theism and to the current debate of divine impassibility. While most often associated with Thomas Aquinas and Thomistic conceptions of a divine ontology, this influence is found earlier in both Maimonides and Averroes, especially as they provide arguments for the existence of God. This new-found Aristotelianism, while largely still present in the Christian East at the time, though employed in different ways, was mediated to a great extent through this Arabophone *mutakallimun* and *falasifa* of classical Judaism and Islam. In the latter case, Averroes' heavy employment of Aristotle marks a significant turn in the Hellenistic influence on the classical theistic tradition, as Averroes will break notably with Avicenna and especially Al-Ghazali in this respect. An emphasis on this revived Aristotelianism does in no way lessen, as I see it, the manner in which divine impassibility would be entailed by those commitments spoken of above. A purely Neoplatonic or Plotinian conception of the divine or features of a divine ontology commensurate with this understanding of *perfection* would likely suffice in bringing us to both an immutability and impassibility in the divine. Yet, the implication of divine impassibility by this understanding of *actus* and *potentia* merely makes clearer the matter at hand and the way in which any passibility, if understood as some potency, would be impossible in God.

It is here worth mentioning that in the Christian East, in never having entirely lost the influence of Aristotelian thought, the Philosopher was likewise heavily employed in articulations of the faith though with slightly different results regarding a divine ontology. Much

as been made over this great difference in a divine ontology, especially as informed by Aristotle, between classical theism as developed in Scholastic and later Thomist arenas and the classical theism of that distinctly Byzantine philosopher and theologian Gregory Palamas. Much of this apparent difference is, I think, overstated and largely polemical but where it is not ought to be included here. For Palamas, the essence/energies distinction, present in Aristotle, will lay the groundwork for a much of later Byzantine theology as a way to speak, in almost emanationist terms, of an essential and economic or dispensational distinction in God, though perhaps only a formal one and with no essential distinction. The *energeiai* of Palamas's Aristotle, while providing something like a mediating role between the ineffable divine essence and creation, serve as something like the divine *operationes* of Thomist thought. Each 'school' will maintain not only divine simplicity (in the divine essence) and transcendence, but will likewise deny any passibility in the God, much less any straightforward *pathos*, even given the Palamite designs to 'make available' something of the divine to creaturely participation.

This is, I believe, an adequate account of how we may rightly see divine impassibility as found in this shared ontology of classical theism. There are differences, of course, and these differences matter, yet what we can discern of that which is constitutive of classical theism does indeed seem to entail a common commitment to divine impassibility, despite those varied uses we have seen across contexts. Again, at a very basic level, despite various other employments and meanings of impassibility in this tradition, we see a common witness that the divine is *not affected* in any temporal sense by creation and given this any reactive, personal, relational or *pathic* language in the scriptural presentation of God must give way to greater metaphysical

commitments and, on the whole, require certain hermeneutical methods to avoid endorsing most anthropopathisms in the scriptures of the revealed monotheism.



### Chapter 3. Passibilist Criticisms

In my introductory comments at the outset of this work, I spoke of a ‘new orthodoxy’ in contemporary theology and the philosophy of religion defined by a rejection of traditional affirmations of divine *apatheia*. This ‘passibilist turn’ has come about over the last century and may be seen as part of broader trend largely critical of a classical ontology of the divine, which would include open and process theism, theistic personalism, and rejection of both timeless eternity and simplicity in the divine. In this chapter, I wish to offer a brief account of this ‘new orthodoxy’ as well as a survey of various passibilist contributions. In ways equally difficult but quite different from those faced above in giving an account of divine *apatheia* in the tradition of classical theism, offering a critical analysis of passibilism is certainly not without its own challenges. Contemporary passibilists are a diverse lot, and thus it is in many ways difficult to speak of this ‘new orthodoxy’ as being constituted by any specific set of metaphysical commitments other than, of course, various criticisms and rejections of divine *apatheia*. Neither may we speak to there being anything like a passibilist ‘tradition’ that might mirror the relative uniformity and commonality of themes in classical theism. In the latter there is largely a clearly identifiable theological and philosophical tradition centred around a common divine ontology that is inclusive of divine *apatheia* or, at least, would entail it.

Even with this great variety present in recent passibilist literature, we can discern several ‘movements’ within this ‘new orthodoxy’. Though there is often significant overlap, it may clearest to classify these contributions by their motivations. Most prominently perhaps, are the works of Charles Hartshorne, J.Y. Lee, and Jürgen Moltmann, Michael Sarot, D.D. Williams,

et al. who offer concerns over divine *apatheia* based in most cases on some perceived deficiency in classical accounts of divine love or goodness or for a theodicy involving the ‘co-suffering’ of God. Many here come from the Christian tradition and so often incorporate new ideas about the meaning of the Crucifixion into both their understandings of divine love and their respective theodicies. Perhaps lesser known than the aforementioned authors are the contributions of Emil Brunner, A.J. Heschel, and Terence Fretheim whose concerns center around the Biblical witness and are motivated to give fuller voice to notions of a scripturally *pathic* character of the divine for largely theological reasons.

Next, we might include both open theists, whose ranks are quite numerous but would include T.J. Oord, W. Hasker, John Polkinghorne, Richard Rice, Charles Swinburne, and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Though not all are straightforwardly ‘passibilist’ in the manner of those authors mentioned above, each will argue for some epistemic passibility in the divine. Of course, we ought also to include various process theists as well in that the very ontology of God found in process thought seems necessarily to include a denial of divine *apatheia*. Among these, we must include A.F. Whitehead whose work sets the tone for all later works in process thought, but also John Cobb, Charles Hartshorne, and a few Jewish theologians and philosophers of religion, including Yoram Hazony and possibly A.J. Heschel whose work shows some tendency toward process theism. Additionally, we must include Jewish contribution working from a theology of the Shoah and here we may also include Heschel. This is, of course, no exhaustive inclusion of Jewish Holocaust theologians, but rather includes those whose contributions show passibilist tendencies. From antiquity, I think it is important to include the Rabbinic and Talmudic tradition in Judaism, but also possibly the tradition of Sufi Islam. In the former, with

its intentional embrace and employment of various anthropomorphic and anthropopathic understandings of God, we may find a striking contrast to the tradition of Jewish rationalism in classical theism. In Sufi Islam and the works of Ibn Arabi, there is a notable emphasis on divine love and a receptivity of God to the cosmos. Both of these traditions could be seen as 'passibilist' but not in ways characteristic of the 'new orthodoxy' spoken of by Goetz as definitive of a recent trend in theology and the philosophy of religion. Even still, they are owed a voice as each offers a rather different conception of the divine than may be found in the tradition of classical theism.

The bulk of this chapter is devoted to providing a survey of not only these varying passibilists criticisms of late (20<sup>th</sup> cent.) but also to those traditions in antiquity that may admit of something like passibilist thought. In concluding this chapter, I offer a critical analysis on the authors examined and attempt to discern some themes common to this trend, especially as it may bear on the viability of a classical ontology. As with the survey of classical theism provided above, no attempt is made to provide an exhaustive account of passibilists contributions. Matters of brevity are prohibitive, of course, and I mean here only to provide a general sense of these recent worries. Of the contributions selected, I have tried to provide not only for the diversity of sources in recent passibilist thought, but also to give voice to authors outside the Christian tradition. While recent passibilist criticisms have largely come from within that tradition, we would do well to be more ecumenical in our approach. For partly this reason, I have included the Rabbinic and Talmudic tradition and as well as that of Sufi Islam and Ibn Arabi. As with the survey of authors representative of classical theism offered above, choices here must be made and decisions as to how to order such an inquiry. Before offering this survey

of passibilist contributions and a critical analysis of some common themes, I here first sketch out very roughly the current landscape of this ‘new orthodoxy’ and then, as I did with classical theism and its general commitment to divine *apatheia*, explore some considerations that might explain an attraction to some form of passibilist thought.

### **3.1 The Current Debate and Some Considerations for Passibilism**

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, until the last two centuries there was little in the way of debate, in Christian philosophical theology at least, as to the impassibility of God. Divine impassibility in Islam and Judaism are more complex cases as I have shown, with direct treatments or defences of divine *apatheia* being relatively rare. Where criticisms of the doctrine of divine *apatheia* have come forth, they have mostly had their origins in Christian sources, with significant Jewish contributions both before and after the Holocaust. In Christian dogmatic theology, the doctrine of divine impassibility remained largely unchallenged from the patristic era, through the mediaeval expressions of classical theism, and well into and through the Reformation. Divine impassibility had become such an integral piece of Christian dogma and philosophical theology that it seemed almost unassailable and ‘axiomatic.’ Despite the recent ‘new orthodoxy’ of passibilist thought, the doctrine of divine impassibility remains ably defended in much of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the confessions of magisterial and continental Protestantism. Likewise, some form of divine impassibility is still assumed in much of ‘orthodox’ Judaism and Islam, though clear dogmatic expressions of the doctrine are relatively uncommon. In Judaism, we might think that the continued importance of Maimonides’s Thirteen Principles (*Shloshah Asar Ikkarim*) and their emphasis on the absolute unity, incorporeality, and eternity of God would collectively entail a commitment

to impassibility and immutability. Likewise, Hermann Cohen's (1842-1919CE) understanding of the divine attributes will largely follow the mediaeval tradition of Jewish rationalism (1995; Katz, 1977, p. 54). In Islam, we may reasonably think that surah of 'Purity' (*Ikhlas*) in its similar emphasis on the absolute transcendence, eternality, unity, and *tawhid* of God might also imply immutability and impassibility in some form (Ali, 2016, p. 893; Qur'an 112). Jamal Elias also notes that for most contemporary Sunni Muslims similar theological commitments are constitutive of orthodox Islam (2010). Yet concerns over the viability of the doctrine of divine impassibility have emerged and remain potent, despite significant pushback from more traditionally-minded theologians and philosophers defending the doctrine (Dolezal, 2019; Hart, 2003; Helm, 1990; Keating and White, 2009; Weinandy, 2000).

Various forms of passibilist thought have gained much traction over the last century, and we have witnessed something like a 'passibilist turn' in much of theology and philosophy of religion. Ronald Goetz has spoken of it, and not without reason, as a 'new orthodoxy' in theism (1986). What was a mostly settled matter of orthodoxy continues to be questioned and represents, as I see it, part of a larger trend critical of much of classical theism.<sup>30</sup> Richard Bauckham offers a fairly detailed account of this rise in passibilist thought (1984). He traces the origin of this trend to the 1946 publication of Kazoh Kitamori's *Theology of the Pain of God*, not long after the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the Anglophone world, Bauckham cites the works of A.N. Whitehead as playing a seminal role in this shift regarding traditional affirmations of divine *apatheia*. As we have seen above, Charles Hartshorne, who

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<sup>30</sup> It seems that surely process theism and open theism ought to be seen as offering ontologies of God alternative to that of classical theism, but we may also wish to think even of theistic personalism, Molinism, etc. as other, less radical, challenges to this classical theistic tradition. Rejections of divine simplicity and divine timelessness should also be seen as part of the trend questioning core tenets of classical theism.

was taught by and worked with Whitehead, would also come to play a significant role in the development of this passibilist trend. Outside of Anglophone theology and philosophy, Bauckham cites the contributions of Emil Brunner, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Jürgen Moltmann as also furthering this move away from a classical understanding of divine impassibility. Moltmann, in his works *The Crucified God* and *The Trinity and Kingdom*, develops these concerns and becomes perhaps the most well known of passibilist authors other than Hartshorne (1972, 1980). Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this movement has waxed only stronger with many theologians and philosophers of religions assuming *some* kind of passibilism in the divine, many of whom are identified above and so I will not provide any further anthology here.

Representative of this turn, Marcel Sarot comments:

During the present century the idea the God is immutable and impassible slowly but surely given way to the idea that God is sensitive, emotional and passionate [...] by now the rejection of the ancient doctrine of impassibility has so much become a theological common place, that many theologians do no even feel the need to argue for it. (1992, quoted in Lister, 2012, p. 123-124)

Sarot is not far off. It has indeed become almost the default in much of theology at least to assume the unviability of divine *apatheia* and, worse even, to dismiss it as an extraneous Hellenistic category wholly incompatible with the love of God or divine concern for creation. Though I address some motivations and themes in concluding this chapter, it is perhaps here worth noting what various concerns in recent theology and philosophy of religion have informed this ‘passibilist’ turn or what perceived deficiencies in traditional thought have animated this significant shift away from a classical account of the ontology of the divine and the attributes of God.

We may then ask what are some possible motivations, religious, scriptural or philosophical, for the adoption of or sympathy for passibilist thought? We can, I think, locate a certain attraction to various passibilist accounts very much along the lines of what these contributions often have in common: the purported failure or inadequacy of traditional theodicies, concerns for a meaningful account of divine love and openness to creation, attempts to provide a cogent philosophical account for divine foreknowledge which allows for robust creaturely freedom, and emphases on ‘plain readings’ of the scriptures. Bauckham here is again helpful. He identifies several themes and possible motivations potentially explanatory of the rise of passibilist thought similar to those I have mentioned above. Patent across much of this passibilist trend is a renewed interest in or feeling of greater acuity of the problem of evil. This can be traced, of course, to historical events of the recent century: the mechanised horrors of the First World War and the deployment of nuclear weapons and the concentrations camps in the Second World War. He notes that the theology of both Bonhoeffer and Moltmann may be traced to their experiences as prisoners of the Nazi regime. Still, Bauckham rightly notes that the presence of human evil (or natural evil) is not sufficient to fully explain this passibilist turn as he observes that, at least within Christianity, the doctrine flourished *during* times of great persecution. This latter observation is most interesting in that it alone may afford of something of how the early Christians understood the soteriological value of divine *apatheia*. In this particular strain of passibilist thought, we see an attempt to reconcile the love of God with profound human suffering. Christian passibilists have often adapted these concerns into a nontraditional theology of the cross or a model of ‘the crucified God.’ For Jewish theologians of the Shoah, there are quite varied responses. But many, even if not conventionally passibilist,

question the viability of traditional conceptions of the divine as might be found in classical theism, particularly the rationalism of Maimonides.

We may also identify related worries regarding divine love and concern for creation as playing some role. In rethinking the nature of divine love, many passibilists have seen the need to predicate some *pathos* in God in order to make that love ‘meaningful.’ That is, one might wonder how it is that God can be said to properly love (or be loving) if there is no participation in some way in human *pathos* or if the divine cannot ‘suffer with those who suffer’ and ‘rejoice with those who rejoice.’ God as a ‘fellow-sufferer who understands’ has struck many as a proper understanding of divine love and certainly this notion may provide great succour for those afflicted in various ways (Whitehead, 1978, p. 351). To this notion of the succour provided by such thinking, we might also locate some of this shift in thought as being due to various pastoral and therapeutic needs. Whilst many may be more comforted by the image of God who suffers with them, this is a separate matter, of course, from whether or not God does (Scrutton, 2013, p. 872; 2020, p. 154). Additionally, some acknowledgement of the influence of Harnack’s Hellenisation thesis must be given here. Especially among recent Protestant theologians and philosophers sympathetic to passibilism, there seems to be the assumption of a philosophical corruption of a ‘scriptural theology.’ While this is certainly a problematic category, there may be an understandable discomfort with the metaphorical, figurative, allegorising hermeneutics of classical theism, one that could be seen as having distorted revealed the character of God and the force of the scriptures themselves. Related to the previous comments about a return to ‘scriptural categories,’ we have the contributions of such figures as A.J. Heschel and Terence Fretheim who both for reasons of theological concern and Biblical criticism have endorsed



forms of passibilism. In varying degrees in these authors, there does seem to be some motivation to separate out or return to scriptural conceptions of the divine unadulterated by philosophical influence.

I would here to give a bit more attention to motivation for a ‘scriptural passibilism.’ In almost all strains of contemporary passibilist thought we examine, can find *some* sense in which these authors assume their works to be more faithful to the scriptures than classical accounts. It is important, I think, to note what they may be tracking whether or not their judgements are in fact correct. We have seen that the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are indeed laden with an apparent passibilism or *pathos* of God; indeed, it seems almost presumed for understanding the texts. Not only is the divine portrayed as subject to some temporal affectations but also seems to be *passionate*—wrathful, jealous, even vindictive. In the Tanakh, New Testament literature, or the Qur’an there is no shortage of citations providing a notable and even scandalous portrayal of the divine in anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language and, to use J.J. Elias’s additional category, anthropopsychic terms as well (2010). Stephen Voorwinde has identified around 842 references to various divine emotions in the Tanakh alone, with some 100 or so of them speaking of God’s compassion (2002). Likewise, the Qur’an is replete with language that seems to attribute very human-like qualities to God. Moreover, we must also be mindful that for Islam its revelational history includes the *Tawrah* and *Injil* and so earlier stories of both Judaism and Christian are included in its theological history. To this Quranic conception of God, Jamal J. Elias provides an analysis in his work on the conception of the divine in Islam. It is here worth quoting:

While *anthropomorphic* references to God almost never lead Muslims to conception God in human form, *anthropopsychic* and *anthropopathic* conceptualisation [...] are pervasive. An anthropopathism and anthropopsychism might be unavoidable in a religion, such as Islam, which holds as a doctrine certainty belief in a caring God who is intimately involved in the maintenance and future health of the universe and human beings. For us to interact with God, He does not have to *look* like us, but for His communication and interaction with us to be comprehensible, He certainly has to *behave* like us, or at least in recognisable facsimile. (2010, p. 163-164)

This passage, I think, captures much of what scriptural passibilists at least might worry about in classical theism's heavy employment of figurative understandings or allegory and metaphor to minimise this 'behaviour like us' conflicting as it might with ideas of divine perfection. The scriptural passibilist might argue that God does, in fact, behave in this way, and this must tell something of the nature of God (at least in interactions with humanity). We, of course, do not have to say that all of the divine actions or dispositions are *exactly like* those in humanity, but what Elias argues is that they must at least be similar enough for us to not only understand but act accordingly.<sup>31</sup> Amongst these texts we then find striking similarities in these portrayals of the 'God of Abraham' as one who 'sorrows' and 'repents' of having made humanity, one who can be bargained or reasoned with, as an answerer of prayers, and as one who visits wrath upon the disobedient. In very anthropopathic language, the God of Abraham is portrayed as jealous and desirous of worship, growing in anger and showing mercy *reactive* to the disobedience and repentance of the people of Israel. Though amongst scriptural motivation for passibilism, perhaps the most potent are those images of the divine in the scriptures of revealed monotheism that portray not merely some regret at the evil of humanity but a sorrow for the suffering of creation, especially those most vulnerable and in need (*vide* Heschel). Throughout the scriptural

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<sup>31</sup> This is, I think, a critical point that I take up below in speaking of my concerns over classical understandings of divine *apatheia*.

witness, God is portrayed as intimately concerned with the wellbeing of creation, taking sorrow in its failures and investing in its righteousness. This is perhaps most clear in the *Nevi'im* of the Torah but is present also throughout the Qur'an which almost without exception names (not merely describes) God *al-Rahim* and *al-Rahman*.

So it is indeed very hard to dismiss the view that the God of revealed monotheism is a very *personal* deity, intimately involved in and revealed unto humanity, and possessed of attributes not unlike those properly found in human beings. We can easily see why an attentive reading of the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam would provide a picture of the divine not easily rendered compatible with *some* of the divine ontology and attributes as presented by classical theologians and philosophers. There may indeed be legitimate worries that Philonian attempts to allegorise and make metaphorical or figurative much of divine revelation could only take us so far if we wish to retain a concept of the divine that is uniquely distinct from any 'First Principle' of Hellenistic philosophy. It seems quite certain that this worry—that of 'scriptural categories' being eclipsed by speculative metaphysical concerns—is motivational for almost every trend toward passibilism and it is a general criticism of a classical ontology that is not easily dispatched. Many of the contemporary passibilist authors surveyed below will see their work as working out a philosophical problem of impassibility and immutability and doing so in a way that is more properly faithful to scripture. Proceeding in an historically chronological manner, as I did above in surveying classical theism, I would now offer some accounts of various passibilists contributions. Though here I would start quite a bit earlier than the 'new orthodoxy' of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rather, we might begin with the

conceptions of God in Jewish antiquity where they diverge notably from the classical, rationalist tradition of Maimonides.

### **3.2 ‘Passibilism’ in the Rabbinic and Talmudic Tradition**

After the fall of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple, Rabbinic Judaism very quickly became the normative form of a previously quite diverse expression of the faith of Israel. With the absence of the Temple, Jewish life came to be centred around Torah study and exegesis and attention to *halakhic* matters in everyday life insofar as they could be separated from the cultic practices of the Herodian temple. In this move away from the sacrificial and cultic centre of Jewish life, it can be said that a new way of being Jewish arose. Interaction with the divine was mediated through Torah and there was an increased emphasis on a holiness of common life. Given the change in this *locus* of connection with God, the desire for critical and exegetical work with Tanakh came to dominate much of Judaism. Through the period of *tannaim* and *amoraim*, the Midrashic tradition developed and resulted in, after some time, the production and compilation of the Talmud (the Mishnah and the Gemara). While the rabbis engaged in allegoresis, metaphorical and analogical hermeneutics in order to make relevant many legal requirements found in Torah and for the sake of ‘pastoral’ or moral development among their people, the image of God presented in much of the Rabbinic and Talmudic literature significantly differs from what we may find in the rationalist tradition of Judaism expressed in classical theism.

Not only does this further show the great diversity in Jewish thought as to how God ought to be conceived, but it demonstrates some tension and perhaps even a divergence of method and tradition in this faith. This is not to say that the Rabbinic contributions are ‘anti-philosophical,’ but rather that their concerns are not such that much employment of

philosophical categories, classical or otherwise, is found. Certainly, part of the reason for this is a lack of motivation to develop anything like a ‘rational’ ontology of God. This does not mean that we cannot speak of a conception of God in this tradition, but rather that it bears little of the fundamental assumptions or influences that shape a Maimonidean or classical theist Judaism. Steven Katz in his *Jewish Ideas and Concepts* give significant treatment to this question of ‘God in the Talmud’ or in Rabbinic Judaism, and Yoram Hazony’s essays in *The Question of God’s Perfection* argue for a preference of this conception of God over that developed in the rationalist tradition (1977; 2019). Hazony’s description of this conception of God (and those of Katz as well) contrast this Rabbinic/Talmudic way of thinking with that as found in *The Guide for the Perplexed* or the *Wars of the Lord*. What makes this significant, I think, for this inquiry of this study is the way in which this Talmudic tradition shows little negative concern for divine *pathos* and rarely seeks to minimise it in the way that, as I have argued, the tradition of classical theism has sought to do both in its hermeneutics and its metaphysics of God. While it would be anachronistic to speak of the ‘passibilism’ of Rabbinic thought, it nevertheless gives a window into another way of doing theology and thinking about God’s presence and interaction with humanity. Furthermore, we can easily imagine that those contemporary passibilists motivated by scriptural, pastoral, or theodical worries would find themselves far more at ease with this tradition than that as expressed by Maimonides, Aquinas, John of Damascus, or Averroes. Again, we ought to think of Philo who, though largely within an accepted tradition of a heavily Hellenised and Alexandrian Judaism, was not much accepted within this developing tradition of the rabbis and largely survived only through his influence on early Christian theology and philosophy. However, we must here be careful so as not to

minimise the very high view the rabbis had of God, though rarely expressed with anything like philosophical precision. Katz notes:

Abstract philosophical concepts, like those found in the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo, and in Greek thought more generally, are foreign to the thought-system of the rabbis who created the Talmud and the Midrash. There, however, a marked tendency among them to present an exalted picture of God, and to avoid expressions that could throw the slightest shadow on His absolute Oneness. (1977, p. 17)

Here we see again that determinative principle expressed by the *Shema*. Though with little philosophical explication, the rabbis still hold to a unity and supremacy of God. So perhaps there is not as much difference between this tradition and that as expressed so profoundly by Maimonides than one may be tempted to think. Yet in the Talmud not only is there a marked acceptance of various anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms but an emphasis on the *nearness* and *interaction* of God with humanity even stronger than that found in the Tanakh.<sup>32</sup> This tradition is, of course, an interpretation as all theologies are, but it is most interesting that his conception of God is preferred. Katz writes, ‘The nearness of God is the predominating idea of the Talmud and Midrash. God mourns because of the evil decrees He has pronounced upon Israel; He goes into exile with His children ... and is overjoyed when the scholars triumph over him in *halakha*.’ (1977, p. 19) It seems that for the rabbis only if God *can* be comprehended and known in anthropopathic and anthropomorphic ways can the divine love be truly felt and, moreover, imitated in a lived religious experience. *Contra* the potential agnosticism and strident apophaticism of Maimonides in his efforts to preserve divine perfection and transcendence, the

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<sup>32</sup> As further evidence of this striking conception of God in Rabbinic and Talmudic wherein there is a fascinating comfort with anthropomorphisms: in Genesis Rabbah 8:10:1, Rabbi Hoshiah is said to have commented that when God created humanity, the angel present mistook [him] for God and began to worship him, bearing as [he] did so much the very image (*selem*) of God.

rabbis present God as needing to be sufficiently personal and human-like so as to allow for a growth into the *imago dei*. Yochanan Muffs, in *The Personhood of God*, remarks, ‘a model of divinity that does not partake of personhood can hardly be expected to cultivate personhood.’ (Muffs, 2005, pp. 192-193. Even more interesting, and perhaps more consistent with *pathic* portrayals of the divine in the Tanakh, is the rabbinic image of God desiring that the divine mercy outweigh wrath with God praying to [himself] for this continence. If only to drive further home this notable different in Rabbinic/Talmudic thought from that found in classical theism, James Diamond, a Jewish theologian of process, is worth quoting here in his demonstration of the contrast with Maimonidean thought, ‘...the biblical and rabbinic God offends the notion of a God whose “perfections must exist in actuality” This God is not a necessary being in its philosophical sense but one that is contingent on human endeavour to realize compassion, perhaps God’s principal trait.’ (Diamond, 2019, p. 45)

What may we make of this both as to the matter of divine *apatheia* and to the tradition of a classical theistic ontology of God as we have examined above? At the very least it gives some historical warrant not exactly to the concerns of modern passibilists but some ground upon which they may stand in antiquity in their questioning of the tradition of classical theism and its affirmation of divine impassibility and an actualised perfection of God. This Talmudic picture certainly does not require that we deny the transcendence, supremacy, and oneness of God, much less force the divine into the cosmos such that God then becomes the victim of our actions. But it does give some room to speak of a condescension of God in way that opens God to affectation, to robust interactions with humanity, and to being known as a ‘father’ in a personal and reciprocal fashion. Furthermore, this tradition might well remind us, or offer some

caution in our attempts to provide a rationalist and systematised ontology of the divine, bringing us back to that ‘revealed’ and personal ‘God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ If anything it represents a venerable tradition of monotheism that has not taken philosophical divine perfection as a rubric for understanding God and, at the very least, may serve as sobering counter to a rarified and deeply analytical metaphysics of God as found in various *loci classici* in the theological and philosophical traditions of classical theism.

### 3.3 Towards the Possibility of Passibilism in Islam

Unlike either Christianity or Judaism, there is no discernable trend towards passibilism in Muslim thought, in antiquity or modernity. Yet we may still be able to explore the possibility of something like passibilist thought in the Islamic tradition through the contributions of Sufism and the works of the Andalusian philosopher, poet, and mystic, Ibn Arabi (1165-1240CE).<sup>33</sup> Ibn Arabi was a prolific author of lasting influence and a remains figure of some controversy in Islam (even accused of heresy or *kufir*). He was a student of Al-Ghazali, and this influence is pronounced in his work. We must recall that though Al-Ghazali was very much the *mutakallim* and *faylasuf*, his mysticism, concerns with the speculative metaphysical theology of Avicenna, and his worries over straying too far from Quranic revelation contrasted with much of the *falasifa* of his day. Moreover, Al-Ghazali provided works on the divine in the Sufi tradition, and this legacy can be seen in the theology of Ibn Arabi (Chittick, 2013). The latter’s work is potentially helpful in that it affords a view of God and the relation of the divine to creation that

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<sup>33</sup> There are two well-known Muslim scholars bearing the name Ibn Arabi/Ibn al-Arabi. Both are of Arab and Andalusian origin and both produced works of impact. I am here speaking of Muhyi al-Din Ibn Arabi, the Sufi poet and mystic, *not* the jurist Abu Bakr Ibn Arabi.



contrasts in interesting ways with a more conservative and classical ontology of God in the *falsafa* of Islam. Ibn Arabi's works (and those of Sufism generally) on divine love are of particular interest. William Chittick, perhaps the most prominent scholar of Sufi thought, provides much in the way of commentary on Al-Arabi's legacy and so is quite helpful here (1989, 1995, 2013, 2014). While we cannot say that there is anything like a clear passibilist theology in either Sufism or the corpus of Ibn Arabi, understandings of the divine in this tradition do afford something of an interpretive possibility of some *pathos* and emotion in the divine in a manner more intimate towards humanity than is present among the works of *mutakallimun* and *falasifa*.<sup>34</sup> In a way quite different from the hermeneutical commitments of *kalam* or *falsafa* wherein the governing rubric is 'nothing is like him,' the Sufi tradition is much more comfortable with an imaginative interpretive approach (Qur'an 42:11). For the Sufi, God is not only 'Majesty' but is present and pervasive in an extremely accessible way (Chittick, 1995).

Perhaps other than the Hanbalite 'literalist' tradition, anything like a window into divine passibility in Islam must be through this Sufi understanding of divine love and of the attributes of God as merciful and compassionate (*al-rahim, al-rahman*).<sup>35</sup> Unlike much of what we have seen above with many of the classical *mutakallimun* and *falasifa*, Sufi authors show much

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<sup>34</sup> On the passionate love of Allah and divine intimacy with humanity, see the 78<sup>th</sup> chap. of Ibn Arabi's *Futuhat al-Makkiyyah* (*The Meccan Openings*), translated by Ralph Austin (1989).

<sup>35</sup> We ought here to recall that Hanbali tradition discussed in the previous chapter. The Asharite and Mutazilite schools of *kalam* strongly opposed the Hanbalite 'traditionalist' or 'literalist' due to their wishing to grant some veridical status to the various *anthropopathism* in the Qur'an. While it is unlikely, despite his opponents' accusations that Ibn Hanbal ever thought God had a body, he did most likely think that the divine existed in and interacted with humanity in forms similar enough to our experiences as to make Allah personal and relatable. Of course, as *kalam* and *falsafa* develop, this view will be minimised in order to provide for the transcendence and ineffability of Allah (Elias, 2010).

greater comfort with ‘the mythic language of Qur’an and Hadith,’ adapting it, unsurprisingly, into poetry on the love of God (Chittick, 2014, p. 230). Chittick speaks to this in his work,

*Divine Love:*

Generally speaking, experts in Kalam insisted on God’s utter transcendence and downplayed any suggestion of immanence. By doing so, they obscured that fact that the human perception and reception of God are intimately bound up with human nature. Trying to avoid anthropomorphism, they sought refuge in the abstrusities of rational thought and avoided the imagery and symbolism of the Qur’an and Hadith, especially when these depicted God in blatantly human terms. A good portion of Ibn al-Arabi addresses this allergy of Kalam to taking the Qur’an at face value. He advises the Kalam experts to stop explaining away the apparent meaning of the verses and to open up their souls to God’s disclosure of Himself in forms and symbols. (2013, p. 3)

From this, we may see that Ibn Arabi (like the Hanbalites) is concerned with a loss of the very specific imagery of God in the Qur’an which, very much like the *Tawrah*, will speak of God with a richness indicative of divine love, mercy, and compassion and in very *anthropopathic* and *anthropopsychic* terms (Elias, 2010). To embrace *kalam* so fully would be a move away from the unique and personal character of God as revealed unto humanity. Like the *falasifa*, however, Sufi authors will still speak of divine love as an energetic force which effects creation and the ultimate perfection of the cosmos. Yet, the Sufi tradition will go much further in speaking of a *personal* character of divine love, in terms of the ‘needs’ or ‘desires’ of God. A citation favoured by the Sufi mystics is from the *Hadith Qudse*: ‘I was a Hidden Treasure and I loved to be recognised, so I created the creatures that I might be recognised’ (Ibn Arabi, 1982, p. 34).<sup>36</sup> Chittick notes that the Sufis would take this hadith to describe both God’s motivations for creating the cosmos (a desire to be loved) and as evidence for an ongoing creative act in perfecting those whose love God desires (2014, p 235). Moreover, there is a creative reciprocity

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<sup>36</sup> The *Hadith Qudse* (*Qudsi*) are those *ahadith* afforded a special status among collections of the *ahadith* of the Prophet due to there being view has directly inspired by Allah.

in this understanding of love in that God's love is fulfilled by the believer responding to that divine love. Ibn Arabi is very concerned with what he sees as the potential errors in 'dialectical theology' (*kalam*) in commenting that if Muslims remained with their 'proofs,' no creature would ever love God (Ibn Arabi, 2014, p. 131-132; Chittick, 1989, p. 180).<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps more interesting from Ibn Arabi and his fellow Sufi Muslims, is the emphasis placed on notions of divine mercy and compassion—*al-rahim*, *al-rahman*—both of which have their etymological origins in *rajim* or 'womb' (Beneito, 1998). This is of note for the Sufis if we consider further what this mercy and compassion should look like in the divine. Far from a juridical notion or an ontological provision of being, either remitting some violation of a commandment or a preservation of existence (though both may be included), this emphasis on the maternal nature of the mercy and compassion of God is most interesting in an otherwise quite patriarchal culture and faith. I think we must take any Sufi emphasis on this aspect of divine mercy to denote something surprising about the nature of divine love—that it describes God as more merciful than any mother could be to her child (Yousef, 2010). Moreover, the Sufi literature and Ibn Arabi will make much of claim that God is 'friend of believers' and that, according to the *Hadith Qudse*, when believers love the divine, God is the 'hearing with which he hears, the eyesight with which he sees, the hand through which he holds, and the foot with which he walks . . . ' (Ibn Arabi, 1982, p. 52; Chittick, 2014, p. 235).

While we must admit again that none of this gets us anything quite like a 'passibilist theology' in the Islamic tradition, it does yet serve a place much like the literalism (or 'traditionalism') of the Hanbali school in early *kalam* or the Rabbinic/Talmudic schools in

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<sup>37</sup> *Vide* Mohammed Rustom's translation of Ibn Arabi's letter to the *faqylasuf*, Al-Razi (2014).

Judaism as a note of dissonance in a tradition otherwise dominated by the contributions of scholastic *kalam* and *falsafa*. Moreover, it offers us another view of the divine, one *defined* by love and mercy and an openness to creation portrayed in very personal and intimate ways. It is not unsurprising then that for many Muslims, both Shia and Sunni, Sufism in general and Ibn Arabi, in particular, is thought of as heretical. Much of what is spoken of in Sufi thought as to the immanent mercy and love of God as well as ‘personalising’ imagination in Quranic hermeneutics can be seen as running counter to the broader orthodox tradition in Islam wherein God is, if anything, transcendent, ineffable and no proper ‘partner’ in creation with humanity.<sup>38</sup>

### **3.4 Passibilism in Contemporary Jewish and Christian Thought**

I mean here now to offer an examination of various authors in the Judeo-Christian tradition of late whose works stand out as representative of this ‘new orthodoxy’ of passibilist thought. Here included are the contributions of both Jewish theologians and philosophers, as well as those coming from the Christian tradition. I have chosen to treat authors from both traditions in the same section as both represent this recent ‘passibilist trend’ and both Christian and Jewish passibilist contributions influence each other in various ways. Authors from the Christian tradition who are motivated by concerns as to divine love and goodness as well to the sufficiency of traditional theodicies are here included. Also included are those authors, both Jewish and Christian, whose concerns are for a return to ‘biblical categories’ as contrasted with

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<sup>38</sup> I am here deeply indebted to the contributions of William Chittick in his various explorations of both Sufi Islam and the works of Ibn Arabi. I was very much aided by several conversations with him as well as the consultation of his works, upon which I heavily rely. While his work on Sufism and Ibn Arabi do not make any clear forays into passibilist thought, they nevertheless provide a thorough treatment of Sufi theology and the theology of Ibn Arabi which are here employed in exploration of the possibility of a passibilist account of God in Islam. Finally, I must acknowledge the ongoing work of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society in its attempt to provide a more comprehensive resources of the works of the ‘*shaykh al-akbar*’ (<https://ibnarabisociety.org>).

the ‘speculative metaphysics’ of Hellenistic thought, e.g. Brunner, Heschel, Fretheim, et al.<sup>39</sup> Again, though not exhaustive by any standard, I mean here only to survey these accounts and offer some comments as to this passibilist trend in contemporary theology and the philosophy of religion. For each author, I offer but a brief sketch of what I judge to be some of the more notable contributions of their works as they pertain to the question of divine *apatheia* at hand.

*Jürgen Moltmann*

Perhaps most impactful in this turn toward passibilism was the publication of Moltmann’s now famous *The Crucified God*, first translated into English in 1974. Certainly, this work set the tone for later passibilist literature, and its impact is hard to overestimate. Yet it seems that a tendency toward entertaining passibilism over and against the traditional orthodoxy of the apostolic, patristic, mediaeval and early Reformation thinkers can be found before Moltmann’s work. J.K. Mozley’s *The Impassibility of God* published in 1926 outlined the tendency toward passibilism in no fewer than twenty-two contemporary proponents of passibilism in Christian theology. Moltmann’s work was heavily influenced by prominent philosophers and theologians such as Whitehead, Hartshorne, Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Heschel and so it was far from some remarkable turn of mind that Moltmann’s work alone effected this shift in philosophical theology, but rather that much of contemporary theology had been arcing toward it for some time. Moltmann sees the orthodox theology of Christianity as struggling for relevance in modernity, especially regarding the question of human suffering. The answer to this, he thinks, is a return to a crucicentric/staurocentric theology: a theology which conceives of the divine *primarily* from the view of the cross and does not seek to mitigate, by the

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<sup>39</sup> I am obliged to Rhiannon Grant for the helpful recommendation that I give a broader account of passibilist contributions from the Jewish tradition, especially those coming from Shoah theology.

Chalcedonian definition and hypostatic union, the very real suffering of God *in the divine nature* with humanity. For Moltmann, Christ's 'Cry of Dereliction' as found in the gospels of Mark and Matthew is the hermeneutical and theological key for properly understanding the relationship of the divine with humanity *and* of the relationship of the Father to Christ (1974). That a person of the Trinity, fully divine, is subject to passion and, in his humanity, suffers with all of humanity both solves the problem of divine impassibility and renders classical theism's insistence on the doctrine existentially vacuous. While it may make for respectable and elegant theology, divine *apatheia*, as Moltmann would have it, cannot stand up to the reality of the cross and its answer to human suffering. Moltmann veers dangerously into Theopaschite territory in this work, yet it is a position he is strangely comfortable with. For Moltmann, the scriptures themselves bear clear witness to the passion of the divine and cannot be conveniently subjugated to patristic, conciliar, or Scholastic theology.

Moltmann offers two interesting contributions to this 'passibilist turn.' Moltmann agrees with the general assessment contained in this work that the view that God is either impassibly static or an eternal victim constantly beset by the affection is an unnecessary dilemma and he emphasises the *possibility* of voluntary passibilism (1974, pp. 267-276). Yet, Moltmann takes it further, arguing not that this kenoticism was simply the self-limiting of the Logos in assuming human nature, but rather that God the Father becomes passible, in his grief for the crucified Christ, for the sake of humanity. Thus, Moltmann wants to take the kenoticism of the Christian fathers much further, applying it to God the Father generally and not only in the person of Christ in a very specific manner. Second, Moltmann, like many passibilists, will insist that love is impossible unless genuine suffering is also possible (1974, pp. 268-270).

Suffering, in its fullest form, is for Moltmann a necessary condition for love. Suffering cannot be merely not a general *pathos* or vulnerability to affectation; it includes specifically the ability to feel pain. This is accomplished, Moltmann argues, by the Incarnation of Christ and his Crucifixion *and* the presence of God with Christ in that suffering. Yet, Moltmann is aware of the problems an unqualified passibilism could bring. The logic is this: if a genuine experience of suffering is required for love and God necessarily is maximally loving, then an unqualified passibilism would seem to necessitate his involuntary and nearly infinite suffering. This would then make the divine an eternal victim of *pathos*; thus, it is necessary that any suffering of the divine be taken on voluntarily. This notion of voluntary passibilism is essential, as Moltmann sees the problem with what he takes to be strong impassibilism. According to his understanding of love, an impassible God would be unable to love and so would be ‘poorer than any man’—the most deficient of all entities, it seems. This work of Moltmann in *The Crucified God* would go on to influence Paul Fiddes, Richard Swinburne, and William Hasker in their various treatments of the question of divine (im)passibility (Fiddes, 1988; Hasker, 1989; Swinburne, 1993).

*J.Y. Lee*

In addition to Moltmann, the work of Jung Young Lee (1974) must also be thoroughly considered. Lee argues that the governing principle in exploring any concept of God and (im)passibility is that the divine nature must be considered essentially loving. Notably, Lee argues that divine love is indeed *agape* rather than some erotic love. As Lee argues, erotic love is dependent on the worthiness of the loved, whereas *agape* is not. Thus, it is proper then to understand divine love as unconditionally agapeistic. This unconditional love is, for Lee,

empathetic, communicative, and participatory. This embrace of *agape* as the very essence of the divine and that which governs all other divine attributes is noteworthy. Lee argues that we can know the love of God by what he does (inferentially), yet he goes further in cataphatically asserting that *agape* is the divine nature. Lee makes several claims here that, similar to Moltmann, are problematic. First, he assumes that all love, insofar as it can be said to be genuine, must be (to use his unclear distinction) empathetic and not merely sympathetic. A lover must participate *in* the suffering of the loved in *each and every sense* in order for this love to be genuine. This reaches perhaps too far for reasons I have shown above. Second, Lee argues that impassibility has wrongly disallowed for Patripassianism, thus contributing to a sterile stasis in God incompatible with, Lee thinks, both scripture *and* the love of God. I have argued that this is an essential mischaracterisation of both impassibility itself within the tradition of classical theism and fails to appreciate the motivations for preserving it. For both Moltmann and Lee, in what is seemingly an endorsement of Theopaschism and passibility, God is moved into the contingent cosmos in an attempt to make the divine more loving but in a way in which it seems may, in fact, compromise the capacity of the divine to love purely and fully through at least some involuntary vulnerability.

*Charles Hartshorne*

While better known for his fundamental role in the development of a Christian process theism (along with A.F. Whitehead, both of which are treated further below), Hartshorne motivations for this move towards a processist theology are largely motivated by concerns of divine *apatheia*. I would here speak to some of those initial motivations and concerns albeit briefly as Hartshorne and Whitehead are discussed in greater breadth below. In his work *Man's*



*Vision of God*, we find some of the influential and impactful criticisms of divine impassibility (1941). Hartshorne, like many of his fellow passibilists, does assume a critical assessment of the role of Hellenistic philosophy in the development of classical theism, but his most interesting positions are those regarding that nature of divine ‘impassivity’ and divine love. Fundamentally, Hartshorne takes divine *apatheia* in classical theism to denote being ‘incapable of being acted upon’ (Creel, 1986, p. 9) It is this incapacity that he then takes to be in conflict with what we may say of divine love, which is taken by Hartshorne to necessarily include vulnerability as love requires not only the affectation of joy from creation but also ‘a sensitivity ... to the sorrows of others.’ It is for this reason primarily that Hartshorne will reject a classical understanding of divine impassibility, given that under his account at least, it does not include the kind of affectational vulnerability necessary for love. And, as divine greatness is expressed most powerfully through love, the divine cannot be said to be ‘impassive’ in this classical sense.

Though he will argue that we ought rightly to conceive of the divine in an Anselmian fashion as the ‘most powerful possible being,’ Hartshorne does not take this feature of a classical ontology to exclude some passivity in God (1941, p. 29). That is, Hartshorne argues that we can in fact imagine God as traditionally conceived—as the greatest possible being—but that this does not commit us either to impassibility or God as *pure act*. Much like J.Y. Lee above, Hartshorne will take this ‘greatness of God’ to be expressed or governed by an essential agapeistic character. In fact, he will reject both the classical conceptions of the divine as impassible and as *actus purus* in that he takes the latter, rightly I think, to admit of no latent potency or passivity. But given that, for Hartshorne, love *requires* some passivity and affectational character and that God is primarily ‘love,’ both the notions of God as purely *active*

and impassible must be rejected. For Hartshorne, this greatness and power of God is in fact expressed in *passivity*, as a 'strong man' may yet well be passive as an expression of goodness, love, etc. (1941, pp. 105-106, quoted in Creel, 1986). His concerns seem also to be bound up with the worry that an impassible God would be necessarily immune to the joys or sorrows of creation and thus unaffected at some essential level by either goodness in creation or a sorrowing for the failures of humanity. These arguments may, on their own, have some soundness, yet it in pushing further on these concerns Hartshorne will come to introduce as essential passivity in the divine through the development of his process theism which then would render the divine unwilling subject to affectation and vulnerability.

*Paul Fiddes*

Another striking philosophical work which comes down on the side of passibilism (and from a thoroughly scriptural basis and motivation) is Paul Fiddes' *The Creative Suffering of God* published in 1988. Fiddes, like Moltmann, considers the pastoral advantages of a doctrine of passibility though these do not substantially obscure his philosophical and theological arguments. Beholden in ways to process thought and Holocaust theology, Fiddes argues that, like Moltmann, the cross is both the epicentre of divine participation in and communication with human life and the means by which the problem of evil can be answered (1988, pp. 163-169). Only a God who can be said to properly suffer in the same ways as humanity can express divine love, and this expression of divine love is found most profoundly in the cross and Christ's 'taking on' human suffering in a universal manner (1988, pp. 16-25). Additionally, Fiddes does well to illustrate what he sees to be the lengths to which classical theologians in the Christian tradition will go to minimise divine *pathos* for the preservation of divine impassibility (1988).

He cites Abraham Heschel's work with the prophets of the Hebrew canon in speaking of the prophets proving an 'emotional nexus' between the suffering of the divine and the suffering of humanity (1955). Fiddes calls to task various classical theologians such as Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas for what he sees as their deliberate attempts to deny suffering in the divine through certain philosophical presuppositions and their distinctive hermeneutics (1988, pp. 16-18). Fiddes finds the classical theist attribution of impassibility to God to be antithetical to Christianity and the scriptural witness as a whole, yet this criticism of the classical teaching of impassibility fails in significant ways to understand the various valences and nuances of the term as it has been employed. Fiddes seems to rely on an understanding of impassibility that is akin to a kind of apathy—a sterile indifference to human suffering, which is right to reject but which is a misunderstanding at the heart of the false dilemma with which I aim to dispense. It is, again, an understanding of impassibility poorly informed by that richness of classical theism. Fiddes, like, Lee is emphatic that proper love is empathetic, and that one can only be said to love another insofar as the lover participates in the sufferings of the loved. In contrasting his view with that of 'traditional theology,' Fiddes writes, '... if God is not less than personal, and if the claim "God is love" is to have any recognisable continuity with our normal experience of love, the conclusion seems inescapable that a loving God must be a sympathetic and therefore suffering God' (Fiddes, 1986, p. 17). This is a clear expression of much of modern passibilist logic, dependent as it is on a very specific understanding of love and desire to preserve meaning in scriptural language. Yet again, however, this presents issues for the defenders of classical theism's doctrine of divine impassibility which, I have shown, sought to protect the divine from any corrupting *pathos* which may, in fact, inhibit a full divine expression of love.

*Marcel Sarot*

Next, I would offer some comments on the passibilist thought of the Catholic theologian Marcel Sarot. Sarot is unique in that despite his being a philosopher and theologian of the Catholic tradition, his work runs counter to the classical theism of Roman Catholicism. His position in *God, Passibility and Corporeality* published in 1992 is radical even among contemporary passibilist thought. Sarot argues that *agape* is indeed the divine nature, citing here the Johannine literature and that this *supra-essential* property governs any other attributes of the divine (Sarot, 1992). That is, in a manner like that of Moltmann, Lee, and Fiddes, any other attributes of the divine must be compossible with love as Sarot understands it. And, unsurprisingly, he understands love in the manner of most within the passibilist ‘new orthodoxy’ as necessarily reciprocal, participatory, and empathetic. Sarot worries, however, and perhaps rightly so, that if this is the case, God’s being incorporeal presents a significant problem for divine experience under the conditions of divine love. If God is unable to experience all human ‘emotions’ or ‘affectations’ as it seems would be the case in being by incorporeal, then Sarot’s radical notion of participation cannot obtain. Sarot’s initial intuitions may seem right, and many would point out that, for Christianity at least, the Incarnation may be able to provide some assistance here, in that God takes on a body with humanity. Nevertheless, Sarot insists that Godhood itself, the very *arche* of divinity should be understood as embodied—a feature he thinks required by the governance of divine love (Sarot, 1992, pp. 160-206). This is indeed an interesting playing out of what such a definition of love as given by many passibilists might, in fact, entail and it is a worry I treat briefly below. Furthermore, this move toward divine embodiment on the part of Sarot seems related to both the ancient and classical positions that

‘passions’ are often associated with embodiment. Recalling from above, one of the classical arguments for a certain type of divine impassibility was the fact that as the divine is incorporeal, there are certain affections that are necessarily unavailable.

*Emil Brunner*

Emil Brunner’s contributions to this debate come largely through his work *The Christian Doctrine of God* (1949).<sup>40</sup> Much like Fiddes above and, as we shall see, Fretheim, and Heschel below, Brunner’s concerns are motivated by what he sees as classical theism’s inattention to ‘biblical categories’ of thought. Much like Harnack, Brunner is critical of the role of Greek thought in the development of classical theism and will dismiss the speculative pursuits of Greek philosophy as foreign to the scriptural witness of the divine (1949, pp. 152-153). In fact, he will go so far as to say that the influences of Platonism and Neoplatonism have shaped a classical theistic concept of the divine in manner estranged from ‘the Biblical idea’ of God (1949, p. 243). For Brunner, this ‘Biblical idea’ of God is that of a subject who is revealed in personal ways and not some intellectual object of philosophical speculation. Brunner argues that this influence of Greek thought has led to a neglect of the character of God as presented in the scriptures and, as such, results in minimising of these ‘revealed’ aspect of the divine. To the matters of impassibility and immutability specifically, Brunner argues that these concepts ought to be reconceived as a ‘steadfastness’ in divine concern and goodness and *not* taken to denote the lack of any affectation in God; God is both constant and ‘react[ive]’ (1949, p. 273). Through

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<sup>40</sup> Emil Brunner’s work is, insofar as I can tell, largely not included in the standard passibilist literature of late. However, the content of his work and his concerns regarding both the divine attributes of classical theism and his desire to return to ‘biblical categories’ seem to make him an accidental ally. For a thorough treatment of Brunner’s contributions and his relative neglect in recent theology (being eclipsed by the far more prominent Karl Barth) see *Emil Brunner: A Reappraisal* by Alistair McGrath (2014).

‘enter[ing] into the activity of man and acting accordingly,’ God is reactive to and responsive to changes in humanity (1949, pp. 268-269). God is, according to Brunner, unchangeable and impassible in divine steadfastness, but nevertheless changes in behaviour in accordance with the acts of humanity (1949, p. 268). While there is a way to read this as comporting with accounts in classical theism of divine responsivity and reciprocity with humanity, Brunner seems to be working against this. This notion of God’s action in the world seem very *pathic* and affectational and he is quite clear in his rejections of immutability and impassibility as classically understood, especially as he wishes to replace our understanding of each with the idea of God’s constancy of goodness rather than an immunity to passivity. While he will affirm God’s ‘unchangeableness,’ Brunner does not understand this in a Platonic fashion but rather as an expression of the *chesed* of God or a ‘steadfastness’ (1949, p. 273). Reading Brunner this way is supported by his overall skepticism regarding the place of Hellenistic philosophy in understanding the divine. In a manner not unlike Moltmann, Brunner’s understanding of the ultimate act of *pathos* is centred on the Crucifixion, though he wishes to provide for a broader *pathic* understanding of God as he thinks the scriptures themselves warrant and even demand as a matter of fidelity to revelation.

*Terence Fretheim*

Terence Fretheim’s concerns over divine impassibility are not shown forth in any strictly philosophical criticism of the doctrine or its classical understandings. Rather, as a scholar of the Hebrew scriptures, he approaches the issue in a manner more in line with theological and hermeneutical concerns. In *The Suffering of God*, he offers what is perhaps his most helpful contribution to the matter at hand (1984). While he gives very little in the way of

any criticism of the classical tradition or its relationship to Hellenistic philosophy, he shows an approach to the scriptures that is certainly at odds with this tradition. He does not take on any view of the divine as existing in a timeless eternity, but rather as in some way very much in time with creation. Knowing what we do of the relationship between divine timeless eternity and *apatheia* in the tradition of classical theism, this denial of a timeless eternity will affect much of how Fretheim understands divine *pathos* (1984, pp. 39-44). Though a Christian scholar of the Tanakh, his hermeneutical commitments mirror those of the Rabbinic and Talmudic tradition discussed above, though with greater concern for an overall *taxis* and shape to his understanding of the divine as found in Hebrew canon. Fretheim argues that the fundamental category that determines how we conceive of the divine is that of metaphor (1984, pp. 5-17). He does not merely mean here a literary convention as employed in texts but rather as an ‘image’ with which we approach the scriptures or which the scriptures evoke in us. It is this concept of metaphor, being of divine *pathos* or divine perfection, that Fretheim argues is determinative of what we say of *who God is* (1984, pp. 1-12). He is critical of the tradition of Philo which he thinks comes to influence much of the Judeo-Christian tradition in that it has sought to minimise various anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms found in the scriptures. Fretheim contends that it is these anthropomorphic and anthropopathic images that tell us what the divine is like in relationship to creation and so should not, in the following of Philo, be dismissed as some mere accommodation to human intellectual failure (1984, pp-7-9). The metaphor or images are indeed indicative of the manner God is disposed to creation and while few of these *pathic* descriptions of the divine should be understood as univocal to human affectation or suffering they do indeed present to us a correct conception of the ‘revealed’ deity

of the Abrahamic faiths (1984, pp. 6-9). That is, in a manner much like with saw above with Jamal Elias's understanding of various Quranic anthropomorphisms and anthropopsychisms, God behaviour and disposition in Godself is *similar enough* to ours as to provide for a reactive, relational, and personal character in the divine (2010). Fundamentally, Fretheim will argue that, again while not univocal, we ought to understand divine *pathos* in very much the sense it comes to us in this scriptures. Yet, Fretheim is here careful is distinguishing between a general *pathos* in the divine—a capacity to be affected by human actions—and any irrationality in the divine. Following Heschel in this understanding, as we shall see below, Fretheim will indeed speak of divine passion, but qualifies that it is not a passion as understood in either the patristic or Scholastic witness examined above. His understanding of divine *pathos* then includes not only affectation or 'affectivity' in God but also some sense of passion. Still, this passion does not include being 'overwhelmed' by emotion or 'embittered' (1984, p. 111). Though not overcome, God is 'touched and affected in the deepest way possible,' but maintains a 'faithfulness' and 'salvific will' (1984, p. 111). Unlike Heschel, however, Fretheim will argue that theses *pathic* dispositions of the God are not merely expressions of the divine/creaturely relationship but admits of an affectational nature in Godself. Still, the essential character of God is unchanged—the divine *chesed*—but creation does indeed impact God not only in the divine *economia*. It is this *chesed*, that divine love, steadfastness, or faithfulness, that both informs and animates divine *pathos* and yet restrains it—never allowing God's continued love for creation to be thwarted, despite various passions (in Fretheim's understandings).

Thus in Fretheim's work, we find a quite interesting perspective. There is, in some sense, an immutability and perhaps impassibility in God in that the *chesed* of the divine is



inviolable and central to the essence of God. Even still, this not at all to preclude God's *pathos* insofar as those emotions evoked by human action remain 'rational.' For Fretheim, both sorrow and anger can be 'rational' in that they are proportional responses to this ills and disobedience of humanity (1984, p. 124, 141-145). What Fretheim lacks in providing anything like a philosophical ontology of the divine, he more than makes up in close reading of the scriptures and in exploring ways in which God could be unchanging in an essential sense and yet reactive temporally to the cosmos. He takes seriously, in a way found in the Talmudic and Rabbinic tradition of Judaism and among the Hanbalites in Islam, the presentation of God in the scriptures giving forceful argument against any Philonian exegetical manoeuvres that might strip God of a meaningful interactivity and relationship with the cosmos. Through his employment of the concept of metaphor, Fretheim offers us a way to think about what 'images' of God dictate or govern our conceptions of the divine.

*A.J. Heschel*

The contributions of Abraham Joshua Heschel are thorough and bracing and clearly motivated by both theological and scriptural concerns regarding the character of the divine and the interactions of God with creation. Heschel provides nothing in the way of a particular philosophical ontology of the divine, but he does come close to something like a consistent 'scriptural theology' inasmuch as such a thing can be had. The ideas most central to and characteristic of his thought are found in his work, *The Prophets*, originally published in 1936.<sup>41</sup> This fundamental idea of divine *pathos* as that unique and characteristic valence through which God expresses concern for humanity is taken up also in Heschel's earlier works, *Man Is Not*

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<sup>41</sup> The 1962 edition by Harper and Row Published is here used. *The Prophets* is largely the product of Heschel's doctoral thesis, *Die Prophetie*.

*Alone, Man's Quest for God*, and *God In Search of Man* (1951, 1954, 1955). Also worthy of note are a collection of Heschel's essays, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity* (1996). While most certainly 'passibilist' in his theology, Heschel does not neglect that ultimate supremacy, transcendence, and ineffability of the divine. That is, even with his emphasis on divine *pathos* as revelatory of the unique character of divine/human interaction, there is yet a balance of immanence and transcendence. Still, Heschel is very concerned with the Maimonidean or rationalist tradition in classical Jewish thought which he traces back to Philo (1962, pp 319-320, 343). He even speaks of this Hellenistic influence as 'block to Jewish philosophy' preventing a properly Jewish way of thinking (Heschel, 1996, pp. 155-156; Held, 2013, p. 135). This Philonian project, as I have called it, distinctive to classical theism broadly was, for Heschel, neither Biblical nor Rabbinic thinking. Through adopting and incorporating Greek categories in Jewish thought, the scriptures are made 'absurd,' according to Heschel, resisting as they do the concepts of the Greek mind (1996, p. 156).<sup>42</sup>

Heschel was profoundly concerned that this classical tradition and its employment of Hellenistic philosophical categories, concepts, and grammar would deprive Judaism of its unique and distinctive features in understanding the divine (1955, pp. 101-102). God's investment in and concern for creation are, Heschel thinks, belied at every turn by the rationalism and agnosticism of someone like Moses Maimonides and other classical Jewish thinkers in that tradition. Thinking of the divine as perfect, unchangeable, and absolutely transcendent was, for Heschel, to conceive of the divine in a way impossible to fit with 'biblical

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<sup>42</sup> I must here acknowledge the great assistance Shai Held's work has been in putting together something of a *précis* of A.J. Heschel's theology. Held's work, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Call of Transcendence*, is arguably the most insightful and comprehensive work of late on Heschel's thought (2013).

faith' (1962, p. 352). Again, Heschel does not want to deny an *essential* supremacy, transcendence, and ineffability of the divine—we shall not nor could ever comprehend the *fullness* of God or the divine essence—but something of Godself has been revealed to us in ways that the classical tradition would seek to minimise. Heschel shows significant agreement with Harnack's Hellenisation thesis, though in Jewish terms. He sees a disturbing attempt from Philo to Maimonides to reconcile the 'God of Aristotle' with the 'the God of Israel' (Heschel, 1996, p. 271). Shai Held argues that Heschel considers this as violence done to the scriptural witness resulting in a loss of 'all that is distinctive and compelling in Jewish theology' (Held, p. 138). Heschel's primary worry here seems to be that the abstraction and speculation of much of mediaeval Jewish rationalism would take from us any conception of the 'God of Israel' as 'living' (1962, p. 289). Here Heschel does not mean to take 'living' as the classical theologians and philosophers might as denoting something apophatically of the divine, perhaps 'not non-existent' or 'not inactive.' Rather, the God of Israel is no mere First Principle or provider of being, but something like a person, engaged with a reciprocal, reactive, and covenantal relationship with humanity and all creation (1962, p. 333-339, 353). Moreover, God as 'living' is taken by Heschel to be describing God as 'all concern' for humanity who cannot watch or judge the actions of humanity 'impassively' but rather is a 'lover' in 'passionate' relationship with creation (1962, pp. 356-357, 331-332).

We have then a sense for Heschel's dominating concerns for liberating a 'scriptural theology' from the abstract and speculative claims of a Philonian and Maimonidean rationalism. Whether or not his criticism of both philosophers is entirely fair is a question I take up below. But we can feel some of his concern in wishing, as other scriptural passibilists will, to give

greater voice to the unique nature of God in the Abrahamic faiths. Not unreasonably does Heschel worry that strongly apophatic and philosophical approach such as found in Maimonides might evacuate much of this revealed and personal conception of God found in the Tanakh. Let us now attend to what exactly Heschel means by divine *pathos*, ‘passion’ and his claims that God is not ‘impassive’ (1955, pp. 244-245). Fundamentally, Heschel sees no warrant in viewing either divine impassibility or immutability as necessarily constitutive of perfection. A *pathic* mutability in God, when governed by *chesed* or a steadfast loving-kindness, is both a better expression of perfection and more faithful to the scriptural character of God (1962, pp. 356-357). Here we may understand a ‘*pathic* mutability’ as simply denoted God’s capacity to respond and change *in time* to the free actions of humanity or states of affairs in creation. This *pathos* of God is, for Heschel (and here we see his influence on Fretheim) neither one of an emotionally overwhelming nature or irrational, but rather a genuine sorrow and concern for humanity that, while admitting of an affectational and emotional valence, is neither morally corruptible nor any ontological ‘claim’ on the divine.

Most certainly, for Heschel, humans affect in a temporal sense the mental life of the divine, but they do not and could not overpower it, governed as it is by a steadfast love. And it is this love or a faithfulness to creation that in fact animates or provides for this *pathos* in God (1962, p. 356). For the ‘God of Abraham,’ it primarily is in and through this *pathos*, in being moved by creation, that love is most profoundly expressed. In no way is the *chesed* of God diluted or corrupted in this, but rather God’s investment in creation is such that sorrow, joy, anger, etc. follow from this risk and vulnerability in creating entities in one’s own image. Divine *pathos* is, for Heschel, an expression of divine paternity (or maternity). While this essential

*chesed* for creation is never moved or thwarted, God does not only love creation, but is *in love* with it. This then admits, as Heschel sees it, for the *passionate* aspects of God's behaviour and disposition towards creation. To the question of divine 'passion,' Heschel takes this passion in the divine as neither irrational nor contrary to any essential goodness in God (1962, pp 332-333). The wrath or anger of God, while tremendous and awesome, is not as the wrath of other deities of the ancient Near East. Determined as it is by love, it is neither 'inscrutable' nor 'impulsive' but rather the *proper* and *proportional* response to a genuine evil (1962, pp. 362-363). It is not only this love which according to Heschel's understanding motivates his *pathos*, especially in the cases of wrath or anger, but a *sympathy* for those who suffer. Thus, with this understanding, there is not only an affectational nature in the divine, as one who can be affected by the actions of humanity, but a deep emotional investment in humanity such that when humanity suffers God in Godself suffers as well.

Still, we must keep in mind, despite all the language of *pathos* that is doubtlessly critical to Heschel's thought, that he still affirms an 'otherness' in the divine (1951, pp. 130-131). This can be understood in several ways, I think. First, we ought not to think, as Heschel cautions us, to imagine divine emotions or *pathoi* as exactly like these dispositions in humanity. Here we see something similar to the treatment of divine *apatheia* in the classical witness: any emotions for God are never unrestrained or, to employ our Aristotelian understanding, *passionate* as contrary to reason or, in other cases, moved by corporeality (Aquinas), etc. This ultimate supremacy, transcendence, and goodness in the divine prevent the impulsive and irrational nature of passionate emotions—sorrow, grief, anger, etc. Yet it does not prevent their expression altogether, nor does it prevent creaturely affairs from affecting and moving the

divine. Shai Held argues that this transcendence which Heschel wishes to affirm, serves something like the endorsement of divine impassibility in the classical tradition whereby, none of God's 'passionate' actions, dispositions, or emotions—though genuine and evoked by humanity—are 'morally compromised' (2013, pp. 152-153). Moreover, Heschel's insistence of divine transcendence and otherness, while serving as something like an 'apophatic qualifier,' preserves the divine essence and its immutable and impassible goodness. Divine *pathos* is, for Heschel, an expression of the morally-righteous divine will—and not any movement or change in the divine essence, no 'essential attribute' of God. Yet Heschel is careful not to allow this 'otherness' in the divine be taken to the level of a Maimonidean agnosticism (1962, pp. 292-293). That the divine does in fact feel and express various *pathic* emotions shows us what a proper expression of the affectations ought to look like and only further reveals the intimacy of divine concern (1962, pp. 355-356). Perhaps most interestingly, Heschel takes divine *pathos* to be a moral category—for a God who does not express these various anthropopathisms and anthropopsychisms in the way that the 'God of Israel' does is a deity who is not truly *morally concerned* for creation (1951, pp. 244-245; 1962, pp. 353-357).

Finally, I would like to speak briefly to Heschel contributions to Holocaust theology. He is of mixed minds on this most difficult of questions and his thoughts evolve in various ways, but from what has been provided above we may be able to construct some of his considerations on this matter. While there is clearly a sense of a *hester panim* understanding of the Shoah in which God's face is hidden, Heschel's understanding of this reciprocity between God and humanity fills this out a bit more. Humanity, and a perfection of it, is that for which God searches. Heschel gives full treatment to human freedom here, however, intimating that it

is not so much that God unilaterally ‘hid his face’ but rather that God was rejected by humanity (1951, pp. 153-154; Held, 2013, pp. 182-183). The creative reciprocity demands that God have ‘partners’ in righteousness and compassion (Heschel, 1951, pp. 241-245; Held, 2013, p. 178). As part of this co-creative process the divine has undertaken with creation, both parties must be present and responsible and, for Heschel, such an event calls for faith and heroism in the face of such evil. Shai Held observes that for Heschel this requires ‘compassion’ or understanding for the divine in that God will ultimately triumph (2013, p. 178). But what to the presence or absence of God in the camps? Heschel wishes to affirm that God was, in some way, always present with those who suffered in the Shoah. How could it be otherwise given divine concern? Perhaps by unbelief, the divine presence was not felt but God was indeed there. Still, Heschel offers nothing like a structured theodicy. At times, as Held notes, he seems to move toward something like a free-will defence or even, as many other rabbis of the time argued, to view the Shoah as the wages of disobedience (Held, 2013, p. 182). Held argues further that what is most interesting perhaps in his attempts to understand the Shoah under this line of thinking is that Heschel may view the Germans as the ones who have ultimately abandoned or rejected God (1951, pp. 153-154; Held, 2013, 180-181). While the Jews certainly feel abandoned and God may feel less present, due not to God’s absence but due to their own disbelief, it is still the enemies of God’s people who have rejected God and then, in a reciprocal fashion, have been abandoned. This is likely an unsatisfactory account, as all perhaps must be in the end and, as Held argues, Heschel senses this tension and the insurmountable task of giving some ‘answer’ for such an event (Held, 2013, p. 179). At the very least, we may say that Heschel never denies the role of human freedom nor the genuine sympathy and sorrow of in Godself at such an event.

But there remains the necessity in this co-creative process which demands that humanity make itself open to ‘the Holy’ (Eanet, 2001, pp. 7-10).<sup>43</sup>

To the matter at hand: what may we then say of A.J. Heschel’s understanding of divine *apatheia*? We certainly should not understand it as encompassing the fullness of meaning it takes in affirmations entailed by the shared ontology of the classical tradition. Heschel is quite clear in wishing to distance his conception of the divine from any ontology as may be found in the rationalist tradition of Judaism. Moreover, he views both immutability and impassibility as categories of philosophy unwarranted for an understanding of the ‘God of Israel.’ Yet through Heschel’s affirmation of divine transcendence and otherness, there is tacit endorsement of an impassibility and immutability in the essence of God. Still, both the divine will and any emotional capacity are most certainly subject to *pathos* or affectation from without. Additionally, Heschel assumes throughout (though he never gives any philosophical argument for this) that God is, in some manner, *in time*. He may take this as a presumption of the scriptural portrayal of God or rather that in order to capture some of the ‘scriptural theology’ insofar as it bears on the nature of God, an omnitemporal or sempiternal understanding of the divine life must be the case. If this is the case, it is much easier for him to imagine motion and change in the divine. Yet even in these changes—in the passibility and mutability of the divine—any *pathoi* or ‘passions’ of God are ultimately informed by the divine essence which is goodness and *chesed*. In this way, Heschel is able to speak of divine *pathos* without the risk of any affectation resulting in divine actions or mental states that are irrational, impulsive, or morally corrupt.

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<sup>43</sup> To Heschel’s latter views on humanity’s responsibility to and compassion for God in the wake of the Shoah, see Heschel’s *A Passion For Truth* (1973).



*Martin Buber and Eliezer Berkovits*

Though not often included among ‘passibilist’ surveys, both Buber (1878-1965) and Berkovits (1908-1992) are here worth some discussion in that each puts forth theological claims that, I think, must be understood as passibilist in some sense or at least in stark contrast with those found in the classical Jewish tradition. Neither gives much allowance for the tradition of Jewish rationalism (represented paradigmatically by Maimonides) and each offers a conception of the divine, in a manner more in keeping with the Rabbinic/Talmudic and Hasidic traditions, as personal and present in history and as known by encounter and relationships. Some expression of this passibilism thought, I think, may be seen through their works on the Shoah. Both Buber and Berkovits will engage with the tradition of *hester panim* or *el mastir panim* (the hiddenness of God or a God who intentionally withdraws grace) (Buber, 1973, 2015; Berkovits, 1973).<sup>44</sup> This theology is particularly interesting for this study in that, as it builds on very personalist and temporally-present conception of the divine and seems to admit of some reactivity in God conditioned by human action. Ben Yosef describes this as when the divine ‘disengages himself from the world and the affairs on man’ (1987, p. 24). Under accounts such as these, the actions of humanity affect God in such a way, either through anger or grief, that the divine reacts to this by (temporarily) withdrawing Godself from involvement in the cosmos. It is a ‘break in communication between God and man’ (Ben Yosef, 1987, p. 25). First, I will address here Buber’s contributions as they may bear on the matters at hand then offer a brief account of Berkovits’ views on this matter.

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<sup>44</sup> The concept of *hester panim* or *el mastir panim* may be found in Isaiah 45:17, Deuteronomy 31-32, as well as in the Psalms and the former and latter Prophets. It is also developed limitedly in the Talmud.

For Buber, we must recall his central '*I-Thou*' theology of divine/human interaction (1958). Buber, drawing no doubt from the Hasidic tradition, will think that anything we may say positively of the divine is beholden to the language of humanity's relationship with God. That is, God is most known through the divine presence and 'dialogue' with creation. For Buber, much like Heschel, God's immanence is almost defined by its relationship with humanity (1958, p. 11, 75-77). Unlike the 'God of Philosophy,' the 'God of Israel' is not the proper subject of philosophy and Buber will even deny that there is any *logos* in God; God is no 'It' or an *object* (1958, pp. 114-116; Wright, 2009, p. 95). What Buber here means is not some mere denial of divine intermediary or Plotinian schema (though he would most certainly deny that), but rather that the divine is not the kind of entity that could possibly be captured by the rational thought of either philosophy or theology. Additionally, this is not any affirmation of the ineffability of the divine essence either. Rather it is provided as trying to present what is like to know a *person* and that this knowledge is only had through a shared history and relationship (1958, p. 135).

For Buber then God may be 'addressed' but cannot be 'expressed' and is known through an encounter in history (1958, pp. 80-81; Wright, 2009, p. 95). For Buber, God is most personal despite being also that *mysterium tremendum* (Buber, 1958, p. 79; Katz, 1977, p. 33). This, of course, all sets up well for what Buber wishes to say of the *hester panim* and God's or humanity's withdrawal from an encounter or dialogue. I. A. Ben Yosef, again, offers an excellent synopsis of the *hester panim* of Buber as found in *On Judaism* and *The Eclipse of God* (1987; Buber, 1973, 2013). God, as present in history, is at times available to humanity and at other times not (Buber, 1973; Ben Yosef, 1987). This is not a simply a statement of some

account of divine dispensation in history or of prophetic revelation, but rather to the ongoing, but intermittent 'dialogue' with humanity. In the case of the Shoah, Buber entertains the possibility that, due to spiritual emptiness of modernity, God is withdrawn and so events such as the Holocaust then occur as a natural and even expected result of a break in communion with the divine. Humanity is given over to its own cruelty and God's face is hidden. Buber does not think this inculpates God. Rather, it is what humanity does when it absents itself from this dialogue with God (Ben Yosef, 1987, p. 26). Still, this may not seem to imply that God changes or that God is passible. For it could be the case that whilst God remains constant, it is humans who hide their faces. It seems, however, that Buber is more forceful than this in his understanding of both divine freedom and personality. God actively enters into and withdraws from these encounters, sometimes mysterious but often as a reaction to humanity's behaviour. In support of this, Buber will cite not only the story of Job, but various accounts throughout the scriptures of divine (non)interaction with creation (Buber, 1973; Ben Yosef, p. 25).

For Berkovits, the account is a bit different. The Shoah is, Berkovits will argue, while an event unprecedented in magnitude, not out of keeping with a pattern in Jewish history (Berkovits, 1973). It is the result of crisis of faith for the Jewish people of which there have been many before, e.g. Babylonian captivity or the destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple. Moreover, Berkovits will at least indulge the possibility that the *hester panim* is an educative lesson in which God withdraws into Godself so that humanity may express its full freedom (1973, pp. 88-90, 104-107). How this ends up, apart from an ongoing communion with God, is plain to tell. Yet still, Berkovits is notable for this idea that a removal of the divine presence is possibly required for humanity to exercise its full but limited potential (1973, p. 105). I. A. Ben Yosef

argues that Berkovits' interpretation of the *hester panim* may be understood in two (compatible) ways. First, like Buber, there are the mysterious accounts of God's absence from creation and humanity, save for some ontological sustenance of being. Another understanding is that this absence is reactive to the sins of humanity. As a response to rejection and as an expression of divine judgement, God withdraws from further contact, leaving the responsibility for repentance on humanity and upon which event God would return unto them (Ben Yosef, 1987, pp. 26-27).

For both Buber and Berkovits, however, God's goodness is still that of the divine *chesed*, an ontological category. Given this, in most cases, when humanity wishes to return unto God, God will then show Godself again and re-enter this 'dialogue' with creation (Ben Yosef, 1987, p. 26). What is perhaps most fruitful from these sources given the question at hand is the kind of intimacy and personality this conception of God provides. Under this view, God is present unto creation in a paternalistic or maternalistic manner which admits of sorrow, anger, grief, etc. as the result of human actions; it assumes or implies *some* affectational capacity in God and so some emotional passivity. While a most frightening account—that of the *hester panim* or 'eclipse of God—it nevertheless seems quite faithful to the very *pathic* presentation of the 'God of Israel' as found in the Tanakh, a conception far removed from the speculative work of Ibn Gabirol or Moses Maimonides.

*Anastasia Scrutton*

Lastly here, in quite a change of tack, I provide some comments on the recent work of Anastasia Scrutton (discussed briefly above) and her contributions to aspects of ‘emotional’ (im)passibility in *Thinking Through Feeling: God, Emotion, and Passibility* (2011). It is perhaps ill-fitting to include Scrutton’s work among those of generally passibilist leanings. Rather than her work being a passibilist criticism, it better considered as a contribution to this debate. As such, it ought to be afforded some treatment on the grounds of her exploration of emotional possibilities in the divine. Through careful exegesis of classical theologians, particularly Augustine and Aquinas, Scrutton outlines the various ways in which that which we now might consider ‘emotion’ can be ascribed to God. Following the Scholastic distinction between *passiones* and *affectiones*, Scrutton argues that while ‘passions’ as understood by classical theologians were not ascribed to God as they are at least irrational, involuntary, and may depend on some corporeality, some ‘affects’ were and can be predicated of the divine (2011, p. 36). These ‘affects,’ such as unperturbed bliss and love (understood specifically) can be proper to God as they are befitting of his nature and, importantly, voluntary. *Passiones* or *perturbationes*, on the other hand, are largely involuntary, dependent upon a sensitive appetite and corporeality *and* are affectations against the will—and so cannot rightly be said to belong to the divine (2011, p. 48). While this work should not be considered among the ‘canon’ of passibilist literature, it certainly allows for a modern and nuanced view of the debate around impassibility in that it provides a fuller treatment of ‘emotion’ in the divine life against many modern misreadings of classical thought, wherein critics imagine impassibility as excluding all emotional valences (Scrutton, 2011).

In Scrutton's most recent work, *Christianity and Depression: Interpretation, Meaning, and the Shaping of Experience*, issues of impassibility and passibility are taken up again with different ends in mind (2020). One of the fundamental questions in this work is whether or not 'a fellow sufferer who understands' is indeed of aid to those in crisis. She engages here with both 'sides' of this debate here, entertaining the possibility that for some, a God who 'co-suffers' would be a source of comfort and yet for others, the belief in a God who beyond the suffering and frailty of this world would be of most assistance. In chapter six and seven of this work, she entertains the debate as to the therapeutic value of a suffering God giving room for the reader to examine each position (passibilist and impassibilist). Ultimately, Scrutton will argue that a 'co-suffering' God, while perhaps having value for some in crisis, is not the best approach. Rather, she argues, we may take comfort in that God is capable of our salvation precisely because God in Godself is outside of such suffering. For those who may take therapeutic value in a solidarity with other sufferers, she offers the possibility of thinking of that 'great cloud of witnesses' many of whom, through their very suffering, achieved holiness and were saved.

So Scrutton moves the pastoral or therapeutic value of a 'co-suffering' God away from any suffering in Godself, but shows that we may be relieved not only by knowing that God in Godself is outside such frailty and so able, with unalloyed goodness and power, to save us *and* that we may enjoy a communion with those who suffer greatly and yet have been divinised despite it or through it. In the end, Scrutton will come down on the impassibilist side of the debate, though fully upholding the Christian understanding of the real suffering of God in the person of Christ, but in his human nature. Very much in line with David Bentley Hart's

insistence that salvation is possible because of God's 'infinite innocence,' Scrutton will argue for very much the same. While we can take comfort in the very real suffering of Christ and in those amongst the saints who have also suffered, an essential impassibility in Godself is necessary to effect the restoration of the cosmos given that it provides for not only transcendence but for a constancy of moral goodness as well.

### **3.5 Open Theism and Process Theology**

It here seems warranted to provide a separate section on the contributions of both open or free will theism and process theism or process philosophy. While both can be rightly said to be passibilist and thus share a genre with other contributions examined above, they are nonetheless distinct. While most of the passibilist literature surveyed above is largely theological, religious, or scriptural in its content, both open and process theism are set apart by their philosophical content. That is, while perhaps initially motivated by some concerns as to the (im)passibility of God, both open and process theism are much more openly *alternative* ontologies of God, with each having its own particular set of assumptions and arguments. That is, of course, not to say the various passibilist contributions examined above do not differ markedly from classical accounts. They very much do. But open and process theism admit of other motivations as well in their rejection of classical theism or in the manner in which problems with a classical ontology are presented. Each then stands as a more discrete philosophical movement than the more general theological passibilist trend surveyed thus far. Due to this, each is here presented separately, though as we shall see, each entails a form of passibilism unique to itself.

### *Open Theism*

Beginning around the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a significant movement in theology and the philosophy of religion began to emerge emphasising the ‘openness’ of God. Initially, much of this work was motivated by the perceived insufficiency of classical accounts of both God’s relationship to time and, relatedly, human freedom. Largely, these concerns were centred around the question of how human freedom might be preserved under divine omniscience. Many open theist or free-will theists remain convinced classical accounts either fail on philosophical grounds or are incompatible with the scriptural witness. Open theists will almost exclusively reject timeless eternity (that God is properly *outside* of time, *vide* Boethius) in favour a view in which the divine is temporal but everlasting and so still ‘eternal,’ albeit in a different sense (sempiternal). Very generally, under such an account, the future is ‘open’ for God (and humanity). This openness, it is furthered argued, provides both a robust account of human freedom and may satisfy certain theodical concerns. What it seeks to do is avoid any necessitarianism thought consequent to infallible divine knowledge. Of course, this opens rooms for both epistemic and thelemic passibilism. If the future is indeed open to God, either voluntarily or involuntarily, then events as they unfold, or human actions will change divine knowledge. Thus God may be said to change, or the divine will may be conditional upon these events. This, of course, strikes at the very core of traditional or classical thinking about not only divine impassibility and immutability, but simplicity and activity as well.

Though each ought rightly to be placed within the tradition of classical theism, the works of both Gersonides and Ibn Daud examined above in some ways presage this movement. Of course, many of the works of passibilists contributions treated immediately above will



assume something like this position. Open theism, however, can be said to come into its own with the publication of *The Openness of God* by Richard Rice in 1980 (later republished in 2004 as *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will*). Consisting largely of the contributions of Christian theologians and philosophers, this movement can moreover be understood as putting significant emphasis on the nature of divine 'care' and 'relation' to creation, allowing room for reciprocity between God and creation that, at least according to many open theists, is absent from the works of many in classical theism. Under various forms of open theism, neither divine foreknowledge nor some providential schema necessitates the future and thus human freedom is preserved by the availability of future contingents. Additionally, open theism breaks out roughly into two views regarding the nature or origin of this 'openness.' For many, divine ignorance (nescience) of the future is involuntary; that is, the future is a thing which does not yet exist and so God could not know it as it has no content to be known. For others, the future is epistemically open to God but this openness is due to some voluntary nescience by which God, for the sake of human freedom, elects *not* to know the epistemic content of the future. What is most important here to note, and I address this further below, is that each view takes the divine to be in some sense *in time* even if eternal (sempiternal) and not timeless as Boethius and others in that classical tradition would think of it. Here I would comment on some motivations for this view.

As is found in the passibilist literature surveyed above, there seems to be a real concern among many open theists to preserve a fidelity to scripture, in its presumption of human freedom, its apparent recognition of contingencies, and the overall 'relational' nature of God to humanity as found throughout the scriptures of Abrahamic monotheism. Open theists will take

prophetic works as conditionals and, in their assertion that God ‘makes room’ for human freedom, something like Plantinga’s Free-Will Defence is possible as a means to both stay faithful to scripture *and* avoid the most acute criticisms coming from the problems of evil (Plantinga, 1977). Regarding petitionary prayer (the efficacy of which is a common concern for many passibilist critics), open theism does, in fact, allow for God to be epistemically and causally influenced by prayer, another feature of this school of thought that seems to place it in *greater* fidelity to scripture, *contra*, open theists would argue, the predestinarian foreknowledge found in classical theism. Put another way, God is indeed *moved* by petitionary prayer and changes as a result of it. Furthermore, divine providence is centred around a relational and reciprocal notion care for creation, rather than merely ordering a certain series of events through knowledge and will. Open theists generally affirm a libertarian account of free will as opposed to traditional compatibilist positions or even a Molinist view. In the preservation of human freedom, the future is indeed open to both humanity and God. There is a significant ‘cooperative’ element to the philosophy of open theism and one which, for many Christian thinkers within this school, is scripturally-grounded in God’s making humanity ‘in [his] image and likeness’—thereby affording humanity a kind of freedom and creativity unavailable to other creatures (Genesis 1:26). Notice here again that this kind of scriptural reciprocity, reactivity, and even the responsiveness by God in petitionary prayer is predicated on the assumption that these are temporally-successive actions, as of course they may well need to be if God is in time. Open theism indeed provides many features attractive to passibilist theologians and philosophers and provides a framework for addressing many passibilist concerns. It seems to allow for passibility in senses of B and C (in knowledge and will) yet does not subject God to

corporeal affectations (as we saw with Sarot) nor does it affect impassibility in D—F (moral goodness, the divine essence, and transcendence).

Various forms of open theism have found endorsement amongst many notable philosophers of faiths, such as William Hasker, Richard Swinburne, and Peter van Inwagen (Hasker, 1989; Swinburne, 1993; Van Inwagen, 2006). Open theism, in general, is perhaps not as radical in its divine ontology as process theism or process philosophy, though it does present (or assume) a certain relation of God to time (sempiternality yet with an ‘open future’) that is quite at odds with classical accounts. Because of this, much of the philosophy of open theism has been met with harsh criticism on both philosophical and religious grounds (though here they overlap and are regularly intertwined). William Lane Craig, a strong proponent of Molinism or middle knowledge, has criticised open theism on both philosophical and theological grounds and Norman Geisler and Paul Helm have argued forcefully against its orthodoxy asserting that it compromises the control and sovereignty (*autarkeia*) of God and renders anaemic many of traditional divine attributes (Craig, 2000; Geisler, 2001; Helm, 1994). Finally, Bruce Ware provides a critique, largely on the basis of scripture, that it is incompatible with a conservative Protestant Christian theology (Ware, 2000). Here I think it is important to note that the centre of mass of open theism that I mentioned above—human freedom—is closely bound up with the idea of divine care and thus love. That is, that by providing a logical space for human freedom, open theism seems to seek to make room for a genuine relationship between God and those creatures made *in imago dei* which, at least as open theists and other passibilists critics would have, is not quite possible under a classical account.

Though I provide a general critical appraisal of various passibilist accounts in the conclusion of this chapter, I think it here worth noting a few things about open theism, particularly its assumptions about the relationship of God to time and how these views contrast with classical accounts. For the open theist, as well as many passibilists generally and for various reasons, God is understood to be *everlasting but temporal* or sempiternal. That is, God has no origin, has always existed and will always exist and so in this way can be said to be eternal, but it is an eternity *within time* and characterised by temporal succession. Under this account, we may speak of God having a past, present, and future much as we do. Thus, if we apply this understanding of God's relationship to time to the question of divine knowledge, some problems emerge, usually along the lines of accounting for divine foreknowledge and human freedom. This purported problem would go roughly as follows: if God knows some event X infallibly, then X will necessarily come to pass. If it is necessary that X occurs, then X could not have it otherwise, and so any language of human freedom (understood in a particular way) is, at best, illusory. But this assumes several things classical accounts would largely deny. It may indeed be problem if God is *in time* (sempiternal rather than timelessly eternal). That is, if God's knowledge is like ours in its relationship to past, present, and future, an infallible foreknowledge may indeed seem to impede human freedom. While we may say that divine foreknowledge does not seem to be straightforwardly causal (knowing may not be the same as willing), we could yet say that even if not causal, the *infallibility* of this knowledge would necessitate event X (it could not be otherwise, lest God be epistemically fallible). But one must notice that this is problem *only if* God is time and bound a succession of temporal events (even

if sempiternal). But it is this last claim, that of an everlasting but temporal divine existence that classical theism across the religious traditions examined will largely deny.

Under something like a Boethian account of divine *timeless eternity*, God is not related to time in this way and thus there is no divine ‘foreknowledge’ any different from knowledge of things (to us) now past. Instead of there being any real distinction in divine knowledge of occurrences ‘before’ or ‘after,’ there would simply be knowledge of events, actions, etc. Thus it would be incorrect to speak, under this Boethian account of an ‘illimitable life,’ of there being (for God) anything like ‘foreknowledge.’ Of course, we may still say that divine knowledge would include knowing that ‘for us,’ as creatures temporally-bound, some event is past or future. Additionally, God could still know *that* X precedes Y, but would not experience it as such. Yet, we could still speak of both experiences, that of a creaturely relationship to time as successive *and* of a divine atemporal existence as real. Neither would necessarily be more real than the other; they would simply be very different modes of relating to time. To a concern that so troubles passibilists—that of a reactive or reciprocal nature in divine/human interaction—the classical theist would not necessarily have to deny that such is possible. It simply would not be a reactivity or reciprocity defined by temporal succession, but rather of something like a simultaneous interaction. The classical theist might say that God knows *ab aeterno* which choice Freddie Ayer would make in 1936 and so disposes or acts simultaneously upon that free action of Ayer’s from a range of possibilities available to God. Similarly, Ayer’s freedom would not be impeded. For Ayer had before him any great number of choices all known to God as possibilities with, we might think, consequent but simultaneous reactions on the part of God, given these choices available to Ayer. Of course, God would not be ‘in 1936’ with Ayer in any

limiting way. But this need not matter; only God's knowledge *that* Ayer has various choices in, what is for Ayer, very really 1936.

Still, we might not think this a philosophically coherent formulation of either God's relationship to time or divine knowledge. This worry as to its coherence will be a driving concern for not only open theists but many passibilists more generally who will deny a Boethian account and then be forced to reckon with the problem of divine foreknowledge outlined above. Some possible arguments against this view have been addressed above: that our experience of time is illusory or that God could not, under this account, be said to properly respond to creation. Others, however, are trickier. We might wonder as what God's omniscience includes if specific types of indexicals are necessary for divine knowledge of events, e.g. that there may be a difference between the proposition 'James is writing on 28 July 2020' and 'James is writing now.' Another might be how we actually can account for their being two equally real modes of time, one particular only to the divine and another to creation. I will address some of these concerns in the subsequent chapter but suffice it to say that these are *some* of the worries motivating a rejection of timeless eternity for open theists (and other passibilists). Still, we might imagine a passibilist concern regarding a Boethian account being rather different and unrelated to its philosophical coherence. Rather, passibilists critics, especially those motivated by certain scriptural commitments, may respond in acknowledging that this account is indeed coherent but that it does not rightly capture any scriptural conception or portrayal of the divine in Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. That is, while it might be possible that divine knowledge and God's relationship to time is this way, the scriptures do not comport with such an understanding and so on those grounds alone it ought then to be rejected. Under a response like this,

independent of any exact philosophical concerns, the passibilist might simply appeal to revelational descriptions of divine interaction with the cosmos or accounts divine knowledge and from there infer that these interactions or reactions are quite temporal (even if God is sempiternal) and that the scriptures of revealed monotheism assume as much despite there being an elegance and coherence to a Boethian account of a timeless eternity in God.

In this survey, I next turn to process theism. This school within contemporary philosophy of religion, varied as it is, offers much in the way of passibilist thought. However, unlike many of the passibilists contributions examined above, process thought does not find its origins in a desire for greater scriptural fidelity or in any specific revelational commitments. Rather, it is a speculative undertaking of philosophical theology in its own right. Of course, this does not prevent it from being incorporated into the theologies of specific religious traditions; it does in fact come to influence various theological expressions. But the initial motivations for and assumptions in process thought are not beholden to any commitments unique to one religious tradition or another. It is more a general philosophical reconsideration of classical theism and especially its relationship to Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought irrespective of any revealed tradition. It begins with the work of A. N. Whitehead as an inquiry into the nature of God via reason and then takes on more recognisably theistic themes with Charles Hartshorne. Only later do we see the influence of process thought in specific theological expressions. As with open theism, process theism is concerned with the nature of divine knowledge yet goes much further in rejecting classical categories. For much of process thought, there is a denial of any essential immutability or impassibility in the divine and a wholesale reconception of the divine nature. While many process theists will attempt to maintain some aspects of divine

transcendence, the cosmos and God are necessarily bound up together ontologically such that it is difficult to speak of this transcendence as bearing anything like a similarity to its understanding in a classical ontology. Here I will offer only a brief outline of its general commitments and speak to the alternative ontology of God it presents that results in a thoroughgoing passibilism.

### *Process Theism*

As one might discern from the very name of this ‘school’ in philosophy and theology, the importance of ‘process’ is central. Not merely to creation as an ongoing process of creative work by a transcendent creator, but rather that God *and* the cosmos grow and change together in the process, with each affecting the other in nearly equal measure. This is important to keep in mind just as a way of seeing the stark contrast between this view and that of any classical account. Process theology finds its origins in the work of thinkers at the University of Chicago Divinity School but comes to something like a full flowering with the work of Charles Hartshorne, a student of Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead, who had been a notable atheist, began a certain metaphysical investigation into the nature and order of the cosmos. Arguing along lines very similar to what one might find in versions of the classical cosmological argument, Whitehead, in his now-famous *Process and Reality*, first published in 1929, posited that any current order which is found in the cosmos (individuation, causality, etc.) must find its source in some prior order which provided potency for current order. Whitehead argues that this potentiality and contingent order which is dependent upon some prior order in the cosmos must then find its origin in some ‘cosmic actuality’ (1960). At this point, the influences of Aristotelian or Neoplatonic thought are patent, yet Whitehead did not go so far as to posit that



this ‘cosmic actuality’ was anything like the God of classical theism in the Abrahamic monotheistic tradition. Rather, in keeping with his mathematical and physicalist realism, God is an ‘unconditioned actuality’ which provides ‘occasion’ for events in the cosmos. Here we must see that, for Whitehead, God is in fact quite impersonal and far more a metaphysical ground of being and we might well think of Paul Tillich’s conception. Interestingly and significantly different than most critics of classical theism who will argue for some form of passibilism, Whitehead will reject not only what he sees as the corrupting influence of Greek metaphysics in classical theism (a common enough claim in passibilist thought) but also, in a notably Marcionite fashion, any Semitic conception of the divine as well. Hallman notes this fascinating but oft-overlooked feature of Whitehead’s early thought. Unlike many passibilists critics (*vide* Harnack) who might cite Paul of Tarsus or Augustine as being formative in introducing something of the Philonian project into Christianity, Whitehead will actually blame both of them for not going far enough in their Hellenism thus allowing too much room for a Semitic conception of God (Hallman, 1991, p. 135). Though Whitehead (and later processists) will wish to distance their philosophical theology from Aristotle or Neoplatonic works, there is a clear influence of Greek thought, especially in some forms of Presocratic thought or in a Hellenistic panentheism.

For Whitehead, this ‘unconditioned actuality’ is *not* a transcendent entity or Aristotelian *primum mobile*, but rather an ‘actuality’ *within* the cosmos itself. This is an important distinction insofar as it bears traditional conceptions of divine impassibility, especially when that impassibility is understood as transcendence, not merely as a causal source for the cosmos, but as a cause external to the cosmos itself. Whitehead either places ‘God’ as unconditioned

actuality within the cosmos itself or, perhaps more precisely, suggests a sort of panentheism. It is important here to truly appreciate the radical metaphysics of Whitehead's proposals. He strongly opposed an Aristotelian 'metaphysics of substance,' arguing rather that all that is real is 'occasional' (1960, pp. 32, 45, 209). What is meant here by 'occasion' is difficult to lay out, but it seems to be something like an event, that is, all things that are properly said to be real are not substances but rather events, affecting subsequent events and affected by prior ones. What it seems Whitehead sought for here was a fluid and synthetic account of the cosmos, uninhibited by various 'substances' mysteriously interacting with each other. However, Whitehead's account, as influential as it turned out to be, seems no less mysterious or free from the problems of a metaphysics of substance it was put forth to oppose. Where suggestions of pantheism or panentheism come in are in the character of these 'events.' These events, at their very basic level, are the absolute substratum for the cosmos and yet are not fixed, material substances but rather 'processes' or 'experiences.' This language at least gives more explanation to his concept of 'occasions.' Each is 'creative' or 'novel' in that it may give rise to a variety of subsequent occasions. Whitehead views these fundamental 'events,' 'occasional,' or 'processes' as actual entities, though not of the Aristotelian type. They are dynamic and overlapping, informing and filling out a matrix of 'events' in the cosmos which comprise its whole (Whitehead, 1960).

Of these 'events,' 'occasions,' or 'processes' which Whitehead considers fundamental, he distinguished between two types: the temporal and the atemporal. The temporal occasions are the various 'processes' which in connection and interaction with each other give rise to things we might think of as material—persons, objects in the world, etc. The 'atemporal' are God and variety of eternal object which, according to Whitehead, provide the 'novelty' and

‘creativity’ for the cosmos. This requires, of course, no strict separation of those ‘atemporal’ events or occasions from the ‘temporal’ processes in the cosmos. In fact, such a strict demarcation between the transcendent and eternal and the contingent and material is already a concession to Aristotelian metaphysics that Whitehead sought to avoid. What God does as ‘preeminent’ is to provide both the creative ‘material’ for processes in the world and, through ‘prehension,’ influences all processes. God then becomes, for Whitehead, a locus of experience as God both ‘prehends’ all possible occasions and the working-out of those occasions become part of the nature of God.

Whitehead’s speculative metaphysics provides some interesting takeaways that are perhaps attractive to passibilist thought. God does not exist, for process theology, ‘out there’ in some immutable and transcendent fashion but is rather the ‘ground of being’ (though Whitehead would avoid such language as being too metaphysically substantial) and the very actualization of each and every occasion or event in the cosmos, both in human life and action and in the material world. It is not far from a ‘naturalist’ view of God which quickly becomes a sort of pantheism or panentheism depending upon the limits one wishes to place. It provides an immediate and reactive presence of the divine in all things; an idea, at least by the lights of Whitehead himself, which is helpful and comforting in the face of an impassible, immutable, and wholly ‘other’ deity of classical theism. Under this foundational work in process thought, the passible/impassible distinction hardly applies with any real clarity. As each event or occasion both influences God and is influenced by God, the very hierarchy of Aristotelian and classical theistic metaphysics is brought down (1960). These various yet related distinctions in Whitehead’s philosophy lead him to introduce the concept of ‘dipolarity’ in God—a primordial

nature and a consequent nature, which Hartshorne will later make great use of and more properly ‘theologise’ in his own Christianity. Whitehead in *Process and Reality* writes:

... the nature of God is dipolar. He has a primordial nature and a consequent nature. The consequent nature of God is conscious, and it is the realisation of the actual world in the unity of his nature and through the transformation of his wisdom. The primordial nature is conceptual; the consequent nature is the weaving of God’s physical feelings upon his primordial concepts. One side of God’s nature is constituted by his conceptual experience. This experience is the primordial fact in the world, limited by no actuality which it presupposes. It is therefore infinite, devoid of all negative prehensions. This side of his nature is free, complete, primordial, eternal, actually deficient, and unconscious. The other side originates with physical experience derived from the temporal world and then acquires integration with the primordial side. It is determined, incomplete, consequent, ‘everlasting,’ fully actual, and conscious. His necessary goodness expresses the determination of his consequent nature (1960, p. 524).

Despite the radical heterodoxy of such a speculative view with its novelty and clear incompatibility with classical theism, it found no shortage of supporters among those of religious commitment, particularly in Christianity, though Whitehead’s influence can be seen in both Jewish philosophers of process and, though not as common, Muslim processists as well (Kaplan in Katz, 1977; Diamond, 2019; Hazony, 2019; Iqbal, 2012; Shah, 2016).

Within Christianity, the most prominent adopters and adapters of Whitehead’s thought were Charles Hartshorne and Daniel Day Williams. With these thinkers, we find perhaps the fullest explication of the possibility of process thought for monotheism. It is really with Hartshorne first that we are able to speak of process theism as expressing itself in any specific religious tradition. For Whitehead, such concerns or goals were not in mind. However, with Hartshorne’s *Man’s Vision of God* in 1941 and Williams’ *God’s Grace and Man’s Hope* in 1949, Whiteheadian thought was applied to Christian theology. As process thought is incorporated into theology, it is here that we see something like the assumptions or concerns found in the more conventional passibilist contributions examined above. Again, we see the

strong influence of Harnack's Hellenisation thesis. On process theologians, John Cobb, Jr. writes:

[They] find that much of what is called 'orthodoxy' reflects substance metaphysics rather than biblical faith. Accordingly, they [process theologians] criticise traditional doctrine and are often viewed as 'heretical.' In response, process theologians argue that 'right doctrine' should be free from the control of a metaphysics that is alien to biblical thinking (2013, p. 574).

This is again an example of the purported hijacking of scriptural theology by Hellenistic thought. Concepts such as immutability, absolute sovereignty, and impassibility are judged to be the products of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought rather than the scriptural witness. We have seen this criticism before and how it does not completely accord with early patristic witness or the work of mediaeval Jewish and Christian philosophers and *kalam* and *falsafa* insofar as the motivations for impassibility are concerned. Similar to the criticisms present in passibilist works considered above and in open theism, process theologians view ascribing strong immutability and impassibility to God as doing 'violence' to the interactive, scriptural portrayal of the divine relating to humanity. John Cobb Jr. writes:

Because of its commitments to substance thinking and the resulting idea of God as the perfect substance, 'orthodox' theology affirms that God is immutable. In support, it [classical theism] can quote the biblical assurance that God does not change, but serious study of such statements in the Bible show that they affirm God's faithfulness to divine promises and God's undying love for the people of Israel. They do not mean that God is *unaffected* by what happens in the world and incapable of responding to worldly events (2013, p. 574).

As with many passibilist accounts, this fails to regard the variety of ways in which impassibility has been understood in classical theism and the justification for its affirmation. This does not, of course, render these criticisms entirely without merit, as there may remain problems with classical conceptions, though it does seem as though Cobb, Hartshorne, Williams, et al. do

indeed fail in paying sufficient attention to traditional authors. What Cobb is here concerned with is that affectational character of God, through divine *pathos*, that classical theism would largely not allow for.

Let us now look briefly at the work of both Hartshorne and Williams in that they are most representative of process thought in anything like its early theological expressions. Hartshorne, as a student of and assistant to Whitehead, supposed that process philosophy could indeed be employed in solving some the traditional problems of classical theism as he saw them. Hartshorne, despite his criticism of classical theism and the Anselmian project of ‘perfect-being’ theism, does not judge that perfection in and of itself is problematic, but rather what is entailed by it. For example, in speaking of the omnipotence of the divine, Hartshorne recoils from the concept of perfect power as being omnipotence, but rather argues that divine power is ‘ideally powerful.’ This is the case, as he sees it, because an omnipotent being would render powerless any ‘agent’ other than it. Therefore, for Hartshorne, an ‘ideally powerful’ God would possess such power that is compossible with the freedom and power of humanity (Dombrowski, 2017). Here then there would be a passibilism in the sense of C (divine will) and also B (divine knowledge). Hartshorne, in agreement with open theists, wishes to allow for a divine nescience of future contingents. Metaphysically, Hartshorne considers his theism to be *dipolar*—that is, there are polarities in God (1941, 1967). This is a concept taken from Whitehead in which there is the primordial or mental ‘pole’ or aspect of the divine and a consequent or material ‘pole.’ The primordial contains in God all possibilities open to the world and is reserved for the mental life the divine alone, while the consequent nature of God consists of those ‘occasions’ or ‘events’ in the cosmos within which God participates, but this nature is such that it is

‘consequent’ to or dependent upon the occasion and events of the cosmos and the free agents therein. This allows for a ‘participatory god’ who is part of and ever-present to the cosmos. Again, these ‘natures’ do not constitute, Whitehead argues, an ontological division in the being of God, but rather they are ‘poles’ of one essence of the divine: one as God in Godself and the other as a participatory and reactive presence within the cosmos (1960). This ‘dipolar’ conception of the divine may perhaps allow for there to be an aspect of God which is essential and another aspect that is able to grow with and participate in creation. There is clearly an attempt here to maintain something of a distinction between transcendence and immanence and between creator and creation, though I am quite unsure if it can succeed. At least in the Whiteheadian structure that is foundational for all later work, even this primordial pole is affected by ‘events’ or ‘occasions’ in the consequent or material pole. Moreover, being an ontology which does not admit of much of anything like divine freedom or personality in any traditional sense, it is unclear that this passibilist or mutability in God could be voluntary. Rather, it seems that God as immanent and God in Godself are both subject to ‘effects’ or ‘occasions’ in the cosmos.

There are, I think, some obvious metaphysical difficulties in this account of a ‘dipolar theism’ as it is presented in process thought and difficulties even more acute in trying to make it amenable to the traditional theologies of revealed monotheism. Still, it is an interesting analogue to the essence/energies distinction found in Eastern Christian thought and to which I devote my attention below. Both accounts give us a certain metaphysical conceptualisation of the divine that has direct bearing on the question of divine impassibility: we may speak of an aspect of God in the divine nature and an aspect of God that interacts with the world. We may

then have a way for God being impassible in one aspect and passible in some other. The Eastern Christian or Palamite account is far closer to any classical ontology of the divine and avoids, I think, some of the more problematic features of a process ‘dipolar theism.’ Despite what it may offer us in the way of speaking of some *pathos* in the divine, the radical ontology of process thought renders it incompatible with not only the warranted commitments of classical theism but also with very basic concepts in Abrahamic monotheism more generally. For Whitehead and Hartshorne, this is much the point: classical theism has weaknesses that must be overcome, and their model purports to do so. Nevertheless, process theology/dipolar theism moves God into the cosmos and subjects the divine to much, if not all, of the vulnerability suffered by creation. It is this compromising divine transcendence which seems most worrisome, both philosophically and theologically. It is a rejection of, at least, impassibility F (transcendence) and perhaps also impassibility E (nature/essence). In fact, it does entail a concept of God which Hartshorne himself admits is ‘panentheistic.’ For Hartshorne, God is very much like a Plotinian *anima mundi* which permeates and participates in all things yet growing and suffering along with creation, despite various attempts in this school to avoid an Aristotelian or Neoplatonic ‘substance metaphysics.’

What bearing then can we say that this Hartshornian/Whiteheadian ontology of God may have on the immediate questions at hand of divine *pathos* and the debate over or problem of divine impassibility. First, it seems that by a convenient separation of divine ‘existence’ from divine ‘actuality,’ Hartshorne (though likely not Whitehead) may be able to claim that in some way the divine existence is impassible in nature (E), but passible in the divine ‘actuality,’ where existence and actuality track the primordial nature and the consequent nature respectively. Even



this, however, is not clear given the relationship between these ‘poles’ of the divine. In some way it seems that God *in se* and the economic or immanent ‘consequent’ pole are related such that many if not all affects on the latter will indeed affect the former. Perhaps at best we may be able to say that this impassibility in nature tracks only the necessary existence of God. So whilst there is ample room for affectation, it may indeed go too far. This *pathos*, even if we can use this term for an entity of such impersonality, does in no way seem to be voluntary and thus it seems as if any passibility under this account could indeed be coercive. Additionally, there is a problem with the distinction process thought draws between ‘existence’ and ‘actuality.’ It is hard to know exactly how a thing is said to exist apart from its *actus* or being. For a being that is necessary, as Whitehead and Hartshorne admit God is, it is difficult to reconcile how divine existence can be separated from ‘what God does.’ Of additional concern is, of course, that panentheistic nature of this ontology. Indeed, such a schema would allow for passibilism, but in doing so it makes the divine largely *part of* the cosmos. As such, it is of course the subject of affectation, but at the great cost of losing any traditional sense of transcendence or this most important distinction between creator and creation in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

### **3.6 Assessments and Potential Problems with Passibilist Accounts**

Thus far, we have seen various and diverse contributions that may be included on the ‘passibilist’ side of the debate. These contributions come from different angles of approach, some directed at the doctrine of divine *apatheia* specifically and others resulting from more general concerns regarding a classical ontology of the divine. Varied as they are in motivation and content, these sources are largely limited to the recent works of Christian and Jewish theologians and philosophers. Still, in the interest of providing a broader picture, I have

explored the possibility of ‘passibilist’ thought in the Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition of Judaism as well as in the Sufi tradition of Islam. The Rabbinic and Talmudic tradition is here, I think, particularly interesting in that it represents a way of thinking of the divine that is quite different from the speculative philosophy of Jewish rationalism and classical theism. We must, of course, keep in mind that neither this tradition nor Sufi Islam seeks to provide anything like a properly philosophical ontology of the divine, but it is nonetheless notable in how very differently images or metaphors of the divine, as Fretheim will use those terms, are employed within the same religious tradition. It seems that any work concerned with classical theism or specifically divine *apatheia* ought not to ignore either of these traditions, especially that of the Rabbinic or Talmudic legacy. As we have seen, the influence of this tradition in Judaism remains strong and is clearly present in some of the contemporary authors (both Jewish and Christian) examined above: Fretheim, Brunner, Heschel, Buber, and Berkovits. The Sufi and Hanbalite or ‘traditionalist’ schools of Islam have not been translated into anything like a passibilist trend in contemporary Islam, though each may still be taken as a tradition quite unlike that found in the *kalam* or *falsafa* that has so influenced orthodox Islam today (both Sunni and Shia).

When we turn to contemporary works in passibilist thought—those contributions we might say constitutive of this ‘new orthodoxy’—some common themes emerge from what is otherwise a quite diverse movement in theology and the philosophy of religion. Common to all in the recent trend is, of course, a perceived deficiency in a classical ontology of God particularly as this ontology entails both divine immutability and impassibility. These perceived deficiencies are expressed in various and related forms: concerns over divine knowledge and human freedom (open theism and process thought), the compatibility of a classical ontology

with ‘scriptural categories’ in thinking of the divine, and a perceived dependence or unwarranted influence by Hellenistic thought (Fretheim, Heschel, et al.). Also, we have seen the prevalent judgement that classical accounts fail to provide for meaningful expressions of divine love, mercy, and compassion (Moltmann, Lee, and Hartshorne). What seems common to all expressions of passibilist thought are worries over understandings of divine reactivity or reciprocity. Whether one’s passibilist concerns centre around the agapeistic character of God, divine knowledge and human freedom, or a return to more ‘scriptural categories’ in conceiving of the divine, this matter of reciprocity or reactivity plays a significant role. These various passibilist authors will largely be of one mind on this matter. Across this ‘new orthodoxy’ we find a shared claim that however God relates to creation, it must be in some manner subject to temporal affectation—that God must respond in time and as a causal consequence to human action. All sources examined above would seem to assume something like this if not argue for it outright. Even in process theism, with its radically alternative ontology of God, this central idea is present: that God, personal or impersonal, must be subject to states of affairs in creation in this affectational way.

To the matters of reciprocity, reactivity, and affectation more specifically, there are amongst many passibilists quite pointed concerns over the nature of divine love. In fact, this worry almost dominates this otherwise diverse field of passibilist thought. For many, any expression of divine love, mercy, or compassion—agapeistic actions or dispositions—must not only be evoked temporally by the free actions of creatures but must also include the possibility of suffering in a broader sense (not merely as being affected *ab extra*). In no few of the passibilist positions examined above, there seems to be a common intuition that unless divine

love is defined by a kind of vulnerability, affectation, and the capacity for God to co-suffer, then this love cannot be said to be meaningful or genuine. This is certainly the position of Hartshorne, Lee, Moltmann, Pinnock, et al. Along with the criticisms offered by Moltmann and Lee along this line of thought, we see perhaps the strongest expression of this worry over divine love in Charles Hartshorne. Coming from the Christian tradition, Hartshorne unsurprisingly takes Aquinas as his target, though we may read it as an argument against a classical affirmation of divine *apatheia* more generally. Hartshorne writes:

...to say that God is totally free from dissatisfaction or sorrow, that he always achieves absolute or maximal satisfaction, is to say that he has no wishes, preferences, or purposes toward us ... to love means to take the joy of another as occasion of one's own joy, his sorrow as occasion of one's own sorrow. The Thomistic God has no sorrow, only joy—and this joy owes nothing to ours. (1943, p. 54, quoted in Silverman, 2013).

This seems to be a succinct expression of a shared passibilist concern regarding classical accounts, and it is one that is also found prominently in Pinnock and Wolterstorff (Silverman, 2013, p. 165). Aquinas, as that paradigmatic figure in Christian classical theism, is the object of criticism here, but we can easily imagine a similar argument against Maimonides or the *falasifa*. Yet there are clear problems with this criticism, as common as it may be in passibilist thought. Hartshorne's argument here fails in several ways that I take up below, yet this remains a potent theme of much of recent passibilist thought—a perceived deficiency in classical theism to provide meaningfully for divine love (or mercy and compassion). It is, in fact, common enough that, as Richard Creel notes, it often takes the form of something of a dilemma for the passibilist: that one may have a loving God or a God who is possessed of some *apatheia*, but not both (Creel, 1986). In the subsequent chapter, I address this purported dilemma and show that it is largely based on misunderstandings of *apatheia* and of classical accounts of divine

goodness. Widespread as this worry may be in passibilist literature of late, it is far from the most worrisome problem regarding a classical ontology as I argue below. That is, this is *not* the problem of impassibility with which we ought most concern ourselves. For now, let us look briefly to what may be some problems or failures in various passibilist accounts surveyed above.

First, we might think that none of the contemporary passibilist accounts examined gives adequate treatment to the valences of meaning and nuance the divine attribute of *apatheia* may take or, rather, passibilists often interpret it in too narrow a meaning—as that of some divine indifference to creation or a static immutability. In the first two chapters of this work, I explored various possible meanings of divine *apatheia*, and none seemed to include such an understanding. Something of this way of thinking about divine impassibility—as indifference or apathy—is present in Moltmann, Lee, and Hartshorne in their concerns over divine love. There is the assumption, under these accounts, that divine impassibility would prevent divine love, mercy, or compassion or at least prohibit us from speaking of it in any meaningful way. This, however, fails to account for the understanding of *apatheia* in various classical accounts and most certainly in a Thomistic account, as we shall see below. Relatedly, there is the worry that an impassible God (who would also be eternally timeless) could not be said to be properly reactive to creatures in time. This seems to be a worry found in many passibilist contributions but is it perhaps most clear in the contributions of open theism. As I have argued above, an impassible and eternally timeless God, as might be conceived of in classical theism, does not seem necessarily unable to relate in reactive and reciprocal ways to creation, though there may yet be legitimate worries along these lines. Additionally, we may have some misgivings over

passibilist accounts which depend heavily on a return to ‘scriptural categories.’ While I argue below that if there is anything like a problem of impassibility it is indeed one involving this very matter, we still cannot claim that a dependence on or return to ‘scriptural categories’ is philosophically adequate. Though there may be an inadequacy or failure in classical theism to account for scriptural presentations of the divine as *pathic*, personal, relational, and temporally-reactive to creation, it is not enough merely to proof-text. As is quite apparent, the scriptures of Abrahamic monotheism are not works articulating a specific divine ontology. And as it stands then, the accounts of Fretheim, Heschel, and other ‘scriptural passibilist’ do not provide a properly philosophical account of divine *pathos*. In their defence, however, none clearly sets out to do so, and it is in fact that determinative nature of certain metaphysical commitments that concern them. Still, we must say that if there is a need to better account for divine *pathos*, it at least requires some metaphysical account of how this *pathic* character of God might be expressed or how it would relate to other divine attributes.

Related to concerns over the sufficiency (or absence) of a robust passibilist divine ontology, we might worry that in at least some of this move toward an affirmation of divine *pathos* there is an inadequate provision of a voluntary qualifier for divine suffering. Without some clear qualification of the freedom of divine suffering or further autarkic provisions, it may be that God becomes, not an incorrupt author of salvation proper, but the subject of maximal and involuntary victimisation. Without this kind of control, God becomes, through a participation in human suffering, the object of the greatest. Ironically then, it may well be that in the passibilist desire to give a fuller expression of divine love through some ‘co-suffering’, it then becomes impossible for God to love in any sense greater than humans can,

for the divine is now the ultimate subject of the very corruption, passion, and finitude the cosmos is in need of deliverance from. Without any voluntary qualifiers for divine *pathos*, God becomes ‘most pitiful’ not because divine love is hampered by impassibility, but because this love is compromised by passibility itself. Thus, the very thing many passibilists critics wish to preserve or reinvigorate—the agapeistic and salvific nature of God—is evacuated of its power by subjecting the divine to creaturely limitations and passions.

Finally, there ought to be serious worries regarding much of process thought, not only for classical theism but even for revealed monotheism broadly. Given the novel ontology of God presented in various process accounts, there is a clear problem in maintaining any kind of divine transcendence or creator/creature distinction. Related to the concerns above regarding an essential victimisation in the divine, process theism seems certainly to risk this in its tendency towards some type of panentheism. Under this panentheism of process thought and its ontology of ‘occasion’ and ‘process,’ traditional divine attributes cannot hold, nor can any distinction between creator and created. And this is a metaphysical distinction most crucial to the theologies of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The divine, despite the reservation of a ‘primordial’ nature of God, is moved ‘into’ the cosmos, becomes an inseparable part of it, evolving with it, and thus is involuntarily subject to contingencies. While this provides the payout of some ‘co-suffering,’ it comes at the cost of any divine control or transcendence. It also seems to remove any possibility for the divine being ‘personal’ in any sense and so removes any real possibility of agency and will in God.

Through what has been provided above, I have sought to give a fair accounting to various passibilists criticisms, speaking to both the weakness and strengths of these

contributions. There are, as I have noted, various problematic assumptions contained within these criticisms, especially as it concerns understandings of divine *apatheia* in the tradition of classical theism and the important role this divine attribute plays in safeguarding divine transcendence and moral stasis. Still, the passibilist contributions examined above do point to some potential weaknesses in a classical ontology of God. This is perhaps most apparent in those passibilist works which focus on a perceived need to return to ‘scriptural categories’ in thinking about God. These authors, such as Fretheim and Heschel, seek to draw our attention to the unique character of God in the scriptural witness of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This unique character is found in the scriptural presentation of the God of Abraham as one who is *pathic*, relational, reactive in some temporal sense, very much like a person, and one who freely enters into relationships with humanity that involve some risk. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share both a common scriptural presentation of God in this manner and, at least in their classical expressions, a common ontology of the divine. The question then, it seems, is whether or not this shared ontology can be said to capture or give full voice to that unique character of this God of Abraham. More precisely perhaps, we might wonder if affirmations divine *apatheia* do not prevent us from being able to speak fully this scriptural conception of God. Below, I take up this question further, arguing that certain understandings of divine impassibility do in fact constrain the divine in a way out of keeping with this scriptural witness. Still, I wish to avoid some of the extremities of passibilist thought and maintain that divine *apatheia* should be retained, thought modified, so that we might preserve much of that which is warranted in a classical divine ontology and yet provide more room to speak to the scriptural witness in the Abrahamic faiths.



## Chapter 4. The Problem of Divine Impassibility and a Way Forward

Throughout this work, I have suggested that there is indeed a problem of divine impassibility for the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Central to my understanding of this problem is the question of the compatibility of a classical ontology of the divine with the presentation of God as found in the scriptures of these Abrahamic faiths—as reactive, personal, relational, and *pathic*. This shared ontology in the classical expressions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam would include the attributes of impassibility and immutability and thereby deny the possibility of any affectation in any temporal sense in the divine. Moreover, each of these faiths embraces a common scriptural witness to this portrayal of God as not only active in creation but as affected by states of affairs in the world and reacting to them. As I have mentioned above, the fundamental question then before us then seems to be whether or not this classical ontology can rightly account for or capture the fullness of this scriptural presentation of the ‘God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ While recent passibilist concerns have been largely devoted to matters of the nature of divine love and the possibility of some ‘co-suffering’ in God, I do not here treat these issues specifically as my focus. Rather, I would have us attend to the common scriptural portrayal of the divine and from there judge best how we ought to think of these concerns. Instead of committing ourselves to either a strongly passibilist position or to an endorsement of divine *apatheia* as generally understood in the tradition of classical theism, I argue that we can, in fact, allow for a certain *pathos* in the divine but not at the cost of abandoning divine impassibility altogether. That is, some middle ground is available.

In this chapter, I further develop these concerns over the compatibility of a classical ontology with the scriptural witness, arguing that traditional understandings of impassibility (and immutability) in fact cannot give sufficient voice to this scriptural account of the divine or to the manner in which God has revealed Godself in time as personal and reactive to actions of free creatures. Unlike many recent critics, especially those working within ‘scriptural passibilism,’ I do not think that it is necessary that we abandon divine *apatheia* altogether. Nor do I think it ought to be viewed as an extraneous Hellenistic import entirely at odds with the scriptural witness or a right ontology of God. I propose, rather, that we may speak of God as impassible in some respects but not in others. In outlining these concerns, I frame this problem in terms of a dilemma of impassibility to which I offer a *via media*. I contend that this proposed *via media* may allow us to retain a conception of divine impassibility (as well as many of the features of classical ontology) whilst giving a better account or fuller voice to the unique character of God as presented in the scriptures of revealed monotheism. To this concern over providing a more substantial account of this scriptural portrayal of the divine as reactive, personal, relational, and *pathic*: I am here very much in line with the concerns put forth by Heschel, Fretheim, et al. Though while their insights are most helpful, none amongst the ‘scriptural passibilists’ affords anything like a philosophical ontology of the divine that can account for those concerns. Here I mean to do so.

Through the broad survey of classical theism offered above, several matters pertinent to this study come forth. First, there is, I have argued, a divine ontology common to classical expressions of these faiths—in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—and that this ontology provides a conception of God as transcendent, immutable, timelessly eternal, and simple. We

may understand this affirmation of divine *apatheia* as entailed by the metaphysical commitments that constitute this shared ontology. Additionally, it has been shown that this affirmation of *apatheia* should be understood, most basically, as a denial of any affectation *ab extra* in the divine. That is, that God is unaffected in any temporal sense of change by either human actions or states of affairs in the world. While we may discern various connotations of divine impassibility in the *loci classici* examined above, this basic understanding of *apatheia* stands out as most common to this shared ontology. Moreover, this denial of any external affectation can be understood to preclude any *passiones*, *perturbationes*, or negative emotions in the divine.

Finally, it seems that in much of this tradition of classical theism there is significant commitment to that understanding of divine perfection explored at the beginning of this work; the perfection of God is manifest through these metaphysical features described above—as existing in timeless eternity, without any lack, and as subject to no external cause, either ontologically or affectationally (through *pathos*). In fact, it seems right that we understand this conception of divine perfection as determinative of the shape this classical ontology takes. As we have seen, this understanding of divine perfection is put to work first in Philo and his Greek philosophical forebears and then plays a significant role in the development of a divine ontology in classical theism, through the influences of Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism. This shared ontology, beholden as it is to this conception of divine perfection, would then include timelessness eternity, immutability, simplicity, etc. and thus would entail *apatheia* in the fundamental form described above.

In preceding sections, I have also argued for the merits of this understanding and affirmation of divine impassibility in the tradition of classical theism. Though entailed by other features of this ontology, it can be taken alone as a necessary safeguard of divinity, preserving the ontological distinction between creator and creation, and as a bulwark against any moral corruption or deviation from divine goodness and will. For these reasons, it seems right that we should wish to retain divine impassibility in some form as necessary and proper to a right conception of the divine and should not abandon this attribute with any undue haste. Though finding its origins in Greek thought, *apatheia* serves an important role in the philosophical theology of the Abrahamic tradition: preserving this distinction between creator and cosmos, providing for the transcendence and supremacy of the divine, and ensuring a moral stasis. While the scriptural data speak very little, if at all, to this attribute of God (conceptually at least), we may be able to understand it partly under the Rabbinic/Talmudic concept of *chesed*—as denoting no absolute imperviousness to human action, but rather as a moral category regarding the divine nature, describing the steadfastness of divine goodness and, moreover, that God will not be affected or moved from that disposition towards creation. Still, I will employ the traditional philosophical language of *apatheia* here, though with this concept of *chesed* much in mind.

However, and herein lie the worries before us, it seems that we must admit that this common affirmation of *apatheia* as understood in classical theism prevents us from speaking, as the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam regularly do, of any affectational or temporally-reactive character of God. And it is, I argue below, this particular character of God as involved with creation in this way that marks out the uniqueness of this deity of Abrahamic

monotheism as neither a removed and distant Hellenistic abstraction (*per* Aristotle or Plotinus) nor a deity given over to *passiones* or mundane and corporeal concerns as are the other ‘gods’ of Semitic or Eastern Mediterranean provenance. Rather, there is the consistent scriptural witness to not only a very intimate and *pathic* involvement in the world, but to this involvement being governed by an unassailable goodness and love in the divine—the *chesed* of God. And yet there is, beginning with Philo, but found also in Maimonides, the *mutakallimun* and *falasifa* of Islam, the Western Scholastics, as well as the Byzantine tradition, a denial of this particular affectational mode of being in the divine, as reacting and being affected *in time*. We might well say that these specific ontological commitments constitutive as they are of classical theism and the shared ontology they comprise, do not allow enough ‘room’ for us to attend to this *pathic* character of the divine that Heschel, Fretheim, the Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition and, to some extent, the Sufi and Hanbalite traditions of Islam would draw our attention to.

Under this shared ontology of classical theism, the scriptures then have to be interpreted in light of these metaphysical commitments and this determinative understanding of divine perfection. Thus, the various anthropopathisms or anthropopsychisms and accounts of conditional or temporally-reactive divine actions must be minimised or interpreted differently. Likewise, any language of God as sorrowful, wrathful, repentant, etc. (all possibly negative emotions or actions) must be understood, at most, as figurative, merely a condescension of language, or as the ‘effects’ of altogether different emotions. It is telling that we already assume much of this language as tracking no real *pathos* in the divine in that we designate such descriptions as *anthropopathisms* and *anthropopsychisms*—descriptions of God in the valence of human emotional experiences. Of course, *all* descriptions of God in the scriptures are

generally in human terms—that is the only way we may understand them. But we need not from this take these descriptions to be merely that. We do not have to understand these various descriptions as univocal in meaning in order to still speak to there being indicative of real *pathic* states in God.

Yet, under this classical ontology, we must say that in reality these descriptions are reflective of no real *pathos* (as either negative emotion or affectation) in the divine. So while *apatheia* rightly protects the divine from any ontological dependence on creation, from anything in creation having a ‘claim’ on God, and ensures a constancy of divine goodness, it deprives us of any way to speak of a temporally-interactive and relational character of God as the scriptures might suggest. Moreover, it becomes very difficult to make much meaning of the personal intimacy with creation that Heschel, Fretheim, the Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition or the tradition of Sufi and Hanbalite Islam emphasise. That is, we cannot speak of any affectational or *pathic* mode of the divine being; that is, in God temporally responding to or being affected by creation. Nor can we speak of this ongoing and intimate concern for creation that is, as the scriptures would have it, marked out by regular expressions of sorrow or negative emotions in God. What I wish here to show is that this concern takes the form of something of a dilemma for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, committed as each is to both a philosophically and theologically cogent account of the divine *and* to the unique nature of this ‘God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’ as revealed in the scriptures.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> It may be tempting here to liken something of what I have described as the ‘problem of divine impassibility’ to ‘mind-body’ problems or questions as to how two substances of wholly different quality can interact or bear causal influence on each other. In this case, this seems to be a category error; for what we can say of contingent substances and their differences may admit of such a problem, but God is a qualitatively different sort of entity. This may seem to affirm this problem of ‘dualism’ but it, in fact, does not. It is both the profound ontological

## 4.1 The ‘Dilemma’ of Divine Impassibility

Here I wish to speak to the nature of this dilemma as I see it and show, that while problematic, we may yet be able to retain much of what is warranted in an affirmation of divine *apatheia* and still allow for an understanding of the divine in revealed monotheism as possessed of some *pathos*. As we have seen above, theses shared commitments—to a robust ontology and to a fidelity to revelations of the scriptures—are manifest in the *loci classici* of the tradition of classical theism. This is to say that I levy no accusation at those representatives of classical tradition as abandoning their commitments to the scriptures under the intoxication of Greek metaphysics. Hellenistic thought, with its various concepts, categories, and grammar, is most useful in articulating truths of these respective faiths and I employ them heavily below in my proposal. But we might still ask whether or not this shared ontology, with its denial of any temporal affectation in the divine, can adequately capture this unique scriptural presentation of God. The worry then may be that whilst we are quite able to maintain divine perfection, a strict distinction between creator and creature, and ensure for a constancy of goodness in God, in doing so we may have to give up on much of this scriptural imagery and metaphor of divine interaction in the cosmos. Already here we have the makings of dilemma. No Abrahamic monotheist would wish to deny either some sense of divine perfection (and a robust ontology of God) or the

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difference between God (as necessary) and the world (as contingent), with the latter entirely dependent on the former, that allows for a divine presence unto the cosmos. If God is the very source of being for all that is and properly the creator of the cosmos, God may indeed do with it what God wills. For to posit that God’s incorporeality prevents interaction with the material world is to lose our hold on *what God is*—not yet another, albeit far more powerful, part of the cosmos. The relationship then is not reducible to ‘different substances,’ but is rather a relationship between ‘entities’ with different modes of being: one a necessary, self-existent entity, and others contingent, finite, dependent on some other thing. It is, in fact, the latter’s ontological dependence on the former, that both separates them *and* allows for God to act upon creation.

uniqueness of this revealed character of the ‘God of Israel.’ While this dilemma may be problematic, it is not, I argue, indicative of an *absolute* incompatibility between a classical ontology and the scriptural witness of the personal, reactive, relational, and *pathic* character of God. I suggest that we may still be able to retain a meaningful sense of divine *apatheia* (and much of the ontology of which it is a part) while yet still giving fuller voice or better account to this scriptural conception of God through the *via media* offered below. But before offering an account of this dilemma of impassibility as I understand it, I would first like to speak here to what I think this dilemma is *not* or rather how it ought not to be understood, despite the prevalence of this (mis)understanding in recent passibilist literature.

In his study of divine impassibility, Richard Creel observes that many critics of the doctrine have thought of this problem of impassibility as taking the form of dilemma (1986). I think framing the problem in this structure of a dilemma is largely correct. But there are significant problems in the manner in which it is commonly presented or implied in recent passibilist literature. These concerns are motivated by a failure to understand or appreciate the classical tradition and its common endorsement of divine *apatheia* and the motivations for that endorsement. In this failure to understand fully this attribute, divine *apatheia* is often then dismissed as theologically or philosophically unwarranted or, quite often, as some Hellenistic accretion foreign to revealed monotheism. This may be most apparent in the works of Moltmann, Hartshorne, and Lee, though it is represented in other passibilist authors as well. Most commonly perhaps, in this broader misunderstanding of divine impassibility, this attribute is taken to entail a kind of divine indifference to creation and, due to this misunderstanding, it is then alleged that any endorsement of divine *apatheia* would prevent us from speaking to



God's love, mercy, and compassion. It is, I think, on these grounds that divine impassibility is often dismissed out of hand as incompatible with any right notion of the agapeistic character in God. As such, we are then presented with the dilemma of an impassible God who is unable to love or a God who can be rightly said to love and yet cannot be impassible. As common as it may be, this way of understanding any dilemma of impassibility is founded upon not only a profound misunderstanding of that attribute as understood historically, but also ignores the quite robust and coherent accounts of divine love put forth by authors in the tradition of classical theism.

To this matter then of divine *apatheia* and love or an agapeistic character in the divine: as present amongst passibilists authors, there is the uncritical assumption that any endorsement of *apatheia* necessarily precludes our speaking in any *meaningful* sense of divine mercy, compassion, or love or even of a divine concern for creation. That is, divine *apatheia* is often taken to denote some way in which God is 'cut off' from creation and unable to meaningfully communicate with the cosmos, save by the barest understanding of the divine as a 'First Cause' or merely as a source of being. This seems to be a basic confusion of a Hellenistic philosophical theism with the tradition of classical theism given its employment of Hellenistic theological and philosophical concepts, categories, and grammar. Unsurprisingly given this understanding, impassibility is dismissed as fundamentally incompatible with both the agapeistic actions or dispositions of the divine and with any scriptural presentation which may give witness to this character of God. Yet there are, as I have mentioned, several problems in understanding this issue in this way. Primarily, it fails to attend to the various understandings of impassibility explored above (both theoretically and in the *loci classici* of classical theism). Then, resulting

from this inattention, we often see this doctrine of divine impassibility or *apatheia* taken to be a kind of kind of divine ‘apathy’ or an unfeeling divine indifference towards creation. While there is, of course, an etymological connection, there are etymological fallacies, and this is most certainly one. Through the theological and philosophical survey of classical theism offered above, we have seen that none of the various connotations of impassibility imply any obvious ‘apathy’ or a divine indifference.

Yet so prevalent is this understanding of *apatheia* as ‘apathy’ that it comes to bear on what is said of God’s goodness or a divine concern for creation. If it were indeed the case that any of these various understandings of divine impassibility entailed that God is ‘apathetic’ or ‘remote’ in this way, then we might well worry as to how one could speak of divine goodness as expressed through any concern and love for creation. Yet nowhere in this tradition of classical theism have we seen that divine impassibility is understood as a kind of ‘apathy,’ rather we see divine impassibility being employed so as to better provide for the goodness and love of God. Far from being an uncaring indifference towards creation, a common understanding in this classical tradition is that this attribute protects the agapeistic character of God, providing for a constancy of goodness and incorrupt moral stasis. For the classical theist, this is precisely what makes divine goodness or love of a different and primary quality. Under this account, divine goodness and love are constant, unwavering, and without dilution. And, for the classical theist, this is possible only through some affirmation of the impassibility and immutability of God; that the divine cannot be moved from an agapeistic concern for creation and so then can be rightly said, with the appropriate apophatic qualifiers, to be truly ‘good,’ morally trustworthy, and the right object of our worship and praise. This is a compelling reason,

I think, for retaining divine *apatheia* in some form as a provision and governing principle for an essential agapeistic character in God.

Still, we may need to qualify our understanding of divine mercy and compassion under such classical accounts. Given the metaphysical commitments of this ontology, these agapeistic expressions can be taken neither as temporally-reactive nor as evoking any sorrow in the divine, but rather as the perceived effects of a constancy of divine goodness. Moreover, divine love is most certainly accounted for in this tradition, albeit with significant differences from any human experiences of love. In the tradition of classical theism, for the *mutakallimun* and *falasifa* of Islam, Maimonides, or the Western Christian Scholastics, we may understand divine love as the primary cause of any creaturely love, wherein the latter is by contrast often incomplete, passionate, and marked by finitude and contingency. Yet we may indeed still speak, except in the most extreme cases of an apophatic theology, of something like an analogical understanding of divine goodness. Perhaps expressed most clearly in the works of Thomas Aquinas examined above, we find an account of divine goodness that is far removed from a ‘detached’ or ‘remote’ Aristotelian love which eternally meditates on the profundity of divine perfection. Rather, the goodness of God is expressed not merely through a bestowal and sustaining of being for all creation, but in an immanent and providential constancy of love towards creation (*ST* 1.20.1-4).

Yet for passibilist critics, this is often not enough. Even where we do not find divine *apatheia* taken as a kind of ‘apathy’ or divine indifference, it is common enough amongst recent passibilist authors to question this classical understanding of divine goodness, as expressed in mercy, compassion, and love for creation. Understandably perhaps, it is deemed as an

insufficient account of these dispositions or actions, particularly as love may require some vulnerability, risk, and affectation. The case is similar, as we have seen, to the matters of divine compassion and mercy. These also may require some affectation or temporally-reactive mode to be rightly understood or to take on any meaning insofar as they are commonly understood. Still, the tradition of classical theism would understand these as ‘effects’ of a more general and constant provision of love or goodness for creation, but indicative of no real change in the divine. For our passibilists critics, however, unless this compassion, mercy, or love is *necessarily* subject to or conditioned by some *pathos* or affectation, it cannot be said to be properly any of these things or bears only some equivocal meaning when predicated of the divine. Of course, this presumption of the necessity of risk, vulnerability, or affectation is largely conditioned by the experience we have in cases of creaturely love. Indeed, these do admit of affectation and often *passiones* or *perturbationes* in our cases. But this would be exactly how divine goodness, under a classical account, is different and of a purer quality than it is expressed in creatures. Yet we may still be able, as I argue for below, of imagining this various divine expression of love, mercy, and compassion as indeed affectational in some manner, but not given over to the *passiones*, not entirely involuntary and not subjected to coercion or moral corruption.

Additionally, there is often a confusion regarding divine impassibility and God’s relationship to time in classical accounts. While I discuss this further below, it is here worth mentioning as a potential passibilist criticism that is indeed unwarranted. If we imagine God entirely in time or subject to temporality *in toto* (sempiternal or everlasting), then both impassibility and immutability may indeed prove a problem for God’s interaction with creation.

Within temporal confines, such attributes might well give us cause for concern regarding God's ability to respond to various actions of free creatures or states of affairs in the cosmos. Yet, if is God if properly 'outside time' or timelessly eternal, as most classical accounts would endorse, then this worry of a 'static' inability to interact with creation may be allayed. Under an account of God as timelessly eternal, we might say that while God's response or reaction to creation is not temporally-successive, we need not exclude responsivity altogether. As I discuss below, we may understand any divine response as being willed *ab aeterno* in light of God's full knowledge of creaturely action. For example, we might say that in God's knowing from eternity that Augustine of Hippo would beseech God for faith and strength at some time (from the vantage of creation), God would then have eternally willed to provide such things at Augustine's request. Under such an account we could well speak of a responsivity in the divine, perhaps in the form of some simultaneity as Stump and Kretzmann have explored (1992). While it would not be right to characterise this responsivity as temporally affectational *per se*, as God would be without time (timelessly eternal), it would nevertheless be a means by which an impassible, immutable, and timelessly eternal God could be said to interact with creation. Though such an account may not allow for a temporally reactive or temporally conditioned reactivity in God of the affectational and *pathic* character I have discussed throughout, it would still provide for a divine responsivity to creaturely actions or various states of affairs.

Still, it does not seem obvious that when God is said to be impassible or immutable that this then entails some fundamental inability to love or show compassion and mercy. It only shows that this love (or compassion or mercy) is of a markedly different quality than is expressed in creatures. To take *apatheia* as fundamentally prohibitive of divine love evinces

both a profound misunderstanding not only this attribute as employed in this tradition but also various treatments of divine goodness present in this tradition. Very similar concerns are expressed along theodical lines or to the matter of a divine ‘co-suffering’ with humanity. As much of this passibilist trend of late would have it, only a God of *pathos*—subject to the evil and suffering of the cosmos—can be said to provide for an adequate theodicy, whereby the divine must bear or feel the suffering of humanity (or creation) *in the same way* in order to either provide some existential meaning to that suffering through divine solidarity or unity with creation or to be said to ‘meaningfully’ love. But we ought here to remember that it is in fact divine *apatheia* that provides for this constancy of goodness or, to use more properly scriptural or theological language, the *chesed* or faithfulness and loving kindness of God that knows ‘no shadow of turning.’ Some *pathos*, I would contend, may certainly be admitted in the divine life, even affected and conditioned from without, but it must remain ultimately governed by this essential *chesed* in the divine and so in this way it would be quite different from the *pathoi* experienced by creatures.

Yet again, it is not clear here that a classical account stands or falls on this criticism of a theodical insufficiency. As we have seen above in the comments of David Bentley Hart in *The Beauty of the Infinite* and in his essay ‘Impassibility as Transcendence,’ it is in fact because the divine, through *apatheia*, is transcendent of the sufferings of creation that we are able to speak of some relief of suffering or salvation coming from *without*—uninfected by the immense suffering that would affect the divine were this kind of literal *compassio* necessary. *Apatheia* preserves this ‘divine innocence’ such that God is *not* mired in creaturely suffering and so can, with purity and a constancy of goodness (*chesed*), provide fully for the life of the world and its

salvation (Hart, 2003, pp. 354-355; 2009, pp. 300-301). We must then, it seems, admit that it is most certainly not the case that the tradition of classical theism has no response to these passibilist criticisms regarding divine goodness or theodical concerns, but in fact gives a quite robust account for them. What I wish primarily to demonstrate here is that these common passibilist criticisms of classical understandings fail on several accounts, in that *apatheia* is wrongly understood and there is the failure to appreciate traditional accounts of divine goodness or neglect to see the theodical value in a retention of this attribute. I think it is then better if we *not* conceive of any dilemma of divine impassibility along such lines, wherein we must choose between divine *apatheia* and divine goodness or a sufficient theodicy, etc. Where passibilist critics, such as Heschel or Fretheim, may be correct is to the account of what divine love does, in fact, look like through the lens of the scriptures: as not only a constant provision of goodness or an unalloyed salvific capacity, but as an ongoing concern, vulnerable in some ways, given over to some emotions generally natural to relationships and, as such, admitting of some *pathos*, though never without ultimate control.

So if this dilemma of impassibility is not along these lines, that of some fundamental incapacity of God to love creation nor of impassibility as denoting some ‘apathy,’ what then may we say is the nature of this dilemma or any problem with an affirmation of impassibility? It is, as I see it, a question of the scriptural witness of God as reactive, personal, relational, and *pathic* and of God as impassible as classically understood. Whilst we have seen above the various valences of divine *apatheia* and the critical place it has in vouchsafing not only divinity itself but also divine goodness, we have also seen that it would fundamentally disallow any temporal affectation in the divine. That is, even under this most basic and common

understanding of divine impassibility in classical theism, we are denied any way to speak of God as temporally-reactive to creation or as, in some way, emotionally-conditioned by the actions of free creatures or states of affairs in the cosmos. Still, we might reasonably ask, whence is there any deficiency in the ontology of classical theism? We have, after all, seen in these various classical accounts the provision of both agapeistic divine interactions with creation and a robust notion of divine *apatheia*. But my concern here is that for all the philosophical soundness such an ontology offers, it still commits us to particular hermeneutical approach, largely of Philonian origin and much concerned with preserving a particular notion of divine perfection. But this, I mean to show, comes at a cost, as Heschel and Fretheim might remind us.

Indeed, this classical ontology maintains much of how we ought rightly to think of the divine—as a transcendent creator, as infinitely good and possessed of no moral corruption, and independent of creaturely finitude. But in these various commitments, as understood in that tradition, something of the revelational nature of the divine is lost. These shared ontological commitments and this shared notion of perfection require that we understand the divine as revealed in very specific ways, way perhaps out of keeping with ‘Jewish [scriptural] thinking’ (Held, 2013, p. 135). There is much then in the scriptures that we must say is simply not true of God: that the divine is not in time nor temporally-affected by our actions, that God does not sorrow at our loss or pain, that God’s joy does not wax or wane with ours, that God is very much *unlike* a person. Yet it seems that these various dispositions or actions or this ‘emotional life’ in God constitute a great deal of what is particular and unique about this ‘God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ And so then to deny the veridical nature of these expressions or, rather, speak



to them as *merely* figurative or allegorical would be to deny very much indeed of what sets this God apart.<sup>46</sup>

It is here, I think, that not only such ‘scriptural passibilists’ as Heschel or Fretheim should come to mind, but also the antique traditions of Talmudic Judaism or Sufi and Hanbalite Islam. In each, we are presented with a very different way of thinking about the divine than is found in the shared ontology of classical theism. These authors and their contributions remind us of this unique character of God as presented in the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—as temporally involved with humanity, reacting to the various conditions amongst creation, and expressing no small amount of *pathos*. And yet it is this understanding of God that is not available given the various commitments of classical theism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The scriptures themselves, one might think, attest to this unique character of the divine and if we are to deny any *pathos* in God, much of the force of revelation itself is lost. To do so, in fact, would be to imagine (to use the language of metaphor and imagery Fretheim employs) very different deities. Of course, this is not to say that we can or ought to take the scriptures of revealed monotheism in some literalist manner. For to do such would be to ignore that which is quite obvious both rationally and in the scriptures themselves: that God is not like humanity in very fundamental ways—the divine is unconstrained in ways we are bound, and neither is God subject to any finitude of creaturely corruption. But to acknowledge these differences does not then prevent us from affirming distinct similarities. This is not to argue

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<sup>46</sup> In speaking here of a ‘veridical’ understanding of scriptural anthropopathisms and anthropopsychisms, I need here to be cautious. I do not mean that allegorical or figurative language cannot be truthful or track something true about the divine. I mean only here that we may take these *pathic* descriptions as tracking actual emotional states in God and their changing as result of external actions, and so not *merely* our perception of the effects of some other actions or dispositions of God. That is, I mean to understand *pathos* and these changes in emotional states as admitting of some passivity in the divine.

that we should understand the various anthropomorphic, anthropopathic, or anthropopsychic descriptions of the divine in the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as indicating some absolute univocity in attributes or actions; no mere literalism is warranted any more than a Maimonidean agnosticism. While we must acknowledge, on the very basis a creator/creature distinction and as an affirmation of God's supremacy, that divine love, mercy, or compassion would be quite different from how we experience it, as would any divine emotional states, it does not follow that these be so radically different from our own.

So while must say that these various divine affectations are indeed unlike in some ways those are experienced by us, they are yet sufficiently similar that we may understand something more of the divine life. Most importantly, perhaps, it might well be *because* God relates to us in these ways that we are not only able then to enter into a relationship with the divine, but also so that we can better know what it is to be *in imago dei*—how our own love, joy, sorrow, and concern ought to look. If this is the case, then it would require not merely that we believe that God's life does indeed look like this, but that it, in fact, is this way. That is, that what we see of various divine emotions and the *pathos* of God in the scriptures of revealed monotheism, is not only a condescension of language, though it must be partly that, but some indication of what the divine life is like. This is, after all, what revelation is: some unveiling, however dim, of God in Godself and not merely the perceived effects of an ineffable and eternal disposition towards creation. Perhaps then the question is not so much how exactly God ought to love (passibly or impassibly) or what emotions are befitting of God 'as perfect,' but rather how God *in fact* does love or does express these emotions inasmuch as revelation may afford us. It seems then that this dilemma of impassibility or any problem with the doctrine ought to be conceived on rather

different lines than we have seen above. Rather than structuring this dilemma as it is often found in the recent passibilist literature as a choice between divine *apatheia* and the love, mercy, or compassion of God, we ought to think of it as taking something like the following form:

A) affirm an essential impassibility (understood as that fundamental denial of any temporal affectation *ab extra*) in the nature of God thus preserving divine perfection as understood in this shared ontology of classical theism, but at the cost of much of the revealed character of the divine,

OR

B) deny an essential impassibility of the divine, thus allowing for personal, reactive, relational, and *pathic* understanding of the divine as presented in the scriptures of the Abrahamic monotheism yet compromising some notion of divine perfection (as conceived in classical theism).

But, of course, we should not want to do either; such is the nature of a dilemma. But it is not clear that we have to choose from among these two. While this might seem like the proper way of understanding our choices from the perspective of much of recent passibilism, I do not think it comes down to this. We neither have to jettison divine impassibility or divine perfection *in toto* nor must we commit ourselves hermeneutically of conceived of God as quite unlike this scriptural conception.

We may be able to retain an essential impassibility in the divine and yet allow for much of this scriptural conception of God that Heschel, Fretheim, et al. would point us to. Put another way, perhaps much of the richness of the Talmudic/Rabbinic tradition or the tradition of Sufi or Hanbalite Islam may be retained or even incorporated into a proper ontology of the divine

that still accounts for many of warranted features of classical theism. We must, after all, recall what is so valuable and necessary in an affirmation of divine *apatheia* in classical theism and what should draw us to it now: to vouchsafe divinity and demarcate clearly that difference between the contingent and finite existence of creatures with the transcendent and supreme existence of God. And in this safeguarding, we have the preservation of an essential goodness in God. If this is indeed the right way (or a right way amongst others) to view the motivation for this attribute, then it seems we might well be able to keep it whilst still allowing for some *pathos* in the divine; not a *pathos* of moral corruption or *passiones*, but a *pathos* of divine concern, in a paternalistic or maternalistic manner such that God does indeed, as the scriptures show forth, sorrow with our sorrows and rejoice at our rejoicing, and is in fact willingly *moved* by creatures made in the divine image. Next, I would like to offer at least the rudiments of an ontology that could account for both an essential impassibility in the divine (when understood a certain way) and for some qualified divine *pathos*.

## 4.2 A Way Forward

I believe it has been shown sufficiently above that classical account of divine *apatheia* cannot give an adequate account for the personal, *pathic*, and reactive portrayals of God as found in the scriptures of Abrahamic monotheism and, consequently, have limited metaphysical ‘space’ in which to speak of the nature of divine emotion as resulting from some affectation. At the very least, commitments to an absolute timeless eternity and simplicity in the divine would not allow for any *pathos* under this very basic definition as I have understood it. Still, I have argued that *much* of how we may understand divine impassibility ought to be retained as necessary to a proper conception of the divine, yet with certain modifications or qualifications.

Here I wish to begin to offer a proposed *via media* which may account for some of the concerns of ‘scriptural passibilists’ whilst still providing for *some* notions of impassibility in the divine. This proposal may allow for a better understanding of meaningful expressions of divine *pathos*, and yet not go so far as many of the recent passibilist criticisms in their designs to abandon *apatheia* altogether either as a basic impediment to divine/creaturely interactions or on the grounds that it is a foreign, Hellenistic concept at odds with Abrahamic conceptions of the divine.

In what follows, I wish to explore ways in which this proposed ontology, though retaining a modified understand of divine *apatheia*, may allow us a richer picture of God as revealed in the scriptures of Abrahamic monotheism. Essentially, what I mean to provide is an account wherein we may predicate divine impassibility in the nature, essence, or *ousia* of God and yet allow for a qualified passibility through an ‘energetic kenoticism.’ This ontological schema would allow for an affirmation of the unity, transcendence, and impassibility of God in the divine nature or *ousia* and yet, through a voluntary condescension via the divine energies, provide for a better account for the scriptural witness to a robust and dynamic account of God’s temporal interactivity and reciprocity between God and creation. Building then on the dilemma introduced above, we might then think we have yet another option available to us and one that I seek to outline in this *via media* offered below.

A) affirm an essential impassibility (understood as that fundamental denial of any temporal affectation *ab extra*) in the nature of God thus preserving divine perfection as

understood in this shared ontology of classical theism, but at the cost of much of the revealed character of the divine,

*OR*

B) deny an essential impassibility of the divine, thus allowing for personal, reactive, relational, and *pathic* understanding of the divine as presented in the scriptures of the revealed monotheism yet compromising some notion of divine perfection (as conceived in classical theism),

*OR*

C) maintain that the divine is impassible in essence or *ousia* (incorrupt and immovable in the divine *chesed*), and yet still through a voluntary condescension, an energetic kenosis, be capable of some passivity or *pathos*, and for a fuller account of divine emotion and personality as affective in the various ways the scriptures of revealed monotheism would suggest.

Some version of (C) is what I wish to explore and advance as a possible alternative to the ‘dilemma’ outlined above. Given the various meanings of *apatheia* examined in previous sections of this work and through a measured analysis of the very motivations for predicating *apatheia* of the divine, we may be able to offer more a more nuanced understanding of this concept.

Thus, what I propose here is that we understand divine *apatheia* as primarily, though perhaps including other meanings as well, a warranted and needful safeguard of divinity and moral goodness, yet *not* as an absolute prohibitor of any passivity or *pathos* in God. Of course, we must here be very careful as to what we mean by divine passivity or *pathos*. Here I take it

to mean some capacity to be affected or moved by creation (in a temporal manner), but not as indicative of some moral corruption or ultimate loss of control or freedom in the divine. To build off Heschel's paraphrasing of Isaiah, 'my pathos is not your pathos,' we may say that whilst the passivity and affectational character of God is indeed real, it is still that of a transcendent and supreme being (Heschel, 1962, pp. 353-357; Held, 2013, p. 154). As such, it would not be in the same order as the affectations or *pathoi* we experience. God is not moved exactly as we are, God does not lose control through being affected from without as often we do, God is disposed to no despondency as we may be. Yet this divine *pathos* is indeed quite real and similar to ours in that it is effected by others or by states of affairs in the world.

If we are thus moved by the concerns of Heschel and Fretheim or if we are to think that Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition or that legacy of Sufism or Hanbalite Islam does indeed afford us some alternative 'imagery' of the divine, perhaps more in keeping in the scriptural witness, what then would an ontology that could capture this look like? None of these sources offers anything in the way of such an ontology or a sufficient one, nor does any in any real sense pretend to do so. Yet it is not enough merely to affirm various pieces of scriptural imagery as tracking something quite true about the relationship of God with creation. We must give some account of how this might go, bearing in mind those features of the shared classical ontology we have examined above that afford us much in filling out a metaphysical picture of God as both impassible and yet *pathic*. Neither ought we to ignore the richness of the Hellenistic tradition which may also aid in such a project. *Contra* recent passibilists critics, we should indeed 'spoil the Egyptians,' most certainly if it allows us to give a fuller voice to a scriptural conception of the divine in Abrahamic monotheism. To this, the irony is not lost on me that in

a desire to provide an ontology of God which may give better account for a scriptural conception of the divine that I would here draw so heavily upon not only the features of a classical ontology, but one quite influenced by Hellenistic thought.

Yet here I think we may draw from both—the tradition of classical theism and the wealth of Hellenistic thought—and the proposal I offer is indebted to each. What I begin with is an ontology of the divine that finds its most prominent expression in Byzantine Christian thought and so can be said to still be within the orbit of classical theism, but of a rather different conception that is found in much of classical theism, whether in Jewish rationalism, the tradition of *falsafa*, or in Christian Scholastic expressions. It seems that we may employ it here, though with significant modifications, to speak of the divine as impassible *in se* and yet affectationally-open and temporal through the divine *dispensation* or *economia*. First, I would here speak to this ontology and then explore how it may be an advantage in maintaining the transcendence, unity, and impassibility of the divine, whilst yet allowing for some *pathic* or affectational capacity in God in interactions with creation.

### **4.3 The Essence/Energies Distinction**

Here I would like to introduce a metaphysical distinction in philosophical theology that may provide some structure or a conceptual foundation for the *via media* I propose. Though in its original expression this distinction is still quite impassibilist, it may yet afford a means by which we may maintain a notion of *apatheia* in the divine essence and still provide for some *pathic* and temporally-reactive affectational capacity in the divine. This distinction between the essence and energies of God is commonly associated with an Eastern Christian ontology of the God, articulated most notably by the Byzantine theologian of the mediaeval era, Gregory



Palamas (1296-1359CE). I have heretofore spoken little of the relationship between classical Eastern Christian or Byzantine philosophical theology and its occidental counterparts. Despite polemical and unfounded accounts otherwise, the philosophical ontology of God in Eastern Christian thought shares much in common with what is found in the contributions of classical theism, not only in Christian Scholasticism but also in the tradition of Jewish rationalism and the *kalam* and *falsafa* of classical Islam as well. In the Byzantine theology of the late mediaeval era, we find a philosophical ontology of God that would not be unrecognisable to Avicenna, Maimonides or Aquinas. It would affirm the transcendence, ineffability, timeless eternity, and simplicity of God (though to this last attribute, there is some debate).

Above, I have argued that we may speak of classical theism as defined by a shared ontology of the divine and we ought to include this Eastern Christian model of God as, for the most part, well within that tradition. Yet there are some interesting differences. Differences not so great as to speak of this Byzantine or Palamite conception of God as alternative to those expressions found in the classical sources of Judaism, Islam, and Western Scholastic Christianity, but distinctive features nonetheless. So what then may we say is distinctive in this Eastern Christian philosophical ontology when compared with the various expressions of classical theism examined above? Perhaps the most noticeable difference and one which I employ heavily here is that of the essence/energies or *ousia/energeiai* distinction. While it may be too general to speak of this as characteristic of Eastern Christian theology, it certainly represents a dominant 'Palamite' understanding of a divine ontology or a rather different way in which the East, as also an heir to Aristotle, has incorporated that tradition into its theology.

This *ousia/energeiai* distinction may be traced to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, though employed with no specific theological end in mind. It is later adopted in the works of Plotinus in a more decidedly theistic manner. Perhaps unsurprisingly, its introduction into revealed monotheism is found first in Philo of Alexandria (*De Post.* 168-169 and *Spec. Leg.* 1.47-49, quoted in Bradshaw, 2004, pp. 59-64). The distinction is then employed prominently in the theologies of Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas, though it may be found in less systematised expressions in earlier Christian authors. Both Maximus and Gregory Palamas employ it to speak of the divine as transcendent (in essence or *ousia*) and as economic or immanent (in the divine energies or *energeiai*). We may then speak of the *ousia* of the divine as God in Godself (*in se*), utterly transcendent and ineffable. The divine energies are those activities or operations of the divine manifest through an ongoing interaction with the cosmos. These energies or *energeiai* vivify all that is, reveal something of the divine unto creation, and afford a means by which rational creatures may partake in the divine.

The divine essence is altogether simple while the energies are manifold and express the effects of various divine attributes insofar as we may speak of such as discrete. Under this schema, there is the provision for a transcendent, immutable, impassible, timelessly eternal, and simple 'aspect' of the divine and also for a condescension of the divine through a free and active immanence of God in creation. These energies of God, finding their source as they do in the divine essence, are considered to possess the full divinity of God but in manner comprehensible and available to creation. It is then through these divine energies that rational creatures may know something of God and while we may speak of this energetic procession cataphatically,

the essence of God may be known only through inference from that which is availed via the energies of God or expressed in apophatic language, in a denial of what this essence is.

Far earlier than Maximus or Palamas, Philo writes in the *Special Laws* that the attributes of God are, according to their essence, ‘beyond apprehension’ (*Spec. Leg.* I. 47 quoted in Bradshaw, 2004, p. 63). If anything can be known of the divine essence it is only through these energetic expressions or manifestations. Palamas writes in his *Contra Akindynum* that the very essence of God is ‘altogether incomprehensible and incommunicable to all beings ...’ (quoted in Pelikan, 1974, p. 263). Yet God may still be known and participated in through the divine energies (*energeiai*). Stated differently, God is manifest in the cosmos through the divine energies and yet the divine life itself is protected by the ineffability (and impassibility) of the divine nature. Regarding this distinction, Basil Krievosheine writes in his commentary on the teaching of Gregory Palamas:

The divine essence and the divine energies are distinct one from the other in that the divine energy is communicable and is divisible without division, and is nameable and apprehensible in a certain sense, although obscurely from its: effects, while the substance is incommunicable, indivisible and nameless, as altogether transcending every name and concept (quoted in Hopko, 1982, p. 174).

This essence/energies distinction then offers us a concept of God that can allow us to speak of God in a manner both protective of divine transcendence essentially, but one that also allows for knowledge of and interaction with the divine energetically. This mode of understanding God through essence and energies is not simply a matter of arranging appropriate theological language or for finding some means of speaking in a manner worthy of the divine (*theoprepes, dignus deo*). Rather, under this distinction, there is not only an epistemic or linguistic difference between the essence and energies of God, as apophatic and cataphatic respectively, but a

difference in our metaphysical ‘access’ to the divine. We may participate in the divine via the energies, but the divine essence is eternally beyond all that which is contingent, finite, and created. Here we may wonder if this distinction does not introduce an unacceptable division in the divine. This is a question I will take up below in dealing with some anticipated objections. Some interpreters of Palamas will speak of it being only a ‘formal’ distinction and others as a real distinction in God.

John of Damascus, whose works would certainly go on to influence Palamas, employs this Aristotelian distinction for theological purposes in his *De Fide Orthodoxa* (*On the Orthodox Faith*). He states that the divine energies are ‘the physical power and movement that manifests [God’s] essence’ (quoted in Bradshaw, 2013, p. 257). They serve a mediating role between the absolute transcendence of God’s essence and the creaturehood of the cosmos. Gregory Palamas, in *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, writes, ‘the divine energy [is] in God, for it is neither substance nor accident, even though it is called quasi-accident by some theologians who are indicating solely that it is in God but is not the substance [essence]’ (quoted in Bradshaw, 2013). Thus, the energies represent a true manifestation of the essence of God yet are not his essence. We can then know God through the divine energies and participate in the divine, yet the divine essence remains untouchable and beyond comprehension. Jaroslav Pelikan states, ‘... the justification for this view of relation between the participable and the imparticipable in God was a combination of the [energies] ... with the doctrine of the divine essence [*ousia*] ...’ (1974, p. 269). With this conceptual foundation in mind, we may have a way of maintaining an essential impassibility in the divine and still providing a means by which God

may, through the energies, interact with creation in a manner that provides greater room for *pathic* expressions of God relationship with humanity.

Still, in its ‘orthodox’ and original expressions, this distinction is quite thoroughly impassibilist. While the divine energies may indeed reveal something of God unto creation, animate the cosmos, and even allow us to participate in them, they are still the immutable and impassible processions of the transcendent and ineffable divine essence. Though free and voluntary in a way we may think Plotinian emanations are not, it is not that case that these divine energies admit of any affectation. That is, while this energetic condescension does indeed afford us not only some knowledge of God but also an ontological access to the divine—a means by which we may participate in the divine—any change or movement is creatures alone and *not* in the energies themselves. Having their eternal origin in the divine essence, they are similarly immutable and impassible though comprehensible and accessible. Thus it is that even with this interesting and helpful distinction in the ontology of God—as God existing transcendentally and immanently—it is still a mode of being in God that is, however dynamic, without any passivity or affectation. Yet it may provide, or at least I wish to suggest that it could, a conceptual framework for maintaining much of which we would wish to say of God essentially (and in concert with many of the commitments of classical theism) while providing some room through the divine energies for a fuller account of a temporally-reactive and reciprocal relationship of some *pathos* with humanity.

As one should notice, this Palamite distinction bears some marked similarity to the ‘dipolar theism’ found in both Whiteheadian and Hartshornian thought, though with significant differences. Thomas Hopko has argued that the traditional ‘essence/energies’ model is a way

of approaching the problem of the divine impassibility, roughly analogous to the ‘dipolar theism’ of process philosophy, but without falling into its strongly passibilist and pantheistic errors (1982).<sup>47</sup> I contend, however, that the essence/energies model, as traditionally understood, is while beneficial still a strongly ‘impassibilist’ approach in that it cannot account for the reactive and *pathic* nature of divine/creaturely interactions as the scriptures of the revealed monotheism so often present. Nevertheless, the work of Hopko is helpful in understanding the potential of Eastern Christian philosophical contributions to this issue and the influence of his work is present throughout this study (1982). This is a metaphysical picture central to Eastern Christian understandings of God, and yet one that has only recently received much treatment in Western theology and philosophy (Totleben, 2015). It is a particularly fecund and nuanced tradition that has, in my estimation, something to offer the contemporary debate over divine impassibility. As such, it forms the very foundational structure of this proposed *via media* I wish here to develop.

As a final note here as to this essence/energies distinction: it seems that a similar idea, though perhaps not having the same Aristotelian pedigree as this particular articulation of such a distinction, may be found in Judaism and Islam as well. Or at least something akin to this understanding of God’s transcendence and immanence. In Judaism, in both the Rabbinic/Talmudic and Kabbalistic traditions, we have attempts to account for God *in se* as

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<sup>47</sup> The model which I here develop, dependent as it is on some ‘dipolarity’ or a ‘dual aspect’ conception of the divine in as transcendent and immanent, is beholden not only to this Palamite essence/energies distinction but to some influence of process theology as well (Hartshorne, 1941; Whitehead, 1960). Given the interesting connection between these two ontologies, as different as they may be, it is not implausible to think that at least some of the inspiration for a ‘dipolar’ conception of God in process thought was inspired by the works of Nikolai Berdyaev given his likely exposure to the essence/energies distinction in his own Russian Orthodox Church (Berdyaev, 1949; Dombrowski, 2013).

contrasted with God's immanence. The Kabbalistic concept of God's nature as *ein sof*—as boundless, ineffable, and utterly other would track a similar idea here present in the Palamite understanding of the divine *ousia*. The various *sefirot* or divine emanations and the theophanic *shekinah* or presence of God in creation might similarly follow the *energeiai* of God under a Palamite ontology.<sup>48</sup> While the *sefirot* are largely associated with the Kabbalistic literature, the *shekinah* of the divine is found throughout the Rabbinic corpus as contrasted with divine transcendence and is understood as a means by which God is present unto creation.<sup>49</sup> In Islam, there is a similar notion of the *sakinah* which whilst not indicating as strongly a divine 'presence' in creation as the Rabbinic *shekinah*, at least includes such a possibility (Katz, 1977, pp. 82-84). More interestingly perhaps, is Ibn Arabi's (the very same Andalusian Sufi philosopher discussed above) understanding of the various names of God in the Qur'an as not merely descriptive of various attributes of the divine but as God 'disclosure' of Godself unto creation.<sup>50</sup> These expressions, in various forms across Abrahamic monotheism, give us at least some precedent for understanding a divine ontology in this 'dipolar' manner.

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<sup>48</sup> *Vide The Zohar*, 1993, Stephen Katz, 1977, pp. 78-84, and Gershom Scholem, 1941. Whilst the Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition may not bear much influence in the way of Neoplatonism, it is likely the case that Kabbalistic ontologies did. Even in this *ein sof/sefirot* distinction we see something similar to a hierarchy of being as found in Plotinian and Neoplatonic thought.

<sup>49</sup> Outside of the strictly Rabbinic/Talmudic corpus, both Saadiah Gaon and Judah Halevi will speak of the *shekinah* of God as means of mediation and condescension in God towards creation. For the Gaon, it is a creation of God which sometimes takes human form. Halevi, however, is not as strong as Sadia in presenting the *shekinah* as a merely a creation. Halevi will argue that it is part of the 'Divine Influence' in creation (*ha-Inyan ha-Elohi*), Katz, 1977, pp. 81-82.

<sup>50</sup> *Vide* Gerald Elmore, 2001 and Saiyad Nizamuddin, 2014.

## 4.4 Divine Kenoticism

In the previous section, we have seen the very basic structure of the essence/energies distinction, its origins in Aristotelian thought, and its incorporation, through Philo of Alexandria, into an ontology of God found in Eastern Christian or Byzantine theology. It is also clear that, as it stands, it bears very much in common with Western expressions of classical theism, in its affirmation of divine immutability and impassibility in both the essence and energies of God. What I wish to explore here is how this ontology may be modified to accommodate some of the concerns spoken of above—to giving fuller voice to this scriptural conception of God as temporally-reactive and *pathic*, admitting of some affectation. This conceptual ontology may allow, in the divine essence or as God *in se*, for a governing impassibility and immutability regarding the steadfast goodness or agapeistic character in the divine—the *chesed* of God—while yet providing for an energetic participation in the cosmos through a kenoticism in the divine energies. What I wish here to suggest is that we may be able to speak of God as impassible and immutable in essence and yet, through a kenotic condescension, as passible in some qualified ways. This may give us a way, in keeping with my aims here, of maintaining the transcendence, *aseity*, etc. of God while yet providing for an account of the divine presence in the cosmos more consonant with this scriptural conception of God.

As this project has been concerned with proposing an ontology of the divine that may stand as something of a *via media* between this shared ontology of classical theism and various passibilist concerns, I would here adopt a piece of Christian doctrine to this end. It seems to me that kenosis, while having a most prominent place in Christology, need not be confined only to



this purpose. It is, after all, a matter of the divine limiting itself so as to become accessible to humanity, though without diminution of this divinity. We may then, I think, adopt it as a concept with the potential for broader application—to speak of some manner in which God may ‘empty [him]self’ for the sake of partaking in the cosmos and being, with necessary qualifications, affected by it. Thus I propose a conception of God that incorporates this kenotic view, but rather than limiting the kenosis of God to the Incarnation of the Logos, we may consider kenosis a more general possibility for the divine in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Such an approach has a precedent in Judaism, as we shall see below, in the concept of the ‘self-limiting’ of God in order to ‘make room’ for the cosmos and we might also find the possibility of such in Islam in God’s self-disclosure, insofar as it is possible, to the cosmos in the works on Ibn Arabi.

This is not to endorse an incarnational kenoticism for the divine in classical theism generally, but rather some form of kenoticism in the divine that would allow for a greater veridical understanding of various scriptural anthropopathisms and anthropopsychisms; to treat them not as qualified only in their resemblance to human emotion and *pathos* (they certainly are that as well), but as indicative of true mental states in God. Keeping in mind our concerns for this scriptural conception of the divine, we could understand God as kenotic in the following manner. In order to ‘make room’ metaphysically for a temporally-reactive and *pathic* relationship with humanity (and creation more generally), God, through an energetic kenosis, might be freely divested of a strong immutability and impassibility, both of which if retained *in toto* would make such a relationship with creation impossible or at least very different from any scriptural presentation of such a relationship. Here we ought to be mindful that we need only think of the divine energies as kenotic in this way—condescending to some passivity or

passibility for the sake of this relationship—whilst the divine essence remains transcendent, immutable, and impassible. We need not understand God’s ‘self-limitation’ as speaking to the entirety of the divine, but only to that means by which God comes to interact with creation—through, as I have proposed above, the divine energies as that immanent ‘aspect’ of God.

In addition to the classical Christian employment of kenosis, similar ideas may be found in both Rabbinic and classical sources in Judaism. Both the rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572CE) and Gersonides propose something along these lines, though Luria’s suggestion is perhaps bolder. Luria speaks to the concept of *tzimtzum* (a contraction of the *ein sof*) through which God withdraws into Godself to ‘make room’ for the cosmos. This ought not to be read as some spatio-temporal contraction, but rather as a metaphysical limitation necessary, in the rabbi’s judgement, for both human freedom and a relationship between God and creation (Klein, 2005). For Gersonides, the concern is more straightforward and philosophical. Gersonides conceives of God as, in some way, temporally involved in knowledge and providence and so in *The Wars of the Lord*, Ben Gershom speaks to a ‘limitation’ of divine foreknowledge in order to provide for logical space for human freedom (1984-1999; Drob, 1990; Gersonides, 2009). Such a move, at least on the part of Gersonides, is dependent on God’s being somehow *in time* (sempiternal) as the various open theists examined above would argue for (as well as many other passibilists). Still, the matter here is only that we have some basic idea of this kenosis or self-limitation in Godself as found, not only its most prominent employment in Christology, but in both the Rabbinic and classical traditions of Judaism as well (and possibly in mystical Islam). I see no obvious reason why we could not make a more modest proposal in suggesting that this free self-limitation occur as it regards the divine energies and yet not obtain in the transcendent,

impassible, and immutable essence of the divine. Perhaps we may think of the energies of the divine or this immanent ‘aspect’ of God as kenotic—limiting itself so as to provide for some interaction with creation—and yet retain a fullness of the divine essence or as God *in se*, as simple, timelessly eternal, immutable, and impassible.

For our purposes and the concerns of this project, the idea may be extrapolated thus: so that there is ‘metaphysical space’ for creatures with free will to enter into a relationship with God and that that relationship be characterised by some affectation in God (in the manner of a temporal reactivity and *pathos* described by the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), God freely ‘withdraws’ into Godself but in such a way that makes this temporally-reactive and *pathic* relationship possible. We might here also think that this ‘metaphysical space’ would also accommodate some personal aspect in God so that the divine can more explicably relate to persons. A similar line of thought is found in the work of Douglas White (1913). In his comments on White, J.K. Mozley writes, ‘God voluntarily limits himself, as in creation, then it is of his own choice that he takes the path of suffering.’ (Mozley, 1926, p. 152) While White is speaking of suffering in a stronger sense, we may still take the idea as God’s voluntary limitation to allow some temporal affection. It seems that if we wish to provide this logical or metaphysical space for such a relationship as the Tanakh, New Testament literature, and Qur’an describe, then some form of kenoticism is a reasonable and plausible account. This concept of kenoticism—of a free self-limitation of the divine—when conjoined with essence/energies distinction may then allow us to maintain many of the classical attributes of God in the divine nature (insofar as we may know them apophatically) whilst providing ample room for the very sorts of relationships between God and creation as widely witnessed in the scriptures of revealed

monotheism. Still, we need not speak of this kenoticism as a self-limitation of God *in se*, but rather as a means for divine immanence, for both an omnipresence and omnitemporality in the cosmos.

Under this model of an energetic kenoticism, God may be essentially impassible (*in se* or in the divine *ousia*) and yet passible and mutable (with necessary qualifications) in the immanent *dispensatio* or *economia* towards creation through the divine energies.<sup>51</sup> This protects God from being at the whim of actions external to Godself or being coerced (a consequence of passibilism in its stronger forms, specifically those found in the tradition of process philosophy and open theism), yet allows God to be freely disposed in various ways towards creation insofar as those dispositions or changes in God which may accompany them are assumed voluntarily or are properly kenotic. This immanent ‘aspect’ of God is then open to some affectation and *pathos*, but the conditions under which this is possible are entirely free. Though apophaticism is here necessary, we may then speak of the divine nature as possessed of all or most of those traditional attributes we would find in a classical ontology of the divine. But we can then still, through the divine energies, speak to God’s presence in the cosmos through this kenotic condescension. Moreover, though limited apophatically by what we can say of the divine *ousia*, we might here consider that the divine *chesed*—an illimitable and eternal goodness—is present in the divine essence such that it would then govern whatever affectations or temporally-reactive *pathos* is present in divine energies as immanent in the cosmos. Under this *chesedic* governance, God may experience various affectations, *pathoi*, and emotions but is never moved beyond this moral stasis. And so it is possible that through both this ontology of essence and

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<sup>51</sup> By this, I mean mutable in the sense that God may be subject to *some* change, though not any change in the divine nature, which remains both impassible and immutable.

energies as a foundation for expressing these ‘dual aspects’ of God *and* through a kenosis in God’s immanence that we may have conceptual space for some *pathos* in the divine.

#### 4.4 Creation and Time

Thus far we have seen at least a substantial portion of the makings of a potential solution to this problem of divine impassibility as I have conceived it or at least some account of how we may better answer or fill out various concerns regarding this scriptural presentation of God. And we may do so by, in large part, employing philosophical categories from classical theism in order to provide for this modified ontology. In the essence/energies distinction we are afforded a coherent model of God as existing *in se* in the divine nature and as immanent in creation through the manifest activity of the divine energies. Additionally, we have seen the possibility of understanding divine immanence as kenotic or as involving some self-limited condescension such that God may be said to properly enter into creation and participate in it. That God is present in creation is, of course, never denied under any classical theistic accounts and the scriptural witness speaks strongly to the divine presence throughout the cosmos, interacting with and affecting (and effecting) various states of affairs in creation. Still, both the scriptural witness and our concerns here to give greater voice to this affectational character of the divine, as *pathic*, reactive, and personal, demand that we give some account as to God’s relationship with time and, moreover, how that relationship is related to or affected by God’s creation of the cosmos.

Here I wish to explore some possibilities related to these matters and to show that we may not need to endorse the philosophically problematic position of God being *entirely* temporal nor need we give up on timeless eternity altogether either. Following much of what

we have seen above, not only in philosophical ontologies of the divine but in the scriptural witness as well, we are presented with a conception of God as existing ‘dually.’ That is, we would want to speak to a transcendent ‘aspect’ of God and to an immanent ‘aspect’ as well, but without any problematic division. Perhaps this also affords us a mean by which we may maintain a timeless eternity in the divine essence, as God *in se*, but also allow for some temporal existence in God’s ongoing involvement with creation (sempiternality or omnitemporality). The question of divine creation matters here, of course, because it will affect what we say of God’s relationship to time. How we come down on this question of creation—as eternal though contingent or as having some discernable beginning (a finite *creatio ex nihilo*)—informs how we understand this relationship between God and time. I do not mean here to give any exhaustive account this relationship and even less do I wish to provide some thorough account of time itself. Rather, I lay out some possible ways of thinking of this relationship between the divine and time and explore potential options. Taking up this matter is, of course, unavoidable in a study such as this, concerned as we are with the possibility of God being *temporally-affected* in the manner by which I have understood the basic nature of *pathos* throughout this work. As such, we must confront this question. Here I wish to introduce a few possibilities regarding this relationship and then explore how we might bring them to bear on this question of divine (im)passibility.

### *God and Time*

As we have seen above, especially in our examination of open theism, we have perhaps two accounts available to us. The first would be that God’s relationship to time is one of a timeless eternity or that God is properly outside of time (a Boethian account). Under this view,

we would not have to deny the reality of time, even though God would not experience it as we do, and we could say that time comes into being along with, or as part of, the cosmos. That is, we have a creation that is defined by spatio-temporal features, and that time is a creature along with the material composition of creation. This would maintain divine transcendence in that God would be properly external to creation—here taken as both space and time. We would certainly concede that this notion seems right regarding the cosmos as spatial. We might then also think it reasonable to include time in that category of creation—time comes to exist at the moment the cosmos comes into being, as time would be properly part of it. This would not, of course, necessarily prohibit God's involvement in time just as God's being incorporeal and transcendent of the material cosmos would not prevent God's acting in it.

As we have seen through our examination of various sources in classical theism above, God as timelessly eternal is largely the favoured position in that tradition. It provides for divine transcendence and may avoid problems of divine foreknowledge. We may still speak of there being some duration in the life of God though, being timelessly eternal, it would not be a duration of any temporally-successive, metered, or sequential character. Thus God can be said to be living and existing eternally and as having a life of a duration though quite unlike that of temporally-bound creatures. What this Boethian account cannot do, however, is provide for the kind of reactive and responsive relationship to creation with which we are here concerned, a relationship characterised by some temporal affectation or by certain acts or dispositions of God as reactive in a successive manner. Under this account, it seems that we could not have the kind temporal *pathos* commonly present in the scriptural portrayal of the divine, for that would require God being, in some way, *in time*.

Another account would be that God is still ‘eternal,’ as everlasting or sempiternal, having neither a beginning nor an end but rather that this existence is everlasting. We could then speak to God being *in time* but without cessation (everlasting or sempiternal) and not entirely confined by time in the manner that creatures are. Under this account, time to be no creature, as it would exist with and alongside God as a metaphysical category perhaps. Time then, for God, would look very much like our experience of it, though we need not think of God as being so confined by it as we are, given that God has an infinite existence, is sempiternal, and necessary. Moreover, God would have a proper ‘history,’ retaining perfect recall of the past and a perfect knowledge of the future. This view would perhaps better allow for the kinds of temporal interaction with which we are here concerned—God’s reacting temporally, in a sequentially-ordered manner, to the actions of free creatures or to states of affairs in the cosmos. It also might better account for God’s effecting change in the world or as relating to humanity ‘as a person.’ Under this view, we could speak of divine foreknowledge and a very real past, present, and future in the life of God, but as we have seen, this problem of foreknowledge and necessity would again be a thorny issue. Relatedly, divine knowledge, under this view of the everlastingness of God, would be quite different than it would be under an existence of timeless eternity, though each comes with difficulties regarding the fullness of divine knowledge or what we may suppose omniscience to include.

These are, as stated, but rough accounts of the two dominant views of God’s relationship to time. Both, of course, have attractive features. Under the first, timeless eternity, we can speak to the ultimate transcendence of the divine and a ‘perfection’ in the divine life as God would be truly present at all ‘times’ as we experience them, though confined in no way by any



temporal ordering or succession. God would be limited by no spatio-temporal categories as time would be a creature, coming into existence along with and as part of the material nature of the cosmos. We may more easily speak of God as immutable and simple under this account; divine knowledge would never grow or change, and so any mutability in God could be avoided. Divine knowledge would also be entirely complete and perfect, and we could avoid any necessitarian concerns over foreknowledge. Under the account of God as everlasting or sempiternal, we may be better able to speak of God having a ‘history’ or for divine knowledge being such that, while it may encompass all things that may be known, having some temporal extension such that God knows and experiences time very much in the way we do. Time would then be for God a tensed experience, and the present would be the privileged vantage. Furthermore, this account of an everlastingness or sempiternality in God may better comport with the scriptural witness as to God’s reacting in time and as conditioned by the acts of free creatures. Both accounts are, I think, not without significant merits. But what we must attend to here is how this relationship of God to time comes to inform the question of the (im)passibility of God. And, moreover, what we can make of this relationship of God to time and the nature of creation from the perspective of the scriptural witness in revealed monotheism. As with impassibility, the scriptural witness—in the Tanakh, New Testament literature, or the Qur’an—is unclear as to this matter. We might well expect it to be so as none of these works presents anything like a philosophical account of God. We then must infer as best we can what this relationship of God to time or God’s position in time in regard to interactions with creation might be.

As we have seen above, the shared view amongst authors within this classical theistic tradition has been that God exists in a timeless eternity. We may naturally think this consonant

with perfection if we examine more closely what this conception of divine perfection as employed in classical theism looks like. Of course, we must here appeal to other divine attributes thought constitutive of or proper to this perfection. If God is indeed transcendent, altogether simple, and immutable, this would seem to entail an existence outside of or beyond time. Being timelessly eternal would mean that at every 'moment' or from all eternity, divine knowledge is complete and, perhaps more importantly, God would be subject to no motion or change. Given the necessary relationships that obtain amongst the divine attributes, we may also think of it in the other direction. Anything that could, in fact, admit of motion, change, or movement would be subject in some way to time. So we might then say, on the grounds of transcendent, immutability, and simplicity, that God must be timelessly eternal. For any subjection to time would potentially admit of change or modification and, likewise, any change, movement, or modification would require some temporal extension. As God is, under classical accounts, altogether simple and complete (or *a se*) then God would necessarily be timeless. This is, I think, a quite sound account philosophically and one that follows the Aristotelian tradition very much in its understanding of the relationship between time and motion. Moreover, it accounts quite well for this 'otherness' in God, maintaining that most important distinction between creator and creation, especially if we take time to be a creature. That is, both space and time (or some union thereof) come into existence in the creative work of God. God must then necessarily be outside of time (in any way that we may understand it) and so completely transcendent of any spatio-temporal confines.

This classical account of a timeless eternity in the divine, for all its advantages, still evokes some interesting questions, particularly as to how a timeless being would be said to

interact with temporal beings or states of affairs in time or what God's knowledge would amount to (Stump and Kretzmann, 1981). The most important point to recall here is that we have seen that this classical account would not necessarily prevent God's being responsive to prayer or interacting with creation. It would occur, we might think, in the form of some simultaneity given God's eternal timelessness and omniscience. It seems right that we can, in fact, speak of a timelessly eternal God as responsive to and even reciprocal with creation *contra* many recent passibilist critics (and critics of classical theism more generally). Though what it cannot do is account for the scriptural witness to a temporally-reactive character in God or as the divine as *pathic*. *Pathos*, as I have argued for above, is a temporal matter, insofar as we take it as affectational or admitting of some movement. Under this classical account of a divine timeless eternity, we are unable to speak to God reacting to the actions of free creatures in any conditional way or speaking of how certain creaturely actions or states of affairs might evoke some response in God temporally. Thus, much of what we would wish to say of divine *pathos* and emotion, of divine openness to creation, and some relationship of vulnerability with free creatures would seem to be unavailable under this classical account.

While we would not be able to provide any room for this understanding of *pathos* in God or any emotional change in the divine, this would be viewed as a virtue of this account by classical theists across the religious traditions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Because God is *not moved* by anything in the cosmos, the divine disposition is sure in its stasis and constancy, and divine perfection is maintained. Still, this forces us to radically reunderstand how we are to take this scriptural conception of the divine. Instead of being a relationship characterised by a temporal reactivity or an 'openness' to creation as the scriptures suggest, we must then say that

any divine activity in the world must be understood to be *ab aeterno* and in no wise conditioned or evoked by creation in a manner of temporal succession. As I have spoken to the matter above, we are then committed to a largely Philonian hermeneutic regarding divine action as expressed in the scriptural accounts and one that would deprive us of much of the personal and involved character of God quite unique to Abrahamic monotheism. On this account alone—that of the overwhelming scriptural witness—we might have concerns as to the theological or religious viability of a timeless eternity in the divine, despite its philosophical promise. We might then move the argument in the other direction (as we often see in argument from theistic personalists and open theists). We might begin with the claim that God is certainly *pathic* or reactive in temporal ways to free creatures or states of affairs. From this, we would need to say that such is only possible if God is, in some way, in time. Then we would, necessarily it seems, be forced to deny timeless eternity.

However, I am not sure this alone would warrant our abandoning timeless eternity altogether. After all, we must retain a robust notion of divine transcendence and *autarkeia* and to force God into some sort of temporal existence, even if everlasting, would possibly compromise both those commitments. Again, we ought to think that at least part of what is unique about the understanding of God in revealed monotheism is not only this *pathic*, reactive, and personal character of the divine that the scriptures well attest to, but also that God is transcendent as a supreme creator, beyond the confines and limitations of the cosmos and so entirely free to enter into it. I wish here then entertain the possibility that we may not have to choose between the divine as existing entirely in a timelessly eternal manner or as everlasting or sempiternal. On the face of it, of course, this seems outright contradictory: that God could

be both timeless and temporal. But it may be contradictory only if God is timeless and temporal in the very same ways. I have spoken above of this duality in God. Not a duality in division but a duality in ‘aspect,’ in the way God is *in se* as transcendent and the mode of the divine as immanent in creation. Perhaps here this distinction might be of some aid.

We could entertain the possibility that God may exist *in se* entirely outside of time and so in a manner of being that is rightly said to be timelessly eternal. And yet, we could also suppose that *with creation* God assumes something a temporal existence above but still alongside that which is made. Thus we might say that God exists transcendentally in a timeless eternity, but in the divine immanence there is *some* temporal existence in the divine life. This distinction of a ‘dual aspects’ in the divine—as transcendent and immanent—would seem to fit quite well with that which I have introduced above: that of the essence/energies or *ousia/energeiai* distinction in the divine. Both Millard Erickson and William Lane Craig present a version of this idea, though Craig’s thesis involved the trickier issue of God’s ‘moving’ from timelessness to everlastingness (Erickson, 1998; Craig, 2001). This proposal of dual nature of God’s relationship to time is also explored by Charles Hartshorne and William Reese. Though they do not speak of God’s ‘becoming’ everlasting, they do entertain the possibility of God eternal and having some temporal relation but in different respects (Viney, 2013, p. 65).

Such a proposal may not be as radical as it seems on the face of it. We must keep in mind, after all, that we often conceive of God this way regarding the creation of the material world. That is, on the one hand we may speak of God as transcendent and beyond all material involvement and yet on the other, we speak of a divine omnipresence in all of the cosmos. We might also think, especially if we view the cosmos as composed of or defined by some unity of

spatio-temporality, that God's presence *in time* could also be this way. In fact, it may be more consistent to conceive of this transcendent/immanent duality as very much along these lines. If God as transcendent and *in se* is properly external to the material cosmos, God may likewise be transcendent of those temporal features of the cosmos as well. In this, we could speak of God as transcendent in a timeless eternity. Similarly, as God is immanent and omnipresent in the material cosmos, God could be likewise disposed temporally. We might then affirm that in this transcendent 'aspect' of the divine, God is beyond and outside of all space and time and in this immanent 'aspect' God fills and is a part of this cosmos, though not entirely constrained by it. Then it may be the case that this immanence—as spatio-temporal—can account for much of the scriptural language speaking to God's involvement in time, as having some 'history' and as reacting to various conditions in the world.

Yet God need not be *bound* by this involvement in cosmos in any spatio-temporal manner. *In se*, God remains transcendent and without time (timelessly eternal), yet in this condescension of divine immanence God becomes involved in the temporal world, thus affecting it and potentially being affected by it. Or at least this what I wish here to consider. When viewed this way, we may better maintain this balance of a transcendent/immanent duality in the aspects of God, provide for and protect divine *aseity* and *autarkeia*, and yet give a fuller account for God's presence in time and space, as interactive with creation. Thus it may be the case, as I have argued throughout regarding divine *apatheia*, that we have other options, and this may well be one of those. A concern here may be in this notion of God's 'assuming' some immanence or 'becoming' immanent in creation. This is a significant matter, as it seems divine immutability (even *in se*) would prohibit this. William Lane Craig, in arguing for a similar

position, wishes to speak of God as timeless *before* creation but ‘omnitemporal’ *after* creation (2001). And it is not clear how God could ‘come to be’ in this way given commitments regarding an essential immutability in God. I speak to this concern below in my dealings with the nature of creation.

Of course, even if such a schema is correct or plausible, this does not quite get us the capacity for some passivity or *pathos* in the divine, though it helps. Partly, as we have seen above, the denial of any affectation in God is due to the divine being not subject to movement or change. Being immune to movement or change is at least related to divine timelessness. If God were indeed temporal, in some sense as I suggest, then we may well have a way in to predicate some qualified passibility or mutability in God better in keeping with both the scriptural witness but also perhaps our religious intuitions as to God’s actions in the world as well. Below, I wish to join up this timeless/temporal account with that which has been provided above both in the essence/energies distinction and through the employment of a kenotic nature in God. Here, however, I would speak to further to the nature of creation and how God’s relationship to time relates to that question. We might well ask here after the nature of this ‘becoming’ immanent, or how it may be that with creation God comes to change in such a way that God ‘now’ is related to creation through this immanent ‘aspect’ of the divine.

### *God and Creation*

We have here, I think, two possibilities before us, each of which has been mentioned above in brief. The first would be that not unpopular view amongst various classical theists that creation is eternal and yet contingent. This possibility may prove easier to fit with what I have proposed regarding this spatio-temporal immanence. The second possibility is that creation is

temporally-finite and came into existence at some time in the past, having no existence at all in any way 'prior' to that. The scriptural data in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam would largely support this second possibility though it is not clear at all the former possibility is out of the question for revealed monotheism. It may well be that, upon some reflection as to the character of God in the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and particularly in classical theism, that an eternal creation is also a reasonable consideration and one which does not obviously contradict the scriptures. Let us first consider this possibility of an eternal creation. What might motivate the consideration of God as an eternal creator? One intuition might be that we may infer, though only apophatically, that any being whose essence is agapeistic or even goodness and being itself would wish to share this goodness of being with others. This seems to be plausible under both the considerations of classical theism and within something like the Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition or the more mystical and traditionalist schools of Islam. To the former, that is according this shared ontology of classical theism; we might think that anything which is both being itself and bears some essentially agapeistic character would eternally desire to create and, being able to realise its desires, would then create eternally.

Many of the *falasifa* will take the possibility of creation's eternity very seriously, as will Maimonides though he will reject it out of a disagreement with Aristotle on the relationship between necessity and eternity and for reasons that a temporal creation *ex nihilo* accords better with the Torah. Well earlier, however, Philo of Alexandria anticipates something of this view in his work *De Providentia* (of which the longer version survives only in an Armenian manuscript):



God is continuously ordering matter by his thought. His thinking was not anterior to his creating and there never was a time when he did not create, the Ideas themselves having been with him from the beginning. For God's will is not posterior to him, but is always with him, for natural motions never give out. Thus, ever thinking he creates and furnishes to sensible things the principle of their existence so that both should exist together: the ever-creating Divine Mind and the sense-perceptible things to which beginning of being is given (*De Prov.* 1.7, 1981, p. 15).

There is perhaps here the temptation to think of this eternal and *processional* nature of creation in quasi-Plotinian terms—it is an overflowing of the very love and being that is God. Interestingly, this emanationist schema of an eternal cosmos was entertained by both Avicenna and Averroes (Campanini, 2008, pp. 84-85; Leaman, 2002, pp. 41-106). While Aquinas affirms a finite *creatio ex nihilo*, he yet thought it not possible to demonstrate logically the temporal finitude of the cosmos (*ST*, 1.46.1-2). Yet each would want to maintain some aspect of divine freedom in creation. Still, an eternal creation need not preclude this. Neither would an eternal creation in any way, except under some involuntary Neoplatonic emanationism, confuse the ontological distinction between creator and creation. Even if eternally willed and eternally brought into being, creation would yet be contingent and ultimately dependent on the sustenance of God for its enduring.

Under this account of an eternal creation, it may be easier to speak of this 'duality of aspects' in the divine, as transcendent *in se*, utterly beyond all spatio-temporal categories and still immanent and omnipresent (and omnitemporal) within both time and space. If creation is eternal, then we do not have to explain the 'coming to be' of this immanent 'aspect' of the divine. We could simply say that, for as God has always created, God has always been immanent in this creation and interactive with it. Again, this assumes some essential agapeistic character in the divine nature. While we ought to approach such assumptions apophatically, we

may still say that we can rightly infer such from the acts of God in the world and revelational accounts of who God is. If it is the case that the divine is of this essential agapeistic character, then it is not implausible that such an entity, overflowing in goodness and being, would wish to share that. Moreover, given that this creation would necessarily be *less* than God or of a different ontological status, some condescension or immanence would be required for God's participation in it. We could then speak of God as being eternally of 'dual aspects'—transcendent and immanent—and so avoid the problem of having to account for God's 'becoming' or 'assuming' some previously absent immanent 'aspect.'

Under the more common account of some temporal *creatio ex nihilo*, or more precisely, as creation coming into being at some finite point in the past, we may then have to account for what this immanence would be like 'prior' to creation. But this is here where a classical account of a timeless eternity may afford some possible solutions. For God, if existing in a timeless eternity, there would be no 'before' or 'prior' to creation from God's vantage. This is not to say that creation would then be eternal, but it is to say that from the perspective of the divine, there would be no before or after creation. Creation simply would *be* for God, even if having some finite existence in (our) past. What would then be a history for the cosmos that would have some temporal origin, as time would come into being with the rest of creation, we may say that for God there is no such 'history.' God, as timelessly eternal, would simply always be the creator of what is and, as such, would always bear some immanent 'aspect' towards this creation. Part of Craig's proposal mentioned above involves these concerns that God 'becomes' or 'comes to have' some relation with creation that previously did not obtain. But this is precisely to misunderstand the position of God as existing in a timeless eternity. For God,

from the perspective of Godself, would always be a creator unto creation, whatever the temporal duration of the latter may or may not be. So it seems that even under an account in which creation is not eternal, but rather has a finite past, we may still say that God's disposition towards creation is eternal. Because of this, we need not give an account of God's 'coming to have' some immanent aspect in creation that the divine did not previously possess. We can say that insofar as God is a creator, God would exist *in se* and transcendent of this creation *and* that God would exist immanently within it, in both space and time, yet confined by neither.

Under either account of creation it seems we can maintain these 'dual' aspects of God, having neither to account for God's 'becoming' immanent or a creator. If we can retain this duality without any mutability *in toto* in the divine, then we can speak to the transcendent 'aspect' of God and of this immanent 'aspect.' Building upon what I have set forth above, we may then conceive of God as impassible and immutable in the divine essence or *ousia* and potentially kenotically passible or open to some creaturely affectation through the free condescension of the divine energies. We then have before us at least the possibility of a voluntary passibilism in God, mediated by and through this energetic kenoticism, such that we may indeed speak of God's having, in the divine immanence, something of a temporal 'life' and so being freely subject to some *pathos* or affectation from without.

#### **4.6 Energetic Kenoticism and the *Pathos* of God**

Thus far, I have set forth several features of this proposed *via media*. I began this work with the aim of providing a fuller account of divine *pathos*—of God's being temporally-affected by creation and thus having some qualified passibility and mutability in the divine immanence. The motivation for this, as I have argued above, is to give a better account for this scriptural

conception of the divine as very much in time (everlasting or sempiternal), *pathic*, temporally-reactive and personal. I have argued that this classical account, in its denial of any temporal-affectation in God, cannot fully provide for such a conception. Under this classical ontology and various metaphysical commitments constitutive of it, much of the anthropopathic and anthropopsychic language describing God must be consigned to the category of the figurative or allegorical or treated as just that—*anthropopathic* or *anthropopsychic*. In this section, I wish to join up that which has been introduced and discussed above in such a way that we might yet be able to provide for an account of divine *pathos* and yet retain some warranted conception of divine impassibility. Still, in thinking of this proposal as a *via media*, I would not wish to deviate so strongly from classical impassibilist account of the divine. We have seen well above that divine impassibility serves a most important role in protecting this creator/creation distinction, ensuring divine transcendence, and providing for the moral stasis of God. In building on these various concepts I have introduced above, I mean here to argue that we can retain these warranted features of divine impassibility and yet still speak of some *pathos* in God. That is, we may have a way to speak of an essentially impassible deity who is yet, in some ways, passible and *pathic*.

In previous sections, I introduced the essence/energies distinction as a way to better speak of these dual ‘aspects’ of God as transcendent and immanent. By means of this essence/energies distinction we may think of the divine as, on the one hand, *in se* and transcendent, altogether beyond space and time, and on the other, as immanent throughout creation via the divine energies. This provides, I think, a solid ontological foundation for speaking to these ‘dual’ modes of divine existence. Next, I have argued for a broader conception

of kenosis as a potential advantage in this proposal. While not limiting kenosis to Christological concerns alone, I have attempted to show that we might understand the immanence of God as itself an expression of this kenoticism, making possible God's presence in creation. I have not, however, argued for any kenoticism *in toto*; that is, while we may speak of the divine as kenotic, we need not understand this kenosis as a divesting God of those attributes proper to the divine essence.

Rather, we can speak to a divine kenosis through the manifold energies of God eternally present unto the cosmos through this immanent 'aspect' of the divine. Additionally, I have given some account of how we might think of creation and God's relationship to it. Whilst we ought to understand creation as properly other than God in its finitude and contingency, we must still affirm that God would wish to enter into and participate in that which is made. So while we must maintain the creator/creation distinction and not lose track of divine transcendence, it seems that God would desire to enter into a relationship with creation given that God, especially as conceived in revealed monotheism, is of an essentially agapeistic character. So far, all is well and good and seems not to deviate significantly from any account of God or of God's relationship to the cosmos found in the tradition of classical theism. Yet we must ask what this relationship would look like, or rather, what it does look like? With this question in mind, we are then in a better position to consider how our metaphysical commitments inform what we can or cannot say of this relationship.

As I have argued above, we are afforded in the scriptural witness across Abrahamic monotheism—in the Tanakh, the New Testament literature, and the Qur'an—a largely consistent account of this relationship. It is one characterised by not only a divine provision of

being and love for all creation but of an interactive and ongoing relationship with free creatures. This scriptural account would portray God, not only as personal, but of having various emotions, coming to know certain things, having some sort of history in time with creation, and reacting to and being affected by those made *in imago dei*, possessed as they are with freedom, agency, creativity, etc. While we may be able to minimise these various anthropopathic and anthropopsychic descriptions of God, we must realise that we are giving up a quite a bit of what is particular to this conception of God in the revealed tradition of Abrahamic monotheism. We are presented with an image of God as while transcendent, eternal, and other, still very much involved in the cosmos, relating to creation in very personal ways, and possessed of an emotional life. Moreover, as various ‘scriptural passibilists’ would remind us, this relationship is one often characterised by some *pathos* in God. Such is seen at least in not only those features of God that Heschel and Fretheim would remind us of, but also throughout the Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition and in Sufi and Hanbalite Islam as well. Yet we cannot, as we have well seen, speak to this possibility under standard classical accounts of divine impassibility. Of course, we can speak to some emotion in the divine, an unsullied joy or bliss, and to an ongoing and constant provision of goodness and love for creation. But this does not capture fully the nature of this relationship or, in the very least, it requires us to significantly reorient our understanding of this scriptural portrayal of the divine. Yet this does not, as I have attempted to show, require that we give up on divine *apatheia*. We may, through a careful employment of some of the concepts outlined above, as well as through the various meanings of divine impassibility at our disposal, imagine an ontology of the divine that does indeed admit of some *pathos*. What then might such an ontology look like?

First, we might consider our understanding of the essence/energies distinction as here helpful. We may still speak of God *in se* in the divine nature as transcendent, timelessly eternal, and wholly immutable and impassible. When we think of impassibility in the divine *ousia*, we may employ several of those valences of meaning outlined above. We can say that in the divine essence, God is impassible in aspects (E) and (F)—impassible in transcendence and nature. We may understand this as an affirmation that God's essence, as necessary, timelessly eternal, and transcendent, can in no way either be affected from without nor could it be subject to any change. Insofar as we can within the bounds of apophaticism, we might also consider the divine nature to be characterised by an infinite goodness of being and, moreover, of an agapeistic quality. In this way, we might also say that the divine *ousia* is impassible in moral stasis. The love and goodness of the divine which flow from the divine essence cannot be stayed or thwarted or moved. Of course, as this may be taken as 'positive' attribute, we should speak of this agapeistic character in the divine essence only insofar we can infer either from the actions of the divine unto creation or from the revelation of scripture. Still, it seems we can maintain an impassibility in moral goodness in the divine essence. Under this conception, we may still affirm a quite traditional understanding of impassibility and immutability in the divine essence as well as a governing and determinative moral goodness or *chesed*; that God *in se* cannot be affected from without or moved from an abundance of being, goodness, and love for creation. Thus, as it regards the divine *ousia*, we need not deviate much from a classical ontology of God and traditional understanding of divine *apatheia*.

In the divine energies, however, we might speak differently. We may take these as the mode by which God is immanent unto creation, ever acting in it and providing for its sustenance

of being. I think this is, when we consider the immanence of God in creation, a rather uncontroversial proposal. But we may go further yet. Taking up the notion of the kenotic aspect of divine immanence, we may think that the energies of God condescend in such a way as to make a relationship with creation possible. They provide, as Palamas would have it, a metaphysical bridge between the ineffable and absolutely transcendent nature of God and creation. Still, under the standard Palamite account of the divine energies, despite their character as a kenotic condescension to creation, they remain impassible and ‘one-directional’ manifestations of various attributes of the divine. However, if we move rather from the other direction—that of the scriptural witness—as to what this kenoticism and condescension of divine immanence might look like, we get an altogether different picture. Let us here then take up the question of what a kenoticism in the divine energies might look like and how that may provide for a more robust sense of divine immanence and reactivity.

### *Energetic Kenoticism*

From the scriptural witness, we may rightly say that God is disposed to creation, and humanity specifically, in a personal and relational manner very much in time. If we think of how the divine energies might accommodate or provide for something like this scriptural conception, we could consider the following. As expressions of divine immanence, we can conceive of these divine energies as not only kenotic, but kenotic to such a degree that there is this ‘metaphysical space’ for a genuinely interactive and reactive relationship with humanity. Moreover, we might think of these divine energies, in their kenotic condescension, as revealing or taking on a personal aspect. We need not here think of God ‘as a person’ in any endorsement of theistic personalism, but rather that the divine reveals itself as sufficiently personal unto



humanity so as to make this scripturally-conceived relationship with humanity possible. Here we might think of this ‘personality’ in God’s immanence as being expressed through those very characteristics of God we see so prevalent in the scriptures of the Abrahamic monotheism: as emotional, as entering into relationships, and being moved and affected by the actions of humanity, as having a sort of history with humanity.

Under such a proposal as this, we can well maintain the impassibility and immutability in the divine essence while still supposing that through this energetic condescension, God assumes or expresses a character of being which can accommodate or provide for the kind of fullness this relationship of ‘personality’ would require. What I mean here is that God may, via the divine energies, be disposed to humanity in a manner both quite personal and *pathic*, thus allowing for a better account of not only this scriptural conception of God but also for a fuller treatment of this relational and reciprocal involvement of God with persons. We might then think that as God has created free persons, God would then interact with them as such. That is to say that, in having made persons and made them *in imago dei*, the divine would then condescend so as to relate with them in a mode of being explicable to them. This is where I think the importance of a kenotic self-limitation is most helpful. We might rightly suppose that God *in se*, as transcendent, impassible, and immutable, (however good), could not yet relate to humanity in the manner the scriptures present and presuppose.

We can, however, consider that, via the divine energies, God is not only immanent to creation but also that the divine may, through this ongoing kenosis of self-limitation, take on those features of a person such that this relationship may indeed be as the scriptures describe it: transactional, *in time*, reciprocal, and reactive. With this in mind, we are then able to think of

this ‘aspect’ of immanence as the divine presence not only in space but in time as well. Under such a view, we can consider the divine *ousia* as properly outside time and space, retaining all those attributes proper to divinity, but through this self-limited and kenotic condescension as a way of God being in the cosmos (and thus in time) with creation. Under this view, we may then consider God *in se* as existing in timeless eternity and possessed of all perfections befitting of God and yet in and through creation, coming to bear a temporal relation to the cosmos through this energetic kenosis. Moreover, as we have seen above, this ‘assuming’ such a relationship would imply no real change in God any more than ‘becoming related’ to creation as creator would. Under either an account of an eternal creation or a *creatio ex nihilo* with some finite terminus, God in Godself would remain unchangeably disposed in this way, having no ‘time’ when God was not a creator, nor any ‘time’ when God becomes immanent to creation. A timeless eternity in the divine essence ensures as much. And just as God can be said to have always been present with creation in a material sense, pervading and affecting it, God may also be said to be, through the divine immanence, present in and with creation in time. Given this ‘dipolar’ schema of God as transcendent and immanent, we may speak of God as having a non-temporal duration in the divine essence, but a temporal presence and duration through the kenotic and immanent divine energies.

Building then on this concept of an energetic kenoticism—as God entering into time and space with humanity—we may then be able to provide some account for the *pathic* character of the divine as revealed in the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As we have seen in classical accounts, it is largely because God is not subject to time in any way that we cannot speak to any change in God as any temporal-affectation would cause. But this

scriptural conception of the divine would seem not only to present God as being so affected but assume such a possibility throughout various accounts of divine-human interaction. And it may then be that through this energetic kenoticism and a divesting of some of those features thought proper to divinity, we may be able to speak to the possibility of some divine *pathos*. While we should rightly be concerned with any notion of divesting of the divine attributes, here we are helped by the transcendence, immutability, and impassibility of God in the divine essence. We need not, through positing this kenotic condescension, think that God divests Godself entirely of what it is to be God, but rather than God voluntarily limits these features *through this kenotic immanence* so as to be present, personal, reactive, and reciprocal in God's relationship with humanity.

### *Divine Pathos*

So what then may we say of divine *pathos*? I have explored above various ways divine *pathos* as been understood and, relatedly, divine *apatheia* as well. A quite common understanding of *pathos* is, of course, that capacity to suffer, or be affected, by agents or states of affairs external to oneself or to be emotionally 'moved' from one mental state to another. Neither, of course, would be possible in the divine essence being fundamentally immutable and impassible, but it may well be possible through energetic kenoticism in God's immanence. Emotions would, of course, be admitted under a classical ontology, but none would be such that it is the result of change or movement. Following this scriptural conception of the divine and under the ontological schema I have proposed, we could imagine that God could endure some *pathos* in the divine immanence and yet that these affectations are neither entirely involuntary nor given over to an absolute passibility. That is, we need not subject God to either a

fundamental passivity or abandon divine *apatheia* altogether to provide an account for God's being affected by creation. Rather, we can say that whatever relations 'as a person' God may have with creation, even allowing here some *pathos*, that these affectations or changes in emotional states are not only freely assumed, but also governed by that eternal, immutable, and impassible goodness in the divine essence—the ultimate *chesed* of God. We then have room to conceive of these various anthropathisms and anthropopsychisms as indeed tracking something very real in the mental or emotional life of God as the divine has condescended to us. In affirming both the voluntary kenotic nature of this divine *pathos* and by providing for immutability, impassibility and a *chesedic* governance in the divine *ousia*, we are thereby able to protect God from being an unwilling victim or being totally subject to creaturely actions.

Under such an account, we may be able to give fuller voice to various descriptions of God's rejoicing with humanity, sorrowing at its failures, growing angry with the disobedience of humanity, but never in such a way that is unbefitting of this constant goodness and enduring loving-kindness. That is, governed as these affectations are by this essential *chesed*, the assumption of the *pathic* possibilities is not only *voluntary* but is also never given over to moral failings or *passiones*.<sup>52</sup> Under this *chesedic* governance, these various emotional expressions, whilst indeed admitting of some movement, passivity, and affectation from without, can still be taken as reasonable and controlled—determined by the impassible and immutable goodness in the *arche* of divinity. In allowing some passivity or potentiality here through this energetic

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<sup>52</sup> We might think here, in keeping with a Thomistic understanding of the *passiones*, that they are both without rational control and 'extreme and overpowering' (Scrutton, 2011, pp. 50-51). Similarly, we might imagine that whatever 'affects' God undergoes, this *chesed* provides for its never being out of control or irrational. Moreover, Scrutton notes that 'real emotional feeling and personal involvement with creation is attributed to God, and yet this is never contrary to God's reason or will ...' (2011, p. 51).

kenosis, we may then be able to accommodate a broader range of emotions attributed to God.<sup>53</sup> We still here need to ask what this *pathos* or broader emotional range in the divine might look like. Of course, we would want to deny that any of these expressions are either irrational or fundamentally involuntary, but we would yet wish to affirm there being a truly affectational character in them. That is, that God is not only temporally affected by creation, but that divine emotional states change as a result of this though with the qualifications I have mentioned above.

There will be, of course, certain *pathoi* or affectations that are necessarily impossible in the divine under this account. Any *pathos* that might be of something like a sensitive appetite or require some corporeality in the divine must be excluded.<sup>54</sup> Given this, God would not be able to be affected by the pangs of hunger, physical harm, or any movements of strictly somatic nature. But simply because God cannot be *pathic* in these ways, due to an essential incorporeality in the divine, does not mean that a vast array of other affectations and consequent emotions states are unavailable. While it seems that many of the various affectations and attending emotional changes we experience have some corollary in our bodies as psychogenic effects, this does not mean that God could not experience *something* of what these emotions are like. Again, they will be quite different as God's experience of them would be neither corporeally linked nor given over to a loss of control or irrationality, but we might still imagine

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<sup>53</sup> As we have seen, part of the problem at least in classical accounts is that in denying any passivity or potentiality in God, there is little space for any emotion that may be seen as implying some lack.

<sup>54</sup> Though I do not wish to here include among these possible affectations of God any *passiones*, it worth hear mentioning regarding the relationship between corporeality and affectation that both Augustine and Aquinas will connect *passiones* with the sensitive appetitive and corporeality (as well as there being unwilled). Yet, as Anastasia Scrutton notes, Augustine will also entertain the possibility of *passiones* in purely intellectual beings, thus indicating that the *passiones* may not necessarily require a body (2011, p. 36).

various psychological states obtaining nonetheless. Here analogy may help us and Heschel's reminder of the difference in divine *pathos* from our own. But again, we might well consider these experience sufficient enough to approximate our experiences despite their differences and, as I have alluded to above, we might think that it is exactly in God's experiencing these emotions much like we do, that we see something of what it is to rightly and reasonable experience these states. In partly this way, God's *pathos* and condescension to us 'as a person' would not only provide for a fuller relational aspect between the divine and humanity but would also show us how we are to be as persons. What might this *pathic* life of God, with its various emotional states, look like in this relationship with creation and, specifically, humanity?

Here I have in mind something very much like the paternal or maternal imagery that so fills the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We can conceive of God, in this condescension to us, as being very much like a father or mother to creation and suffering and expressing the various emotions such a role entails. Just as any parent risks something with her child in its freedom, agency, and creativity, God may be likewise understood. We may know that God can and will ultimately bring about that which is good for creation, especially humanity, yet in providing this 'metaphysical space' for human freedom—for persons—there is a significant element of vulnerability. This vulnerability is not entirely as our is, and there is no clear univocal understanding of *pathos* or emotion here. As Heschel would remind us, God's *pathos* is not exactly like ours. And yet we may entertain analogies of how it could be sufficiently similar or not merely *anthropopathic* or *anthropopsychic*. For if our child were to experience some trial or displeasure that we know will not endure (though the child may not know this), even our knowledge of the cessation of this suffering would not entail that we do

not grieve or lament with our child. And so even where God would know and provide for all being made right in some ultimate sense, we can still imagine our suffering evoking a sorrow in God. Moreover, we can well imagine that while God's goodness and love would indeed provide for succour and comfort in human affliction, this provision need not preclude God's sorrowing as we sorrow.

And still, we must be mindful that God would never be so overwhelmed by such sorrow that it would prevent this provision of goodness and love. And while we do not know, nor do we have any ultimate power to provide things that would certainly ensure the best for our children, God most certainly would. But even this need not prevent God from being moved by the actions of humanity, or to experience any range of emotions evoked by those actions. The significant difference would be that these divine emotions would be ever governed by an essential *chesed*. In this way, the *pathos* of God would be quite different from our own, yet not radically so. To the matters that so often drives these debates, we must here say something of the notion of love, mercy, and compassion in the divine. We have already supposed that this love of God would 'endure forever' in the divine *chesed*. But to the question of mercy and compassion, we can under this proposal take them to be truly affectational. That is, that God is moved by some state of affairs and so reacts by showing mercy upon this afflicted, remitting some past grievance, or having compassion in sorrowing with humanity, though never to despondency and never without the motivation of love. None of this would preclude a general agapeistic providence for creation, but it may allow a more meaningful account of the scriptural imagery regarding these actions or dispositions; that they are in fact evoked by the free actions of creatures and properly reactive to states of affairs in the world. Given that God can be active

in this way, through this condescension and self-limiting, we may be able to make more sense of not only this scriptural conception of the divine but to God's actions and reaction 'as a person' religiously.

If we can indeed conceive of God in the manner I have suggested thus far—as existing in a kind of transcendent/immanent 'dipolarity—then we may well be able to speak, in the following of the scriptural witness, to some *pathos* in the divine. What I have proposed would not only admit of the possibility of some affectation but also of a greater range of emotion in the divine. Still, given the ultimate impassibility and immutability in the divine *ousia*, we could not speak of these affectations as either *involuntarily* subjecting the divine to human action or such that this *pathos* leads to any moral failing. Rather we may say that, via this energetic kenosis, God may willingly submit to some affectation for the sake both properly relational interactions with humanity but also to reveal something of how human *pathos* and emotions ought to go. That is, God shows us, through God's own *pathos*, what care, concern, love, mercy, and compassion look like when rightly expressed. God, through this kenotic immanence, becomes 'as a person' in order to relate to us and reveal to us what it is to be, insofar as we can, *in imago dei*.

Under the ontological schema I have offered above, it may be possible that we can better account for the various expressions of apparent anthropathisms and anthropopsychisms in the scriptures as tracking some very real descriptions of emotional states in God. And yet we need not give up on divine *apatheia* or *autarkeia* as each would still be the case for the essence of God and, as such, would determine and govern the various affectations and emotional states as expressed in the personal immanence of the divine. Still, under such a proposal, we must



provide some account as to what divine knowledge and will would amount to, given this ‘dipolarity’ in transcendence and immanence or in *ousia* and *energeiai*. This, of course, will be necessarily related to what relation with time we may say God has under such a schema. Not unlike what has been provided above, I wish here to maintain something of that classical view as to these matters, but also mean to provide some account that comports well with the scriptural witness and with this ontology of God as passible in a qualified sense. Knowledge and will are, of course, very much related in a discussion such as these, so I will treat them together as what we say about one will necessarily affect the other.

### *Pathos in Knowledge and Will*

In concluding this section, I must attend to matters of divine epistemic and thelemic states or impassibility in (B) and (C) as discussed above. How we understand these matters will, of course, inform what we can say of divine *pathos* or vulnerability. Likewise, the way in which some passibility or passivity is possible in the divine will determine much of what we say of God’s knowledge and will. We must also here keep in mind this immanent aspect of God’s being in time. I am here inclined to think that this notion of God’s self-limitation or kenosis in order to make ‘metaphysical space’ for free creatures must determine much of what we can say to both what God knows and what God wills and desires. And, as this entire proposal of an immanent kenosis is for the sake of fuller scriptural account, we must also think along the lines of revelation. I mean here to propose that, in conceiving of God in these ‘dual aspects’ and in considering this kenoticism in the divine condescension, that we must significantly modify how we usually think of divine knowledge and speak of their being two modes of knowing available to God and, perhaps less controversially, to modes of the divine will. I will speak first to how

we may understand divine knowledge under the schema I have proposed above and then treat the matter of what God's will might look like under such an understanding.

As with the questions of impassibility and God's relationship to time, the scriptures are not of one accord on the matter of divine knowledge, or rather, none presents anything like a conceptual testimony to this question. In some cases, we see testimony to God's vast and unsurpassable knowledge, and in others we find striking and scandalous accounts of God's learning something new or discovering some aspect of a person's behaviour. One way in, favoured by open theists, is to examine various conditional statements attributed to God in the scriptural witness or to depend on various presentations of this *pathic* and reactive character of the divine as revelatory of God's way of knowing. Under these accounts, it *appears* God does not always know how free creatures will behave or rather what choices they will make. As such, God then reacts to these decisions in accordance with the divine character. In keeping with the notion of a self-limited kenosis in God as described above, we might think that the divine, while possessing the possibility of knowing all thing, including the acts of free creatures and all future contingents, might similarly limit such knowledge for the sake of a libertarian freedom in creation. In this way, as the open theists (and to some extent Gersonides and Ibn Daud as well) would have it, any necessitarian worries about the compatibility of human freedom and divine foreknowledge would be allayed. Of course, this is perhaps only a problem if God is in time and is said to be capable of (fore)knowledge. But under the account I have provided above and in line with, I think, the scriptural witness, God is indeed in some way in time along with creation, having a history which includes a past, present, and future. We might then suppose

that if this is the case (and any possibility of *pathos* or affectation in God would seem to require it), that we are then faced with several options.

There is the possibility of some compatibilist account, some kind of necessitarian or predestinarian determinism, or an incompatibilist view such that libertarian free will is maintained but at the cost perhaps of some divine knowledge. I am inclined to support something like this last account. It would seem to fit well with not only the scriptural witness but also to a robust conception of human personhood and freedom. It would also fit well with what has been offered above: that is God's creation of creatures *in imago dei* there is an element of vulnerability and risk, yet one undertaken freely for the sake of humanity. What I wish there to propose then is that we may think of divine knowledge in two aspects: one as it obtains in the divine essence and another as it might be present in this energetic kenoticism in God's immanence. We may imagine that, just as God could be entirely impassible and immutable and thus subject to no temporal affection or *pathos*, that God could similarly have perfect knowledge all things, including future contingents. This could be had either through omniscience via a timeless eternity or through foreknowledge in an everlasting/semipiternal but temporal mode of being. Still, what I have outlined above would seem to commit us to an altogether different view, though one which is perhaps not without scriptural warrant. Perhaps we should, keeping in mind this conception of a self-limited and energetic kenosis I have proposed, that God does in fact not know in each and every case how humans will behave or react under various circumstances. We may think of the nescience as obtaining only in God's immanence and of it being of a voluntary character. That is, for the sake of human freedom and the possibility of a fullness of personhood, God has freely elected to limit knowledge in this

aspect. This would seem to fit with the kind of temporally-reactive character in God we have been trying better to account for and provide ample logical space for human freedom.

We might then imagine that, while God could know all actions and all future contingents, God voluntarily limits this knowledge through a kenotic immanence. Such a schema might better explain the scriptural accounts of God's 'learning' or 'coming' to know and provide for a libertarian freedom in humanity. So we could then, speak of an epistemic passibility in this kenotic immanence and that such would only obtain in this aspect of the divine that is in time or has a history with creation. Regarding the divine essence or to what knowledge God can be said to have *in se*, we might consider it to include nomological and metaphysical content (as creator of the cosmos) and a knowledge of universals. Under an account like this, depending as it does on both these 'dual aspects' of God as immanent and transcendent and on an energetic kenoticism to condescend 'as a person' in interactions with humanity, we could posit a general and timeless knowledge in the divine *ousia* and yet a voluntary nescience as God's immanent relationship to creation. This is manoeuvre not uncommon amongst open theists who, whilst already conceiving of God as in time (everlasting, sempiternal, or omnitemporal), must then deal somehow with the problem of foreknowledge and necessity. While here I recognise that as an issue that plays no small role, here my concern is to give a better account of what God's knowledge of human actions looks like in the following of the scriptural witness. It seems that something like this account—that of voluntary nescience—might suffice for such concerns. And yet, as with divine passivity and the possibility of *pathos* in God, we may still say it is freely undertaken.

Here it would right be right to wonder what the divine will could amount to under both the ontological proposal offered above and under this account of divine knowledge. We may think, again in accordance with the scriptural witness, that God's will seems to be of two modes. We may consider there to be an inviolable will in the divine essence and a will that is passible in some ways in God's immanence. What would this then look like? To the former, we could say that there are states of affairs regarding the cosmos that God's will would necessarily bring about, such as a restoration of creation or the salvation of all, etc. Or we could consider less lofty aims such as the fulfilment of prophecy. This would remain well within God's power to do so, as God would not divest Godself of such a capacity entirely. Then we may speak of a mode of will in the divine immanence of through these kenotic energies whereby God desires X or Y, but human freedom is such that these desires could be frustrated. Again, this would be a voluntary allowance of such freedom. Yet we might that God could indeed accomplish much of God's desires or wills in this immanent sense, through the prescription of laws, through punishment for disobedience, through some persuasive means in acting and being present 'as a person' to creation.

If we were then to join up these two modes of God's willing, we might suppose that these inviolable ends God wills to obtain could be accomplished, not by a necessitarian mandate or a deterministic account, but through this interactivity, reciprocity, and reactivity with free creatures. That is, God could effect various ends through all manner of situations present unto God and humanity. This would not, it seems, impede human freedom any more than setting various condition or proscribing certain boundaries for a child might. God might then bring about that which is willed, despite occasionally thwarted desires, by this persuasive interaction

with humanity. And it would, of course, always remain within God's ultimate power to effect these ends by more deterministic means. So we then might say that will the divine essence may know and possess certain general ends for creations, this immanent and reactive will is such that, being like our but possessed of far greater power, could still realise these ends yet without any significant encroachment on human freedom. So we then may speak some thelemic passibility in the immanence of the divine, but to an ultimate impassibility regarding very few and general designs for creation in the divine essence. This would seem to accord quite well with the scriptural account (especially if we think of God's dealings with Israel) in that God would will some final ends for God's people, but that these are accomplished through relational and transactional means in time with creation.

In what has been offered above, I have sought to give an account of an ontology of the divine (or suggested the makings of one) that accomplishes several ends. It retains a notion of the impassibility of God *in se* whilst still providing metaphysical space for a temporally-reactive divine/creaturely interaction. Through this, we may be able to better account for various scriptural *pathisms* and, moreover, to better fill out the relational and personal character of God in divine involvement with humanity. Additionally, we have a means to speak of God as transcendent and outside time and still related to time in a way that the scriptures suggest. We are also able to maintain much of what we would wish to say of God under classical theistic accounts (divine transcendence, *aseity*, immutability, and impassibility) and yet still speak to some affectational mode in God. Given that we have a common scriptural witness to this reactive, personal, and *pathic* character in God and, as I have argued, a shared ontology in classical theism that would not allow fully for such a character or mode of being in the divine,

what I have offered may be able to better accommodate the former whilst not entirely dispatching with the latter. I have kept in mind the value of divine *apatheia* in providing for the transcendence, *aseity*, and moral stasis of God and have sought to retain as much of this attribute as possible though attempting to provide some account of how God could still be spoken of as *pathic*, temporally-effected by creation, and expressing a range of emotion. In doing so, we may then be able to speak of *via media* between a strong impassibilism and various passibilist proposals that would judge impassibility to be altogether incompatible with the scriptural witness and character of God in Abrahamic monotheism.

## Chapter 5. The Impassible God Suffers: Impassibility Reconsidered

In this chapter, brief as it may be, I mean to provide a recapitulation of the detailed proposal offered above and to provide something of an outline of this proposal for greater clarity. Moreover, I here provide a more unified view of the overall scope of this work. In the subsequent and final chapter, I will offer some concluding remarks and entertain various possibility of further research and treat some anticipation objections. Here, however, let us consider what has been offered through this study. Throughout this work, my aim has been to provide for a fuller account of the *pathic*, personal, and temporally reactive character of God as presented in the scriptures. I have argued that this character or mode of being in the divine is much of what makes unique this ‘God of Abraham’ as thought of in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Additionally, part of this unique conception of God is also the transcendence, supremacy, and infinite moral goodness of the divine in these traditions.

It is, as I see it, most important that we attend to both of these ‘aspects’ of being in God, as transcendent and beyond all creaturely claim and contingency and yet still intimate in a personal and reactive way in time with creation. I take both these concerns—that of maintaining divine transcendence and divine immanence—to be of the utmost importance. Both are, as I see it, central to how these faiths of revealed monotheism conceive of this ‘God of Abraham’ and to how the scriptures of these respective faiths do indeed portray God. In wishing to maintain both ‘aspects’ of the divine in this way, I have offered an ontology that may be better able to capture that conception. It can, as I judge it, provide for an affirmation of divine impassibility and yet not deprive us of the possibility of speaking to some *pathos* in God. In this way, we



may indeed be able to speak to the ‘sufferings’ or the affectations of an impassible God; *pathic* and affectational in an energetic kenosis and self-limiting and yet impassible in the divine essence. Under the account I have proposed, we may speak to impassibility and immutability in, at least, the divine nature, wherein God is both unmoved and unchanged in existence, transcendence, and moral goodness. Moreover, we may understand the divine as impassible and immutable in a general and universal knowledge and in a providential will. We may, however, speak to a qualified passibility and mutability in divine immanence. In this voluntary and kenotic immanence, some change in knowledge, mental states, and affectation is possible. Yet any of the immanent passibility and mutability must be taken to be freely borne, incurring no absolute creaturely claim on God, but rather a gracious condescension of the creator to enter into a full and personal relationship with humanity.

At the outset of this work, I posited that traditional accounts of divine impassibility in classical theism are unable to metaphysically capture this scriptural character of the divine, or rather, be unable to speak to many descriptions of the divine as tracking any real change or temporal-reactivity in God. Through the careful analysis of the various *loci classici* of classical theism provided above, I think this has largely been shown to be the case. Even where impassibility *per se* has not been directly addressed, other metaphysical commitments have been shown to entail it. As such, much of this portrayal of God in the scriptures of the Abrahamic faiths or in a ‘scriptural conception’ of the divine must then be understood under a rather different hermeneutic wherein various anthropathism and anthropopsychisms must be taken as *merely* metaphorical and allegorical. I do not, as I have made clear, wish to deny that these descriptions may admit of such interpretations, but I do mean to afford some possibility

of their having a fuller meaning. While these classical accounts provide much that is warranted in predicating impassibility of God, at a very basic level this shared ontology would deny the possibility of any *pathos* or temporal affectation in the divine.

Through an engagement not only with recent ‘scriptural passibilist’ accounts such as the works of Heschel and Fretheim, but also through an examination of the Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition in Judaism and Sufi/Hanbalite tradition in Islam, we have seen another way to think of God as found in the scriptures or another hermeneutical and conceptual tradition. In these ancient traditions, especially that of Rabbinic and Talmudic Judaism, we have a conception of God as open to creation, *pathic* in some senses, and moved by the actions of humanity. These traditions offer us an interesting counter to the classical theistic accounts of God in rationalist Judaism, Islamic *falsafa*, and in the Western Scholastic or Byzantine ontologies of the divine. Much of my aim then has been to take seriously what these ‘alternative’ traditions have to say about our conception of the divine in revealed monotheism especially as it relates to scriptural portrayals of God. These traditions admit of something like as ‘passibilist’ theology and as such would direct us to the uniqueness of these scriptural conceptions of God as personal, present unto creation and, in some way, in time with us. For anyone steeped in the tradition of classical theism, they are needful reminders of the radical nature of God’s concern and involvement with the cosmos. Yet while helpfully pointing us in this direction (as do Heschel, Fretheim, et al.), there is nothing in them like any philosophical account for this conception of the divine. In attending to these traditions (and the insightful work of such passibilists as Heschel and Fretheim), I have sought to give some ontological grounding for their concerns and ways of conceiving of God. This requires us to speak to the possibility that various anthropopathisms

and anthropopsychisms in the scriptures are not only metaphorical or allegorical condescension of language but may indeed describe God's emotions and interactions with humanity albeit in no univocal manner.

While we would do well to pay more attention to the conceptions of God found in the traditions of Rabbinic/Talmudic Judaism and Sufi/Hanbalite (and the works of Ibn Taymiyyah), we may not simply rely on the scriptures as providing some coherent philosophical account of the divine (Peters, 2003, p. 235, Ali, 2016, p. 896). We are still left to 'theologise' from these scriptural portrayals and descriptions and must, as reason demands, give some account for *what God is like* insofar as we can speak to the matter. Even with this in mind and with greater attention given to these 'alternative' traditions in Abrahamic monotheism, we ought not to disregard all of that shared ontology of classical theism for passibilists concerns. Nor ought we to reject it as overly philosophical or beholden to Hellenistic concepts foreign to a Semitic faith. Rather, we ought not only to employ those concepts from pagan philosophical thought that may aid our conception of the divine but should also attend to the various and important concerns and contributions offered by classical theism, especially as it regards divine *apatheia*. As I think we have well seen above, affirmations of divine impassibility play an equally important role in preserving this unique character of God in revealed monotheism through vouchsafing divine transcendence, the creator/creation distinction, and *chesed* in the nature of God—preserving God's unassailable goodness. So we must then—and this has largely been the central concern of this project—maintain divine impassibility as safeguarding divinity itself whilst not going so far as to distort that scriptural conception of the divine.

My work throughout this project has been both historical and speculative and has sought to provide some way, some ontological structure, for accounting for each of these concerns: God as ultimately impassible, transcendent, *a se*, and infinitely good *and* as reactive and involved in time with creation. The provision of such an account is not without significant difficulty, but some of what has been offered above may be a starting point. It avoids some of the problems found in various passibilist accounts such as process theism its tendency to compromise divine transcendence and *aseity*. Likewise, it would seem to avoid some of the more serious problems associated with a full-throated endorsement of open or freewill theism in providing for an inviolable will in the divine essence that would effect some beneficent or salvific ends (known or unknown to us). And, most importantly perhaps, this proposal allows us to retain a meaningful sense of divine impassibility, immutability, and *autarkeia*, with ultimate control remaining within God's power. It is still in many ways influenced by not only traditional sources such as the Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition and the Byzantine theology of Gregory Palamas, but to various passibilist contributions (and other recent criticism of classical theism) as well. It contains significant elements of open theism, especially in proposing a voluntary nescience in the divine energies and depends on Hartshorne, Erickson, and Craig in consideration of God's relationship to time. The most significant influence, however, has come from Heschel and Fretheim in their offering of alternative views of our conception of God scripturally and where each has not provided an ontology that can accommodate those concerns, I have sought to provide that which is lacking in that respect. It has at least the makings of some ontology which could accommodate both these scriptural passibilist concerns and

maintain much of what classical theism rightly holds to. For perhaps the sake of greater clarity, we might here summarise in a fashion what has been proposed above as *via media*:

- 1) God's existence is such that we may speak of there being a divine nature (*ousia*) and various and manifest divine energies (*energeiai*). This divine *ousia* is ultimately the source of the various *energeiai*.
- 2) This distinction of essence and energies allows us to speak to the divine 'aspects' of transcendence and immanence, as God is *in se*, and as God is disposed to the creation.
- 3) *In se*, God is transcendent, timelessly eternal, immutable, and impassible, and apophatically, perfectly good.
- 4) Energetically or in the 'aspect' of God's immanence, the divine is present unto and participates in creation, both materially and temporally.
- 5) This energetic immanence is characterised by a voluntary kenoticism or self-limitation thus allowing the divine to be present and involved with creation as both omnipresent and omnitemporal.
- 6) In this immanence, God is present unto humanity in time and 'as a person,' admitting of various affectations and emotional states, through this voluntary kenosis.
- 7) While various states of passibility may obtain in this divine disposition of an energetic kenoticism, each is governed by the *arche* of the divine essence as impassible, immutable, and perfectly good.
- 8) God may then, in the divine immanence and as existing in time (as everlasting or sempiternal), experience very real affectations, *pathoi*, and emotional states, but all are ultimately governed by the *arche* of the divine essence—the impassible and immutable *chesed* of God.
- 9). As such, none of these affectations, *pathoi*, or emotional states is ever irrational, involuntary, or *passionate*, but rather the proper expression a various mental states in the divine.
- 10). We may then speak to an essential impassibility in the divine *ousia*, but to a qualified (im)passibility in the energetic and kenotic immanence of God.
- 11) In a similar fashion of the 'dual aspects' of God, we may think of the knowledge of God *in se* as relatively general including nomological content, moral content, and the knowledge of universals. As God exists immanently and kenotically in creation,

this knowledge is of a voluntary nescience, thus providing for greater fidelity to the scriptural witness and providing for a robust, libertarian freedom in humanity.

- 12) Finally, we may consider God's will likewise, as being inviolable in the divine essence and including fairly limited determinations as to creation, but in the energetic kenosis of God we may consider God's will as persuasive and person, effecting certain ends through interaction with humanity and availing us of various possibilities.

As broad as it is, if the structure of such an ontology is plausible we may be able to maintain some meaningful sense of divine impassibility as protecting or vouchsafing the very divinity of God in transcendence, *aseity*, and moral goodness, while allowing for not only some *pathos* in the divine but a broader range of emotions as well. Additionally, we may be able to understand God as temporally reactive in this divine condescension and immanence but eternal in the divine essence. This proposed model would allow for divine impassibility in a sense that gives God ultimate control and constancy, but still makes room for a robust reciprocal and relational character of God in time. Through this, both the transcendence of God and the divine immanence can be better maintained, and we may well be able to account for the consistent scriptural witness as to God's *pathos* and temporal affectivity. We can, under what I have proposed, maintain divine impassibility in essence (in nature, transcendence, and goodness) and yet predicate a qualified passibility of the kenotic energies of God. This may accomplish much of what 'dipolar theism' seeks to do whilst still retaining a model of God that provides for transcendence, causal grounding, *aseity*, and moral stasis—all things rightly endorsed in this shared ontology of classical theism. It does, however, allow for some room to move regarding passibilist criticisms in providing a mode by which the energies of God—divine activities in the cosmos which have their source in the divine essence—may admit of some passibilism thus

giving greater conceptual and metaphysical space for a temporally-reactive, relational, and *pathic* mode of divine/creaturely interaction.

What has been offered in the previous chapters is admittedly quite broad as has been this project in its entirety. I make no claims as to its being a tidy piece of analytic philosophy of religion. It is an attempt to critically survey the literature both ancient and modern as it pertains to the question of divine impassibility and then to offer another way; a way that may attend to the concerns of both passibilist critics and to the defences of impassibility found in the tradition of classical theism. This proposal employs, creatively I think, much of the material found on ‘both sides’ of this issue of divine *apatheia*, taking seriously classical arguments for its retention as a warranted and necessary attribute while drawing from various passibilist proposals (Heschel’s *pathos* theology, open theism, dipolar process theism, etc.). In what I have offered above, I have sometimes come down on the side of passibilism and, in other places, on the side of the impassibilist tradition. Having surveyed the literature, both ancient and modern, and explored the various ways impassibility is understood, it certainly does not appear to be a doctrine that when rightly understood should be hastily discarded, as is common in passibilist circles of late. Yet, as I have shown, it would not be without warrant to have some concerns over its traditional expressions. Given this, and in an attempt to balance both concerns and provide a *via media*, I have put forth this alternative ontology above. Again, this is a bold proposal and one that frankly warrants much further exploration, yet it perhaps offers a way forward for finding some middle ground in this necessary and meaningful debate. If something like the above proposal is indeed successful, we may entertain a concept of God that allows for divine ‘otherness’—in transcendence, *aseity*, and an impassible and immutable *chesed* in the

divine nature—and yet provides for a more scripturally-faithful conception of divine immanence and care for creation through a personal and *pathic* character in God. In the final section of this work, I shall consider some potential objections, highlight some areas of further research that would likely provide to be fecund, and round out this proposal.



## Chapter 6. Conclusion and Areas for Further Research

In this final section, I wish to discuss both some general areas that may merit further research concerning what I have put forth above and highlight some topics in the study that warrant individualised treatment. Additionally, I would like to speak to some anticipated objections as best I can. Because of the broad and speculative nature of this work, there are unavoidably areas which require further consideration and also arguments, assessments, and views provided that could be analysed in greater detail. I would here, however, wish again to emphasize that caveat which I provided in the introduction. I do not understand this proposal to be necessarily a uniform solution to questions of divine impassibility in the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, I think its broad nature and engagement with a variety of sources at least allows for that potential. Still, it need not be taken as any replacement for faith-specific solutions to perceived problems regarding this attribute nor do the concerns over divine *apatheia* I have expressed here exhaust areas of further inquiry. I have sought to deal with one aspect of this problem of divine impassibility. Yet it is one that would seem to be present across the revealed monotheistic traditions especially insofar as they are classically expressed. That is, inasmuch as they share a sufficiently common ontology and a similar scriptural witness, each may worry as to how to provide an ontological account for this revelational conception of the divine.

With that caution again noted, I would first deal with a few areas that I think are perhaps worthy of further inquiry. Most certainly there is further room for exploration in Islam as to the possibility of or tendencies towards passibilist thought, not only in antique sources but in

contemporary Muslim theology and philosophy of religion as well. As we have seen, impassibility is implicitly assumed in Muslim theology as a consequence of *tawhid* and the radical transcendence and immutability of the divine. Still, any dogmatic expressions of these attribute are rare. Likewise, in Judaism, more work is warranted in the relationship between the classical, philosophical thought of the Maimonidean tradition and the Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition that so informs daily Jewish religious life. Moreover, an inquiry into divine impassibility in these traditions, together or separately, would likely offer much. There is very little in the way of historical and philosophical surveys of impassibility as found in these traditions, and this forced me to return, as best I could, to a sample of primary sources. While this may seem less than ideal, having to rely on various primary sources has allowed for an unadulterated examination of impassibility and the concept of God in these traditions. At least, in this case, I think the historical and critical survey provided above is a something of return *ad fontes* and one that could be fruitfully expanded. I have dealt with contributions of each faith as best as I can, though space is always an unfortunate limitation. Given this, some discrimination was used as to what sources would be employed, but I have tried to present a broad sample of sources from these traditions. There is certainly more room for discussion of the innumerable ancient and patristic Christian sources that may have something to add to this discussion. However, I foresee no cessation of this debate within Christianity any time soon.

In Christian theology, much of this work is currently being done. Both Paul Gavrilyuk's work *The Suffering of the Impassible God* (2004) and the excellent anthology of essays edited by James Keating and Thomas Joseph White, *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (2009), are fine attempts to narrow in on specifically Christian worries about this

matter (though both are generally impassibilist in their commitments as a reaction to earlier Christian passibilists, e.g., Moltmann, Ogden, Fiddes, et al.). Additionally, David Bentley Hart and Thomas Weinandy have contributed much to this specific area of study, and some of their work has been employed above. Both seminal works on impassibility from philosophical and theological frameworks respectively, Richard Creel's *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (1986) and J.K. Mozley's survey, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (1926), may provide for further inquiry and discussion. Additionally, the relationship between Eastern Christian or Palamite metaphysics and those found in the classical tradition of Western Christianity is an area of research not without promise. While I have provided above something like a critical analysis of process literature as it pertains specifically to (im)passibility, again, both space and time are prohibitive. Further work could be done in examining the dipolar theism of both Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne as it relates to the passibility of God specifically (Whitehead, 1960; Hartshorne, 1941, 1967) and, moreover, to the ways process theism has been incorporated into Jewish and Muslim thought (e.g. Diamond, Hazony, Iqbal). Additionally, there seems to be room for more work in the nature of emotion in the divine and the relationship it has to intelligence, will, corporeality, etc. Such has been begun by Anastasia Scrutton in her 2011 monograph dealing with these questions. Given the breadth of this work, both in content and time, in matters theological and philosophical, there are likely manifold avenues of further research warranted by what has been provided here. I have above offered only a sample of those possibilities. Next, I would like to treat some potential objection to what has been proposed in this work.

It may be claimed that my employment and modification of ‘dipolar theism’ to fit my Eastern Christian essence/energies conception of God is reaching too far. Perhaps it may be. It nevertheless seems like a fruitful analogue, however different these theologies may be, and one that allows for greater expression of this *pathic* and reactive character of God, the very issue at hand in this brief study. Thomas Hopko, a priest of the Orthodox Church, drew a similar comparison in his doctoral dissertation, ‘God and the World: An Eastern Orthodox Response to Process Theism’ (1982) at Fordham University, though I think he is far less sympathetic to process thought than I have been. His work, nevertheless, has been tremendously helpful in accessing resources for both Palamite theology and process thought. Even in its traditional articulation, there is always the outstanding criticism that the essence/energies distinction introduces an unacceptable division into the divine. And it is easy to imagine that concerns concern over divine simplicity would result. Indeed, this is a lively matter of debate both in the East and the West, with some theologians arguing for it being a merely ‘formal’ understanding of the activities of God in the world and others arguing for it being a ‘real’ distinction in the divine: God *in se* and God as immanent.

To the worry over divine simplicity: it does indeed seem right that what I have proposed would run afoul of traditional affirmations of the simplicity of God in classical theism (a Palamite ontology may be an exception here). To posit some temporal ‘aspect’ of God and the possible of some passivity would perhaps entail an incompatibility with divine simplicity as traditionally understood. While I have worries as to the doctrine somewhat unrelated to this project (very much like those offered by Plantinga and Craig), it seems that under what I have proposed we may still maintain a spatio-temporal simplicity in the divine essence. And even in

the divine energies insofar as they are reactive and in time, we need not then think of God's life as separable by temporal parts anymore that we need think omnipresence entails some spatial composition. So while there may be legitimate concerns over maintain simplicity in the kenotic energies of God, it would seem plausible that we may still think of the *ousia* of the divine as altogether simple and ineffable. To the question of metaphysical or property simplicity that is bound to arise: I think this is significantly more difficult to square not with what I have proposed specifically but with its conceptual structure as well in Palamite theology. As we have seen, Byzantine theology would have various and manifold energies permeating the cosmos, and potentially they are distinct though having their origination in the simple essence of God. Yet even here we might consider there being no real distinction in the various energies but rather that they are kenotically discrete for our apprehension and participation in the divine.

Along the lines of divine simplicity, a greater worry may be the introduction of some metaphysical potentiality in God, a supposition which does seem incompatible with the standard interpretation and employment of Aristotle as found in classical theistic ontologies. Any passivity or potentiality would *prima facie* rule out God as *actus purus*. While conceding this, we might that that any potentiality or passivity that exists in God as a consequence of what I have proposed indicates no deficiency in God *in se*. And we might yet consider this passivity and the 'reactivity' in God made possible by it as never as the potentiality for God to become greater or different that God essentially is. In this way, we might still suppose that in all action and reaction with creation and humanity specifically, that the *chesed* of God is every active and constant admitting of no potency in that regard. Likely this is an unsatisfactory account for the classical theist, but it is hard to know how any room can be made for a temporal reactivity as

the scriptures of revealed monotheism suggest without some passivity in the divine, even if it eternally and kenotically assumed. Any perceived epistemic ‘lack’ or ‘deficiency’ would, under what I have offered, indicate no essential deficiency in the being of God, but rather a voluntary nescience for the sake libertarian freedom in humanity and a fuller personal and relational account of divine/creaturely interaction. We might next take up the related concern of God’s relationship to time under this proposed model energetic kenosis. While I have wished to maintain a timeless eternity in the divine *ousia* and an everlasting, sempiternal, or omnitemporal presence of God in the divine energies, such a position would come with significant worries. In this, I have depended on the works of Craig, Hartshorne, and Reese for the possibility of something like this, as it seems that we would not wish to give up on either a timeless eternity in God or some means by which God could be said to properly relate to creation (which would seem to require an everlastingness in God if these relations are to be real rather than logical or nominal).

Next, I think there could be grounds for concern regard the manner in which I have proposed that God could be affected. I have proposed that any affectation in the divine and various emotional states resulting from it would be assumed voluntarily. While I have not argued that it is necessary that God suffer or be affected in *exactly* the same way as humans might experience such, I have proposed that any affectation would be sufficiently similar to ours. But it might be contested that much of our *pathos* or affectation and various states consequent to those are of a unique nature *because* they are often involuntary. We are often affected and moved by things entirely outside our control, e.g. various events befall us, the actions of others affect us in ways we cannot control. While we may be able to control our

responses to the affectations, our passivity or the capacity to be involuntarily subjected to some event is largely not within our control. I would here wish to double-down on what I have said of a voluntary and kenotic self-limitation in God. While I do not mean that God divests Godself of all control in this energetic kenosis, I would emphasise that there is a genuine risk and vulnerability in God's creation of free creatures. In both affording humanity such freedom and in relating to humanity in the way I have proposed, we can speak of God being affected by various states of affairs not entirely in divine control. In this, we are able to speak more fully of something like a relationship with humanity in which there are disappointments, sorrows, and anger. Though God has freely chosen 'from creation,' to assume such a relationship, we ought not to take this as minimising the very real *pathos* in God that results from this 'risk' of creating. Of course, given the nature of God and the governing and determinative *chesed* I have included in this proposal, God's various reactions to creation might be very different from our own. If an identical or univocal sense of affectation or suffering is required here, then that I cannot provide. But what can be afforded here is a sense in which God's *pathos* is indeed *passive* and admits of a range of emotions reflective of that affectation. Still, while similar or sufficient like our sufferings as to provide for full account of the relational nature of God, God's '*pathos* is not [our] *pathos*' given this creator/creation difference (Heschel on Isaiah 55:8-9, 1955).

Additionally, I would wish to speak to some methodological concerns that might be raised, or issues taken with certain assumptions in this work. I have in this work, largely in the follow of Heschel, Fretheim, and other scriptural passibilists, taken for granted that God does indeed act in the world and, moreover, act and react in time in a reciprocal relationship with creation. I have argued that sufficient attention to this character of God in scriptures of

Abrahamic monotheism would attest to as much. This is, again, not to endorse any mere literalism or to deny that we have various interpretive methods available to us that are of great value. I mean only to say that there has been inadequate attention paid to this various *pathic* description of the divine in the tradition of classical theism and, moreover, that even traditional sources (e.g. the Rabbinic/Talmudic tradition) would have us not neglect what such portrayals may tell us of how God is in the divine immanence and relation to creation. Since Philo, and largely for the sake of certain metaphysical concerns for divine perfection, there has been an almost systematic process of minimising these portrayals. Often they are warranted. After all, there is much in the scriptures that must admit of figurative, metaphorical, or allegorical readings, despite my criticism of the excesses of Philo (or Maimonides or Al-Farabi). We may retain those whilst still giving fuller voice to this personal Hebraic conception of the divine. Analogy is here quite important, and we need not require either univocal or equivocal understandings of scriptural language as to divine actions. What I have sought to do throughout is provide a bit more space metaphysically for understanding the emotional and affectational nature of the divine as it relates to and interacts with creation. By predicating an ultimate impassible and immutable *chesed* of God in the divine essence, I think we can largely avoid concerns over such a treatment of divine *pathos* as conceiving of God in terms too human or creaturely. We are able to maintain a real difference in God's character and our own.

Finally, I ought to note a few matters about what I have *not* set out to do in this work. I mean in no way to have provided anything like a theodicy through introducing some qualified passibility in God. How that should go and what it should look like I have left to those specific religious traditions within Abrahamic monotheism. Rather, I have attempted only to provide



something like more space for a philosophical account of what divine actions do indeed look like as revealed in the scriptures of the Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and how we may better understand this unique Semitic character of God. While accounting for divine *pathos*, emotion, and *chesed*, may indeed offer some further understanding of theodical concerns, that has not been my primary focus. Still, there may be therapeutic or psychological value in understanding God as sorrowing with humanity, rejoicing at its obedience, and grieving with those who grieve. And I do not take this value to be simply in the *belief* that God is this way, but rather that we have a philosophical and scriptural accounting for God's character in relation to humanity. For those who would argue that an impassible God is both therapeutically and *in se* more promising for answering the frailty, evil, and suffering in this world, we still largely have that. For others committed to a model of 'co-suffering' God, we have a bit more room to speak of some *pathos* in the divine and way to speak of God's sorrows and grief as sufficiently similar to our own to express not only this reactive personality in the divine but also to an invulnerable and constant goodness in God.

This project has drawn from a variety of rich sources in an attempt to move the debate just a bit further through providing an alternative, yet not altogether foreign, ontology of God for revealed monotheism. Various concepts and categories from across different philosophies and theologies have been appropriated. I have employed them where I saw their potential utility to this proposed *via media* of energetic kenoticism. None has been, I think, rendered too far from its source or its historical or philosophical context. Rather, it seems that there are the pieces to a study such as this found throughout the rich intellectual legacy of revealed monotheism, both in its traditional and contemporary expressions.

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