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# OMNISCIENCE, IMMUTABILITY, AND THE DIVINE MODE OF KNOWING

Thomas D. Sullivan\*

Recent attacks on the classical doctrine that God is both omniscient and immutable reason that God's knowledge of temporal events must be adequately expressible in indexical or nonindexical propositions, and that, on either account, the doctrine is incoherent. I argue that this is a false dilemma, that Aquinas exposed it as such, and that he offered a solution to the problem seldom considered by either proponents or opponents of the classical theory. I then defend Aquinas' neglected proposal.

## 1. *The Problem*

There was a time when it was widely held that God, perfect in all ways, was beyond change. Indeed, change did not even exist until God created the world. By his thought and loving action, God thereafter transformed the world, not himself. In our time, however, a new orthodoxy has replaced the old. Many philosophers and theologians now teach that the notion that God stands stiff and immutable above time and the flux of things is a wayward idea of the Greeks, at variance with scripture and radically incoherent.<sup>1</sup> In an influential essay a few years back, Norman Kretzmann set out the following argument, widely adopted by proponents of the new position.<sup>2</sup>

- (1) A perfect being is not subject to change.
- (2) A perfect being knows everything.
- (3) A being that knows everything always knows what time it is.
- (4) A being that always knows what time it is is subject to change.

Therefore:

- (5) A perfect being is subject to change.

Therefore:

- (6) A perfect being is not a perfect being.

Finally, therefore,

- (7) There is no perfect being.



There have been a number of recent replies to the Argument from Omniscience, one by Kretzmann himself.<sup>3</sup> Rather oddly, however, though writers on both sides of the debate often take Aquinas as representative of the classical position, few consider the remarkable proposal at the heart of Thomas's solution.<sup>4</sup> My main purpose here is to draw attention to this proposal, which seems to me to light up an entire range of questions about the operation of the divine mind.

Before turning to Aquinas it will be useful to review briefly a common response to the Argument from Omniscience. That response, often taken to be Aquinas' own, fails. But Aquinas' solution, I will argue, is left untouched by the Argument from Omniscience.

## *2. A Standard Reply to the Argument from Omniscience*

What can a defender of the classical view say in response to the Argument from Omniscience? The defender's first choice might be to deny proposition (4). Propositions (1) and (2) are classical assumptions. Proposition (3)—A being that knows everything always know what time it is—seems obvious. But proposition (4) looks entirely gratuitous. Why should anyone think that a being that always knows what time it is is subject to change?

Proposition (4), however, is not a gratuitous assumption. A very strong argument can be made for it.<sup>5</sup> If I know, say, that it is now noon, I do not now know that it is one o'clock. To know that it is one o'clock, I must wait an hour. Then, however, I will no longer know it is noon. But to know one thing at one time and not to know it at another is to change. So, more generally,

- (A) Necessarily, a being that always knows what time it is [now] knows different things at different times.
- (B) Necessarily, a being that knows different things at different times changes.

It seems, then, that a being that always knows what time it is now is indeed subject to change.

Perhaps, then, we have moved too quickly past (3), the claim that a being that knows everything always knows what time it is. For on the traditional view, God is not only immutable, but timeless. He does not know one thing at one time and another at another time, but everything in an eternal present. A classical theorist should reject (3) unless it is restricted to timebound beings. With this restriction, however, it fails to mesh with (4).

Let's take a closer look at this point. To say that a being that knows everything always knows what time it is, could mean either

- (3a) Throughout all time the (timebound) being knows what time it is.

or

- (3b) Throughout all its (timeless) existence, the being knows what time it is *quoad nos*, i.e., what time it is for those whose existence is temporal.

The classical theorist accepts (3) only in the sense of (3b). God “always” knows what time it is in a timeless sense of “always.” But, proposition (4) is true only if “always” is taken temporally. Thus there is no genuine connection between (3) and (4). The Argument from Omniscience trades on an ambiguity.

### 3. *The Inadequacy of the Standard Response*

But does the rejoinder by the classical theorist really solve the problem? Many think it does not. Arthur Prior observes “it seems an extraordinary way of affirming God’s omniscience if a person, when asked what God knows *now*, must say “Nothing,” and when asked what he knew *yesterday*, must again say “Nothing,” and must yet again say “Nothing” when asked what God will know *tomorrow*.”<sup>6</sup>

Prior’s taunt, however, should not disturb a defender of the classical theory. Of course it looks like an “an extraordinary way of affirming God’s omniscience” if all you focus on are the denials. But the defender of God’s atemporal omniscience affirms as well as denies. The defender affirms divine omniscience while denying imperfections. One might as well say that it is an extraordinary way of affirming God’s power if a person, when asked what God can lift with his right arm, must say “Nothing,” and with his left, “Nothing,” and with his teeth, “Nothing.” By so answering no one is trying to affirm anything, but only trying to deny absurd anthropomorphisms. It would be an extraordinary way to affirm God’s infinite intelligence by denying God has the brains of a rabbit. But what should one say? God *does* have the brains of a rabbit?

A much deeper difficulty, however, confronts the classical position. There seems to be no proper answer to the question: What, precisely, does God know “throughout eternity” when he knows temporal events? Suppose it is now the twelfth of May. Does God know that *it is now the twelfth of May*? If so that knowledge would seem to locate God’s awareness, and thus God Himself, in a time frame. For knowing that today is the twelfth of May entails knowing one’s temporal position. And it follows from knowing one’s temporal position that one has a temporal position. Thus it is a necessary condition of knowing it is *now* the twelfth of May that one have a temporal position.<sup>7</sup>

To avoid this, some note that we may know and represent the same facts in different ways. Jill can know that Jack has a toothache, without knowing it in the same way Jack does. Jack thinks: *I have a toothache*. Jill thinks: *He has a toothache*. Similarly a timeless being could know what Jack knows

when Jack thinks *It is now the twelfth of May*, but represent the fact in a somewhat different way. A timeless being could have recourse to eternal statements expressing only a certain order among events. For example, the being could say that the twelfth of May of a given year is so many days after the birth of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

This, however, will not do. Kretzmann exhibits the futility of such a reply with a striking piece of parallel reasoning. The knowledge of contingent events attributed to God on this account would be like the knowledge you would have of a movie you had written, directed, acted in, and seen many times. You would know every scene in complete detail and you would know the sequence of scenes, and if there were a visible clock in every scene, you would also know the time of every scene. But if the film were now showing in a distinct theatre, the patrons would have one big advantage over you. They, but not you, would know what was on the screen *now*. An omniscient being must not only know the entire scheme of temporal events, but as Kretzmann notes, *at what stage of realization that scheme now is*.<sup>9</sup> You might know that Annushka spills the sunflower oil before Berlioz slips on it and slides down the slope leading to the streetcar rails. But you would not know whether the screen shows Annushka spilling the oil or Berlioz sliding to his death.

A defender of the classical theory, therefore, cannot counter the Argument from Omniscience just by insisting that God stands outside of time. For the defender still must say what it is that God knows. To say that what he knows is just the temporal sequence is to deprive God of the knowledge of what is happening at any particular moment.<sup>10</sup> This is tantamount to giving up the claim (2) that a perfect being knows everything.

The difficulty for the classical theory, then, is this. Suppose proposition (3)—A being that knows everything always knows what time it is—is understood in such a way as to place the being in time. Then it connects with (4)—A being that always knows what time it is is subject to change—and there is no equivocation. The Argument from Omniscience goes through. Suppose, on the other hand, “always” in (3) is understood to mean eternally. Then (2) turns out false; there will be much that a perfect being will not know, namely, what is going on as it is going on. Either way, then, the classical position appears incoherent.

#### 4. Aquinas' Proposal

With these difficulties in mind, let us turn now to Aquinas' proposal. Thomas takes up the problem immediately after arguing that God's knowledge must be immutable since his knowledge is identical with his immutable substance.<sup>11</sup> The objection—our objection—is that God's knowledge can scarcely be immutable if it is to include temporal events. After all,

God knew Christ would be born. But now he does not know that Christ will be born, because it is not now the case that Christ will be born. Therefore it is not the case that whatever God knew he knows. And so, it seems, God's knowledge must be variable.<sup>12</sup>

Before giving his solution Aquinas considers a variation on the contemporary reply—eternalizing the proposition that God knows—only to reject it. He then makes his own proposal:

It must therefore be conceded that this assertion "Whatever God knew he knows," is not true if the reference is to storable things (*si ad enuntiabilia referatur*). But because of this, it does not follow that the knowledge of God is variable. For as it is without variation in the divine knowledge that God knows one and the same thing sometime to be and sometime not to be, so it is without variation in the divine knowledge that God knows something storable (*scit aliquod enuntiabile*) to be true at some time, and false at another. The knowledge of God, however, would be variable if he knew storable things in the mode of the storable, by composing and dividing, as happens in our intellect (*si enuntiabilia cognosceret per modum enuntiabilium, componendo et dividendo, sicut accidit in intellectu nostro*).<sup>13</sup>

It is not obvious how this reply is supposed to solve the problem. Why should it matter whether God knows by composing and dividing or in a simpler way? This seems irrelevant. For whether God must perform several acts or only one to arrive at what we arrive at, we still must ask the same question about the result, about what is grasped in divine thought. What is it that he knows? If we say God knows what we know, that he knows what is happening *now* or *will happen* or *has happened*, albeit by a simpler act than our own, it remains that God is mutable. If, on the other hand, we deny that he knows what we know, then God remains ignorant of some things. The point about composing and dividing seems to leave the problem in exactly the same place.

But we *can* see the relevance of Thomas' suggestion that God does not know by composing and dividing if we take into account an important point made in the preceding article. There the question is whether God knows storable facts (*enuntiabilia*). Thomas reasons that since the power to form the statement of facts lies within the human mind, and since God knows whatever is in the power of his creatures, God knows all the statements of fact that can be formed. But since the divine mind, unlike the human mind, has no need to unify in a statement an understanding of reality taken in bit by bit, (*unum redigere per modum compositionis vel divisionis, enuntiationem formando*), it does not understand storable facts by forming statements of them (*scit enuntiabilia non per modum enuntiabilium*).<sup>14</sup>

The important thing to note for our present purposes is that to say the divine mind does not compose or divide is thus to say something not only about the way the divine mind *acts* but also about the way reality is presented to the divine mind—the *object of the act*. In a more contemporary idiom, we may

say that God's knowledge is nonpropositional, i.e., God does not form propositions to understand the world. And if God knows everything without forming propositions, then there is something wrong with the challenge to state in propositional form just what God represents to himself of temporal events.

With his customary terseness, Thomas is thus proposing a remarkable solution to the Argument from Omniscience. God knows all that we know about temporal events, but in a way that we cannot adequately represent to ourselves.

Of course so extraordinary a claim has its difficulties, and we will shortly consider some of them. This much, however, is already clear: the Argument from Omniscience neglects an alternative.

The contradictory of *God knows occurrences through indexical propositions* is not *God knows occurrences through nonindexical propositions*. The contradictory is that *It is not the case that God knows occurrences through indexical propositions*. The right way to set out the alternatives is this: Either God knows propositionally or not. If the former, then he knows either by indexical propositions or nonindexical propositions. Opponents of the traditional view have routinely overlooked the first division—propositional/nonpropositional—passing on immediately to the second. There thus remains the neglected possibility that God knows the world in a way we cannot adequately represent in any proposition.

To refute the traditional position one must block Aquinas' way out. This few attempt.<sup>15</sup>

##### 5. An Objection: The Common View of Nonpropositional Knowledge

Perhaps some will say that the reason few attempt a refutation is because it is unclear just what this putative nonpropositional knowledge is supposed to be. Of course, we are familiar with nonpropositional knowledge in the form of sensation—tasting an orange—but surely this is not what Aquinas has in mind. Thomas is referring to intellectual knowledge, knowledge that penetrates beneath the observable surface of things to get at the things themselves. But how is the mind to see things as they are without forming propositions?

Our understanding of Aquinas' point is apt to be very much conditioned by the common conception of nondiscursive knowledge. As Richard Sorabji observes,

It is commonly held that non-discursive thinking does not involve thinking *that* something is the case. Instead it contemplates concepts in isolation from each other, and does not string them together in the way they are strung together in 'that'-clauses.<sup>16</sup>

On this account of the matter, nondiscursive thinking is a kind of subjudgmental exercise of intelligence indistinguishable from interrupted thought. You start to think that beauty is truth, but get only to beauty when the number 68

bus knocks you unconscious.<sup>17</sup> Nondiscursive knowledge is fragmentary knowledge. By moving from concept to concept the mind grasps a state of affairs, the fact that something is the case. Such a movement presupposes lesser acts, none of which by itself attains an understanding of the way things are. These lesser components are acts of nondiscursive understanding.

Construing nonpropositional thinking this way makes sense of the notion, but it scarcely provides a defense for the traditional view of God's knowledge. Instead of an exalted mode of cognition, nonpropositional knowledge turns out to be all too human half-thought. Limited to subjudgmental knowledge, God would be anything but omniscient. He would grasp no truth whatever. Thus the traditional view again seems to lapse into incoherence.

#### 6. *The Assumption Behind The Common View of Nonpropositional Knowledge*

Now Sorabji may well be right. Maybe the common view is that if a thought is nonpropositional, then it must be mere contemplation of isolated concepts. For this is the way *we* know the way things are. We string concepts together. And so it is natural for us to assume that simple thought is necessarily incomplete thought.

This, however, is only a natural assumption. It does not follow from *x does not know y by stringing concepts together* that *x does not know y*. This is just a special case of the invalid argument form: *If x does y by z-ing, then if x does not do y by z-ing, then x does not do y*. If you can read by moving your lips, it hardly follows that you cannot read without moving your lips. Of course, if by definition reading involves lip movement, as people might have thought in the early days of reading when silent reading was unknown, then those who fail to move their lips would fail to read. And if by definition, to know the truth of things is to string concepts together, it would then follow that if a thinker did not string them together, the truth would not be attained. But why should we assume that our way is the only way intellectually to grasp a complex reality?

Thomas made no such assumption. In fact, he assumed the opposite. Our way of knowing is accidental to knowing.<sup>18</sup> It is a grave error to assimilate the divine to the human mode of knowing.<sup>19</sup> The first step towards understanding the classical view, at least as expounded by St. Thomas, is to set aside an idea of nonpropositional thought as interrupted propositional thought.

But what, then, did Aquinas have in mind? Rather than sink the discussion in exegesis, let's see what we can make of matters in our own terms.

#### 7. *An Uncommon Understanding of Nonpropositional Knowledge*

For this purpose, it will be useful to introduce the expressions: "Occur-



rence,” “Intellectual Act,” “Cognitive Display,” “Mode of Intellectual Act,” and “Mode of Cognitive Display.”

7.1. *Preliminaries: Occurrence, Intellectual Act, Cognitive Display, Mode of Intellectual Act, and Mode of Cognitive Display*

*Occurrence.* Let us refer to anything that happens within the space-time system of things as an “occurrence.”<sup>20</sup> A bird landing on a branch, a clock’s hand sweeping past a number on its face, and a child breaking into a smile are all occurrences. So too are more static realities, e.g., the statue staying fixed in its place over time, and remaining, for however long, self-identical.

*Intellectual Act.* To know an occurrence a mind must do something to make cognitive contact with it. Let us call this the intellectual act. A nonoccurrence may also be the object of an intellectual act. Since, however, our present problem concerns occurrences, we may confine our attention to intellectual acts bearing on occurrences.

*Cognitive Display.* When by an intellectual act the mind makes contact with an occurrence, we may say it displays the occurrence. The occurrence, then, picks up the attribute of being cognitively displayed.<sup>21</sup>

Here it is important to note two things.

First, “cognitive display” is not a substitute for “proposition.”<sup>22</sup> The whole point of introducing the concept of a cognitive display is to open the possibility of discussing nonpropositional modes of apprehending truth about reality. A “cognitive display” is a showing of an occurrence to a mind, *whatever the mode of display*. “Propositional knowledge,” by contrast, indicates a particular mode of display. We shall return to this point in a moment.

Second, “cognitive display” does not refer to an ontological medium between the action of the mind and the occurrence in the world. It may or may not be necessary for a mind to form a medium to display the object. But by “cognitive display” I mean the object displayed, not the medium of the display. In other words, if in order to display an occurrence it were necessary to display it on a mental mirror, “cognitive display” would name the occurrence, not the mirror. A cognitive display of an occurrence is just the occurrence *qua* known.

*Mode of Intellectual Act.* The mind acts to display an occurrence in various ways and with various levels of success. One act may display an occurrence with less penetration than another, or in less detail. Smith knows the light passing through the diamond somehow makes it bright; Jones knows the same *in terms of diamond’s index of refraction*. One intellectual act may display an occurrence in isolation, while a second relates the occurrence to something else. Smith knows an effigy of the Devil peeking from a huge boot was discovered hanging from a Liberty Tree; Jones knows it to be in dishonor of Lord Bute.

In these cases the mode differs because the content is richer or poorer. But that's not necessary for the mode to vary. Thinking that 21 has the prime factors of 7 and 3 differs modally from thinking that 3 and 7 are the prime factors of 21. The truth conditions are the same, but the intentional structures of the act differ inasmuch as in one case the composite is taken first, in the other the factors.

It would be difficult to define "mode of intellectual act." Fortunately, however, what we need for our purposes is only the assurance that intellectual acts can vary in mode even when displaying the same occurrence. The examples provide that assurance.

*Mode of Cognitive Display.* We may now say that two displays differ in mode if the corresponding intellectual acts differ in any of the ways just depicted or in any other way.

These noetic terms are meant neutrally, applying to divine knowledge as well as human. Nevertheless, in order to try to state more accurately a theory of nonpropositional knowledge that is free of the drawbacks of Sorabji's "common" view of the matter, we need to take human knowledge as a point of departure.

## 7.2. *The Human Mode of Knowing*

Propositional knowledge is a particular mode of displaying an occurrence through an intentional referent and an abstract attribute (a property or relation). An abstract attribute is an attribute grasped abstractly. To grasp an attribute abstractly is to separate the attribute from its real and possible exemplifications. Things of this world, the referents of our cognitive displays, exemplify abstract attributes, but do not possess abstract attributes. The Black-capped Chickadee perching on a twig has no abstract attributes. There's nothing abstract about her little black cap and bib, ragged over the lower edge. She does not perch on an abstraction, nor does she perch abstractly. For there are no abstract twigs to perch on, nor is there any way to perch abstractly. But we abstractly display the perching Chickadee through concepts marshalled to form propositions. We cannot have propositional knowledge about a thing of which we have no concept whatever.<sup>23</sup>

There is yet another feature of propositional knowledge pertinent to our discussion. As Russell once expressed it, our knowledge of things seems to "radiate out" from these objects at the center of our attention.<sup>24</sup> We express what we know of singular temporal events in relationship to the time of our representations or utterances.

At least this is true of the passage of fullblooded time, if not of what some have called "bare temporality,"<sup>25</sup> the mere sequential ordering of: earlier/simultaneous with/after. To grasp more than bare temporality, we must realize the present temporal stage of the universe, as present, and other stages in

relation to it. We grasp the present from *within* the series of temporal occasions and represent it with temporal indexicals.

### 7.3. *The Divine Mode of Knowing*

Human knowledge reflects the mind's need to compose and divide, and in the case of knowledge of the present as present, it connects the intentional subject with the attribute in a manner that indicates the temporal position of the knower. Why must God display such knowledge in any other way?

Aquinas argues in several ways that the structure of God's knowledge is nonpropositional. His deepest reason is that God is utterly simple,<sup>26</sup> a doctrine that for some is "a lot to swallow."<sup>27</sup> But Thomas also argues without relying on the doctrine of simplicity, taking as his point of departure the perfection of the Creator's knowledge.

The Creator knows everything insofar as his causality extends to it. His penetrating knowledge extends to the very individuality of things as causally sustained by his acts. If any analogy with a movie is to be made, it is that the movie is the story God tells. The creation does not exist prior to God's knowledge of it; the Creator does not wait to see what he creates. By contrast our knowledge of things is dependent upon a cognitive apparatus that grasps things through universals, incompletely. The one who knows a thing by having a universal concept of it does not know that thing in itself. "To know Socrates through this, that he is white or the son of Sophroniscus, or to know him through some other universal (*quidquid aliud*), is not to know him as *this man*."<sup>28</sup> But the "active power of God extends itself not only to the forms, from which universal notions derive, but even to matter...and singulars."<sup>29</sup> By one intellectual act the divine mind attains intimate epistemic acquaintance with every concrete occurrence. God knows the whole of it, in all of its individuality. He displays occurrences to himself through a single intellectual act, without relying on impoverished abstraction, and since he is beyond space and time, without temporal self-reference.

The more perfect a being, Aquinas argues, the more perfect its mode of knowing; the more perfect the mode the simpler. As internal sense powers grasp, in a single act, complexes that external sense grasps separately or not at all, so the divine mind grasps intellectually all that our composing and dividing mind grasps through complex operations. As God knows the changeable unchangeably, and the material immaterially, he knows the composite simply.<sup>30</sup>

Just how God displays to himself nonpropositionally the fact we display as *The Chickadee is (now) perching on the twig* we cannot say. Gone are the abstractions through which we access and display the intentional subject and predicate. God has no need of these. Gone too is the peculiar indexical mode of connecting intentional subject and predicate, for gone too are intentional subjects and attributes. As a race of blind beings that perceived extension

only by synthesizing multiple touch sensations would find it difficult to understand descriptions of another mode of perception that took in extension all at once and without proprioceptive sensation,<sup>31</sup> so we are mystified by the description of knowledge that grasps temporal occurrences without synthesizing concepts and without temporal self-reference. But from the fact that we find it difficult to imagine such knowledge, nothing whatever follows about its possibility.

The mode of existence of a thing does not determine the mode of knowing it.<sup>32</sup> In general it is not the case that for *x* to know *y*, which has characteristic *z*, *x*'s noetic act must have characteristic *z*. A yellow object may be sensed without the sensation being yellow. Our way of knowing is accidental to knowing. No *a priori* reason precludes an intelligence from knowing a temporal occurrence atemporally.

#### 8. *Returning to the Problem*

I have stated, largely in my own terms, what I take Aquinas' view of nonpropositional knowledge to be, and I have given some of the grounds for thinking God enjoys such knowledge. Whether it is Aquinas' position or not, the idea of nonpropositional knowledge spelled out here is far removed from the common view of nonpropositional knowledge as "interrupted thought." God does not string concepts together, but he displays everything to his mind according to a mode above our own.

This isn't to say that we cannot affirmatively answer questions of the form "Does God know it is now \_\_\_\_\_?" It is just that we have to qualify the answer. God knows what we know by thinking it is now \_\_\_\_\_, but he knows it "purely," without the intrusion of incidental elements peculiar to our limited way of knowing. Our way is just one way to know the present as present, peculiar to an intelligence that takes its knowledge from things. And it is not God's.

It follows that we cannot adequately state in propositional form God's knowledge of the present as present. Adequate representation of God's knowledge as he represents it to himself requires more than representing the same facts. It requires representing them in the same way. This we cannot do since God's way of displaying occurrences couldn't be more alien to our own.

In reply to the Argument from Omniscience, it is thus open to a defender of God's immutability to deny (4), that a being that always knows what time it is is subject to change. It is true that (3) a being who knows everything always knows what time it is. But it is true only in the sense that (3b) throughout all its (timeless) existence, the being knows what time it is *quoad nos*, i.e., what time it is for those whose existence is temporal. And though we cannot meet the challenge to state adequately a proposition that expresses from

the eternal point of view what it is that God knows, the challenge rests upon the faulty presupposition that God displays his knowledge propositionally.

### 9. Conclusion

This reply to the Argument from Omniscience—or better, beginning of a reply<sup>33</sup>—is of course open to objections. How could it be otherwise when we are speaking of a way of knowing so much superior to our own? My main purpose, however, has simply been to bring attention to a neglected way out of the dilemma. Perhaps it will be helpful to conclude with a few remarks directed to possible misunderstandings.

First, to say God knows nonpropositionally is not to say that God is ignorant of propositions. These too he knows—nonpropositionally.<sup>34</sup> Something G. E. Moore says can serve to clarify this point. “Surely everybody can see that the fact that a lion does exist is quite a different sort of entity from the lion himself.”<sup>35</sup> Instead of saying with Moore that there are two facts here, we may simply say that an existing lion may be displayed in the thought *that a lion does exist*. The human mind spreads the existing lion into the fact that the lion exists. The nonpropositional knower grasps the existing lion, the beast itself, without refraction. And without refraction, he knows our mind bends the light from every reality towards its own temporal locus.

Second, I do not mean, nor do I think Aquinas means, that the difference between the human and divine mode of knowing is that God knows things directly, while we must know them through an ontological medium, a proposition, dwelling in some queer limbo between mental acts and things.<sup>36</sup> Consider a parallel. If it were to be claimed that some unearthly being could see the whole moon, inside and outside, all at once, while we of course can see only aspects of it, we should not immediately infer that we see something distinct from the moon called Aspects, while the unearthly being saw the moon itself. One *might* want to say that human knowledge of the world is through an ontological medium; but that position is independent of the one developed here.

Third, I do not mean to assert or to suggest that the world is in itself an undifferentiated whole, that discriminations are the mere product of mind. The bird and its perching, for example, are distinct realities. It is not that they are distinct only for the human mind. But only the human mind is obliged to grasp the bird’s perching here and now by forming an abstract idea of it.

Last, with specific reference to time, I am not saying that time is unreal or only a human construct, as if there is no temporal reality for God to know. There is, and he knows it, but not in a way that requires temporal self-reference. The claim seems paradoxical because of our automatic assumption that to know is to know in a human way. Thus we are apt to reason:

But, of course, presentness cries out for a recipient, to be present is to be present *to someone*...The very concept of the now-of-the-present is thus inseparably linked with a conscious experience, the experience of a being who, from a position of placement within the framework of temporality assumes with conscious awareness that temporal *perspective* through which alone the A-series distinction of past/present/future [McTaggart's] can come into operation.<sup>37</sup>

It's this sailing from knowledge of the present requiring conscious experience to requiring conscious experience *within the framework of temporality*, so natural to us, that Aquinas bids us to resist.

*College of St. Thomas*

## NOTES

\* I owe a debt of gratitude to Prof. William Alston, two anonymous readers of this journal, and to several colleagues and friends for criticisms of earlier drafts of this paper.

1. See, for example, Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 215.

2. "Omniscience and Immutability," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 63 (1966), p. 410. Kretzmann's argument relied on earlier work by A. N. Prior, "Thank Goodness That's Over," *Philosophy* 34 (1959): 12-17 and "The Formalities of Omniscience," *Philosophy* 37 (1962): 114-129. Anthony Kenny in *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) repeats the argument. Variations may also be found in Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," in Clifton J. Orlebeke and Lewis B. Smedes, eds., *God and the Good* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 181-203, and others. Patrick Grim's "Against Omniscience: The Case for Essential Indexicals," *Nous*, 19 (1985): 151-80 sketches the history of work since Prior and Kretzmann while arguing in the Prior/Kretzmann tradition against omniscience. Kretzmann's argument aims to show only an incompatibility between omniscience and immutability; he doesn't indicate which is to be given up.

3. In "Eternity," with Eleonore Stump, *The Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429-58.

4. An exception is William Alston, "Does God Have Beliefs," *Religious Studies*, 22 (1986): 287-306 Alston's fine essay, which came to my attention too late to take it more fully into account, anticipates a number of points made in these pages. Our strategies diverge, however, at one critical juncture. Please see note 36 below.

5. "Omniscience and Immutability," p. 410.

6. "The Formalities of Omniscience," p. 116.

7. Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), pp. 88-89, credits Robert Coburn, "Professor Malcolm on God," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (1963): 155-56, with the clearest formulation of this argument.

A way to avoid placing God in the temporal stream, too involved to consider here, construes such expressions as "It is now the twelfth of May" as "The eternal present is simultaneous with the twelfth of May." This requires making sense of an eternal present being simultaneous with a temporal period. For an illuminating discussion of the issues,

see Stump and Kretzmann, "Eternity," Paul Fitzgerald, "Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity," *The Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1985): 260-269, and the reply by Stump and Kretzmann, "Atemporal Duration: A Reply to Fitzgerald," *Journal of Philosophy*, 84 (1987): 214-19.

8. Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness*, pp. 93-4.

9. "Omniscience and Immutability," p. 414.

10. For a helpful discussion of the problems with attempts by Hector-Neri Casteneda and others to capture ephemeral indexical knowledge by means of a permanent non-indexical equivalent, see Patrick Grim, "Against Omniscience," especially the summary statement on pages 167-68. The general difficulty for all such attempts is that knowledge of the supposed equivalent requires the assumption of further indexical knowledge.

11. *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 14, a. 15.

12. *S.T.*, I, Q. 14, a. 15, obj. 3. This and all other translations of Aquinas are my own.

13. *S.T.*, I, Q. 14, a. 15; cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I. c. 58.

14. *S.T.*, I, Q. 14, a. 14.

15. An apparent exception is Anthony Kenny, who touches on the point in *The God of the Philosophers*, pp. 48-9. Kenny treats the reader to a bit of fantasy about how God might try to communicate his nonpropositional knowledge of time through a cosmic clock booming out "Thus saith the Lord: at the third stroke it will be 12:52 precisely." But the point isn't whether God could make sounds that we would or could construe as expressing an indexical proposition, but whether sounds could be made that would represent matters to us in the way that God represents them to himself. The fantasy does nothing to establish the point at issue.

16. *Time, Creation, and the Continuum* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 137. The whole of chapter 10, "Myths about Non-Propositional Thought," is very useful. See also A. C. Lloyd, "Non-discursive thought—an enigma of greek philosophy," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 70 (1970): 261-74.

17. A. C. Lloyd, "Non-Discursive Thought," p. 270.

18. *Dicendum quod scientiam esse acceptam a rebus scitis, non per se convenit scientiae speculativae, sed per accidens, in quantum est humana.* *S.T.*, I, Q. 14, a. 16, ad. 2.

19. "Because of the difficulties, some philosophers, such as Averroes...denied God had a knowledge of particular contingents, thinking that the divine mind works like ours (*cogitantes intellectum divinum ad modum intellectus nostri*), and therefore they erred." *Sententiarum* I, Dist. 38, Q. 1, a. 5.

20. I use "occurrence" rather than the more traditional "facts" or "states of affairs" or "events" to avoid the complications that would arise from the use of terms that have picked up special and sometimes peculiar meanings in this century.

21. This may sound odd. One might want to say instead that the *mind* acquires an attribute, that of cognitively displaying some occurrence. But if a thing is known, it has at least what Roderick Chisholm has called a "converse intentional property." See Chisholm, "Converse Intentional Properties," *The Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982): 537-545. Medieval philosophers called the relation a "relation of reason."

22. Nor is it, like *Vorstellung* ("representation" in Kant and "presentation" in Brentano), a mere potential element of judgment. A cognitive display could include a whole scene.

23. This is *not* to say, however, that to have a concept of the referent, one reaches the referent through a universal or complex of universals that the referent uniquely satisfies. The claim is only that the knower must display the referent under *some* universal concept. See Russell Pannier and Thomas D. Sullivan, "Mindful Logic: How to Resolve Some Paradoxes of Identity, *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 29 (1988), 249-66.

In a sequel to that essay, in progress, we represent the intentional structure of our acts by:

$$x^S: F(x^S)$$

which can be understood as "the intentional subject  $x$ , referred to as an exemplification of the universal  $S$  exemplifies the universal  $F$ ."

24. Cf. Bruce Aune, *Metaphysics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 32.

25. Nicholas Rescher, *Conceptual Idealism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), pp. 120 ff.

26. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk. I, c. 58.

27. William Alston, "Does God Have Beliefs," p. 291. Alston, however, is generally sympathetic to Aquinas. He applies Aquinas' contention that God's noetic structure is simpler than ours to this problem and to the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

28. *S.T.*, I, Q. 14, a. 11.

29. *Ibid.*

30. The summary in this paragraph is immediately based on *S.T.*, I, Q. 57, a. 2 and Q. 58, a. 4, but Thomas argues these points in many places. Aquinas attributes nonpropositional knowledge to angels as well as God.

31. Of course blind *humans* are not in this situation. Touch for us is not so atomistic that we must always gain a sense of extension by synthesizing touch sensations *over time* since substantial areas of our body can be impressed at once.

32. *I Sent.* Dist. 38, Q. 1, a. 2. The temptation to ascribe to the noetic act the properties of the object and *vice versa* leads to idealism. See Aune's comment on Moore's "*Refutation of Idealism*" in Aune, *Metaphysics*, p. 166.

33. A full account would require taking up matters such as eternity.

34. *S.T.*, I, Q. 14, a. 14. "...*nesesse est quod Deus sciat omnia enuntiabilia quae formari possunt. Sed, sicut scit materialia immaterialiter, et composita simpliciter, ita scit enuntiabilia non per modum enuntiabilium....*"

35. *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Collier Books, 1953), p. 322.

36. But see William Alston, "Does God Have Beliefs," 297-98, for a defense of the idea that God's knowledge is more direct than ours. Aquinas does say that in ratiocinative knowledge reality is known through another, whereas in intellectual knowledge a thing is known through itself. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk. I, c. 57.

37. Rescher, *Conceptual Idealism*, pp. 125-26.