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ARTICLE

God's absolute immutability vis-a-vis his real relation with the world

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Abstract
The absolute immutability of God, as it was expounded by many ancient and medieval thinkers such as Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, contends that God has no real relation with the world, but only a relation of reason. This view lingered until contemporary scholars like the process thinkers such as Alfred North Whitehead and his disciple, Charles Hartshorne, argued that God has a dipolar meaning that God influences the world and that the world also influences him. While protecting God's intrinsic Being, some contemporary thinkers like Clarke, Grant, and others also tried to formulate his real relationship with the world. But the problem remains on how to posit this real relation with the world without insinuating two natures in God. I wish to state in this paper that God has real relation with his creatures which is rooted in what I call "creational relation" that was made manifest at creation and continues after it.

Keywords Immutability · Relation · Creation · Universe · Change · Creational relation

Introduction

The ancient thinkers expounded on the absolute immutability of God in their quest to determine the origin of the temporal world of existence, which they tried to locate in an immutable being.[1] Ancient and medieval thinkers such as Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas argued that God has no real relation with the world, but only a relation of reason. This was because their focus on being was more on substance

[1] It is good to note that my discussion in this paper has to do with God's immutability as different from God's impassibility which concerns his being affected by an external agent.

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since the relation among created things was regarded as an accident (*S. T.* V, 9, 889–92.; III, 5, 310–22). But in the Godhead, Aquinas (2014, 2023) regarded relation as equally primordial as substance, though he did not extend this to the relation of God with created things (*S. T.* I, 28, 1 & 2.; *De Potentia* VIII, 1.; Klima, 1993).

This idea of absolute immutability continued until some contemporary scholars like the process thinkers such as Alfred North Whitehead and his disciple, Charles Hartshorne, argued that God has dipolar, that is, he has two natures: a mutable or consequent nature and eternal or unchanging nature. It is with his dipolar that he influences the universe and the universe, in turn, influences him. Some contemporary thinkers, such as Norris Clarke and Matthews Grant, rejected Aquinas' doctrine of absolute immutability, arguing that it is too rigid. Nevertheless, both accepted some elements of the doctrine of immutability in God. While Clarke argued that God is mutable in the field of his intentional consciousness, Grant argued that he is mutable in his extrinsic nature. I wish to state in this paper that, while I accept in some sense the arguments of Clarke and Grant, I will attempt an extension of the primordial relational mode of God, which was manifest at creation to the created world as the "creational relation" which is the real relation of God with the universe.

By creational "relation," I mean the relation that flows from God at the point of creation of the universe by virtue of the fact that he brought all things into being. This relation flowing from God at the point of creation seems similar to Schindler's (1993) proposed notion of relation, which flows from creation into the first act of being, then in the being itself, and out of that being towards others.[2] Miccoli made a similar allusion when he tried to distinguish the human person from the robot. He describes the human person as having a relation with the totality of existence, beginning from God and coming into existence with others in the world, and returning to God again (Miccoli, 2014).[3]

This creational relation is the ground of God's real relation with the world since he created the world more or less directly, and the world he created is real. So, his manifestation of relation brought real things into existence. Such a relation does not affect his being as the pure act (*actus purus*) since it has to do not with his being as such but with the outflow of his goodness which brought real beings into existence. Matthews Grant has used this relation at creation to argue that God knows the particulars, and this knowledge is not intrinsic but extrinsic to his nature (Grant, 2012). But by arguing that God's knowledge of the particular is extrinsic, Grant seems to be positing two natures in God: One extrinsic and the other intrinsic. Instead, I wish

[2] David Schindler described this ontological relation as *esse-ab*, *esse-in*, and *esse-ad* (being-from, being-in, and being-towards), which is meant not only to demonstrate that relation is primordial in the first act but, more importantly, to emphasize that relation flowed at the point of coming into being from the creator to the created beings of which the finite beings are indebted to the creator for that generous act of creation. Specifically, *esse-ab* reflects this creational "relation" which flowed from God to created beings, and in as far as such relation brought real beings into existence, it must be a real relation itself from God, not just a relation of reason (1993).

[3] Miccoli sees the human person as *essere da*, *essere-in*, *stare tra*, and *essere con e essere per altri* (being from, being in, being among, and being with and for others). The creational relation in Miccoli could be seen in his *essere da* (being from), even though Miccoli never used it in this sense, which is the relation from God toward the creation that was real at the point of creation (2014).

to argue that the creational relation emerges from the outflow of God's goodness grounded in his primordial relational mode as found in St. Augustine, who described God as substance and relation with no accident.[4]

Absolute immutability of God

The absolute immutability of God is the theory that he is wholly unchangeable as a pure act (*actus purus*). This theory was widely accepted and developed among many ancient and medieval philosophers. According to this theory, God does not change like the finite things or the human person who changes, and he is not in potency to something. St. Augustine (2012) wrote thus: "Nothing is spoken of God according to accident, but according to substance or according to relation" (*On the Trinity* 5, 5, 6; Ratzinger, 1970; Clark, 2001). The substance of God here refers to his real being as One supreme substance, while his relation refers to the connectedness within the divine persons. Therefore, it is obvious that he does not relate to the universe as such. God's relation is extended to the universe only out of his infinite goodness. One can imagine this world where everything changes from one thing to another. This changing universe may prompt one to ask how this change began or how the first change began, assuming that the universe began to exist with one thing after the other and not everything coming into being at once. The tendency is to keep searching for the first thing that moved the rest of the things that itself cannot be moved by another. Because if another moved him and that other was moved by another, then we are in an infinite regress of motion which is tantamount to no motion. This was the dilemma of Aristotle, who in his *Metaphysics XII & IX* described God as the Unmoved Mover and Pure Actuality (*Actus Purus*), who is the origin of the whole universe of existence.[5] God became the first who moved every other thing in the universe without being moved by any other thing since nothing existed "before" him. This Unmoved Mover, for Aristotle (2003), cannot think about anything outside himself because He is a Self-Thinking Thought who has no real relation with the world except the relation of reason (*Metaphysics* XII, 6–9).[6]

[4] St. Augustine described God as having no accident or potency but only substance and relation (*On the Trinity* 5, 5, 6). Also, Joseph Ratzinger wrote: "[…] the sole dominion of thinking in terms of substance is ended; relation is discovered as an equally valid primordial mode of reality. […]. It is probably true to say that the task imposed on philosophy as a result of these facts is far from being completed […] (1970: 184)." W. Norris Clarke described being or human person as not just substance but as substance-in-relation having the dyadic structure of substance and relation as equal primordial modes (Clarke, 2004). Aristotle (1963) has described relation as one of the nine accidents (*Categories* I, 25).

[5] However, against the stance that a pure act is immutable, Steven Duby argued that God's doctrine of pure actuality (*actus purus*) is coherent with his formally and temporally diverse actions. For him, the fact that essence or first act (*actus primus*) and second act (*actus secundus*) are identical in God, he relates to us by outwardly excising what he eternally is as God in order to accomplish his plan in us (Duby, 2017).

[6] Aristotle believes that thinking about the changing world would imply potentiality or change in God and that since change implies imperfection, then imperfection would become part of God. So, God cannot know the world (*Metaphysics* XII, 9). Also, Parmenides (b. 510 B.C.) had before Aristotle used his principle of non-contradiction to argue that being is One, unchangeable and permanent (Parmenides

However, one of the critical problems which Aristotle wanted to avoid while describing God as a pure act was the issue of explaining how a Supreme Being could know the finite universe without being involved in change. How could God be a pure act and still relate directly with finite beings? This is because the world changes and exists in time. If God knows the world, Aristotle could have imagined, it means that there was a time when he did not know it, or the fact that he knows things that come to be, implies that he is confined in time and space and with the finitude of knowledge. To know something, for Aristotle, is for that thing to become part of the knower, at least in mind. If God were to know the world it means that the imperfect world has become part of him, who is ordinarily regarded as an absolutely perfect being or pure act. But, for him, God is a pure act implying that there is no potency in him. So, he cannot be involved in potency or becoming. But the notion of God in Aristotle makes it difficult for the notion of a personal God who is the origin of the universe that moved the rest of things into existence. It is clear that Aristotle, in his *Physics* and many parts of *Metaphysics Bk. VIII & XIII*, spoke about many intermediaries who were responsible for the creation of the universe (*Physics* 258b 11; Copleston, 2006).

But it remains problematic how the originator of the universe is immutable from the universe in which he is the supreme cause. For instance, St. Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 A.D.) believes that historical events are divine providential intrusions into human history that do not affect his immutable nature. During the Fall of the Roman Empire in 409/10 A.D., the pagan inhabitants blamed the Fall on Christian teaching on the virtue of tolerance which the pagans believed weakened state patriotism. But St. Augustine argued that the sins of the people rather caused the Fall, and the consequence was God's providential intrusion into the world in order to curb the city of the world and enrich the city of God (Augustine, 2000). It is presumed that such providential intrusion of God in the world's affairs does not mean that he changes since he is the omnipotent master of the universe. Since God is omnipotent, he can probably move into temporal affairs while remaining unchangeable. One might argue that if God's absolute immutability militates against his relation with the finite world, then he is powerless to move into the temporal sphere. If God is powerless to relate with the finite world, it may be argued that it implies that he is not omnipotent and hence not absolutely perfect. But it may be difficult to understand Augustine's providential intrusion while retaining absolute immutability. If God is absolutely immutable, how could he operate within time and space since human history is within the categories of time and space? Does his omnipotence abolish time and space momentarily so that he may operate within them? If he momentarily abolished time and space, that means that the universe sometimes exists outside time and space only to return to them after that, which might be absurd. If not, then how does a timeless and spaceless being operate within time and space?

Footnote 6 (continued)

1991, *Fragments* II, 7–8). Leonardo Tarán argues that such an argument of Parmenides excludes duration also (Taran, 1965). However, some scholars have argued that Parmenides never argued explicitly that non-being cannot come into being but rather for the identity of non-being and that it was Plato who made him look like he excluded non-being (O'Brien, 2013).

Some may like to shift the argument to the question of how does the supreme origin of the universe not know it in real terms. Suppose one takes Aristotle's solution of God creating through intermediaries. In that case, it implies that the intermediaries have some elements of mutability or are not absolutely perfect or immutable like God. In other words, God created an imperfect or non-absolutely perfect intermediary who, in turn, created the rest of things. But Aristotle might not have intended that God created those intermediaries directly; that is, they might have existed from eternity with God. But if they existed eternally with God, how come they created the finite things in the world that God is too perfect to create directly? Aristotle has made it clear that only God is a pure act. I would argue that since God created through intermediaries, it may imply that he created at least the first intermediary directly, even if he created the other intermediaries indirectly through the already existing intermediary. In this case, he has real relations, at least with the first intermediary, by the fact that he created him directly. This direct creation of the first intermediary seems to establish the idea of a personal God with real relation with the universe.[7]

This notion of the immutability of God gained momentum in the medieval Ages with the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225/7–1274 A.D.), who maintained an absolute immutability of God as in Aristotle, but unlike Aristotle, God is the direct creator of the universe *ex nihilo*. Aquinas (2014), in his *Summa Theologiae*, wrote: "Since therefore God is outside the whole order of creation and all creatures are ordered to Him, and not conversely, it is manifest that creatures are really related to God himself; whereas in God there is no real relation to creatures, but a relation only in idea, inasmuch as creatures are referred to Him (I, 13, 7)." Aquinas' argument could be seen from these perspectives, namely that God is outside the whole order of creation and that all creation is ordered to him, not God being ordered to creatures. Now, the fact that God is outside the entire order of creation, that is, outside time and space, is accepted by many thinkers, even St. Augustine we saw above. But, at the same time, some thinkers like Augustine did not conclude, like Aquinas, that it makes it impossible for God to have a real relationship with the world. It

[7] This immutability of the God of Aristotle had perturbed the Middle-Platonists, such as Albinus, of the first and second century A.D., who decided to make a synthesis of the Demiurge of Plato in *Timaeus* (35a) and the God in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in order to arrive at the idea of a personal God who is also the moving cause of the universe, hence with somewhat real relation with the world (Plato, 2000). The God of Aristotle has the feature of a moving cause, but does not generate the form or the essence of the universe as an artist with the exemplary idea of the form in his mind. So, this idea of a God who produces the world with the exemplary idea in his mind is Plato's God (Demiurge). But the Demiurge was a secondary importance producer because the Forms he used to produce the visible things did not come from him. Based on this, the Middle Platonists contended that the personal God who lives in heaven is the God of Aristotle, whose mind could be filled with the Forms of Plato so that he could produce the universe in his own image like an artist (Demiurge) (Cornford et al., 1937; Dillon, 1996; Flannery, 2000). So, by merging the God of Aristotle and the Demiurge of Plato, the Middle Platonists have arrived at a personal God who is the producer of the universe. But later, Plotinus (204/5–270 A.D.), in his *Ennead*, went back to the One in Plato's *Parmenides*, where Plato discussed the idea of the One who is static and impersonal. This One in Plato becomes, for Plotinus (1988), the highest principle, beyond the Aristotelian God, having his ideas in his mind. The Aristotelian God became the second God of Plotinus, which is the *Nous*. But the God of Plotinus produced the world through emanation and out of necessity through intermediaries without having direct effect with the creature (*Enneads* VI,2,11–12).

seems that Augustine did not actually consider the implications of God intruding into time and space, of which Aquinas seems more conscious. However, Augustine's argument might have presumed God as the author of the universe who can "toy" with it whenever he wishes without being changed. But one may argue that this type of author has an anthropomorphic gab that enables him to deal with temporal affairs.

Again, arguing from the other perspective that the whole order of creation is ordered toward God, not vice versa, as a ground for God's relation of reason with the world might, in some sense, present an idea of an authoritative and uncaring God who is obsessed with his authority to the extent that what matters to him is only to protect his exulted position without having any interest in the affairs of the creatures who are ordered toward him. But a more critical look at Aquinas's statement above does not seem to actually imply that real relation from God to the world is completely excluded. On the contrary, Aquinas' argument seems to contend that God, in his intrinsic nature, has only a relation of reason with the world, and the creatures in their intrinsic nature are really ordered to God. Such an argument seems to imply that there could be a real relation from God to creatures insofar as he is the creator of the universe.

Furthermore, St. Thomas anchored his argument on God's immutability on three grounds. First, God, as the first being, is a pure act without any potentiality in him. Second, everything that is moved possesses some composition, but God as the pure act is absolutely simple. Third, everything that is moved acquires something by the movement which it did not have previously. But since God is absolutely perfect, he cannot acquire anything new. So, for Aquinas, God is altogether immutable (*S*.T. I. 9. I). But still, these points do not rule out completely the hint that he might have substantially intended God's intrinsic being, not actually as a personal God. The medieval thinkers such as John Scotus Eriugena (815 – 877 A.D.) and Richard of St. Victor (1110–1173 A.D.), including Aquinas, developed the idea of God as personal, in their doctrine of the divine persons, who pilots the affairs of the universe as the creator. Still, they regarded it not really as a philosophical discourse (Eriugena 1987, *De Divisione Naturae* II, 36 & III, 1–9; Wolfson, 1956; Richard of St. Victor, *De Trinitate* I, 4, 22; Ratzinger, 1990). Aquinas, while responding to the question of whether the word "person" signifies relation, stated that it is in the divine persons in God that person signifies relation directly and univocally, but only equivocally in the angelic or human person (*S*.T. I. 29. 4). He even argues that God communicates himself to creatures only in His likeness (*De Potential* II, 1).[8] Aquinas invoked the doctrine of divine simplicity to consolidate his argument on God's immutability. This doctrine implies that God is identical with His essential or intrinsic attributes or that there is no real distinction between him and them. For instance, if God is good, he is identical to his goodness. The relation within the divine Persons is in the nature of God and cannot be something less than God himself. So, Aquinas argued, therefore, that relation in God is identical to His nature (*S*.T. I. 28. 2). The view on divine immutability lingered, with certain variations of the argument especially from the Reformers. During the period of Reformation, Martin Luther (1483–1546

[8] This communication of God to creatures in His likeness is not actually a communication of His substance.

AD) accepted that God is immutable and his will cannot be changed. But he still argued that human knowledge and experience can magnify him (Luther, 1961: 117). Also, John Calvin (1509–1564 AD) was of the same opinion that God is immutable since his Word can never change. For him, God's immutability is his essence (Harold, 2021: 6). The idea of a personal God who has a real relation with the universe seemed to be elusive in the ancient and medieval periods, though its precipitation could be seen in the act of creation.

God's real relation with the world

The yearning for a personal God who can relate with the world in real teams continued. In fact, life will make more meaning if one realizes that God can relate with them in real terms. Our knowledge of God's omnipotent and omniscient always suggests that divine immutability may not be absolute, as Aristotle and Aquinas had argued. For instance, Al-Ghazali (1058–1111), in *The Incoherence of the Philosophers XIII*, argued that if God is omniscient, he knows what time is. This knowledge does not diminish his perfection as a supreme being (1963). His argument seemed to be based mainly on divine omniscience, which for him, surpasses everything that could limit God from his relation with the finite world. But basing the argument of divine immutability on omniscience still raises the difficulty of time and space. However, since immutability is tied to God's simplicity as the pure act, which in turn has to do with his essential or intrinsic attributes, one would try to think that the idea of a personal God could be built from his non-essential or extrinsic attributes. This seems to be the idea of some thinkers who described him as mutable or not immutable. However, some others, like the German Idealist, such as Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, described God as the Absolute Spirit who is identical to the World and changes with the Universe of finite beings (Fichte, 2005; Hegel, 1989; Schelling, 1978). Though Hegel described him as a Self-thinking Thought, just like Aristotle, the thought of God, for him, is the Universe itself since God and the Universe are identical. Identification of God with the Universe would ordinarily result in seeing him as more or less a being in flux which might invariably conflict with his being as a pure act. In this case, the question of God's relation with the world might become superfluous since there is no distinction between one from the other.

If we want to preserve the immutability of God and the fact that he relates with the created universe, the common thing is often to try to argue that he is both mutable and immutable. This seems to be the motivation of the process thinkers who towed that line of argument. For instance, Alfred North Whitehead described finite beings and God as *actual entities* who are always in the process of becoming, though God, for him, is one timeless actual entity (Whitehead, 1978). In this sense, God is unlike the other actual entities that are time bound. So, to place God in that category of becoming shows some elements of German Idealism in Whitehead's thought. Furthermore, a famous Whiteheadian, Charles Hartshorne, argued also that God has two poles or "*di-polar*" by which he possesses an unchanging nature and, at the same time, an ever-changing nature with which he is ever-growing with the world in actuality. For him, God, in his abstract essence, such as eternity, is unchanging,

but in his concrete essence, such as his experience of suffering and sympathy, he is ever-changing and ever-growing with the world, and has real relation with the world (1967). Obviously, the process thinkers were aware of the implication of arguing that God is altogether mutable, so they decided to subscribe to protecting one pole of God from mutability and then subjecting the other to mutability. But their description of God as having two poles implies that he has a nature without potency and another with potency. In this case, God may no longer be seen as a pure act in Aristotle or a simple being in Aquinas.

Many 21st-century scholars seem to support this line of argument. For instance, William Norris Clarke (1915–2008), an American metaphysician, is of the view that God's absolute immutability is incompatible with the notion of a personal God. He states that the argument of some process thinkers such as Alfred North Whitehead and a Whiteheadian, Charles Hartshorne, with the notion of God's mutability, which is in direct contrast to that of Aristotle and Aquinas, inspired his own notion of God's real relation with the world (Clarke, 2007). He argued that God, in his primordial nature, is immutable and infinite, but in his nature by which he relates to the temporal process of the world, he truly changes and grows with the world, hence mutable and finite (Clarke, 2008, 1990, 2007). He argues that immutability is not a self-justifying absolute value in itself to which God's infinite perfection must conform; rather, immutability should be understood as a necessary corollary to God's infinite perfection. To this effect, he rejected the unqualified immutability of ancient and medieval thought and argued that though God is immutable in His intrinsic real being, He is mutable in His intentional field of consciousness (Clarke, 2008, 2009).

By making a distinction between the real intrinsic being of God and his intentional field of consciousness, Clarke seems to make a similar distinction between two natures in God even as he refuses to accept the God of process philosophers as a "real" mutable being. He rejected the idea that all changes should be understood only from the side of creatures, as Aquinas seemed to have argued. Clarke has argued above that immutability is not a self-justifying absolute value in itself to which God's infinite perfection must conform, implying that God should not be "limited" by immutability; rather, immutability should be limited by God. In this case, he seems to be tilting toward divine omnipotence, God as a being whom nothing should be above. The sense here is that Clarke indirectly uses divine omnipotence to attack his immutability in order to enthrone qualified divine immutability. This becomes clearer with his further argument that immutability is only a necessary corollary to God's infinite perfection. By implication, it emanates from God's perfection, and God can modify it with his omnipotence.

But if God is mutable in his intentional field of consciousness as Clarke portrayed, is he still a Simple Being, as Aquinas and other classical philosophers had argued? Suppose his real being is not different from His intentional field of consciousness. Then, is it not a contradiction to argue that God is immutable in His real being but mutable in His intentional field of consciousness? But suppose his real being is different from His intentional field of consciousness. In that case, there is doubt whether God is actually a Simple Being as Aquinas and others had contended (*S*.T. I. 3. 7). Clarke's response to this problem is that the simplicity of God in Aquinas is rigid and "too simple," therefore it needs to be modified by giving it

a qualification as he did on the immutability of God. But how is it to be adjusted, or how does making it less simple not affect his being as a pure act? To what extent will this modification be accomplished without affecting his being as a pure act? One understands the need to fashion a personal God who relates with humanity and the entire existence. But when such doctrine touches on divine simplicity or divine being as pure act, it becomes difficult to understand how ascription of "mutability" to God could make him a personal God. However, Clarke acknowledges that Aquinas made some improvements on God's simplicity from its original order in Plotinus, who regarded the One as simple and motionless. St. Thomas' improvement was that he created a place for the interior relationship of the Trinity of Persons within the divine simplicity, thereby making the multiplicity of the Trinity to be compatible with the divine simplicity. But, for him, Aquinas' shortcoming was that he still insisted on God's rigid simplicity by relegating all changes to creatures alone (2007[2], 1979[1]). I may think that Aquinas' argument was based on the problem of ascribing real relation from God to the world, knowing fully well that such relation has to do with a timeless and spaceless being coming into relation in time and space. Aquinas' loosening of God's simplicity within the divine Persons is accepted because the divine Persons exist within the domain of simplicity of divinity and within the realm of timeless being. So, arguing otherwise would have been a contradiction. But the pitfall of Aquinas is that he failed to bring this relation within the divine persons down to created things which would have been a novel way of establishing God's real relation with the universe.

Clarke argued that the only reason why some people deny this is that they tend to have an anthropomorphic notion of God, thereby conceiving his consciousness to be human consciousness (Clarke, 2007). Invariably, if we conceive the consciousness of God not as human consciousness, then we can understand that he has real relations with the world even though he is intrinsically immutable. This verdict of Clarke, based on the anthropomorphic notion of God, seemed to be the crux of the matter about the whole argument on the immutability and mutability of God. If we think of God from the anthropomorphic point of view, then it will be difficult to imagine how he could have real relation with the world without himself being tainted with imperfection. But this does not warrant that one should think of God as having two natures, as Clarke and the process thinkers insinuated. Suppose we conceive him from an omnipotent point of view. In that case, it will be, to some extent, easy to understand how he could have real relation with the world because he is above the finite imperfection of the universe. He could freely intervene as an omnipotent being.

Some scholars like Michael J. Dodds have tried to make God's immutability and real relation compatible based on his nature. Dodds, for instance, argued that just as motion is positive and desirable for creatures that are in potency to a further perfection, so also is immutability positive and desirable to God, whose nature is pure act without any potency (Dodds, 2008). For him, we call God compassionate not because he follows others in suffering but because he identifies with the suffering of the other and with the action that will improve the situation (2008). The implication here is that Dodds is making a distinction between God "following" others in suffering and God "identifying" with the suffering beings, that is, between "following"

and "identifying." Invariably for Dodds, when God follows the sufferer in suffering, it will affect the intrinsic nature of God, but when he identifies with the sufferer, it is his extrinsic being that is affected. While I may avoid the arduous task of explicating the terms “following” and “identifying” to know if there is any difference as such, the problem here lies in Dodds’ seemingly implicit distinction between two beings or acts of existence in God, which is implied in the distinction of the above two terms. However, on the other hand, Dodds seems to be saying that there is only one nature in God that may be affected when he relates with the universe. Still, this nature will not be tainted if God identifies with the world because God’s identification with the world is passive; that is, he is passively, not actively, identifying with the universe. So, his being is not affected by this passive act of identification. Janine Idziak made this clearer in his review of this Dodds’ writings by arguing that God’s love for creatures is not caused by the goodness or something God found in creatures that makes them change. Rather it is God identifying with humans (Idziak, 2010).

The dilemma of real relation

On the one hand, if God is immutable, it means that he cannot change and, hence, he cannot answer our prayers or relate with the world in real terms. On the other hand, if God answers our prayers and can relate with the world in real terms, then he cannot be absolutely immutable; hence, he can change. The argument of making God’s immutability compatible with his real relation to the world raises great difficulty about the divine simplicity according to which God is a pure act.[9]

An absolutely immutable God would be a perfect God and master of all creation who is above all creation as an omnipotent Being. Such a God would properly be the origin of all perfection. Also, a mutable God with real relation with the world would be a caring God who watches over his subjects as a good and perfect Master. God so conceived would be a perfect father of the universe. These two contrary concepts of God constitute a dilemma.

But a God who cannot relate in real terms with the world does not seem to be omnipotent, that is, being unable to relate with the temporal things while at the same time remaining immutable. But we have to ask that if the philosophers such as Aquinas accepted that the same immutable God created the mutable world of things, how then is it impossible for the same God to relate in real terms with the same finite beings he created? If God’s immutability was compatible with his act of creation of the mutable world, why is it then incompatible with relating with the same mutable world he created?

[9] Ebrahim Azadegan used his concept of emancipation project to "emancipate" divine immutability by arguing that God who knows particulars is more worthy of worship than the traditional Hellenistic notion of God understood by Avicenna and some of his contemporaries as immutable and having no knowledge of the changing world. For him, Shiite theology and philosophy support this emancipation project of freeing God from the constraint of immutability imposed on him by the Hellenistic tradition. This is because the God who knows the particular existing things in the universe is the God who has real relation with the world, not the traditional immutable God (Azadegan, 2022).

One may argue that God, who created the mutable world, is a being above immutability because his omnipotence allows him to intrude or intervene in the mutable world while remaining immutable. So, one way to understand God's immutability is to lean more toward divine omnipotence. But does divine omnipotence make it possible for one to conceive him as a pure act who nonetheless relates with the finite existence while remaining unchangeable? More insight into the understanding of God's omnipotence could be seen in Helm, who argues that a tenseless proposition could express temporal truth and that a timeless God who knows things in this world, even though timelessly, is coherent (Helm, 2002, 1998). The argument about tense or tenseless propositions existed in the ancient times. For instance, the ancient nominalists among the Stoics such as Chrysippus of Soli (c.279–c.206 BC), a Greco-Phoenician Philosopher, formulated a rule for tensed proposition in order to attack the theory of universal. For example, Chrysippus propounded the rule of "if, then" sentence which he used to argue that the universals do not exist and there is no need for them. For him, we only need the particular in explaining things, not the abstract things with independent existence (Sharples, 1996). Aquinas would later accuse the ancient nominalists of erroneously believing that God does not know tensed propositions; rather, he knows only events. According to those nominalists, whether the proposition is in the present or past makes no difference because they both refer to an event that alone God knows. But Aquinas, on the contrary, argued that the difference in tenses of the propositions makes them express different truth so that not all tensed proposition expresses what God knows. God's knowledge, for Aquinas, is invariable, not variable (*S*.T. Ia. 14. 15 ad3). Aquinas' objection implies that God knows some tense propositions. If God knows some tense propositions, one may ask whether it does not support the above argument that he is not absolutely immutable. Aquinas then argued that God's knowledge does not depend on the affirmation of propositions; rather, it depends on timeless intuition (*De Veritate* 2, 5 ad 11).

I return to what I describe as the relation of the final cause in Aquinas. He had argued above that God has no real relation with the world because he is not ordered to creatures; rather, creatures are ordered to him. This notion of creatures being ordered to God refers to the idea of God as the final cause of the universe, towards whom every creation is ordered. This could be described as the teleological relation by which creatures connect to God. Aristotle had argued that the Unmoved Mover, being the final cause of things, is also the efficient cause through the power of attraction by which he is desired and loved by his creatures. Also, the created things are inspired to strive toward their natural ends, and this process of final cause goes on eternally.[10] But in this relation of final cause, it is the creatures who want God; God is not actually in want of creatures as such. So, it seems that Aquinas' notion of the real relation between God and creatures is rooted in this teleological relation or

[10] Aristotle had taught about the teleological nature of things to aim towards their natural destiny or end (*Metaphysics* 2,1013a23-35; *Parts of animals* I,642a32-b4).

relation of final cause.[11] This is one-sided because the movement is towards God, not vice versa. But one could ask, how did it happen in reality that an immutable God could create beings with whom he has no real relation?

Creational relation

Aquinas did not actually deal with this relation aspect, which is the relation by which God created the universe. I name it creational relation to distinguish it from the one-sided teleological relation that flows from the created things to God. By creational relation, I mean the relation which flows from God at creation and after creation to the world out of his goodness. As I said above, Aquinas developed the primordial relation within the divine persons but could not apply it to God's relation with the world. He states that God created the world directly *ex nihilo* as a personal God. A personal God has the perfect intellect and will with which he created the universe willingly and directly. I believe that the primordial relation in God flowed from him at creation into creatures. This creational relation of the universe could be seen in St. Thomas's description of God's self-communicating of his being. In this passage, Aquinas responded to whether God wills things apart from Himself. He writes:

I answer that, God wills not only Himself, but other things apart from Himself. […]. For natural things have a natural inclination not only towards their own proper good, to acquire it if not possessed, and, if possessed, to rest therein; but also to spread abroad their own good amongst others, so far as possible. It pertains, therefore, … to the divine will, from which all perfection is derived in some kind of likeness. Hence, if natural things, in so far as they are perfect, communicate their good to others, much more does it appertain to the divine will to communicate by likeness its own good to others as much as possible. Thus, then, He wills both Himself to be, and other things to be; but Himself as the end, and other things as ordained to that end; …(*S*.T. I. 19. 2).

[11] In this teleological course of God's plan, Michael Gorman tried to answer whether the doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus Christ as a divine person implies that God or the divinity was made mutable since the divine person Christ took human nature. He weighed two possibilities of the divine person becoming mutable in Christ's incarnation, which stems from the fact that Christ has two natures: human nature and divine nature. Gorman employs St. Thomas Aquinas' argument that something is mutable only if it has the potency to be actualized or when something is coming to exist in a new way. He adopted Aquinas' argument that the assumed nature of Christ is related to the divine person (Son) only by mixed relation, which ensures that the Son was not actualized by the relation with which he was assumed. Because the divine person is not assumed then, the incarnation of Christ is not a case of mutation. But he accepted that with the incarnation, Christ came to exist in a new way; otherwise, the incarnation would be nothing different from creation. For him, Christ came to exist in a new way, not because he wanted to actualize a perfection he did not have before, but rather because he came to have a particular type of being in a created existence. He concludes that Christ is both mutable and divine and that there is no inconsistency here since he has not only a divine nature (Gorman, 2018). In his other work, he tried to reconcile the idea that the Word took flesh and is fully human with the idea that the Word is divine, immutable, and impassible. That is, for him, Christ's incarnation is in harmony with divine simplicity, immutability, and impassibility (Gorman, 2017).

Aquinas' explanation above depicts the creational relation by which God communicates himself in his likeness by bringing finite beings into existence. He willed the universe directly by this self-communication. Like the natural things which continue to incline themselves toward the things they possess, it is reasonable to argue that God continues his creational relation with his creatures after creation. By creating the world directly, he had a real relation with the things he created by that act of creation or of willing them "to be." At the point of creation, there is the perfect relation that came from God to his creatures, and there is an imperfect relation that comes from the creature to the creator. The perfect relation is God's infinite goodness by which he designed the universe and brought beings into existence.

This perfect relation could be further divided into relation by the first act of creation or bringing into being and relation of a continuous act of creation by which God, in the same infinite goodness, continuously preserve his creatures until they attain the goal of teleological relation in him as the final cause. The relation in this continuous act of creation cannot be imperfect because it is from God toward his creatures, and he is supremely perfect. By this continuous act of creation, God is directly, though in an attenuated manner since it is not the active creation, continually relating with his creatures in real terms, not just of reason. In the first act of creation, the creatures had no choice of to-be or not to-be, so in this case, God's direct relation with the creature is a strong one. But in his continuous act of creation, the relation there is a weak one, but still perfect on the part of God and also real because the creature, like the human person, has consciousness and free will by which he can freely make responsible choices. The imperfect relation at the point of creation, which came from the creature to God, is passive because the act of creation came fully from God the creator. It is imperfect because the creatures are imperfect. Even the continuous act of relation after creation from creatures toward him remains imperfect but real. So, both from the side of God and that of creatures, relation is always real with the variations just stated.

The notion of creational relation could also be seen in Barry Miller, an advocate of divine simplicity, who tried to link God's knowledge of contingent objects to his causing those objects to come into being. He argues that primarily God knows himself, and it is precisely in knowing himself that he knows everything he does, including everything he created. God knows Plato, for instance, in the very act of creating him (Miller, 1996). That God knows the contingent things by knowing himself does not mean, for Miller, that his knowledge of contingent things involves his intrinsic nature; rather, it is simply a practical knowledge that explains that he created the universe intentionally, thereby evolving a relation between him and his creatures. This line of thought indicates that God, as Supreme Being and Creator of finite things, has two natures: Intrinsic and extrinsic, which has to do with his practical knowledge. If he has two natures, how do we reconcile it with the doctrine of divine simplicity or God as *actus purus*? This is a similar problem to the solution of Dodds and the process thinkers I treated above.

This notion of two natures in God is even more obvious in the work of W. Matthews Grant. Grant developed what he called the theory of extrinsic model of divine knowledge in which he argued that God's contingent knowledge of the world, which is a real relation, does not involve his intrinsic nature. He proposed three models for

this argument: The belief model, the immediate cognition model, and the agency model. The belief model, for him, states that God's act of believing in contingent propositions is a relation of propositions that exists outside of him. These relations, for him, do not involve anything intrinsic to God (Grant, 2012). In the immediate cognitive model, he argues that, like the belief model, God's act of knowing contingent realities consists in relation to those contingent realities, and such relation exists outside of God, which has nothing intrinsic in him. The last, which is the agency model, has to do with divine causality. Here, he argues that divine causal act consists of bringing a relation to an effect. This relation does not involve God's intrinsic nature, which would be otherwise if the relation were not holding, that is, were God not causing things. God, while creating the contingent things, knows them, and this creates a relation with the created things. Grant argues that God's knowledge of contingent objects in the first two models is a brute fact, without any further explanation about how he knows them. But in the agency model, it is clear that he knows the contingent realities because he intentionally created them (Grant, 2012). This Grant's argument, especially on divine causality, leans towards my creational relation argument. To intentionally create something implies knowing that thing directly. But the difficulty in his argument is the assertion that God's knowledge of his creation is extrinsic, resulting in an extrinsic relation. One way of understanding Grant is to see this God's knowledge as something not originating from the nature of God. Hence, we cannot say that God as God actually knows them. Or, we may understand it, as in the above, that God has two natures: extrinsic and intrinsic natures. So, since the extrinsic nature is still the nature of God, and this nature, for Grant and Miller, is the domain of imperfection and potency, by implication, God has an imperfect and potential nature.

Consequently, the entire effort to protect divine immutability has been affected. Such ascription of intrinsic and extrinsic natures in God implies probably that he has infinite and perfect nature, and finite and imperfect nature. Though the advocates seem to suggest that the extrinsic nature does not belong to God as such, they have not clearly shown how it can be attributed to him and, at the same time, does not belong to him. Either it belongs to him as a perfect being (*actus purus*), or it belongs to the imperfect existence, hence, not actually God's.

If Grant had considered the primordial relational mode in God made manifest in the divine persons, since God is a pure act, he would have avoided the insinuation of the extrinsic nature of him. It is difficult to understand how God could have an extrinsic nature belonging to him and, at the same time, not being his, though Grant wants us to believe so. But since God is a pure act, it is difficult to see how he can possess something that is not possessed by his real nature. So, the relation between God and the created things cannot but belong to his being if he actually knows it. This seems to be why Clarke did not, as such, posit an extrinsic nature of God; rather, he insisted that God's simplicity should be loosened since it is too rigid.

Some might confront this relation by arguing that such creational relation does not really exists since it neither refers to God specifically nor to the universe of finite beings. In this case, for such objection, God's relation with the universe is not a real relation from him, as the Supreme Being, to the world. Furthermore, for the objector, the relation is rather by something independent of God and the universe, which

is called creational relation. The objector might cite Bertrand Russell's argument on relation. For instance, Bertrand Russell argued that the proposition that "Edinburgh is north of London" has a relation between those two places which is "north of" and that this relation subsists independent of the human knowledge of it. For him, such relation belongs to the independent world, which cannot be found anywhere and does not depend on our thought for its existence. This relation as a subsistent being does not exist in Edinburgh or London. It is neither in space nor time, neither material nor mental, but it is something. Russell concluded that relation, in this case, belongs to the universals, and it is a subsistent being (Russell, 2008). Though Russell ascribes being to this relation because it subsists, it is evident that it could not have existed without the two locations it connects. That is, without Edinburgh and London, "north of" as a relational concept in this context would not exist. So also, the creational relation that connects God and creatures could not have existed without God and the things he created. While a Russellian might argue that the mutability which I ascribe to this relation does not necessarily belong to God and hence cannot be used to argue for God's real relation with the world, they must at the same time agree that without his creation of the universe, there would not have been such relation. The relation between Edinburgh and London connects two finite beings, but that between God and the universe connects an infinite being and the finite world. So, this relation depends on the infinite being who created the universe and the universe he created. Creational relation flows from God himself to generate the creatures. It cannot flow from creatures since such creation is God's activity alone. Therefore, it cannot belong to non-God like Russell's subsistent universal since creation as such is not the activity of such universal or any other being outside God. Therefore, the creational relation from where God's real relation with the world flows is a manifestation of God.

On the part of the human person, the imperfect real relation at the first act of creation is absolutely passive because the creature had no choice of to-be or not-to-be. God brings them into being out of his infinite goodness. But in God's continuous creation, the creature responds actively and directly in relation to him. However, "creatures" have the free will not to respond to God. Irrespective of free will, the relation from the creature to God after creation is real and stronger than that from God to creatures. From the point of view of the creational relation, this seems to be the implication of Aquinas' statement that the creation is ordered to God and that he is not ordered to the creation. So, for Aquinas to have used the "ordering to creation toward God" to argue that there is no real relation from God to the universe does not seem to have, in an actual sense, considered the issue of God continuously creating the world out of his goodness. But one may argue that Aquinas' argument was specifically that God is outside creation. If God is outside of creation, that is, outside of space and time, at least he created the world within space and time. Since he directly created the world, his act of creating the world is a real relation with the world even when it comes from a being outside space and time.

Some scholars today, like Norman Kretzmann, rejected the doctrine of God's immutability in favour of his omniscience. Kretzmann argued that if God knows what time is now and what it is now is changing, God himself is also changing and cannot be absolutely immutable. Therefore, he maintains that omniscience and immutability are incompatible (Kretzmann, 1966).[12] Kretzmann believed that omniscient Being must be "subject to change," which he refers to extrinsic change, not intrinsic (Kretzmann, 1966). By arguing that omniscient being must be subject to change, Kretzmann seems to be chatting a way for God's real relation with the world. But his problem lies in his conviction that omniscience and immutability are incompatible because immutability denies that God knows in time. He equally seems to posit two natures in God; intrinsic and extrinsic. Suppose the extrinsic knowledge of God is outside his intrinsic being, as many scholars I have noted in this paper indicated. How can such knowledge actually establish his real relation with the world? If God's knowledge of the created things is founded outside his real being, it is difficult to argue convincingly that his relation with the world is real since such relation does not come from his real being as God. It seems to boil down to the relation of reason that many ancient and medieval scholars had asserted, as I note above. This is even more problematic when we realize God is a pure act and a simple being without any potency. One may ask which aspect of God, who is pure act, refers to his extrinsic nature or knowledge? If this extrinsic knowledge is outside his real being, how is it actually part of God? This difficulty might be why, as I noted above, Clarke argued for loosening the divine simplicity and immutability because it is too rigid. If his immutability is loosened, it could accommodate his real relation with the world without posing another nature in God or arguing that he has an extrinsic nature. But how to loosen such simplicity is yet to be achieved.

But creational relation argues that God's knowledge of the world is a real creational knowledge by which he knows the beings he created since he cannot create what he does not know. His knowledge of them could be seen as knowledge on the "edge" between temporality and eternity, finite and infinite, perfect and imperfect. This is because the created things, as Aquinas had argued, are communications of God's goodness. God himself is timeless, and his creatures are not purely time-bounded, even though they exist in time and space. The human person, for instance, has been described as a being on the edge, between spirit and matter, time and eternity, because one possesses body and soul (Aquinas, *S.T*. I. 75. 2–3 & I. 76. 1&5;

[12] Some even contend that God's immutability vitiates his freedom. For instance, Swinburne argued that free action and immutability are incompatible, so if God is immutable, he cannot act freely (Swinburne, 1993). But Jared Michelson tried to defend divine immutability against the attack by Richard Swinburne by agreeing with St. Augustine that when we speak of divine relation, we must keep in mind, just like every other attribute of him, the utter distinction between God and his creatures, allowing room for God's ineffable reality as the context within which our theological reason of him unfolds. The theological reason for Michelson could be traced to creation, providence, reconciliation, and redemption. For him, the notion that an immutable God has no real relation with the world does not allow God-creature distinction to inform our process of theological reason (Michelson, 2019).

Gilson, 2011).[13] God's creational knowledge of the universe cannot be entirely time-bounded. So, it is a knowledge on the edge which pertains only to his creational relation with the world. Edward Wierenga argued that all truths are eternally true, so what is true does not change, even true propositions. What then changes over time is not what is true but what those who live in temporality have access to, unlike God, who is a-temporal. His position is that, against Kretzmann, the doctrine of divine omniscience is not inconsistent with divine attributes such as changelessness, immutability, eternal, and timelessness (Wierenga, 1989). In fact, a divine immutability that completely forecloses God's real relation with the world can hardly explain how he created the universe. God's real relation with the world, which I founded on his creational relation insofar as he is the creator of the universe, is a relation on the edge, just as his creatures are not completely time-bounded but exist on the edge, especially the human person.

Conclusion

The ancient and medieval thinkers such as Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas argued that God has no real relation with the world, but only a relation of reason. This view has lingered until its rejection by some scholars like the process thinkers such as Alfred North Whitehead and his disciple, Charles Hartshorne, who maintained that though God has a dipolar by which he has a changing nature and at the same time an unchanging nature, that is, God influences the world and the world, in turn, influences him. Many contemporary scholars argue that God has real relation with the world. But the way each scholar describes this real relation is sometimes problematic. Clarke, for instance, rejected Aquinas' absolute immutability arguing that it is too rigid. However, he accepted some elements of God's mutability in the process philosophy and argued that though he is immutable in his real being, he is mutable in the field of his intentional consciousness by which he relates with the world. Matthews Grant also argued that God has real knowledge of the world through his act of creation, but this knowledge is extrinsic, not intrinsic, to God. I wish to state in this paper that though some of these contemporary thinkers offer some viable solutions to the dilemma, the problem remains on the implication of their theories which insinuate that God has two natures: extrinsic and intrinsic natures. This is why I have argued for a real relation of God with the universe flowing from his creational relation founded in the primordial relation in the divine persons by which God intentionally created the universe as an overflow of his goodness. God cannot create the universe directly without knowing, in reality, the things he created.

[13] The human person is in the middle between the spirit and matter. Plato narrated a story of a charioteer riding two horses, one (reason) looking upward to the Forms, the other (appetite) looking downward to earthly beauty. On seeing an earthly beauty, the appetite (horse) loses control and plunges the reason (other horse) and the charioteer into the earth, where the soul is imprisoned in the body (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246a-254e). He again cited Plotinus and the Neoplatonic tradition, which described the soul as living on the edge between time and eternity, matter and spirit (Plotinus, *Enneads* VI,2,11–12; Stumpf, 1994; Bussanich, 2006, O'Meara, 2006).

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