Realism, Identity and Being in Time

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Trying to understand human identity is a drive which has been experienced by all of us.[1] Most of the experiential and ontological elements of this search are defined today in terms of existential presence, perceptual factors, modalities of probability and choice, and contrary to fact conditions.[2] The phenomena of time, when included in these discussions, is treated in terms of our perspective on experience, i.e., learning from the past, etc., rarely in terms of the effect of time on identity. Yet our sense of identity is strongly modified during the passage of time and the events of history. On the topic of time, Bill Craig,[3] David Ford,[4] Wolfhart Pannenberg,[5] and Karl Rahner[6] have interacted with Kant,[7] Heidegger,[8] Lonergan,[9] and Putnam.[10] I will review this discussion and include implications of scriptural teaching.

I. The Issue of Identity

Let me use the ship of Theseus example. We generally use this example to talk about the physical changes in the ship over time; that is, change based on the events which cause the physical changes and the results of those changes. This lets us describe a mereological sense of identity over time and see the ship as the sum of its parts, over time.[11] But we could also use this in a postmodern way to illustrate the change from the ship's perspective. It carries different people and objects each day. It goes different places. Some parts are changed, from time to time, but substance change is a small part of the daily and annual passage of existence. If it had the ability to feel and think, i.e., consciousness, it would be aware of the passage of time, even on days when no substantial changes take place in its physical makeup, and on those when there

might be significant changes. If it had the further awareness of self-consciousness, that sense of continuing identity would be the single most consistent element over the 20 years. If it were self-conscious it would certainly know that some days had brought more perceived change than other days: refitting, rebuilding, etc.[12] For persons, who are conscious and self-conscious, the sense of the soul is related to the continuity of self-consciousness over time. We have an effect on time by the actions we take and the choices we make. Time has an effect upon us, not only by the fact that we experience change and make different decisions at different times, but also due to the fact that we grow wiser and make "better" decisions. We have the sense that the wisdom of maturity takes time.

The common elements of time (in the Greek sense, both *chronos* and *kairos*) in their affect on identity have not been specified by any theologians and only a few philosophers of whom I am aware. Being-in-time, and what Heidegger and Sartre never discussed, time-in-being, are significantly different topics than being-itself. A perennial philosophy[13] looks across the ages for wisdom, not just one lifetime, and so we will begin this exploration somewhat broadly.

Conceptually, it is necessary for there to be some unifying sense within human experience for the experiences of life to have either personal or social meaning. This unifying sense is most often referred to as a "self." It is also usually assumed that for any given person, being healthy, the sense of self is a unified sense across time. This conceptual necessity of a unified self (as opposed to an actual unified self) has been defined by Kant as the transcendental unity of apperception (TUA). This, thought Kant, is the only way to account for 1) daily experience via the senses, 2) memory, and 3) common human experience.[14] This TUA is the foundation for all analytic and synthetic reflection. The TUA applies to a theoretical starting point for experience, and does not apply in the same way to actual individuals and their knowledge of

themselves.[15]

But we can know, both via intuition and reflection, that we actually have such self-consciousness, identity and real knowledge of self, the world and others? This actuality for each person is not the TUA, but what Kant calls a unity of consciousness, "There can be in us no items of knowledge, no connection or unity of one item of knowledge with another, without that unity of consciousness which precedes all data of intuitions, and by relation to which representation of objects is alone possible."[16] The intellectual experience of a self making sense of life, he describes as synthesis. "Synthesis in general is the mere result of the power of imagination, a blind but *indispensable function in the soul*, [my italics] without which we should have no knowledge whatsoever, but of which we are scarcely ever conscious." [17] This function is not blind, and it is not only imagination (see Lonergan's analysis of perception and learning[18]). Walsh mistakenly blends together these two senses of the self, the theoretical and actual, when he concludes, "All thoughts, feelings, experiences are thoughts, feelings, experiences of a subject, a unity of apperception."[19] The importance of time, one of the fundamental categories of existence identified by Kant, is not used by him in the transcendental analysis of personal self-awareness.

Philosophers since Kant have continued to deepen the investigation of the status of knowledge claims and of the claims to ontological existence of a self, other beings, the world, absolutes, and God.[20] For example, Frege's theory asserts that conceptual representations of referents are *present to us* as senses (perceptible entities in our experience, then in our memories), not just as meaning in thought or discussion, and that the senses include a mode of presentation of the referents to us as both concrete (direct reference) and abstract objects.[21] This constructs

both a way of thinking about external reality interacting with us as subjects and a way of reflecting about that reality. Frege's theory, or something like it, is necessary to establish a bridge between our concepts or ideas and a real world. Can we accept the idea of senses as presenting existing concrete and abstract entities? This sounds like Heidegger's recapitulation of pre-Socratic Greek understanding of reality as presenting itself to us. Does this actually preserve the needed unity between ideas or concepts and the empirical entities they present to us? It might; but this position does not commit us to modern versions of foundationalism, nor does it close that door.[22]

Heidegger responded to Kant's ideas in his *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* in 1929, two years after *Being and Time*. Heidegger wanted to demonstrate the necessity of an ontological analytic of *Dasein*, and clarify it in relation to the question, What is man?[23] This led to Heidegger's move in 1949, and in keeping with Kant's categories, from rational analysis, which keeps us in metaphysics, to poetic expression of reality, intuitively and concretely expressed, in keeping with his perception of the nature of reality as presenting itself to us and being known intuitively prior to being known through reflection.[24] This keeps the medium of discussion on the same level with the item under discussion, in this case, Being. In his dialogue *On the Discussion of Detachment* (1959) he indicates that we must wait and think, but not fall into the trap of logic. The hard part is to "stop deceiving ourselves" (p. 140). This leads to Heidegger's culminating idea of the unity of all knowledge and being, or of being and becoming, in the experience of the self with its own *ousia* and *alethia*.[25]

Heidegger modifies the Greek notion of a self or a personal being and describes the self as an entity which is present-to-self and present-in-the-world, and therefore as present-to-others. This is a somewhat static sense of being, but Heidegger balances this with the idea of the self in action,

that is, praxis, which could bring in the element of time, although Heidegger did not do that. To examine this we have to go back to Heidegger's early work.

II. The Nature of Time

Heidegger's reversal to "Time and Being" in the third section of the first part of *Being and Time*[26] leads to his transformation of thought about the nature of time itself.[27] Humans are actors, manifesting being and time (in existentially and modally congruent ways through memory, repeated actions, self-fulfilling actions such as eating, etc.), before they are self-reflective (existence precedes our understanding of assent). Therefore, we do not experience being or time individually, nor are they intuited separately, but always experienced together. They can be analyzed separately. But there is a holistic reality which presents itself to us, every moment, every day. Reality, the presence of being and time in our lives and with which we interact, controls our philosophy, our world view, and our concepts, as well as our lives and choices. This means that the future is open and unknown to us. Heidegger borrowed from Kierkegaard the phrase, "possibility is higher than actuality." Max Muller[28] thought this reversal on the nature of time made Heidegger more compatible with theistic thought.[29] The Russian philosopher, Sergi Bulgakov said, "time is the created image of eternity, eternity-in-becoming. . . . The whole of the Christian religion presupposes, for its truth to be credible, the reality of time."[30]

From a more scientific perspective, Eddington's remarked about time, "Just as each limited observer has his own particular separation of space and time, so a being co-extensive with the world might well have a special separation of space and time natural to him. It is the time for this being that is here dignified by the title 'absolute."[31] This philosophical point is reinforced (or preempted) by the idea of the existence of the triune God, the members of whom have actually

and always related to one another in a way characterized by joy. This eternal (ages long) actual fellowship is what John invites us to join (I John 1). John implies that the actual relationship of the triune God is somehow accessible to us. Peter implies much more than access; he calls us to participation (II Peter 1:4).

These very diverse 20th century thinkers agree that time exists as a reality for each of us and for all of us as a part of the shared continuum. I don't see this in any way discrepant from Kant's position about consciousness. We have not explored the nature of time as an abstraction, nor time as we are related to God, nor God's time in relation to the universe; but time as it is part of our personal and social experience.

III. Time and Identity

There is a corollary to this phenomenon of being and time in the realm of spiritual experience. In mystical experience, especially in contemplative prayer, we enter a realm in which reality presents itself to us and we are centered but passive. We stop deceiving ourselves about the false images of life and reality presented to us by the senses or by the philosophies of the world and we refocus on reality as given to us and shared with us by God and our fellows who have experienced this path of spiritual insight.[32] In this experience, the being of the world, the nature of the self, and the experience of time are sought and experienced for their spiritual qualities of identity, unity, and joy.[33] The issue is that in contemplation personal identity and the integrative interpretation of reality are experienced in a unified way, whereas in philosophical analysis they are separable in thought (but not in reality).[34] This unified experience of reality is also true in the community of maturing discipleship as we act intentionally, in time, in community,[35] and in relation to all we know of life and God.[36]

In our time, Putnam (describing internal or pragmatic realism) begins with the self as an

actor in the world (much like Aquinas) and seeks to explain the self as a functional being who is present to self, the world, and others. This approach he calls pragmatic realism, which is experientially internal to the actor, based on perceptual states, self-consciousness, knowledge, memory and will.[37] Putnam knows there is a common world in which people experience some elements of each other. His discussion of time is minimal. I think that Putnam's pragmatic realism is parallel in many ways to Heidegger's claims about the Greek's beliefs regarding presence and praxis.

Combining these ideas allow us to restate the problem of identity in time as follows. Can a means of analyzing the knower and the perceptual event be developed which will initiate with discussion of *a priori* conditions, which we would then need to define as necessary {as Kant and Frege do}, at least as a beginning point, in all possible worlds,[38] then hold on to the unity of what is found in the perceptual activity (sensual, intuitive, and conceptual) over time, based on mereological genidentity, and generate a rational base for further analysis of social consequences? The static nature of the question as just posed is expanded when we add the element of time and its bivalent effects. Can this unified experience of an actual subject be analyzed as to the effects of time on all the aforementioned aspects of the subject? Further, as actors in time do we have a cumulative net affect upon time? I think these are valid questions for us as Christians to address, for they have to do with the philosophical grounding of our beliefs regarding a real God and a real world, which are accessible to all of us and the biblical call to sustained action over time; e.g. communicating the gospel to every person.

The unity of actual experience and self-consciousness is the ground on which all self-understanding as persons and as community depends (psychology,[39] sociology, etc.)[40] and is the source from which intentional activity (worship, economics, marketing, planning) develops.

It can include modern ethical problems,[41] such as cloning and can learn from older debates.[42] This self-reflection is a major theme in Asian philosophy,[43] and is reflected in the moral crisis in modern educational theory and practice.[44]

Lonergan presents just such a means of analyzing perception. Earlier[45] I traced perception as far as the assertion of the real self, and noted that the same transcendental phenomenological method, now based on a real self, is followed in the assertion of a real world. A key to the usefulness of Lonergan is the inter-objective world of Frege's senses and references which allows philosophical expression of an objective world.[46] Lonergan's method, or something like it, is needed which begins with these *a priori* truths and proceeds to an analysis that will generate the understanding of the existence of the self and the world, in time, as logically necessary implications based on phenomenological analysis of personal perceptual activity. Lonergan is much more detailed and precise than Kant was able to be. If we begin to analyze the objects before we are clear on the nature of the perceptual acts, we will continue to confuse the issues of self, time and beings. Therefore, the case for the existence of the self is critical to the development of a case for the existence of other people and the world and to any planning or action.

One of the points needed is an argument for content knowledge of the self and the world. Given a self and a world as logically adducible, there is still no actual content in Lonergan and thus nothing to use for analysis in any kind of phenomenological or teleological argument (although perhaps some kind of cosmological argument would have better ground).[47] The closest Lonergan comes to giving this argument is his step in which differentiation of the real takes place through insight and conceptualization.[48] This is similar to Kant’s use of

imagination, but, in light of post-modernism, this approach needs to be supplemented by a systematic consistency method[49] based on a phenomenological analysis of existence (as in Popper, Carnell, Collins, Rahner and MacGregor). This was best done so far by MacGregor.[50]

This would bring us to the point of establishing a case for the existence of the self in time, and consistent through time. This could be extended for knowledge of other people, the world, and God; anything which enters into our perceptual experience.[51] But now it would have the philosophical grounding to avoid either skepticism or presuppositionalism and would have given us knowledge of the real self and a real world, not as pre-rational foundations but as reflectively identified from inter-subjective experience of being in time. It does not yet address the effect we have on time.

These proposals discuss the implication of a position on the nature of time. From Parminedes or Kant to contemporary discussions, the nature of time is directly relevant to our understanding of reality, including the reality of our selves. For us, time is assumed as given as a part of our experience and our identity, past, present, future; whether we find it in analysis of love or fellowship, or as a necessary feature of apperception and imagination. Therefore, life cannot be studied as a static entity, even in the abstract, without losing an essential part of reality in the field of the discussion. Like energy or quanta, experience cannot be analyzed properly without taking account of time, and the act of analysis, across time, modifies the nature of time and being. In a similar way, God, as a trinity of persons experiencing identity,[52] love and fellowship throughout eternity, also exists in a time relationship (a sense of before and after) and has an effect on the nature of both physical time in the universe and in our personal perceptions of time itself, although God's "time" may be very different in nature than what we experience.[53]

However, some philosophers (Craig, Hawking) argue that time is not necessary to an

understanding of being. Craig makes a distinction between time for us and time for God. We experience time as a necessary part of creation. God is timeless and He created time. Craig argues that God, existing without creation, is timeless and that He enters time at its inception with His creation of the universe.[54] Since creation is a freely willed act of God, the existence of real time is therefore contingent. I think Craig here gives a good explanation of time in and for the universe but fails to include the implications of the relations of the Trinity on the nature of time for God. I certainly agree that time for us, and perhaps for the universe (including angels), is different than time for God.

If I understand Craig's argument in the more recent *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, he has changed to not only supporting absolute time but also to seeing time as a necessary element in the interaction of human persons.[55] If this is true, then the interpersonal relations of the three persons of the trinity, the joy expressed in their fellowship, the wonder of the creation as the designated place for the ongoing life of the second person, all contribute to an understanding of some sense of sequence present in the experience of God, by necessity. Further, the move from natural knowledge to middle knowledge to true knowledge in the mind of God[56] either implies a logically necessary movement, and therefore a real movement sequentially in the knowledge of God, or the whole doctrine of middle knowledge is not needed and we fall back into hard determinism.

Also, we have the assertions by Hawking: ". . . the theory of relativity put an end to the idea of absolute time . . . . The theory of relativity does . . . force us to change fundamentally our ideas of space and time."[57] I think both these assertions are incorrect. Time, as spiritual, existential and intellectual sequence, not just as history, is a necessary element of personal being, even the three persons of the Godhead. Our individual experience of time, on which we reflect intuitively

and collectively, gives us a common field which we often call history. This is not the same as God's time experienced by the three persons. I am not presenting the argument (based on the interpersonal experience of the three persons - on a common ground as the analysis above for us humans) for this position here; rather I am seeking to sketch the picture of reality which is presented to us every day. This movement of thought from Lonergan and Putnam to Craig is needed to make sense of our everyday experience.

Another approach to "everyday" theology is by David Ford. In his recent book, *Self and Salvation,*[58] he bring two non-foundationalists into dialog on the topic of understanding how to conceptualize God. The first dialog partner is Levinas, a skeptical Jewish and very post-modern philosopher who's writings are a critique of all ontology and foundationalism.[59] The second dialog partner is Jungel, a theologian who has moderated the positions of Barth and Bultmann.[60] Jungel comes at the knowledge of God explaining the mystery of God as the first requisite of a non-idolatrous approach. Ford makes use of these two thinkers to build a case for understanding the presence of God in our midst through the experience of a worshiping self who encounters God phenomenologically in the presence of worship. This experience of worship is one that can be part of all people's experience, at any time.

This brings our experience within time together with the life of God. But Ford leaves out discussion of the time of God and the history of our experience of God in terms of past experiences of others, and focuses on the lived experience of each person in present time. This focus on the aspect of time we call present, while presenting a genuine case in post-modern terminology,[61] loses the gains of the last century in understanding the commonality of the shared world.

[62]

Ford ends by using Theresa of Lisieux and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as examples of writers who describe in phenomenological ways their experience of God. The book concludes with an invitation to feast on Jesus Christ by faith and see for yourself. Putnam would bring a good balance to this discussion in terms of the arrangement of the interior world and the possibility of speaking back into a shared world.

IV. Conclusion

As believing Christians we are 'given' God, Christ, revelation, as well as real selves influencing time and space and being influenced by them, and a real world.[63] With the promise of a present fellowship shared between all of us as believers, and with God (I John 1), the issue of time becomes vital to the realities of life in the created world.[64] We are agents making changes in the nature of reality as it occurs. As such we are responsible agents. As persons in the world we are also being acted upon by God and by other people. A soft compatibilist's or libertarian view of freedom and responsibility are both possible and may, depending on the argument, be coherent with scripture. As individuals standing among people in the world, we need to demonstrate the truths of these realities influencing us and call for authentic action based on realistic values.[65] This can be done by furthering the work on theistic realism of Collins, McGregor, William Craig, David Clark, myself and others. Including discussions on the nature and effects of time keep the dynamic aspects of all these discussion. May God continue to help us as we proceed in the philosophical search for expressions of being and truth which will draw all persons closer to God.

Footnotes:

[1] Russell, M. 2003.

2 Garrett, B. 1998.

3 Craig, William. 1988.

4 Ford, D. 1999.

[5] Pannenberg, W. 1995.
[6] Rahner, K. 1968.
[7] Kant, I. 1965, p. 88.
[8] Heidegger, M. 1962.
[9] Lonergan, B. 1977.
[10] Putnam, H. 1987.
[11] Moreland & Craig, 2003.
[12] Agar, N. 2003.
[13] Collins, J. 1962B.
[14] Ameriks, K. 1982.
[15] Clinton, S. M. 1984C.
[16] Kant, I. 1965, p. 107.
[17] Kant, I. 1965. 103.
[18] Lonergan, B. 1977.
[19] Edwards, P. 1967, 315.
[20] Craig, W. 1988; Thompson, M. 1990.
[21] cf. Salmon, N. 1983.
[22] cf. Grenz, S. 2000 on the need to keep this door open.
[23] Introduction, p. xxiii.
[24] Heidegger, M. 1971.
[25] cf, Vick, G. 1971.
[26] see the correspondence with Jean Beaufret, 1943.
[27] cf. Borgmann, A. 1968.
[28] Muller, M. 1964.
[29] cf. Collins, J. 1967 synthesis of Kant and Hegel.
[30] quoted in Williams, 1999, pp. 198-99.
[31] Eddington, A. 1907, p. 168.
[32] Frohlich, M. 2002.
[33] cf. Ford, D. 1999 on the worshiping self.
[34] cf. Rahner, K. 1968.
[35] Copp, D. 2002; Fiorenza, F. 1987.
[36] Clinton, S. M. 1984B.
[37] Putnam, H. 1981.
[38] Clinton, S. M. Fall, 1990; Perrett, R. 2003.
[39] Russell, M. 2003; Clinton, S. M. Winter, 1990.
[40] Schwarz, G. 2003.
[41] Agar, N. 2003; Poskaite, L. 2003; Kohlberg, 1981.
[42] Clinton, S. M. Fall, 1990.

[43] Perrett, R. 2003.
[44] Purpel, D.1989.
[45] Clinton, S. M. 1984A.
[46] Clinton, S. M. 1983.
[47] Fiorenza, F. 1987 and Moreland & Craig, 2003.
[48] McKinney, R. 1987.
[49] Henderson, H. 1998.
[50] MacGregor, G. 1973.
[51] Clinton, S. M. 1994.
[52] Culp, J. 2001.
[53] Clinton, S. M. 1988.
[54] Craig, W. 1979, 497-50.,
[55] Moreland & Craig, 2003.
[56] Moreland & Craig, 2003, p. 522.
[57]Hawking, S. 1988, 21, 23.
[58] Ford, D. 1999.
[59] Levinas, E. 1981.
[60] Jungel, E. 1983.
[61] cf. Clinton, S. M. 1996.
[62] Frohlich, M. 2002.
[63] Malik, C. 1980.
[64] Tooley, M. 1997.
[65] De Ruyter, D. 2002.

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