In: *God, Eternity, and Time.* Hg. v. Christian Tapp und Edmund Runggaldier, Farnham: Ashgate 2011, 1–8.

Introduction

Is God in time? If he is, how can he be a perfect being that has created time? If he is not, how can he relate to a temporal creation? These seem highly theoretical questions, of interest only to a small group of philosophers of religion. But in fact, they are closely related to topics that feature widely in theology, metaphysics, and anthropology. Can a timeless God understand our prayers, can he be compassionate with his suffering creatures, can he act in any way in time, and can he be present to creatures – as the biblical image of God has it? Can the knowledge of an infallible, omniscient being change over time? If not, would not the existence of an infallible, omniscient, temporal being preclude human freedom? If God knows now that I shall do *p* tomorrow, am I really free not to do *p* tomorrow?

This volume presents contributions from scholars of world-wide reputation who tackle various aspects of these complex questions. The contributions have been presented and intensely discussed during a conference on *God, Eternity, and Time* held in Berlin September 28–30, 2008.

The **First Part** of this book contains three papers devoted to the analysis and defence of a classical conception of divine timelessness. In his paper, *On Existing All at Once* (pp. 11ff.), Robert Pasnau argues that with respect to traditional conceptions of eternity, one should distinguish carefully between two aspects of timelessness: being "outside of time" (atemporality) and having no temporal parts ('holochronicity', Pasnau's neologism). Atemporality implies holochronicity (what is outside of time cannot have temporal parts), while it is not clear that holochronicity implies atemporality. Pasnau then considers Boethius' traditional definition of eternity as *interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio* (the complete possession all at once of illimitable life). Pasnau takes it for granted that eternity requires holochronicity (which seems to be a perfection), and he asks whether it also requires atemporality. According to Pasnau, Boethius' statement that God is not in time is open to other interpretations than the atemporality of God. If it is understood in the sense of holochronicity, it denies the temporal locatability of changing, merechronic (that is, non-holochronic) entities. This view was, Pasnau points out, evident to Anselm of Canterbury who advocates the thesis that God is in time, but in a holochronic sort of way that makes God immune to temporal change. Pasnau argues that, given that holochronic but temporal existence is possible, this would be a mode of existence much more likely to be a perfection than is holochronicity possessed in virtue of atemporal existence. Moreover, he shows that the contemporary debate about 3- vs. 4-dimensionalism has a striking parallel in medieval times. When medieval philosophers and theologians distinguished between successive and per-

manent entities, they did not necessarily mean that God is the only permanent entity while all of creation is successive (which would have approximated modern 4-dimensionalism). Instead, for instance, Nicole Oresme proposed that creatures are not merechronic *simpliciter*, but merechronic *in a certain respect*: a temporal being's life has successive parts while its essence remains permanent during the succession of the events of its life. Pasnau draws an interesting parallel between the medieval distinction of existence and essence and the modern distinction between perduring through time and enduring (in the sense of a thing's existing wholly at each moment of its existence). Pasnau advocates an Oresme-inspired view that 'the mode of existence manifested by divine eternality is simply the perfect instantiation of a phenomenon displayed by ordinary substances all around us'.

For Eleonore Stump it is beyond dispute that timelessness is a divine perfection. In her paper, *Eternity, Simplicity, and Presence* (pp. 29ff.), she examines arguments for the thesis that the classical doctrines of eternity and simplicity preclude God from being present to human beings and from being known in the ways biblical scriptures presuppose. Those arguments have led some philosophers and theologians to reject the classical doctrines in favour of what they take to be a biblical view. Stump wants to show that this rejection is groundless. To this end, she analyzes what it means for persons to be present to one another. Then she shows that such presence is not ruled out by classical conceptions of eternity like that of Thomas Aquinas. In accord with Aquinas, she rejects arguments based on the principle that to be present to temporal beings requires being temporal oneself. Stump's main reason for rejecting this principle is that the generalization of it (presence generally presupposes a shared mode of being) is completely implausible, even though the affirmation of the generalization seems to be the only reason for accepting the principle with respect to time.

As for the unknowability of God as allegedly implied by the doctrine of divine simplicity, Stump presents several reasons for doubting such an implication. She holds Aquinas to be correct in saying that we cannot know what God is. The impossibility of knowing the *quid est* (a technical term of medieval logic) of God does not rule out every form of positive knowledge about God, for even Aquinas, when explaining divine simplicity in negative terms, relies on several positive claims about God.

If, contrary to her reasoning, divine simplicity did make propositional knowledge of God impossible, then there would still be, Stump says, another kind of knowledge whereby God *could* be known by human beings: the knowledge of persons. While the sentence 'Aquinas knew that God exists' expresses *knowledge that*, the sentence 'Aquinas knew God' expresses *knowledge of persons*. According to Stump's account of knowledge, these two sentences are neither equivalent nor can the second be reduced to the first. Knowledge of persons, Stump says, is a prerequisite for shared attention and, thereby, a precondition for the presence of one person to another. Hence, it is presupposed in biblical stories about God's presence to human beings, but it is in no way affected by divine simplicity. Thus, Stump arrives at her central thesis that the doctrines of divine eternity and simplicity do not imply

that God can be neither present to nor known by human beings in the way the biblical stories presume.

Thomas Schärtl presents an overtly theological argument for divine timelessness in his paper *Why we Need God's Eternity* (pp. 47ff.). Most systematic theologians today are, according to Schärtl, in favour of a temporal conception of God, for eternity as timelessness seems to be incompatible with the interactiveness of the Christian God. Schärtl follows Robert Jenson in his diagnosis that there is also a deeper Christological problem at issue: the intimate relation between Jesus Christ, a temporal person living in Palestine some 2000 years ago, and the *Logos* or Son in the sense of the second person of the Trinity. If God is a non-temporal entity, how can such an identification be possible?

Jenson drew the conclusion that we must conceive of the Trinitarian God in a radically temporal way. He tied the Holy Spirit to the future and read Karl Rahner's famous axiom, that the 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity, as an identity claim. But then, Schärtl complains, we face a modal problem, since the Father is necessarily the Father, but the *Logos* is not necessarily the Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Jenson's account leads to paradox, for it implies that Jesus Christ had once been a future entity for a God whose second person is identical to Jesus Christ. Jenson can solve this problem only by what Schärtl calls 'futurizing' God, making him a future entity. But then is God still a 'temporal' God? Can he be said to be present at any moment of history at all?

Schärtl tries to follow Jenson's incentive to focus on the "Christological frame of reference" while avoiding such *aporias*. He thinks the only way to keep the immediate reference of the Trinitarian *Logos* to Jesus Christ in a stable way is to hold onto a strong concept of co-presence between God and Jesus Christ. This is possible only, Schärtl argues, by employing a concept like Stump and Kretzman's ET-simultaneity (a concept of simultaneity according to which temporally separated events can both be simultaneous to something eternal) and, in consequence, by holding onto the classical doctrine of an eternal God.

Schärtl finds his conclusion especially pressing in case temporal presentism (the thesis that something temporally exists if and only if it is temporally present) is right in that the predicate 'exists' can only be truthfully attributed to present entities. In this case, the possibility of referring to past events may require a mind which is aware of them. This "job" could only be done by an eternal entity which can be termed 'super-present', that is, co-present with all past and future events in the sense of ET-simultaneity. As a result, for Schärtl, the possibility of temporal presentism presses us towards accepting the traditional concept of divine timelessness. This is especially remarkable, as many philosophers have argued that temporal presentism is incompatible with the conception of an atemporal God.

While the First Part of this book is devoted to divine timelessness as conceived by its defenders, the **Second Part** supplements it with two papers devoted to the relation of divine omniscience and human freedom. Both papers show that this important topic in the philosophy of religion is intimately connected with the question of Divine timelessness.

In *Eternity and Fatalism* (pp. 65ff.), Linda Zagzebski examines three kinds of fatalist argument – logical, theological, and causal – and the attempt to escape the dilemma of theological fatalism by appeal to divine timelessness. A fatalist argument is one to the effect that we have no control over future events, and therefore, 'since the past used to be future', over any events whatsoever. Zagzebski finds that all fatalist arguments have certain features in common (like the use of the Transfer of Lack of Control Principle, which transfers having no control over the past to having no control over the future). Zagzebski's primary interest in her paper is in theological fatalism, as sharply distinguished from logical fatalism. Both forms of fatalism argue that we have no control over the future. Logical fatalism says that this is so because the truth values of propositions cannot change. Theological fatalism reaches the same conclusion via the infallibility of God's past beliefs about the future.

Theological fatalism seems to be resolvable by assuming divine timelessness, in that God does not know propositions at certain times and therefore *a fortiori* not in the past. Zagzebski argues that the timelessness move can survive recent objections that do not clearly distinguish logical and theological fatalism, but it falls prey to a parallel fatalist dilemma that does not make use of temporal relations as the standard arguments do. In the end, her conclusion is that although there may be many reasons for Christian philosophers to adhere to divine timelessness, finding a solution to fatalism is not one of them. The crucial point of her argument is that timeless eternity may be outside our control just as the past is. If this is true, one could formulate a dilemma similar to theological fatalism. And although this dilemma presumes the 'necessity of eternity' (its being outside our control), which has a weaker hold in our intuitions than the necessity of the past, the dilemma is worse than theological fatalism in that the 'fall-back position' of qualifying divine omniscience in order to "save" human free will is of no help.

In his *Molina on Foreknowledge and Transfer of Necessities* (pp. 81ff.), Christoph Jäger discusses one of Luis de Molina's (attempted) refutations of the view that divine omniscience and human freedom are incompatible. Theological incompatibilists essentially rely on a certain modal principle, but this principle, Molina argues, is false. Whether this verdict is correct depends on what exactly the principle is. In Jäger's reconstruction, it has the general structure: $Np \wedge \Box(p \rightarrow q) \vdash Nq$, where $\Box$ stands for metaphysical necessity while there are several candidates for N. N cannot reasonably be taken as logical or metaphysical necessity, Jäger argues, for then it could not be applied to the argument Molina wishes to refute (for instance, Molina takes p as the metaphysically contingent proposition 'God knows eternally that Peter will deny Christ the night before crucifixion'). Nor can N be taken as 'accidental necessity', i. e., as a kind of necessity that pertains to states of affairs that are already past (a reading suggested by Alfred Freddoso). For then, Jäger says, the principle would be true. Given Molina's great logical sophistication, an interpretation in terms of accidental necessity would thus be rather unconvincing. Moreover, Jäger argues, such an interpretation would be in strong tension with the general Molinist conception of God as an extratemporal being.

Jäger concludes that *N* should be taken as what he calls 'causal impact (= CI-) necessity', in the sense that a state of affairs *p* is 'CI-necessary' for *S* at *t* iff *S* is not able at *t* to 'contribute causally to something that constitutes, or grounds, a necessary or sufficient condition for *p*'. As an agent performs an action freely only if it is not CI-necessary for him, this reading provides the most charitable reconstruction of the argument that divine omniscience is incompatible with human free will – the argument Molina sets out to refute. Jäger presents two versions of such an argument, one regarding God's 'free knowledge' (which He can have only postvolitionally, i. e., after having decided to actualize a certain possible world) and one regarding God's 'middle knowledge' (a hypothetical kind of knowledge which He is supposed to have (logically) independent of any creative act). However, Molina can rightly reject both versions of the argument, says Jäger. For both versions rely on the aforementioned closure or transfer principle regarding CI-necessity. But, according to Jäger, CI-necessity is indeed not closed under entailment, which is shown by counterexamples in which some state of affairs is causally overdetermined. Jäger concludes his article by drawing a parallel between the closure of accidental, but not CI-necessity, under metaphysically necessary implication on the one hand, and the closure of knowledge, but not belief, under known entailment on the other hand.

Most of the authors in the First Part of this book argue strongly in favour of divine timelessness. The **Third Part** differs in this regard. It consists of three papers that deal to a lesser or greater extent with the question of a "third way" besides purely temporal and purely atemporal accounts of God.

In the first paper of this part, Christian Tapp examines the relationship between the concepts of *Eternity and Infinity* (pp. 99ff.). He distinguishes three senses of infinity (quantitative, comparative, metaphysical) and shows in which sense sempiternalism (the thesis that God is everlasting and not timeless) makes use of quantitative infinity. Then he discusses the comparative use of infinity in the traditional doctrine of God when God is called 'infinitely good' or 'infinitely powerful'. He raises some doubts about whether infinity is needed for the purposes of the threefold traditional way of enunciating divine predicates by *via positiva, negativa et eminentiae*. In order to clarify the third, metaphysical, concept of infinity, he examines Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of divine infinity and divine eternity in some detail. He shows that sometimes Aquinas talks about 'eternity' in the sense of sempiternalism, while at the core of his doctrine of God, eternity is used in the Boethian sense of the complete and perfect possession of illimitable life.

Although Tapp stresses the differences of a quantitative concept of infinity as used in mathematics and the metaphysical concepts, he defends an analogy between mathematical and metaphysical infinity: in mathematics, a set is infinite iff it is equivalent to a proper subset; in the traditional doctrine of God, God is the only entity whose essence coincides with its existence. He concludes his paper with a section which he himself characterizes as 'a little experimental in character'. In this section he critically examines the widely held position that God could either be temporal or timeless but not both. Tapp, however, thinks that 'before' and 'after' refer to an ordering relation which could, for instance, be time extended by an

"infinitely distant" point. By this move, motivated by Christian Eschatology, he also tries to make sense of a statement by Boethius that most contemporary philosophers and theologians think is senseless, namely, that the Trinitarian God existed with His interpersonal relations even 'before creation' ('*ante mundi constitutionem*'). While Tapp considers his closing considerations 'experimental', the next author is well known for a fully worked-out account of relative timelessness.

Under the title *The Difference Creation makes: Relative Timelessness Reconsidered* (pp. 117ff.) Alan G. Padgett presents a review of his conception of relative timelessness, which he has modified to some extent. Relative timelessness attempts to combine the advantages of both the timelessness account and the temporal account of God. The key point is that although God is timeless relative to our space-time world, He is in some way temporal.

According to Padgett, God is timeless in that His infinite dimension of time cannot be measured by our earthly space-time coordinates and He is never subject to the negative effects of time's passage. He is immutable with respect to his essential properties, while in his relations with the world God can change. For Padgett, change and duration are conceptually connected, and so he comes to the conclusion that if God is capable of change (as he must have been when creation came into existence) he must be in some way temporal. In the end, Padgett's position is: before creation and all change God was relatively timeless, i. e., changeless and free of temporal measures. After creation God is omnitemporal, which means that God's time or eternity transcends physical time by being infinite and immeasurable. He is, then, immutable with respect to his essence, but enters into relative change with us, being in some way temporal yet never being bound by time.

In the following chapter *Timeless Action? – Temporality and/or Eternity in God's Being and Acting* (pp. 127ff.), Reinhold Bernhardt presents a genuinely theological perspective on this debate. According to him, it is a datum of Christian faith that God acts: in continuously creating and sustaining the world, in walking with his people as the biblical narratives tell us, and in individual situations of history. Bernhardt takes for granted that a rigid conception of divine timelessness, conceiving of eternity as completely opposed to time, is not compatible with these basic convictions of Christian faith. On the other hand, he is not convinced that temporalists do better – their main danger is to build temporality into their conception of God's nature, losing sight of his transcendence over time. So Bernhardt set out to develop an alternative: God, he says, is not temporal in the sense of creatures which are spatio-temporal entities, but he is also not completely timeless. Instead, God is non-temporal, but intimately related to time as its ground, creator, and encompassing whole.

From a theological point of view, Bernhardt presents a threefold concept of eternity, parallel to the doctrine of the Trinity. He then develops a model of divine action that avoids the shortcomings of the traditional models taken from human action or from natural causality, but that aims at integrating their various advantages. To this end, he introduces the notion of a spiritual force-field that influences human actors. God in the third Trinitarian person of the Holy Spirit acts in this way through the

action of creatures (as in Aquinas's model of the prime cause). The spiritual force-field is not identical to God. It is a mode of His acting. By this move, Bernhardt avoids the lurking danger of pantheism and aims at integrating the concepts of action, as well as causation into one model, which he calls the model of 'operative presence'. In his final reflections on the 'power of weakness' in God's spiritual self-representation, he eventually hints at an answer to the problem of evil.

The **Fourth Part** of this book is devoted to the defence of temporal conceptions of God. The papers of the Third Part opted for a "third way" besides divine timelessness and temporality, mainly for the reason that while they realize the convenience of the traditional timelessness account (as exemplified by the arguments in Part I of this book), they also see the advantages of a temporal picture of God, especially with respect to the biblical stories and the beliefs of "ordinary believers". Not everyone finds this temporal picture compatible with the traditional timelessness account, as, for example, do Eleonore Stump in following Aquinas or Brian Leftow in following Anselm. Therefore, some hold that a Christian position should develop a convincing temporal conception of God as, for example, the influential British philosopher of religion Richard Swinburne does. This is what the Fourth and last Part is devoted to. It could also be termed 'dialogue with natural science', for the two papers of this section stand in intimate relation to positions advocated by many natural scientists.

In his paper *Divine Eternity and Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity* (pp. 145ff.), William Lane Craig deals with an argument to the effect that the Special Theory of Relativity (STR) conflicts with a temporal conception of God. For if STR is correct in its description of time then, allegedly, there is no absolute time but only time relative to inertial frames. But it is impossible to choose a particular inertial frame as God's frame or to associate God with all the times of all the frames. So it seems to be impossible that God be temporal if STR is correct. Craig assesses this argument by focusing on two of its premisses: (1) that STR's description of time is correct and (2) that if its description is correct, then God could be temporal only if associated with a particular inertial frame or a set of inertial frames. Concerning (2) Craig argues that while STR is a limited theory, the General Theory of Relativity (GTR) has shown how a 'cosmic time' can be defined by a preferred slicing (in the model) of the universe. So even if STR is correct within its limits, it does not require us to associate God with the times of inertial frames. Concerning (1) Craig provides a fascinating analysis going back to Newton's absolute time. Craig charges that Einstein's rejection of Newton's absolute conceptions and, in fact, all of STR relies on a verificationist theory of meaning. And as verificationism has been proven untenable, an Einsteinian rejection of Newtonian absolute time has no sound foundation but is based upon mere stipulation. Craig is keen not to take sides with Newtonian absolute time or a temporal conception of God. He nevertheless refutes an argument against both, trying to keep open the possibility of maintaining a Lorentzian interpretation of the relativistic nature of space and time, according to which a temporal God would determine the existence of a preferred reference frame of absolute time.

The paper of Hans Kraml, *Eternity in Process Philosophies* (pp. 157ff.), deals with philosophical ontologies which are especially popular among natural scientists. Kraml strongly opts in favour of an ontological pluralism. According to his analysis, we use different ontologies in our everyday lives, depending on the purposes pursued in concrete situations. For an analysis of time, he considers process ontologies to be best suited, but he also claims, a little surprisingly perhaps, that they are largely compatible with an Aristotelian account of time. In this perspective, time is something that beings which act in the world abstract from processes in correlating their activities with their plans. Then God's eternity becomes the actuality of processes – an idea which fits much better with the scholastic idea of God as *actus purus* than the static concept of a *nunc stans*. Moreover, Kraml presents *en passant* some arguments against scientific reductionism. According to him, the language of science and even the metalanguage of philosophy are meaningful only because of their connections to our everyday language – one more argument for taking our everyday ontological pluralism seriously.

What, then, is time, what is eternity, and how do they relate to each other? This book shows that philosophy has in a sense proceeded much farther than where it stood in the times of St Augustine, who coined the famous words: 'What then is time? If no one asks me, I know, if I want to explain it to someone who asks, I do not know' (*Confessions* XI). While Augustine's statement is surely true for many of us in our everyday lives, philosophical and theological deliberation has advanced since his time. New insights shed more light on the nature of time, even if they may not combine to a full explanation of what time is.

When Ludwig Wittgenstein commented on the above statement of St Augustine in his *Philosophical Investigations*, he wrote: 'Something that we know when no one asks us, but no longer know when we are supposed to give an account of it, is something that we need to remind ourselves of' (Aphorism 89). The modest aim of this book is to serve as such a philosophical reminding.

Christian Tapp