Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 9 | Issue 4 Article 3

10-1-1992

Eternity, Awareness, and Action

Eleonore Stump

Norman Kretzmann

ETERNITY, AWARENESS, AND ACTION

Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann

Our article "Eternity" (1981), in which we presented, defended, and applied the traditional doctrine of divine eternity, prompted some criticisms that focus on difficulties in the concept of eternity itself. In the present article we summarize our original account of the doctrine before offering versions of two such criticisms and replying to them. Our replies are intended to clarify and develop further the essential notions of eternity's atemporal duration and of its relationship with time.

1. *Introduction*

In an earlier article[1] we presented, defended, and applied the traditional doctrine of divine eternity, the doctrine that God's mode of existence is timeless, characterized essentially by "the complete possession all at once of illimitable life."[2] We argued that the traditional conception of God as the absolutely perfect being entails eternity as his mode of existence. No life that is imperfect in its being possessed with the radical incompleteness entailed by temporal existence could be the mode of existence of an absolutely perfect being. The necessarily beginningless, endless life of a perfect being must also be possessed perfectly. That means that it must be devoid of any past, which is no longer possessed, and of any future, which is not yet possessed. The existence of an absolutely perfect being must be an indivisibly persistent present actuality.

Our article prompted some criticisms that attacked the concept of eternity directly, by focusing on difficulties in the notion of atemporal duration, which we take to be at the heart of the concept,[3] or on difficulties in the relationship between eternity and time, a relationship presupposed by all traditional theological applications of the doctrine. Some of those criticisms have already been satisfactorily addressed in the literature, but there are others that strike us as particularly important and requiring further clarification of the doctrine or modifications in our presentation of it.[4]

After briefly summarizing the doctrine of eternity as we originally presented it, we introduce versions of each of these two sorts of objections and reply to them. In doing so we hope to clarify and extend our original account.

2. *Eternity Summarized*

The ancient and medieval philosophers who first argued for eternity understood it as the mode of existence requisite for whatever they considered to be the foundation of temporal existence—for being as contrasted with becoming, or for the absolutely perfect being as contrasted with the various and necessarily imperfect manifestations of perfect being in material, temporal being. With the possible exception of Parmenides, no ancient or medieval philosopher who accepted eternity as a real, atemporal mode of existence meant thereby to deny the reality of time or to suggest that all temporal experiences are illusory. In introducing or drawing on the concept of eternity, they treated eternity and time as two separate modes of real existence. Eternity is a mode of existence that is on their view neither reducible to time nor incompatible with the reality of temporal existence. The resultant concept of eternity, especially as developed by such Christian philosophers as Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, and Aquinas, has four ingredients: life, illimitability, duration, and timelessness.[5] The combination of these ingredients obviously gives rise to difficulties, some of which we discussed in "Eternity."

The Extension and Timelessness of Eternity

3. *The Terminology of Duration and Timelessness*

As we've already said, the most flagrant of the difficulties arises from the combination of duration and timelessness. Of course, if the duration implicit in the definition of eternity counts as persistence through time, the ordinary meaning of 'duration,' then the combination of duration with timelessness is incoherent. But, as we explained in our 1981 article,[6] the philosophers who developed the concept of eternity were led to use familiar terms in unfamiliar ways in trying to express the novel notion of a life possessed completely all at once.[7] In particular, 'duration,' familiar only in its temporal application, can be seen as applicable even more aptly to that atemporal mode of existence; for biological life, or any other sort of temporal duration, is characterized by a peculiar non-durational evanescence. Our past is already lost to us, our future is not yet accessible, and even a little consideration of our present, the time at which we actually exist, shows it to be a durationless instant, the unextended boundary between our past and our future. No life that is imperfect in being necessarily possessed with such radical incompleteness could be the mode of existence for an absolutely perfect being. The necessarily beginningless, endless life of an absolutely perfect being must be perfectly possessed and thus devoid of past and future; it must consist in an indivisibly persistent present actuality.

An insistence on interpreting 'duration,' 'persistent,' 'life,' and 'present' in their ordinary temporal senses would effortlessly render the concept of eter-

nity incoherent. But technical uses of familiar terms are common and go unprotested in other theoretical disciplines. The sciences, for example, regularly employ ordinary words analogically to illuminate peculiar features of reality. And, of course, no one would suppose that it was a good argument against the possibility of black holes to point out that they couldn't literally be holes, or against the big bang theory to point out that the first physical event in the history of our universe couldn't literally have made any noise. Nor, on the other hand, would any informed person deny that there were aspects of the real nature of black holes or the big bang that rendered those designations more informative than others might have been.[8] Showing that the concept of eternity is really incoherent, then, would require showing that the notion medieval philosophers were trying to capture with their technical terminology is incoherent even when we allow their unfamiliar uses of terms such as 'duration' and 'present.'

4. *Fitzgerald's Criticism*

One way of trying to show that the concept of timeless duration is really incoherent depends on developing a second difficulty stemming from the definition of eternity, one that goes beyond the terminological novelties to focus on the combination of timelessness and illimitability. An illimitable mode of existence is evidently an infinitely extended mode of existence. Since it seems that any extension can be divided, at least conceptually, it seems that the illimitability that characterizes eternity must entail conceptual divisibility. But if in virtue of being illimitable eternity is divisible, it shows signs of collapsing into sempiternity: beginningless, endless time. Some of the conceptually produced divisions of eternity would be before others of them, thus introducing succession into eternity. But since timelessness rules out succession, the combination of illimitability and timelessness makes eternity look as if it is characterized essentially both by succession and by the absence of succession.

This charge of more than superficial incoherence was forcefully raised in a recent article by Paul Fitzgerald.[9] Anything that counts as extension, he says, is ordinarily expected to meet three conditions: (1) "two distinct particulars can both have the kind of extension in question"; (2) in every extension there must be extended "subphases" having that same mode of extension; and (3) "by having different *positions* along the extensive dimension in question two qualitatively identical particulars can be numerically distinct."[10] If eternity fails to meet these conditions, Fitzgerald says, one wants to know why, and whether in that case eternal duration still counts as an extended mode of existence. If, on the other hand, eternity meets these conditions, one wants to know how eternity counts as timeless—i.e., successionless.

Fitzgerald supposed that we would choose the second horn of this dilemma,

and that we would prevent eternity from collapsing into time by denying to it the possibility of succession. He thought we could accomplish that only by removing extension from eternal duration and reducing it to a point, thereby effectively abandoning the idea of atemporal duration.

5. *Reply to Fitzgerald*

In an earlier reply to Fitzgerald[11] we argued that denying succession to eternity would collapse eternity to a point only in case all extension includes some sort of succession. But whether or not that is the case is just the point at issue between Fitzgerald and defenders of the doctrine of eternity, and so in assuming that the denial of succession is a denial of an extended mode of existence Fitzgerald begs the question.[12] And in fact we do not choose the second horn of Fitzgerald's dilemma, as he supposed we would, but rather the first: we deny that eternity meets the conditions for extension laid down by Fitzgerald. Underlying those conditions is his assumption that anything that can count as extended must be divisible; from his point of view something is either extended and thus divisible, or indivisible and thus unextended. And so he sees the doctrine of eternity as incoherent because it claims of the same mode of existence that it is both extended and indivisible.[13]

Our acceptance of the tradition that uses 'extended' in describing the atemporal mode of existence undoubtedly lends intuitive force to Fitzgerald's argument. If 'persistent' or any other reasonable alternative that occurred to us had seemed clearly less open to misinterpretation, we would have discarded 'extended' in its favor. But, we argued in replying to Fitzgerald, his three conditions for extension are generalizations arrived at by considering samples of extension that are all temporal or spatial. Given the provenance of his conditions, it is not surprising that they will not apply to what is neither spatial nor temporal. That all extensions of time or space are at least potentially or conceptually divisible is generally undisputed,[14] but nothing in that fact, we argued, provides good grounds for inferring that what is atemporally extended must also be divisible. On the doctrine of eternity, the eternal present persists, encompasses time, and is unbounded. In those respects it resembles temporal duration enough to make it helpful to speak of eternity as extended, in something like the way it is helpful to speak of a collapsed star as a hole. On the other hand, because it lacks succession, it fails to resemble spatial and temporal extensions in being divisible. And to conclude on the basis of the characteristics it does share with temporal duration that it must also be like it in all other respects is like thinking that a collapsed star must be an opening in space because it is in some respects appropriately characterized as a hole.

In our view, these considerations reveal serious shortcomings in Fitzgerald's attempt to show that the doctrine of eternity is incoherent. But

we have also come to think that we did not do enough to answer the question implicit in the first horn of Fitzgerald's dilemma: If, as we claim, eternity does not meet his conditions for extension, then in what sense can we say that it is extended? We return to this question below.

6. *Nelson's Criticism*

In *Time and Eternity*[15] Brian Leftow replies to several objections against the concept of eternity in ways that strike us as entirely adequate. But there is one sort of objection, similar to the one Fitzgerald raised, that Leftow seems disposed to concede in a version developed by Herbert Nelson:

> ...the conditions definitive of atemporal duration seem mutually inconsistent. On the one hand, as *enduring* and therefore...*really* and indeed infinitely extended, the atemporally enduring entity must have stages which *really* lie outside one another in some sense, and thus *not* be all at once.... On the other hand, as *atemporal* and therefore...*really* existing all at once..., no real constituent [of it] can be absent when any other is present. Thus at every moment of the infinite duration of the atemporally enduring entity every other moment—and there must be infinitely many eternal moments—must be present as well. To have atemporality, the genuine differentiation of parts or stages required for real extension must be suppressed. To have duration, the absence of differentiated parts or stages required for atemporality must be suppressed.[16]

The core of this objection is virtually the same as Fitzgerald's. But Nelson's criticism is distinguished by his supposition that in attributing duration and presentness to God we are presupposing some genus common to God and creatures since temporal entities are also said to have duration and presentness. Nelson sees this as a "commitment to univocity" on our part,[17] and he protests that predicates are not to be attributed to God and creatures univocally.

The crucial claim in Nelson's argument, as in Fitzgerald's, is that extended eternity essentially involves a plurality and thus must be divisible: "to say that atemporal duration is infinitely extended entails that in it an infinite number of different positions can be designated." We might avoid divisibility, he suggests, but only by falling into another well-known sort of difficulty regarding discourse about God—only, that is, in case "there is some radical equivocation lurking in the use of 'extension' and defeating the whole point of their insistence on the fundamental importance of including *extended* atemporal duration in the concept of eternity."[18]

7. *Reply to Nelson*

Predicating the same characteristics of God and creatures, however, does not entail predicating them univocally, thus presupposing a genus common to God and creatures. If it did, Nelson himself could be accused of the very mistake he attributes to us, because he predicates knowledge, freedom, and causation of God.[19] But, of course, it has long been maintained in the tradition

of Christian philosophical theology that no such entailment holds. So Aquinas, for example, attributes to God not only knowledge and freedom (as Nelson does), duration and presentness (as we do), but also goodness, justice, and love, without supposing that he is thereby in conflict with his own argued position that no characteristic can be predicated univocally of God and creatures. Instead, he maintains that although God's knowledge, duration, or goodness are not *identical* with those characteristics among creatures, there is likeness enough to warrant using those ordinary terms of God (with the proper caveats against interpreting them univocally).

On the other hand, the fact that we deny divisibility to atemporal duration does not mean that we are predicating duration equivocally of God and creatures. To begin with, we are inclined to doubt even Nelson's assumption that every instance of duration *in time* is divisible. Consider the specious present—for example, the specious present during which a mother hears her son yell for help as he flies off his skateboard. The specious present is different from the metaphysical temporal present in being extended. It takes time, however little, for the mother to apprehend and process the various sounds that constitute the utterance 'help,' identify the utterance as her son's, and understand it. That time is of course conceptually divisible, but only into parts of that time, not into parts of the mother's specious present, which is characterized by her hearing her son yell for help. She may pick up theoretically distinguishable component sounds in conceptually divisible parts of the time underlying her specious present, but in none of those parts does she hear her son yell for help. Nor does she successively acquire each individual sound, remember it, and then integrate her short-term memories to produce in herself the experience of hearing 'help.' Reflections on the ludicrousness of such an account contributed to the original introduction of the notion of a specious present.[20] The specious present, then, seems to be an instance of something that is both extended and conceptually indivisible as such.[21] It is also a particularly apposite instance since, as William Alston has suggested, it is illuminating to think of the eternal present as God's specious present, which covers *all* of time.[22] A temporal being might naturally be inclined to impose on such a universally overarching specious present the divisions appropriate to time, but imposed temporal divisions are as inapplicable to the eternal present as they would be to the mother's specious present.

But even if, for the sake of the argument, we grant Nelson his assumption that everything temporal and extended is divisible, it doesn't follow that we are using the terms 'duration' or 'extension' equivocally of God and creatures. Nelson's criticism can be seen as presenting us with an apparent dilemma. If God is absolutely simple or transcendent, as traditional Christian theology claims, then many terms cannot be predicated *univocally* of God and creatures. On the other hand, only a radically agnostic theism would maintain

that terms ordinarily predicated of creatures can be predicated of God only *equivocally*. But this dilemma is only apparent. Analogical predication is the traditionally recognized way between its horns.[23]

Knowledge, for example, is commonly said to be predicated of God and creatures analogically, not univocally or equivocally. But precisely which features of creaturely knowledge are features of divine knowledge too, and precisely what in God takes the place of features of creaturely knowledge that are obviously inappropriate to him—these are things we could say only in case we could comprehend God's sort of knowledge better than we can, in which case we would of course be able to explain more of it in univocal terms. Where univocal accounts are theoretically unavailable and equivocal predication is worse than worthless, we may be said to be in circumstances of irreducibly analogical predication. Similarly, in seeking those features of eternal extension (or duration, or presentness) that take the place of the analogous temporal features, in seeking even a list of all the features shared by temporal and atemporal duration, etc., critics of the concept of eternity are seeking what cannot be found if, as we maintain, this, too, is a case of irreducibly analogical predication.

Still, none of this is to say that human beings cannot develop an intelligible account of God's nature or mode of existence. On the basis of analogical predication we can say, for example, that essentially illimitable eternal duration, like conceivably unbounded temporal duration, is a measure of existence, indicating some degree of permanence of some sort on the part of something that persists—although, of course, divine existence, permanence, and persistence will be analogous to, not identical with, temporal existence, permanence, and duration. Acknowledging the impossibility of predicating certain terms univocally of God and creatures does not, as Nelson suggests it does, drive us into using them equivocally. Analogical predication remains available, and, here as elsewhere in subject matter that lies beyond experience, it leaves open a way along which understanding can be developed.

Relationships Between Eternity and Time

8. *Time and Eternity Compared with Nelson's Alpha and Beta*

Analogical predication may be the fundamental use of analogy in philosophy, but it is by no means the only one. Explanatory analogies seem indispensable, and they range from suggestive similes through arguments to full theories.[24] Somewhere in that range are philosophical stories, for which Plato's myth of the cave is an apt paradigm. Philosophical stories are employed not as mere illustrations but as means of reducing the strangeness in analogical predication by providing imaginable access to concepts that are not obviously instantiated in ordinary experience.

Nelson's rejection of the concept of atemporal duration rests heavily on a philosophical story, which is also intended to challenge our account of the relationship between time and eternity. "Suppose that, in addition to the physical universe which we inhabit [Alpha], there exists another physical universe [Beta] not physically, spatially, or temporally related to our own. ...No thing or event in Alpha exists or occurs *before* or *after* or *at the same time as* any thing or event in Beta. No thing or event in Beta is in the *past* or the *future* or the *present* of any thing or event in Alpha. ...There is no *now* common to Alpha and Beta."[25]

Nelson intends his story of Alpha and Beta to shed some light on the relationship between eternity and time as we presented it.[26] Like Nelson's Alpha and Beta, temporal creatures and eternal God have no connections that could be univocally described as spatial or as temporal; but unlike Alpha and Beta, creatures and God are not totally disconnected.

As Nelson would of course agree, a total separation between God and creatures would be incompatible with many religious beliefs and practices. Consider petitionary prayer. Suppose that one person in Beta—call her 'Venus'—had the role of God for some person in Alpha—call him 'Aeneas'; and suppose that today Aeneas prays to Venus for calm seas tomorrow. Given the total disconnection of these two worlds, it isn't clear that Venus can know what Aeneas is asking or bring about events in Alpha. But suppose, for the sake of argument, that causal and cognitive relationships between these disconnected worlds are somehow possible. So suppose Venus can somehow know that Aeneas prays at t1, and can somehow efficaciously will calm seas in Alpha at t2. What Venus cannot do, even on this generous supposition, is *hear* Aeneas's prayer, *be with* him in his anxiety, or be related to him in any way that counts as or is presupposed in direct awareness. Such acts or relationships require some sort of simultaneity between Alpha and Beta and so would violate Nelson's stipulations regarding them. On our generous supposition Venus could, of course, cause Aeneas to believe that she had heard his prayer or that she was with him; but those beliefs induced in him would be false. Nelson's story does not present our notion of atemporal duration or of the relationship between eternity and time.

9. *The Story of Aleph*

Still, Nelson is on the right track in thinking that telling a story is the most efficient way in which to try to get some idea of God's mode of existence without using ordinary terms either univocally or equivocally. Human beings' attempts at this sort of thing are attempts to think themselves up the ladder of being, so to speak: in some respects the theological equivalent of trying to write a story about a person whose mode of existence involves a space with more dimensions than our own. Failure to appreciate the nature of this

universal creaturely predicament characterizes many criticisms of the doctrine of eternity. For example, like Fitzgerald, Leftow argues that if atemporal duration does not have the features that characterize spatial and temporal extension, if it is not the equivalent of a line, then it collapses into the equivalent of a point.[27] But this inference holds only if it exhausts the possibilities for any mode of existence to describe it either as linelike or as pointlike, and there is no good reason to think that modes of existence higher up the ladder of being or of more dimensions than our own are limited in that way.

Putting the problem in this way suggests a possible way of dealing with it. Because it is easier to think oneself down, rather than up, the ladder of being, it may be helpful to tell a story in which eternity is represented by our mode of existence, and time is represented by a mode of existence lower than ours.

Consider a finite one-dimensional world, Aleph, inhabited by inch-long intelligent beings arrayed sequentially and contiguously in the line-segment that comprises their world.[28] Any of these Alephians may have many others in front of or behind him, but only one other inhabitant can be immediately in front of or behind him. Because Aleph is one-dimensional, no Alephian can share its place with another. Alephians recognize an absolute *here*, their designation for the location of whichever single Alephian happens to have the mid-point of the line segment within his own length. Alephians come into existence at the A1 end of the line, move slowly and steadily toward here, where they reach the height of their mental powers, and pass on into deterioration, culminating in their termination at the A2 end. They designate places between A1 and here *the hither*, places between here and A2 *the hence*. Alephians thus have spatial analogues for the A- and B-series in time, but with this difference, that in Aleph the spatial relationship corresponding to simultaneity—being-at-the-same-place-as or, in particular, being-here-with—is reflexive only.[29]

Suppose that Monica, a human being, has all of Aleph horizontally across her field of vision and is able to interact cognitively and causally with all the creatures in the line-world. In particular, she has been able to make Nabal, an Alephian, directly aware of her; he also hears and understands what she says.

"Where are you, Monica?," says Nabal; "Whom are you behind?"

"I'm not behind any of you," says Monica.

"You're not? Then there's no one in front of you. You're at the point of termination, poor thing."

"Well, no," says Monica; "you're *all* in front of me."

"You're contradicting yourself," retorts Nabal; "it can't be the case both that you're behind no one and that everyone is in front of you."

"Well," says Monica hesitantly, "it's hard to explain to you, but I'm not part of Aleph; I'm not in line at all."

"Not in line?! Then you must be an isolated point! But that makes no sense; how could a point say anything?"

Monica tries to explain: "I'm neither a point nor a line. I'm outside your world, and the relations that govern your world don't apply to me. In my mode of existence I can have all of you in front of me without being behind any of you."

Nabal finds this no help at all: "Just consider what 'behind' and 'in front of' mean. Unless you're talking sheer nonsense, you must be using those expressions equivocally. Please tell me, then, what meaning *are* you giving those expressions?"

"Well," says Monica, giving it a try, "when I say that you're all in front of me, I mean that we're all *here* together."

"Worse and worse! Kindly think before you speak! *I* am *here*. Eglon is in front of me, in the *hence*; Balak is behind me, in the *hither*. The hence and the hither include all the places *other* than here. If, as you say, we are all here together, Balak and Eglon are both here and not here. Isn't that plainly incoherent?"

"No, it isn't," Monica hurries to explain, "because 'here' is a relational term: Eglon and Balak are here with respect to me but not here with respect to you."

"I knew it would come to this," says Nabal; "now you're denying the absolute *here*."

"I'm not," says Monica frustratedly. "I acknowledge that for you in Aleph there is an absolute here; but for me, in my world, there's a different sort of here, relating me to all of you in such a way that from my point of view you Alephians and I are all here together even though in your world you're not here together."

Nabal retorts: "There couldn't be a here of the sort you claim for yourself, an extended here that would encompass you and all of us. Only precisely one thing can be *here*. The fact that there is a plurality of Alephians requires that we be ordered in line. When you talk of our all being here together, you are simply confusing two views. On the one hand, the here cannot be shared. On the other hand, there can be the sort of extension that accommodates more than one of us, but only in virtue of our linear ordering, which is just what precludes there being more than one of us *here*. The fundamental incoherence in your thought is the notion that we could all be here together in some extended here."

Understandably, Nabal cannot envisage Monica's three-dimensional world, from the standpoint of which it really is the case that she and all the Alephians are here together, without in any way implying that the relations that obtain within Nabal's world are illusory or that the Alephians are really three-dimensional. Nabal wants Monica to explain to him the sort of here she's

talking in, but he wants the explanation only in terms of relations that obtain in his own world, and he rejects as equivocation her attempts to give him such an explanation using those terms analogically. The only sort of explanation Nabal would accept is one in which Monica uses terms univocally of things in her world and in Aleph. But that is just the sort of explanation she can't give, because the relations that obtain between her mode of existence and Nabal's are different from any relations that obtain within Aleph.

She could, however, take another tack, offering Nabal an account of being-at-the-same-place-as that would hold between herself and every Alephian, and introducing it under a neologism—'being at the MN-same place as' (or 'MNP' for short)—in order to avoid accusations of equivocation. The point of this exercise would be to show Nabal something of the logic of terms that relate to her world by defining the nature of the fundamentally relevant relationship between her world and his. With the aid of MNP, Nabal would be able to see that some of his attempts to reduce the notion of a three-dimensional world to an absurdity are too facile. But this way of defending the notion is very different from the futile exercise of explaining Monica's world to Nabal using only his terms with only the meanings he attaches to them. Because of the radical difference between their worlds, Monica can't use Nabal's terms in that way to describe her world. On the other hand, if she used his terms equivocally, she would still be unable to describe her world to Nabal unless she could explain to him in univocal language the novel meanings she was attaching to his terms—something she cannot do. Besides spelling out the nature of the fundamentally relevant relationship between her world and his, the best she can do is resort to analogy—from similes to stories—in an attempt to prompt Nabal's intuitions, stirring him to think himself up the ladder of being. A more fully satisfying kind of account that at first seems only reasonable to expect from her turns out to involve the univocity that is theoretically unattainable in her communication with a being in a different mode of existence.

These considerations seem to us appropriate and sufficient by way of a general rejoinder to Nelson's objections and Fitzgerald's first question,[30] all of which consist ultimately in demands that features of eternity be defined in terms that apply univocally to eternity and time (and perhaps even to extension universally).

10. *Revising the Definition of ET-Simultaneity*

As we shall see, the story of Aleph is useful also for suggesting a way of clarifying the relationship between eternity and time. Although eternity and time are conceived of as two separate modes of real existence, neither of which is reducible to the other or to any third thing, they are not conceived of as isolated from each other. God, an eternal being, is conceived of as omniscient and as

the creator of everything that is in time, and human beings existing in time are taken to be able to interact directly with God (in prayer, for example).

But what sort of relationship could obtain between beings whose modes of existence are as disparate as time and eternity? Because eternity is timeless, nothing can be earlier or later than, or past or future with respect to anything else, either within eternity itself or in case one of the relata is eternal and the other temporal. But since eternity is also characterized as (conscious, active) life, presentness must be a feature of eternity. And if what is eternal is to be related cognitively or causally to anything temporal, the relationship must be characterized by simultaneity, which, unlike priority and posteriority, is not ruled out by timelessness.

Of course, if simultaneity must be understood as occurrence or existence *at the same time*, then clearly the concept of eternal-temporal relationships is incoherent, and nothing eternal can be simultaneous with anything else, eternal or temporal. In "Eternity" we dealt with this difficulty by defining a species of simultaneity that would hold between eternal and temporal entities or events. Since simultaneity may be thought of generically as co-existence or co-occurrence, it might be supposed that at any rate *temporal* simultaneity can be spelled out as co-existence or co-occurrence at the same time. Considerations of relativity, however, require that simultaneity be relativized to reference frames, so that a more precise formulation of temporal simultaneity would develop along these lines: co-occurrence or co-existence at the same time *within a particular reference frame*. Generalizing this approach to relations between time and eternity, we formulated a simultaneity relationship between eternity and time (ET-simultaneity):

(ET) For every x and y (where x and y range over entities and events), x and y are ET-simultaneous iff

(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.

It should be noticed that ET-simultaneity is symmetric but (unlike temporal simultaneity) neither reflexive nor transitive.[31] The formulation of ET-simultaneity in terms of observers should not mislead anyone. By 'observer' here we mean only that thing, animate or inanimate, with respect to which the reference frame is picked out and with respect to which the simultaneity of events within the reference frame is determined.[32]

Some aspects of ET-simultaneity may be more intuitively apparent in a picture that has heuristic value although it is in some ways crude and misleading. Imagine two parallel horizontal lines, the upper one representing eternity and the lower, time; and let presentness be represented by light. Then from a temporal viewpoint the temporal present is represented by a dot of light moving steadily along the lower line, which is in this way lighted successively, while the eternal present is represented by the upper line's being entirely lighted at once. So from a temporal viewpoint the temporal present is ET-simultaneous with the infinite present of an eternal being's life. On the other hand, from the viewpoint of a being existing in the persisting eternal present, each temporal instant is ET-simultaneous with the eternal present, but only insofar as that instant is temporally present, so that from the eternal being's point of view the entire time line is lighted at once. From an eternal viewpoint, every present time is present, co-occurrent with the infinite whole of the eternal present.

What is present to an entity depends on its mode of existence. What is present to an eternal entity may be present, past, or future to some particular temporal entity, just as some building may be to the right with respect to one frame of reference but to the left with respect to another.[33] An eternal entity's mode of existence is such that its whole life is ET-simultaneous with each and every temporal entity or event. Any particular temporal event, such as the opening of the Berlin Wall or the end of apartheid in South Africa is, as it is occurring, ET-simultaneous with the eternal present. But, relative to us, given our location on the temporal continuum in early 1993, the first of those events is past, and the second is future.

This understanding of ET-simultaneity strikes us as sufficient to dispose of many of the problems that have been raised about the relationship between eternity and time. But it now seems to us that the definition of ET-simultaneity itself gives rise to a problem.

11. *A Problem in the Definition of ET-Simultaneity*

William Hasker has recently argued that if the fundamentally relevant metaphysical relationship between an eternal being and temporal beings is correctly portrayed in our definition, then eternal God could not be directly aware of temporal facts.[34] Moreover, God could not be with human beings directly and immediately, in the way most theists believe he is. The definition of ET-simultaneity suggests that an eternal God could "observe" human beings as present to him but couldn't actually share their present. In general, Hasker thinks,

(H) To be directly aware of temporal beings requires being temporal oneself.

Hasker's objection is the mirror-image of one raised by Delmas Lewis.[35]

Lewis argues that if temporal beings are really present to an eternal being, they must be present in that being's mode of existence—i.e., they must be eternal. Otherwise, Lewis thinks, they will be only epistemically and not also metaphysically present to the eternal being. But if time and eternity are incompatible modes of existence, at least in the sense that what is essentially temporal cannot also be eternal, then, according to Lewis, the doctrine of eternity has the unwelcome consequence that temporal beings are only epistemically present to God. Lewis's argument seems to rest on this principle:

(L) To be metaphysically present to an eternal being, a thing must be eternal itself.

We are inclined to think that both (H) and (L) are false. (H) appears to depend on a more general principle:

(GP) x can be directly aware of or epistemically present to y only if x and y share the same mode of existence;

and (GP) certainly is incompatible with our concept of ET-simultaneity. But surely neither Hasker nor any traditional theist would be willing to accept (GP) as applied to *space*. Since God is traditionally described as non-spatial, it would follow from (GP) that God cannot be directly aware of spatial beings. And if traditional theists cannot accept (GP) as applied to space, they cannot reasonably apply it to time. If God can be directly aware of his creatures without sharing their *spatial* mode of existence,[36] why should we suppose that he cannot be directly aware of them without sharing their *temporal* mode of existence? (H), therefore, seems false.

And similar considerations weigh against (L). God is traditionally described as omnipresent—i.e., every spatial location is present to him. But according to (L) the attribute of omnipresence would require either that spatial locations be non-spatial or that non-spatial God be spatial. If, then, (L) is false as regards space, why should we accept it as regards time?

We suspect that our definition of ET-simultaneity may perhaps have motivated the sort of objections Lewis and Hasker raise. In it we gloss x's being present partly in terms of x's being *observed* as present by "some observer," thereby suggesting a gap in presentness that is bridged by no more than "observation." This way of putting the matter, familiar enough in the context from which we derived the elements of our definition, appears to be misleading in a theological setting, generating the objection that an eternal God cannot really be with or directly aware of human beings. So, having called (H) and (L) into question, we want to revise the definition of ET-simultaneity in order to alleviate the sort of concern they represent.

12. *MNP and ET-Simultaneity*

Looking carefully at the relationship between Monica and Nabal in the story

of Aleph helps to show the way to revise the definition. An attempt at spelling out the MNP relationship in a form analogous to the definition of ET-simultaneity would look like this:

(MNP) For every x and every y (where 'x' and 'y' range over entities and events in the three-dimensional world and in Aleph), x and y are related by MNP iff

(i) x is three-dimensional and y is Alephian, or vice versa (for convenience, let x be three-dimensional and y Alephian); and

(ii) with respect to a particular three-dimensional entity M, x and y are both here—i.e., (a) x is three-dimensionally here with respect to M, (b) y occupies the Alephian here, and (c) both x and y are situated with respect to M in such a way that M can enter into direct and immediate causal relations with each of them and (if capable of awareness) can be directly aware of each of them; and

(iii) with respect to a particular Alephian entity, N, x and y are both here—i.e., (a) x is in the three-dimensional reference-frame relative to which y is three-dimensionally present, (b) y=N, and (c) both x and y are situated with respect to N in such a way that N can enter into direct and immediate causal relations with each of them and (if capable of awareness) can be directly aware of each of them.

Like ET-simultaneity, MNP is symmetric but not reflexive or transitive. Nabal can be MNP with respect to Monica, but not with respect to himself. If Eglon is MNP with respect to Monica, and Monica is MNP with respect to Balak, it won't follow that Eglon is MNP with respect to Balak.

Our notion of the temporal present and our notion of a spatial here are not completely alike, however. Perhaps the most important difference is that as it is used in the definition of ET-simultaneity, 'present' is an indexical, indicates a relationship (being-present-to), and refers to the absolute present. 'Here' in MNP does not have the same range. In particular, there is no three-dimensional spatial analogue to the absolute present.

The second and third conditions in MNP suggest a less misleading way to formulate the corresponding clauses in a revised definition of ET-simultaneity:

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

(i) either x is eternal and y is temporal, or vice versa (for convenience, let x be eternal and y temporal); and

(ii) with respect to some A in the unique eternal reference frame, x and y are both present—i.e., (a) x is in the eternal present with respect to A, (b) y is in the temporal present, and (c) both x and y are situated with respect to A in such a way that A can enter into direct and immediate causal relations with each of them and (if capable of awareness) can be directly aware of each of them; and

(iii) with respect to some B in one of the infinitely many temporal reference frames, x and y are both present—i.e., (a) x is in the eternal present, (b) y is at the same time as B, and (c) both x and y are situated with respect to B in such a way that B can enter into direct and immediate causal relations with each of them and (if capable of awareness) can be directly aware of each of them.

This revision of ET-simultaneity, in our view, alleviates the concerns of both Hasker and Lewis. The clauses specifying direct and immediate causal relations and direct awareness between what is temporal and what is eternal imply that an eternal God could have temporal entities as the immediate objects of his awareness, even though he is eternal and they are not. Those clauses also imply that temporal entities and events are metaphysically present to God and not just epistemically present. If being metaphysically present is not entirely captured by these specifications, it is not clear to us what else is necessary. If anything else should turn out to be necessary, we see no reason offhand why it could not be added since it strikes us as intuitively clear that there is nothing in the difference between time and eternity that prevents metaphysical presence.[37]

13. *Conclusion*

We are painfully aware of difficulties in the concept of eternity.[38] We also think that conceiving of God as the absolutely perfect being entails recognizing that his mode of existence must be eternity rather than time. Theists committed to conceiving of God in that way are thereby committed to the struggle to make sense of eternity, of atemporal duration, of a timeless being's presence in time, knowledge of time, and action in time. Philosophers and theologians are of course right to be suspicious of a concept whose coherence is repeatedly challenged, but we hope in this paper to have met some of the recent challenges of that sort and to have shown that the challenges often arise out of misunderstanding the doctrine or overlooking the special character of its mode of expression.[39]

Eleonore Stump, *St. Louis University*
Norman Kretzmann, *Cornell University*

NOTES

1. "Eternity," *The Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), 429-458; reprinted in Thomas Morris, ed., *The Concept of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 219-252.

2. Our translation of Boethius's definition, on which see "Eternity," pp. 429-34.

3. *Complete possession* and (even more clearly) *illimitable life* entail duration, and complete possession *all at once* entails the timelessness of that duration.

4. For discussion of other sorts of criticisms see our "Prophecy, Past Truth, and Eternity" in James E. Tomberlin, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives*, 5 (Atascadero: Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1991), 395-424, where we focus on the use of the doctrine of eternity as a basis for resolving the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom, "the eternity solution," especially on criticisms of it as involving violations of the principle of the fixity of the past.

5. The concept of eternity is almost as old as philosophy itself, and its history is not our concern here. But one criticism of our historical claims in "Eternity" deserves a reply. In "Time(s), Eternity, and Duration" (*International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 22 [1987] 3-19) Herbert Nelson suggests that we are mistaken in including Aquinas among those who take duration to be part of the concept of eternity, even though Nelson himself concedes that Aquinas uses the term "'duration' to characterize the existence of a timeless God" (p. 11). He cites I *Sent.* d. 8, q. 2, a. 1, ad 6 against our view (p. 11, n. 10). Aquinas does distinguish eternity from duration in that text as well as in other passages in a. 1. But Nelson has apparently overlooked the parallel between this discussion in Aquinas's early Sentences commentary and his *Summa theologiae* (ST) Ia q. 10, a. 1, which contains his more mature views on the same issues. Both texts present six precisely parallel objections to the claim that the Boethian definition of eternity is correct. But for each passage in the Sentences commentary that separates eternity and duration, the corresponding passage in ST unequivocally unites them. For example, although Obj. 2 in each text argues that *existence* ought to replace *life* in the definition, the argument in ST (though not in I *Sent.*) is based on a premiss that eternity signifies "a sort of duration," a premiss that Aquinas leaves unchallenged in his rejoinder to the objection. Again, in both texts Obj. 4 argues that the phase 'all at once' should not be included in the definition. The objection's argument in I *Sent.* depends on the claim that the definition of duration includes having non-simultaneous parts, a definition that obviously cannot be applied to successionless eternity. But that part of the argument is omitted from the parallel objection in ST. Finally, although Obj. 6 in both texts argues against the inclusion of *possession* in the definition, the objection's argument in I *Sent.* is based on the claim that eternity has the essential character (*ratio*) of duration, a claim that is disputed in the rejoinder to Obj. 6 in I *Sent.* But in the parallel passage in ST the claim in the objection that eternity is itself "a sort of duration" (*quaedam duratio*) is tacitly accepted by Aquinas in his rejoinder, which stresses the absence of change and loss in this mode of existence. So it seems reasonable to infer that any worries Aquinas may have had at an early stage of his career about attributing duration to eternity he had abandoned some fourteen years later, when he wrote ST Ia. For other passages in ST where Aquinas cites and does not dispute the claim that eternity is a sort of duration, see, e.g., Ia q. 39, a. 8, obj. 1 and reply; q. 46, a. 1, obj. 8, and ad 8.

6. And in "Atemporal Duration: A Reply to Fitzgerald," *The Journal of Philosophy* 84 (1987), 214-219.

7. For more discussion of the intended interpretations of such terms in connection with the doctrine of eternity, see "Eternity," especially "IV. Atemporal duration and atemporal life" (pp. 444-47).

8. Of course not every technical use of ordinary terms is analogical. In quantum physics, for instance, 'charm' and 'color' are used not analogically but equivocally: there is *no* respect in which quirks can be construed as charming or colored, and no scintilla of

elucidation would have been lost if other words had been used equivocally for these purposes. For more on the analogical use of words, see pp. 467-69 below.

9. "Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity," *The Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1985), 260-269.

10. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, pp. 262 and 263.

11. In "Atemporal Duration" (n. 6 above).

12. In this respect Fitzgerald resembles Locke, who derived the idea of duration from the idea of succession: "*Duration*, and Time which is a part of it, *is the Idea* we have *of perishing distance, of which no two parts exist together*, but follow each other in Succession;...And therefore...we cannot conceive any Duration without Succession" (*Essay* II xv 12). Reid's decisive criticism of Locke on this point might, perhaps, be extended to Fitzgerald: "let us call the distance between an idea and that which immediately succeeds it, one element of duration... If ten such elements make duration, then one must make duration, otherwise duration must be made up of parts that have no duration, which is impossible. ...Now it must be observed, that in these elements of duration, or single intervals of successive ideas, there is no succession of ideas, yet we must conceive them to have duration; whence we may conclude with certainty, that there is a conception of duration, where there is no succession of ideas in the mind. We may measure duration by the succession of thoughts in the mind, as we measure length by inches or feet; but the notion or idea of duration must be antecedent to the mensuration of it, as the notion of length is antecedent to its being measured" (*Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Essay III, Ch. V, p. 351).

13. It may be important in this connection to distinguish between conceptual divisibility and imaginary divisibility based on conceptual confusion. The sheet of paper on which these words are printed is conceptually divisible into its right and left halves, and that conceptualization quite properly gives rise to the concept of the vertical line dividing the sheet in half. It may be in some sense natural to imagine, further, that that dividing line has its own right and left sides; but however natural such a thought might be, it would of course represent a conceptual confusion. Not every division that might actually be carried out in someone's imagination is evidence of conceptual divisibility.

14. Some philosophers and physicists have, however, argued for extended but indivisible atoms of space or time. See, e.g., Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum* (London: Duckworth, 1983); Norman Kretzmann, "Continua, Indivisibles, and Change in Wyclif's Logic of Scripture" in A. Kenny, ed., *Wyclif in His Times* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 31-65.

15. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991. We are grateful to Professor Leftow for allowing us to see the typescript of his book before publication.

16. Nelson, *op. cit.* (n. 5 above), p. 16.

17. Nelson, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

18. Nelson, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

19. Nelson, *op. cit.*, e.g., p. 7. Although he introduces his omniscient, omnipotent, freely creating God as part of a hypothetical example, it is crucial to his example that this hypothetical God should be identifiable as God.

20. For a still useful discussion of the specious present, see William James, *The*

Principles of Psychology I, Ch. XV, "The Perception of Time," esp. pp. 608-10, "The Sensible Present Has Duration."

21. The indivisibility of a specious present as such does not preclude subsequent conceptual divisions of the temporal interval on which it supervened. Cf. James, *op. cit.*, p. 610: "We do not first feel one end and then feel the other after it, and from the perception of the succession infer an interval of time between, but we seem to feel the interval of time as a whole, with its two ends embedded in it. ...to sensible perception its elements are inseparable, although attention looking back may easily decompose the experience, and distinguish its beginning from its end." James here seems to suggest that the specious present itself may be conceptually divisible in retrospect; our view is that, at least in many cases, only the underlying temporal interval, however short, and not the specious present itself is divisible in that way.

22. Alston proposes conceiving of God's eternal cognition of temporal events as his specious present: "the psychological concept of the specious present provides an intelligible model for a nontemporal knowledge of a temporal world. ...a being with an infinite specious present would not, so far as his awareness is concerned, be subject to temporal succession at all. ...*Everything* would be grasped in one temporally unextended awareness." "Hartshorne and Aquinas: A *Via Media*," in William P. Alston, *Divine Nature and Human Language* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 136; first published in J. Cobb and F. Gamwell, eds., *Existence and Actuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

23. For a good, brief introduction, see James F. Ross, "Analogy as a Rule of Meaning for Religious Language," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1961), 468-502 (reprinted in A. Kenny, ed., *Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books—Doubleday & Co., 1969); for a more extended treatment see Ross's *Portraying Analogy*.

24. We have in mind similes such as Aquinas's likening of God's eternal knowledge of time to a mountaintop observer's view of a procession below, arguments such as Paley's about the watch and the universe or the standard argument for the existence of other minds, and theories such as those in ancient and medieval philosophy that depend on the microcosm-macrocosm analogy.

25. Nelson, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

26. "In some ways the Stump-Kretzmann notion of atemporal duration resembles my own notion of Beta—a universe temporally unrelated to our own," *op. cit.*, p. 17.

27. Leftow, *op. cit.*, ch. V, sect. 5.

28. Cf. the "Lineland" of A. Square's dream in Edwin A. Abbott's *Flatland* (1884; New York: New American Library, 1984), Chs. 13 & 14.

29. Of course there is time in Aleph, and there are temporal as well as spatial relationships; but we are interested only in its spatial characteristics.

30. See p. 466 above.

31. Cf. "Eternity," 439-440.

32. "Eternity," p. 438, n. 15.

33. This way of looking at eternity and time need not conflict with the idea that there

is an absolute temporal present, that temporal passage is real rather than mind-dependent. One frame of reference in respect of which to determine presentness might be all of time itself.

34. "One can be immediately aware only of what is *present* for one to be aware of; what else, after all, can 'immediate' mean? If God is timeless, he can be immediately aware of (supposedly) temporal facts only if these facts *really are* timeless after all. If, on the other hand, the world really is temporal, only a temporal God can be immediately aware of it—and then only of its *present*, not of its past or future," p. 169 in William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989).

35. "Eternity, Time and Tenselessness," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988), 72-86.

36. Consider relationships of direct awareness in which the subject and object are of different orders of dimensionality. A three-dimensional observer can be and very frequently is effortlessly aware of a two-dimensional object as such; an imagined two-dimensional observer could not be aware of a three-dimensional object as three-dimensional. (Cf. the experiences of A. Square in Abbott's *Flatland*, n. 28 above.)

37. Someone might object to clause (c) in conditions (ii) and (iii) of (ET′) along the lines of Nelson's objection to our original formulation of these conditions: "That God observes temporal things *as temporally present* is a condition of...ET-simultaneity.... It is logically impossible for this condition to be satisfied by a timeless God. If God is timeless, whether something is temporally present is a pseudo-question for God" (*op. cit.*, p. 18, n. 4). Unlike Hasker, Nelson is apparently taking 'observes' to indicate a state of direct awareness, and he is presumably assuming that a timeless God cannot have direct awareness of things in time. Nelson does not spell out his reasons for his claim that it is logically impossible for a timeless God to have direct awareness of temporal things. But the only grounds we know of for a claim of this sort is are those supplied by Hasker and Lewis. Similarly, any attempt to object to the corresponding clauses in (ET′) by arguing that it is impossible for an eternal God to have direct and immediate causal relations with or direct awareness of temporal things seems to us to rely on arguments like those of Hasker and Lewis. Since we have already argued against the principles on which those arguments are based, we are inclined to think that the relevant clauses of (ET′) are immune to this sort of objection.

38. "The doctrine that God is timeless turns out, when properly understood, to be a very strange doctrine indeed. The problem with deviant versions of the theory is not that they are strange, but that they are not strange enough to have a chance of being true." William Hasker, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

39. For helpful written comments on earlier drafts we are grateful to Robert Jenson, Timothy O'Connor, Philip Quinn, and Thomas D. Senor.