



An Essay on Divine Eternity and Divine Presence

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Abstract

The belief that an eternal-atemporal God is present to temporal beings is at the heart of Christian doctrine. The problem with such belief is that there seems to be a metaphysical barrier between them. Therefore, the doctrine of divine timelessness is incompatible with divine presence. This essay will show that such a contention is false, given that His awareness of the temporal beings will be sufficient to account for His presence. Furthermore, this is also consistent with the view about the existence of deep interaction between God and human beings and of human free will. This philosophical analysis is pertinent to the proper understanding of the doctrine of divine eternity and divine presence. It also has a significant bearing on the provision for the basis of a meaningful conversation with other theological traditions, such as those living in Indonesia.

Keywords: divine eternity, divine presence, divine timelessness, free will.

Abstrak

Keyakinan bahwa Allah yang abadi dan atemporal hadir kepada makhluk yang temporal berada di pusat ajaran kristiani. Persoalan filosofis dari keyakinan ini adalah adanya batasan metafisik di antara keduanya sehingga ajaran tentang Allah yang atemporal tidak sejalan dengan ajaran tentang kehadiran-Nya kepada makhluk yang temporal. Risalah ini akan menunjukkan bahwa kesimpulan tersebut salah mengingat bahwa kehadiran-Nya dalam bentuk kesadaran sudah cukup memberi penjelasan. Lebih dari itu, pandangan ini juga sejalan dengan ajaran tentang adanya interaksi mendalam antara Allah dan manusia dan tentang kehendak bebas manusia. Risalah filosofis ini tidak hanya relevan dalam memperjelas makna ajaran tentang keabadian dan kehadiran Allah, namun juga secara signifikan memberi landasan bagi sebuah percakapan yang mendalam dengan berbagai tradisi teologis seperti yang hidup di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: keabadian Allah, kehadiran Allah, keilahian di luar waktu, kehendak bebas.

Introduction

God is eternal and the world at which human beings live is not. That is at least the simplest form of one of the Christian beliefs which is present ubiquitously either in the liturgy, in the teaching of the church or even in the daily conversation. God's eternity is one of many divine attributes in the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, how we should understand this doctrine, in particular with regard to the understanding about the relation between the eternal God and the temporal world, is not obvious. To some people, the doctrine of divine eternity rules out God's being present to temporal beings. This is surely contrary to the portrayal of God in the bible where, in both the Old and the New Testament, he reveals himself and closely interacts with temporal beings. In this essay, in order to understand the doctrines of divine eternity and divine presence, I will discuss two different views about the relationship between divine eternity, which is understood as divine timelessness, and God's being present to temporal beings. This essay will focus on the argument of William Hasker on the one hand, and Eleonore Stump and Thomas D. Senor on the other. Hasker (1989, 2022) argues that if eternity is understood as timelessness, there is a metaphysical barrier between an eternal God and temporal beings so that God

cannot metaphysically be present to them. In contrast, Stump and Senor (1981; Stump, 2011, 2016) assert that the doctrine of divine timelessness does not necessarily rule out God's being present to temporal beings. The eternal God is a God who is intimately present to temporal entities.

This essay has four parts: First, it will clarify the notion of God's eternity according to the atemporal account. Second, it will discuss this question: if God's eternity is understood as atemporal or timeless, it raises the question: how could a timeless being closely interact with temporal being, because there is an ontological barrier between these two different modes of existence? Third, it will discuss the follow-up question: if in fact God can interact with temporal beings, especially if God can know temporal events and entities at all times, it raises the question whether God's timeless foreknowledge rules out human free will and whether or not the atemporal account of divine eternity brings any benefit to the problem of foreknowledge and free will. Fourth, in the end of the essay, I will conclude that the atemporal account of God's eternity is intelligible and does not rule out God's being present to temporal beings but we must be careful about how we use our ordinary language, that naturally has a temporal sense, to describe the atemporal being.

This essay should be relevant both for theologians, who almost every day concern with divine attributes in their works, and for non-theologians, who also use the term of eternal God virtually every day. It will give them a better understanding about the possibility of the presence of an eternal God to the temporal being. Although the explanation provided in this essay refers to the Christian tradition, it is however not an interpretation of the bible or the tradition. The essay is instead based on a rigorous philosophical analysis and thereby would be relevant for a wider range of readers, in particular when it is distributed to those who come from different religious backgrounds such as those that live in Indonesia. However, this does not mean that this essay is not relevant in particular to the fundamental Christian theology. It is hoped that the essay will provide a basic understanding about the interaction between an eternal God and the temporal beings which is central either in the liturgy, biblical studies and pastoral theology. A clear philosophical understanding about the doctrine of divine eternity and divine interaction to the temporal beings is necessary for a better theological understanding both within the Christian tradition and in the conversation with other religious traditions.

The Doctrine of God's Eternity

Regarding the relationship between God and time, the doctrine of God's eternity could be understood in two different ways. God's eternity could be understood that God exists in time but His existence has no beginning and end. This view of eternity is usually called "the everlastingness account"; it is related to another similar view called "sempiternalism", according to which God exists at every point of time. Intuitively, it seems that there is nothing wrong with these views taken together: God, who is everlasting, experiences things and events at every point of time. This view is, however, not the main concern of the present essay.

The reason why this essay (and perhaps most essays on this topic) does not discuss this view of God's eternity is because it seems that it does not have the philosophically interesting problem of divine interaction to temporal beings. If an eternal God is in time and temporal beings are also in time, there is no temporal, viz. metaphysical, barrier between them. Nevertheless, such a view does not escape from some problems. Brian Leftow (2005, pp. 51-52), for instance, contends that these views, sempiternalism and everlastingness, are incoherent given the premise of the finite interval of time. If God exists in time and the interval of time is finite, then God has a beginning and an end. Thus, he concludes that

sempiternalist must admit the stronger thesis that there is an infinite interval of time and that God exists at this infinite amount of time.

Another way to understand God's eternity, the one which is discussed in this essay, is that God exists not in time and his existence cannot be measured by time. This view is usually called the atemporal or timeless account. Eleonore Stump's and Norman Kretzmann's publication, "Eternity" (1981), is the critical milestone in the area of analytic philosophy of religion which has been preoccupied with the issue of coherence between divine timelessness and God's presence to temporal beings. Their account of divine eternity is mainly inspired by the work of Boethius who defines eternity as "the complete possession all at once of illimitable life" (Boethius, 1999 Book V.6 as cited in Stump and Kretzmann, 1981, p. 430). In her recent Aquinas Lecture (2016), Stump presents a similar argument which is now based on Thomas Aquinas's view. Aquinas, echoing Boethius, proposed that divine eternity can mainly be understood by two things: God's interminability and insuccessivity. Aquinas expressed this contention explicitly: "Thus eternity is known from two sources: first, because what is eternal is interminable—that is, has no beginning nor end (that is, no term either way); secondly, because eternity has no succession, being simultaneously whole" (*ST* 1.10.1 resp.).

To be clear, let us elaborate certain important characteristics that describe divine eternity as argued in the joint article of Stump and Kretzmann in 1981 and in her more recent lecture. These characteristics have been analysed also by Thomas D. Senior (2009, p. 40).

Atemporality

Echoing the view of Boethius and Aquinas, Stump and Kretzmann are of the opinion that eternity must be understood as atemporality or timelessness. To be atemporal is to be without temporal extension and duration. It is to be in a mode of existence that is neither locatable in time nor expandable over a span of time. When we say that God has the property of atemporality or timelessness, we mean that God is not in time and cannot be measured by time.

Interminability

God's being eternal also means that God's life is interminable. With regard to time, to be interminable is to be in a mode of existence that does not have temporal parts, such as beginning and end, or past, present and future. God's eternal life is not like a human's life which has a beginning and an end. However, with regard to our concept of time, in God's life, we can understand "God's time" as analogical to our conception of "present". In the ordinary understanding about time which corresponds to the A-theory of time, time passes or flows, and we can split time into three temporal orders: past, present and future (Natalja Deng, 2018, 2019); but in God's life there is only one kind, because everything and every event are all at once, namely at "present", analogically speaking. Interminability, thus, means that there are no temporal parts in God's life, but only "present".

Insuccessivity

To be insuccessive, or lack succession, is a mode of being that does not have a sequential series of time. In relation to the previous characteristic, it is worth, however, to keep in mind that the fact that God's life is interminable does not necessarily imply that God's life is insuccessive. It could be the case that, even if God's life cannot be divided into its parts temporally, it is not impossible that there could be some logical-sequential orders or succession, like earlier than, simultaneous with or later than.

According to Stump and Kretzmann, however, this is not how Boethius and Aquinas understood God's eternity. On their view, in God's life, there is no temporal order or any succession, such as past – present – future or earlier than – simultaneous with – later than; though later on in this essay I will show that with regard to God's knowledge of temporal entities and events the atemporal account should involve the logical orders (Stump 2016, p. 60). For the moment, however, we maintain that, according to the atemporal account the whole life of an eternal God is all at once, at one occasion without beginning, middle or end. In eternity, all "events" are at once. Thus, it seems, that these authors understood God's interminability to be equivalent to God's insuccessivity. God's life is interminable and therefore insuccessive, and *vice versa*.

Life

The life of eternal God should not be understood as having biological life but having a mental life and being capable of action. (On Senor's terminology, "God's life" is understood as God's having a *cognitive* life (2008, p. 40). However, "cognitive" is, I think, not the proper word to express the thought that God is capability to know and act, since it seems that such a capability requires material body, whereas God is usually understood as not having such a contingency. Therefore, the word "mental" is, I think, the better one, since God's knowing, perceiving and acting are His mental activities which do not necessarily require the existence of material body.) Since the eternal God is atemporal, he should not have temporal sequences in his mental life and his action. This, however, may create confusion since being able to know something requires perceiving an effect after it has occurred; and being able to do something requires something else to be done. In a later section of this essay, I will clarify the point in relation to this issue of divine knowledge of temporal events.

One may argue that God being timeless implies that divine existence is a static and isolated instant. Stump, however, contends that a timeless God is a God who endures beyond all ages; this means that God's interminability should be understood as an interminability of unending duration and not as a static and isolated instant (Stump and Kretzmann 1981, p. 430). It is a life without succession but with infinite atemporal persistence or atemporal duration in which the term "duration" should be understood analogically with our duration (cf. Stump 2016, pp. 58-59).

The point in the previous paragraph may raise the question of the relationship between an eternal God and all things in all of time. The key concept about such a relationship proposed by Stump and Kretzmann (1981, p. 439) is that, since in God's life there is only "present", the relation between an eternal entity and anything temporal must be a sort of simultaneity. They called this special form of simultaneity between what is eternal and temporal "ET-simultaneity". Their definition of ET-simultaneity between the range of entities and events, x and y , is as follows:

(ET) For every x and for every y , x and y are ET-simultaneous, if and only if

- (i) either x is eternal and y is temporal, or vice versa; and
- (ii) for some observer, A , in the unique eternal reference frame, x and y are both present-i.e., either x is eternally present and y is observed as temporally present, or vice versa; and

- (iii) for some observer, *B*, in one of the infinitely many temporal reference frames, *x* and *y* are both present- i.e., either *x* is observed as eternally present and *y* is temporally present, or vice versa.

(ET) says about the eternal and temporal events as the followings: condition (ii) says that any temporal entity or event which is observed by an eternal observer, *A*, as present is ET-simultaneous to the eternal event(s). And condition (iii) says that any eternal event which is observed by a temporal observer, *B*, as eternally present is ET-simultaneous with every temporal event and entity. Each of the two temporal events can be ET-simultaneous with one and the same eternal event, but the temporal events are not necessarily ET-simultaneous. It means that on the one hand, every temporal event is ET-simultaneous with the whole eternal life of God; and on the other, the whole eternity is ET-simultaneous with each temporal event, as that event is actually occurring in the temporal now.

They explain that there are three relationships between the relata of ET-simultaneity: *symmetric*, *non-reflexive* and *non-transitive*. ET-simultaneous is *symmetric*: For all entities or events, *x* and *y*, either of which is eternal or temporal, if *x* is ET-simultaneous to *y*, then *y* must be ET-simultaneous to *x*. It is *non-reflexive*: There is no temporal or eternal entity or event which is ET-simultaneous to itself. It is also *non-transitive*: The conjoin proposition between “*x* is ET-simultaneous to *y*” and “*y* is ET-simultaneous to *z*”, does not entail “*x* is ET-simultaneous to *z*”. For example, my two sequential actions, (1) raising my hand and (2) saying a prayer, are not ET-simultaneous because both actions are temporal. Event (1) is, however, ET-simultaneous to event (3), God’s perceiving me raising my hand; and event (2) is also ET-simultaneous to event (4), God’s perceiving me saying a prayer. But (3) and (4) must be understood as *an* eternal event which cannot be granted as “simultaneous” as in the temporal understanding. According to (ET), therefore, temporal and ET-simultaneity belong to two different categories.

Even if there is any such relationship of simultaneity between the eternal and the temporal event, it does not mean that God is present to the temporal entity or the temporal entity to God. William Hasker, echoing the view of St. Anselm, argues that there is such a barrier between two kinds of existence and it is impossible for God to break through this barrier. He calls it “Anselm’s Barrier”. The next section will explore Hasker’s position on this issue.

Anselm’s Barrier and the Atemporalists’ Response

Hasker (1989, p. 169) argues that if God is atemporal, he cannot be present to a temporal entity, for example to human beings. For Hasker, to be present to temporal entities requires being temporal oneself. He grounds his argument on what Anselm wrote: “You were not, therefore, yesterday, nor will you be tomorrow, but yesterday and today and tomorrow you are. Indeed, you exist neither yesterday nor today nor tomorrow but are absolutely outside all time,” (Anselm 1965, p. 141). It implies that while God knows temporal realities, his knowledge is not in time, and while God performs actions that have temporal consequences, the acts themselves are not temporal. Hasker (2002, p. 183) calls this “Anselm’s Barrier”: God neither exists, knows nor acts in time.

Hasker is of the opinion that, since there is a barrier between God and temporal events and, since a direct awareness of temporal events requires an existence in time, God cannot know temporal events directly. In turn, neither temporal events can be present to God nor God to temporal entities. He writes, “In God’s timeless eternity, nothing exists in temporal succession, so how can temporal events and

processes, whose very essence involves temporal succession, exist there? If they do so exist, does that mean we are mistaken in thinking about them as essentially temporal?" (Hasker, 1988, p. 389)

To make his argument clearer, Hasker (2002) formalizes his thoughts as follows (p. 186):

1. If God is directly aware of a thing, that thing is metaphysically present to God. (Premise)
2. If God knows temporal beings, God knows all of their temporal stages. (Premise)
3. If God is directly aware of temporal beings, all of their temporal stages are metaphysically present to God. (From 1–2)
4. If the temporal stages of a temporal being are metaphysically present to God, they are present either sequentially or simultaneously. (Premise)
5. If God is timeless, nothing is present to God sequentially. (Premise)
6. If God is timeless and is directly aware of temporal beings, all their temporal stages are simultaneously metaphysically present to God. (From 3–5)
7. If the temporal stages of a temporal being are simultaneously metaphysically present to God, those stages exist simultaneously. (Premise)
8. The temporal stages of a temporal being do not exist simultaneously. (Premise)
9. If God is timeless, God is not directly aware of temporal beings. (From 6–8)

Thomas D. Senor (2009) has taken a closer look at this complex argument and concluded that it is mistaken. In my opinion, premise (1) and (2), and therefore (3) seem to be the most critical ones for this inference since they provide a fundamental requirement for God to have a direct awareness of things, and therefore he is present to temporal beings. Let us take a closer look at these premises.

The first problem which lies in the premises (1) to (3) is the blurred relation between knowing something and being aware of it. It seems that Hasker assumes that if God knows something, God is being aware of it, and *vice versa*. This surely needs more ramification whether this assumption is true, which I cannot handle in this present essay. One remark on this point is, however, of semantics: First, the utterance "I know that *p*", does not necessarily have the same intention to the utterance "I am aware of (the fact that) *p*". It seems that there is no entailment relationship between them as well. Second, if, perhaps, the first form necessarily requires some form of presentness of the object being known, the second one does not. These things are worth to discuss. However, for the sake of the argument, let us grant Hasker's assumption to be true.

The more serious problem lies in the premise (1) as it is conceptually problematic. As Senor (2009, p. 54) argues, it is not clear what exactly "direct" means. If it means epistemically direct, epistemic directness does not necessarily imply metaphysical directness. It is still arguable to think that there is an agent who knows an object directly even if this object is not metaphysically present. Yet, the notion of metaphysically present is unclear. Addressing this criticism, Hasker (2002, p. 186) clarifies the sense of "metaphysical presence" as the literal presence of the thing in question, in its own proper being, and not merely being "epistemically present". He explains it with this example: "the moments we spent a loved one who is now far away may be epistemically present to us but is certainly not metaphysically present, as she would be if she were sitting across the room from us." Thus, it seems that for Hasker the literal presence of things is the ultimate solution to the Anselm's Barrier.

However, even if the atemporalists, those who define divine eternity as divine timelessness, accept Hasker's position, premise (1) is also not conceptually true. Premise (1) is not a claim about epistemic agency in general but in fact it is only an *ad hoc* claim about divine epistemic agency so that the

argument can escape Anselm's Barrier. This surely raises doubts about God's epistemic agency. The question arises is relating to why it is true for God but not for other epistemic agents (Senor 2009, 55). Premise (1) is then still far from clear and, therefore, should be questioned.

Considering premise (2), atemporalists will not reject it because for them all temporal events are present to an eternal God, all at once. All temporal events are present to and known by God in his eternal life. They will even say that God knows us better than ourselves because, for God, all our life stages, either in the past, the present or the future, are present simultaneously to God.

From (1) and (2) one can infer the following: Hasker asserts, as I have mentioned, that direct awareness requires direct perception of the object *as it is*. If something is metaphysically present to God, that thing must be present to God *as it is*. No matter how obvious it is that all temporal objects or events occur in time, they have their temporal extension or temporal stages. However, in the life of an eternal God there is no such thing as temporal extension or stages and, therefore, it is impossible for temporal things to be present to God as they are; rather, they are present to God only in their representation. God's awareness of temporal things is therefore an awareness of representation of temporal objects. Consequently, temporal objects are not metaphysically present to God and God does not have a direct awareness of temporal objects as they are.

However, this inference raises a general question in the field of epistemology. Does direct awareness and direct perception of an object, in one of the forms of metaphysical presence, require the presence of that object *as it is*? Senor (2009, pp. 54-55) gives a negative answer to this question. To use an example raised by Senor, let us consider the physical presence and properties of an everyday object such as a mug. The representational appearance of the shape and the colour of the mug for the observer could be elliptical and red, for example; though in fact these are not the actual shape and colour (the mug is in fact round, not elliptical and there is a red light shines on the white mug). This shows us that the object an agent perceives is distinct from the physical object. Yet this appearance, the representational mug as the observer perceives, is the direct object of agent's awareness. Therefore, direct perception does not require perfect and accurate perception; it requires only that perception is not mediated by other perceived objects. This view means that an agent can have metaphysical and epistemic directness, even if one's awareness is not of the object as it really is. Even if, for example, the agent is colour-blind so that the mug appears to him/her monochromatically, the mug is still metaphysically present to him/her.

The lesson we learn from the above example is that God's awareness of temporal entities does not make him temporal; he has that awareness in his eternal life. God's awareness is also not necessarily awareness of things as they are; rather, divine awareness of things is a direct cognizance of representational objects. However, as theists believe (and I consider Hasker too), God is omniscience, he knows how the objects are, he knows that the objects are temporal and sequential. God's inability to be temporal does not prevent him having a direct awareness of all temporal objects which exist.

At this point we have some explanations for how a timeless being has a direct awareness of temporal things without necessarily being temporal. It means that Senor (2009) and Stump (2011), echoing Aquinas, do not accept that God cannot break through the metaphysical barrier. For them, temporal things which God knows or should know are present to God because he is aware of their existence. In God's eternal awareness even all temporal events, past, present and future, are present to God as a "present event". God knows everything in time.

Many theists will probably not be satisfied with the idea that God is merely aware of existence of temporal beings; instead, they require that God has an intimate relationship with temporal beings. As variously mentioned in the biblical stories, God can respond to what human beings do and to what happens in the world. God can even change his mind, for example, when he did not carry out the punishment, he had intended to impose on the Ninevites (cf. Jn. 3:10). The next section shall give some explanations on how it is possible that God's foreknowledge and his action, in some sense, depend on temporal events. As a result, it shall make the intimate relationship between God and temporal entities, particularly human beings, clear.

God's Interaction with Temporal Beings

As mentioned above, according to the atemporalists, eternity and temporality are two different modes of existence. God lives in eternity and human beings live in time. The relationship between these two modes of existence is ET-simultaneity. In the life of an eternal God, every moment of time is present to him all at once. He knows every temporal event as it is occurring without necessarily being temporal himself. Even though the atemporal account is plausible, the interlocutors may raise the pressing question whether there are benefits of this account for a better understanding about God's foreknowledge and human's free will. William Hasker, one of the prominent interlocutors, provides some argument that the atemporal account does not bring any benefit at all. Let us discuss his argument and see what the atemporalists' response.

Common-traditional theist believes that God's foreknowledge is compatible with human's free will. One is compatible with another means that there is no logical inconsistency between them. Having foreknowledge is one of God's properties. In its robust definition, foreknowledge involves necessity, as it is formulated by St. Thomas Aquinas: "...But this is a true conditional proposition, "If God knew that this thing will be, it will be," for the knowledge of God is only of true things. Now the antecedent conditional of this is absolutely necessary, because it is eternal, and because it is signified as past. Therefore, the consequent is also absolutely necessary. Therefore, whatever God knows, is necessary; and so, the knowledge of God is not of contingent things." (ST 1.14.13.o.2) According to this quotation, the foreknowledge of God (FK) has the following form:

- (FK)
1. Necessarily, [if God has known that *p*, then *p*].
 2. Necessarily, if God has known that *p*, then necessarily *p*.
 3. Necessarily, God has known that *p*.
 4. Therefore, necessarily, *p*.

Necessity involved by foreknowledge is the main problem for compatibilism since it shows that God's foreknowledge precludes human free will. But what is actually human freedom or free will? Though it is conceptually a complex matter, this following stipulation about human free will (FW) could help us (cf. Basinger, 1986, p. 416).

- (FW)
- A subject *S* at time *t* has free will with regard to the action *A*, if and only if,
- (i) *S* at time *t* has power to choose to perform or not to choose to perform the action *A*, and
 - (ii) there is no other power that is not in *S* that determines *S* to choose to perform or not to choose to perform the action *A*.

According to (i), the subject *S* is free to choose to perform the action *A* only under the condition that *S* has the meaningful power to choose to perform *A*. If, for example, Jones, a former sprinter, broke his legs and he knew that he cannot run again, he may have the choice to take part in the marathon competition but his choice is meaningless, since the power to take part in the competition is not in him. However, if his choice is meaningful, it is in his power that he will or will not take part in the competition. While (i) states that free will involves a meaningful power to choose which is in *S*, (ii) indicates that one's choice must be indeterminate, so that the future events are open or contingent and not like the past events which are necessary. Though the alternatives are limited to human conditions, from the present perspective, in the future there are alternatives for which human can choose. The future is not determined by other beings, such as God, how it should be but it depends on human free will.

Those who say that God's foreknowledge (or in general, God's omniscience) and human free will are incompatible should provide an argument either for the claim that if (FK) is true, then (FW) is false, or vice versa. In the first case, given the truth of (FK), one should provide the argument that any human choices are just illusions. There are some more complex arguments, but I think the words from St. Thomas Aquinas represent it very well. He wrote in *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate* 24.1.13: "Whatever God foreknows must necessarily come about, since God's foreknowledge cannot be in error. But God foreknows all human acts. They therefore come about of necessity, and so man is not endowed will free choice in his action" (See Zagzebski 2017)

Those who accept this argument, however, must also accept the doctrine of determinism which roughly says that "every event is necessitated by antecedent events and conditions together with the laws of nature" (Hoefler 2016). Some incompatibilists would not be content to accept determinism and one possible way to deal with the problem is to modify the thesis of God's omniscience. Thus, in the second case, the incompatibilists should argue that, given the premise that (FW) is true, it cannot be the case that God's omniscience entails his knowing of all true propositions, but only of those which is for him logically possible to know. The proposition about true future contingent events, such as that "God has always believed that Clarence [a name of any person] will have a cheese omelette tomorrow", is not part of God's knowledge, even though it is in fact true that Clarence will have a cheese omelette tomorrow (cf. Hasker 1989, p. 69). Future events are *there* and God cannot know them.

There are surely many strategies for the compatibilists to defend their view. However, one which is relevant to this present essay is the strategy of the atemporalists. For the interlocutors of the atemporal account, it is important to show whether the atemporal account of God's eternity has a significant contribution to solve this problem (Hasker 1989, p. 172).

Together with the atemporalists, the interlocutors of the atemporal account may grant that God in eternity has foreknowledge of temporal beings and entities, such that God has a timeless foreknowledge. In other words, (FK) is true. It seems, therefore, plausible to say that at t_1 , God has known timelessly that Jones at t_2 will do a certain action *A*. Given the premise of divine omniscience, then, it is true that Jones at t_2 will do the action *A*. Since in God's eternal knowledge, pastness, presentness and futurity are all present at once, the action *A* will have occurred or is necessary (in the sense of "unalterable"). However, the very same action, *A*, in Jones's temporal perspective, is a contingent future event. Given the truth of (FW), it implies that it is in Jones's power whether to choose to perform *A* or not. Therefore, as Hasker (1989, p. 176) concludes, "[There are things that God timelessly believes which are such that it is in my power, now, to bring it about that God does not timelessly believe those things.]"

It seems that, according to Hasker's conclusion, the atemporal account of God's eternity solves the problem of incompatibility between foreknowledge and free will. However, the game is not over yet. It is still suspicious, whether this contention provides some benefit to a better understanding of God's intimate relationship with temporal being, such as in the problems of divine providence, prophecy and petitionary prayer. The problem is, according to Hasker, even if in God's knowledge there is no temporal order, God's knowledge must involve a logical order. God's knowledge of a future event must be derived from the actual occurrence of it, but he cannot use this knowledge to determine his own action(s) which is/are prior to the event. In Hasker's words, "...it is impossible that God should use a foreknowledge derived from the actual occurrence of future events to determine his own prior actions..." (1989, p. 176). If this is true, then the atemporal account of God's eternity brings no benefit to a better understanding of divine providence of the world. Such an account of God's foreknowledge is useless.

In her Aquinas Lecture and her recent article, Stump (2016, pp. 68-70; 2019, pp. 21-36) however argues that this conclusion is mistaken. First, she contends that Hasker's conclusion, that "There are things that God timelessly believes which are such that it is in my power, now, to bring it about that God does not timelessly believe those things", (Stump, p. 70) is impossible. It is impossible for God, first to believe that *p* and then not-*p*, because, according to the doctrine of eternity, there is no succession in God's life. Stump (2019, p. 27) also states that "If there are things that God believes in the eternal present, those are the things that God believes, and it is not possible for him to believe things different from those. A fortiori, it is not in anyone's power in the temporal present to bring it about that in the eternal present God believes things different from those he believes [had believed?] in the eternal present."

In Stump's view, the problem of the incompatibility of (FK) and (FW) should have a different treatment. According to ET, so she argues, (FK) is ET-simultaneous to every temporal event but (FK) is not in time. God's knowledge of temporal events does not imply that his knowledge is in time. God's knowledge of the future temporal events requires that the corresponding future events has obtained. With respect to God, every temporal event, either in the past, at present or in the future, is all at eternal present. And God's knowledge is necessary: "Necessarily, [if God has known that *p*, then *p*]". According to the doctrine of eternity, this should hold. If (FK) does not hold, or if it is "Necessarily, then not-*p*", that *p* must not be part of God's eternal knowledge. In the perspective of the temporal being, however, that future events are still open: whether it is *p* or not-*p*. With respect to us *now*, so she argues, the future events are not fixed, while the past ones are. It is now in the temporal being's power whether it is *p* or not-*p*. Thus, (FW) holds.

According to the (FK),

(1') "Necessarily, [if God has known that *Paul mows in 2096*, then *Paul mows in 2096*]"
(Plantinga 1986, p. 239)

follows that

(4') "Necessarily, *Paul mows in 2096*";

But (1') does not follow that

(4'') "It is now necessarily, that *Paul mows in 2096*".

(4'') states that the future events are fixed. But with respect to us, whether (4'') is true or not, it depends on whether or not *Paul mows in 2096*. The power to determine whether or not *Paul mows in 2096* is in Paul's hand. The future events are still open and undetermined.

With respect to us, therefore, (FW) requires that it could be true that *it is not the case that Paul mows in 2096*. However, this supposition cannot make (1') false, since if it were true that *it is not the case that Paul mows in 2096*, God's knowledge must have a different content, such as:

(1'') "Necessarily, [if God has known that *it is not the case that Paul mows in 2096*, then *it is not the case that Paul mows in 2096*]"

Thus, so Stump (2019, p. 30) concludes, "God's knowledge in the eternal present of events future with respect to us is compatible with human free will in those future events."

Second, Stump admits that there is a logical dependence between the occurrence of an event *E* at t_1 and God's knowledge of *E*: God knows *E* because *E* occurs at t_1 . However, given the premise of ET-simultaneity between the eternal and all temporal events, in eternity God also wills to exercise causal influence at times prior to t_1 so that *E* occurs at t_1 ; thus, *E* happens at t_1 in part because of what God wills at times prior to t_1 . God's knowledge of event *E* depends logically on the occurrence of *E* and the occurrence of *E* depends in part on the God's causal influence at times prior to t_1 . However, as Stump (2016, p. 69) concludes, God's knowledge of *E* includes the knowledge of his own causal influence on things that helped to bring about event *E* at t_1 , therefore, God's knowledge of *E* does not preclude God's acting in time in such a way as to influence *E*. In contrast to Hasker's conclusion, according to Stump's account, God's foreknowledge does depend on the occurrence of the future event and it is possible for God to use his foreknowledge to determine his own logically-prior actions.

At this point we have seen that the atemporal account of God's eternity is intelligible, that is, that God's timeless knowledge about future events does not rule out human free will and God can use his knowledge of the temporal events in part to shape his action with regard to temporal beings in the world. Furthermore, Stump deals with one more specific problem: how could God as a timeless being personally interact with human being in time, since it seems metaphysically impossible for a timeless God to be present in time if these two modes of existence are irreducible? To my knowledge, she deals deeply with this problem in her book *Wandering in Darkness* (2010) and her Aquinas Lecture (2016, pp. 70-75). To give a plausible solution to this problem she brings a fresh conception of personal presence from psychology, the so called "joint or shared attention". She contends that if two or more human beings come together and they are in a such situation where there is a cognitive state of shared attention between them, they are personally present to each other. We might think that having a "shared attention" requires sensory organs, so that we can see and/or hear and/or speak to each other, etc. However, Stump (2016, p. 72) argues that the sensory modality is not necessary, but instead for her "mutual interior awareness is sufficient." Using this conception of personal presence to answer the problem, she argues that God's being timeless does not rule out his ability to have an interior awareness to temporal beings. In eternity, he can give the full and deep attention to all human being at all times (Stump 2010, pp. 108-119).

In another article, Stump (2013, pp. 29-53), echoing St. Thomas Aquinas, argues that in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which is central in Christian theology, God has the access to human being's mind, so that he has the proportional and personal knowledge of the person. The indwelling of

the Holy Spirit, however, can only be found if the person has faith and love of God. This notion, so she argues, seems to give an explanatory power to the claim about the intimate relationship between God and the person of faith. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit to the person of faith and love of God makes the person possible to know God, so that there is a mutual presence between God and the person. In her opinion, the ultimate goal of this mutual presence by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is unity between God and the person of faith.

In my view, however, it is still unclear how this unity must be understood. The problem is that the notion of unity involves a reductive assumption about two beings which is contrary to the atemporal notion of God's eternity. It is difficult to understand the unity between God and the person of faith without the assumption of the reduction of both existences, either both of them are becoming one existence: God is becoming a person or the person is becoming divine (God-alike), or the unity transforms them into another existence, such as an ultra-human being. These options are all assuming that there is a reduction between the two beings. In my opinion, however, to describe how God in his atemporal existence can be present to the temporal beings, the notion of mutual awareness is sufficient, since it must not assume that one being is reducible to another.

Critical Remarks and Conclusion

In this essay, I have discussed two different views on whether the doctrine of divine timelessness rules out the view that God is present to temporal beings. Doubts in this regard presented by Hasker have been answered by Stump and Senor. Against Hasker's claim, they argue that there is no difficulty to accept that a timeless God can be present to temporal beings.

Even if some problems are clear, the authors I have discussed employ ordinary language but with special meaning. Stump, for example, uses the words "present", "simultaneous" and "duration", but she uses those words interchangeably. In some occasions, she uses them for God and in others she employs the same words for temporal beings. This will, however, create problems. Let us discuss briefly one phrase she uses, "atemporal duration". In her Aquinas Lecture, Stump (2016, pp. 58-59) writes, "... the concept of eternity...is the concept of a life without succession but with infinite atemporal persistence or atemporal duration, where 'duration' is understood analogically with temporal duration." With the phrase "atemporal duration" Stump perhaps wants to demonstrate the mode of existence of God which is timeless or does not have temporal extension. In this definition, however, it seems that the phrase she uses is confusing, not because of the nature of time but because of the nature of language (Padgett 1992, p. 67). It is confusing because the concept of duration cannot be understood without its time extension. I would suggest, that if she wants to demonstrate God's mode of existence, Stump should replace the word "duration" with "existence". Such a straightforward expression might avoid confusions.

This fact shall alert us to the possible equivocation of the words we use, whether these words are used for an eternal entity or temporal beings. A good example of this danger is the word "present". The "present" of God cannot have the same notion with our present. The word "present" is a temporal term and if it is used with reference to God, it must have a particular notion. This means that, even if Stump, Senor and some other atemporalists can successfully explain the coherence of divine timelessness and God's being present to temporal entities, we should be aware of how we use the same words which have different meanings in different occasions. This conclusion should also illuminate and warn us when we use theological terms and words that might have different meaning from the vernacular one.

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