

University of Manchester

David A. Pailin

THE DIVINE PERSPECTIVE(S): GOD AND TIME

So far as the credibility of theism is concerned, it is important to clarify what is meant by God and time since this is basic to a proper appreciation of the relation of God to the processes of reality. Widespread and traditional thought about these matters has put forward certain notions that are at least debatable and probably incredible. In this paper, therefore, I want to consider what may emerge about the relationship between God and time if we understand.

i. God as the proper object of worship who is most adequately conceived as ontologically, valuatively and rationally ultimate, self-conscious, and aware of the actual states of the world as they occur; and

ii. actual reality as processive and so temporal. What does not change is either abstract or past. To be actual is to be a moment of being whose reality is constituted by its response to its environment, including massively and predominantly its grasp of the reality of its immediate predecessor in a route of events.

II

While physical investigations are limited to matters subsequent to the Hot Big Bang and prior to the Final Crunch (if there is to be one), such restrictions are not appropriate to considerations of the relationship between God and time. This relationship is primarily a matter of metaphysical understanding. It concerns truths that apply to and are true for all possible events in any possible cosmic order. They are not restricted to the actual world in which we find ourselves.

Is it, however, possible to identify and verify such metaphysical truths? In his critical philosophy Kant maintained that the only identifiable truths of this order

concern the structures of our knowledge — the forms of intuition and the categories of understanding¹. His views are important because they draw attention to the anthropological conditioning of all understanding. It is arguable, however, that they do not rule out in principle the possibility of a critical realist position in relation to metaphysical claims. On the other hand, it is not easy to identify metaphysical truths. As ultimate and necessary, they can neither be derived from anything ontologically prior to them nor be identified by distinguishing between the characteristics of states which conform to them and the characteristics of other states which do not conform to them.

As Whitehead put it, generally we observe things by ‘the method of difference’. He gives this example, „Sometimes we see an elephant, and sometimes we do not. The result is that an elephant, when present, is noticed”². Since, however, awareness by discrimination is not possible in the case of that to which all actual and all genuinely possible states of reality must conform, what are we to do? Whitehead’s suggestion is that we should seek to attain and verify insights into metaphysical truths by a procedure in which first we consider the character of reality as we experience it (and, we may add, as scientific investigations disclose it), secondly we imaginatively generalize our understanding of its fundamental character, and finally we check our generalizations against further experiences of reality³. The aim of this procedure is to discern a (perhaps, the) story of reality which is internally coherent, appropriate to and makes sense of the fundamental structures of its processes, and appears to be universalizable and fruitful.

III

Since the relationship of God to time is a wide-ranging question, in this paper I want to concentrate on one aspect of it, namely the question of the divine perspective or perspectives on events. In what way are we to understand God’s awareness of what happens?

First of all, however it should be noted that to accept the view of God given earlier entails the rejection of two answers to this question which have a long and impressive theological pedigree.

One holds that God is incapable of change in any respect. As perfect the divine reality is the totally complete. While, therefore, God attracts all towards Godself, God is neither aware of others nor even self-conscious (except, perhaps, so far as being in the state of bliss God timelessly contemplates the divine essence and hence

¹ Cf. I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysic*.

² A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. by D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne, New York: The Free Press 1978, p. 4.

³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 5 and A. N. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1926, p. 76.

timelessly experiences the ‘beatific vision’). This form of theistic understanding identifies God as something akin to the Platonic Good. Since, however, the divine reality is thus held to be non-temporally ordered, it is hard to conceive how God can significantly be said to have any internal relations. Furthermore, while such a divine being might coherently be considered to have external relations (e.g., in being the ‘God’ of p), it could not be affected by nor even be aware of such differences as those between the state when p exists contemporaneously with q and states when p does not so exist.

The other traditional view which has to be given up is that which envisages God as one whose eternity is a state of total simultaneity in which all events are at once immediate to the divine awareness. If such were the case, the temporality of the processes of reality would be illusory from the divine perspective. Divine awareness of a cosmic epoch would be comparable to looking at a film of all events from the Big Bang to the Final Crunch when all the frames of the film were projected side by side on a screen and seen simultaneously. In such a case the relationship between events in time parallels that between objects in space.

These interpretations of God’s unchangeability and eternity are incompatible with ideas of God as actively responding to what occurs. If God is unchangeable and timeless in every respect, to seek divine aid is as pointless as shouting to a hero on a film screen to watch out because the baddies are behind the rock! What will happen is fixed on the film. Nothing can be done about it.

This may be how reality actually is. But if it is, theistic faith is not only mistaken in holding that God is creatively, responsively and graciously active. It is also mistaken in holding that our decisions are significant and that our relationships with each other and with God are due to the decisions of persons who enjoy autonomy (and, as a result, responsibility) to a worthwhile extent.

Before, however, we leave the description of God as a wholly unchangeable, *totum simul* eternity, it should be noted that this doctrine, however mistaken religiously, does match the four-dimensional (or more than four-dimensional) ‘block universe’ model by which some physicists describe the fundamental structure of reality — a model in which time is one dimension of a reality whose other dimensions are spatial. Since this continuum is always real throughout (and so is determinate as a whole), it can be interpreted (and arguably must be interpreted) as a deterministic view of reality. This is because, according to the model, all locatable states of ‘here-now’ (which characterize each present actuality), whether they are past, present or future from our perspective, are located within this continuum. Our experience of events ceasing to be future and becoming present is merely *our* experience of the identifying spotlight of presentness moving around that continuum from one position to another. There is no genuine openness about the future states of any entity, including and supremely God’s. All that a perfect (i.e., divine) observer can do is to note which time-lines track through the block universe and which do not.

The notion of a block-universe continuum raises certain fundamental problems. It suggests, for example, that it is an illusion to hold both that human beings have freedom and creativity and that the divine being is autonomous, free and creative in relation to the processes of reality. Since the events constituting the processes of reality are as fixed as frames in a film, those processes are without any authentic autonomy, novelty and creativity. God is either totally unaware of them or, if aware, unable to do anything about them because all the successive states to any event are already as clearly known to (and so are as determinate for) God as the event itself.

Both the notion of a block universe and that of an unchanging God, then, contradict the theistic view that God is intentional, purposive and agential, having both internal and external relations. They also contradict humanity's fundamental self-understanding that the constituents of reality have genuine value because they are to a significant extent self-created by internal relations as well being the product of external relations.

The question thus arises whether another model can be envisaged which makes sense both of the theistic faith that God acts and of human self-understanding of the intrinsic worth of human being in particular and the processes of reality in general. Let us consider, therefore, what is presupposed by coherent talk of God as acting — namely, the notion of the temporal ordering of the divine reality as having both internal relations and external relations with other realities that are really (and not merely apparently) processively ordered.

IV

A credible view of the relationship of God to time presupposes nine basic (and rationally credible) theses about the fundamental character of reality.

1. The relationship between events is limited by certain factors. No event can be physically influenced by another event that lies outside the cone of its causal past; nor can any event physically influence another event that lies outside the cone of its causal future. In this cosmos the limits of the cones of causal influence on and from a particular event is finally determined by the speed of light.

2. No concurring event can be influenced by 'contemporaries' where its 'contemporaries' are determinate events which lie outside its past causal range; nor can it influence 'contemporaries' where these are concurring events which lie outside its future causal range.

This means that the notion of being 'contemporary' is a complex one. It covers both determinate events outside the past causal range of an event and indeterminate possibilities outside the future causal range of that event. Contemporaneity with an event is thus set by the causal range on and of that event and is defined in terms of what can neither influence nor be influenced by it.

It should be noted, however, that theism suggests an exception to the principle

that the interconnection of events is finally limited by physical factors. It seems reasonable to maintain that divine awareness, response and communication are not constrained by physical factors such as the speed of light. This being so, the notion of ‘contemporaneity’ in the case of God has to be defined in terms of the sum of the points of subjective decision in all states which have determinate predecessors and no determinate successors. We will consider some of the implications of this later when we discuss the divine ‘now’ and the so-called ‘Noah Case’.

3. No event is simply here and now. The causal network in which each event comes to be means that each event is a moment of creative synthesis which ends a past causal cone of determinate events and which begins a future causal cone of possible events. While, therefore, the notion of simple location is a useful abstraction for many purposes (e.g., to indicate that I am here and not there, that the pot is there and not here), it leads to error when it is understood to mean that a concrete event (or object) is confined to an independent, separate, here-and-now location in space and time. Whitehead describes this error as ‘the fallacy of simple location’ and sees it as a form of the fallacy of ‘misplaced concreteness’¹, that is of the fallacy of ‘mistaking the abstract for the concrete’.

Each actual event, then, is a response to a limited range of past events and a projection² into the past causal range of future possible events. It is a focus or resolution of forces, a moment of determination which creatively synthesises influences from past events and which is projected as a causal influence on future events that lie within its future causal range. Hence each event is part of a social universe.

It should be noted, therefore, that while it is useful to talk of events as if they are separate entities, their actuality may be more appropriately understood in terms of points, of foci produced by the creative synthesis of forces, in an ongoing (or ever extending) continuum rather than in terms of discrete quanta. Indeed, in the final analysis, events themselves are to be seen as abstractions. They are points of specification in the processive continuum of the whole which is what is actual and in which they are interconnected. Furthermore, as pantheism maintains, all events are linked together to constitute a cosmic whole in that they are immediate to the divine awareness and accordingly incorporated into God.

4. Time (and, *mutatis mutandis*, also space) is not a given real ‘thing’. This thesis, however, is not an expression of the Kantian view of time and space as the forms of intuition by which we distinguish between the objects of experience. On the basis of this Kant holds that time belongs only to the phenomenal world and cannot characterize (or, at any rate, cannot be known to characterize) reality as it is

¹ Cf. A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1926, pp. 611T, 72, 84, 1131T; *Process and Reality*, p. 137. According to Whitehead, it is a ‘fallacy which is the occasion of great confusion in philosophy’ — *Science and the Modern World*, p. 64.

² Whitehead calls such a projection a ‘superject’ — cf. *Process and Reality*, p. 87.

in itself. This being so, it does not characterize the realm and experiences of the divine. Although erroneous, such a conclusion may fit traditional theistic doctrines that the divine mode of being (as the being of that which truly is) is one of timeless *totum simul* eternity. This doctrine, however, makes nonsense of the reality of the creative process and of the divine as agential in creative and responsive ways.

5. If time is neither an object nor a structure of the intellect, how is it to be understood? *Time* refers to the way in which events are causally related to and distinguishable from each other. Time is thus not itself a reality but an abstraction expressing the relationship between events. What is real are events: if nothing happens (i.e., if no events occur as foci of creative syntheses within the continuum that is reality as a whole), there is nothing for the notion of time to refer to.

Time, furthermore, is an abstraction which describes a *directional* factor in the causal relationship between events. An event which is temporally before a second event is within the past causal range of that second event; an event which is temporally after another event has that other event within its own past causal range; contemporary events have causal ranges which exclude each other. The measurement of time is thus a way of expressing the ordering of events within causal ranges.

Since, therefore, time is not an absolute within which events occur but describes the internal and external causal relations between events, time is not something (some 'thing') which can coherently be envisaged as having been 'created' by God. Whatever mode of activity 'creation' by God refers to, it refers to the (coming into?) being of the continuum whose processive character is distinguishable into series of actual events. Time is the way that the causal relationship between events constituting this continuum is abstractly describable.

The nature of the relationship which 'time' describes provides a further reason why 'time' should not be regarded as a reality. Since time describes a relationship between events where one is before or after another, at best only one of the events to be related is present and so actual. The other is either past (and so perished) or projected (and so not yet determinate). Hence the relationship between events links either what is not now to what is now (the latter only being actual), or what is not to what is not. In neither case does 'time' refer to what is itself real in the sense of being something present.

6. Since time is not real, it is not appropriate to think of *time* as having a beginning and an end. Only temporally ordered events and series of events, so far as they may justifiably be considered to have simple location, can be regarded as having temporal beginnings and ends.

The set of events can be either finite or infinite. While not more than one event entails no temporal ordering, the temporal relation is finite if the set of events greater than one is finite, and infinite if the set of events constituting a route of events is endless.

7. What will happen is essentially open. References to future events are not to

what, as *future*, are determinate events which have not yet occurred, let alone to events which have occurred but not yet been observed from a particular location; properly understood such references are to ranges of possibilities within which some appropriate determinations will occur.

Consequently the notion of a complete (i.e., an unextending) space-time continuum makes the fundamental mistake of regarding the relationships between temporally separated events as symmetrical, like the relationships between spatially separated objects. This is not the case. The relationship of present events to past events is asymmetric to the relationship of present events to future events. References to what is a *past* event refer to what is essentially precise, determinate, fixed. To have been an actual event means to have established a particular form. References to a *future* event, in contrast, refer to 'what' is essentially indeterminate, open, awaiting final determination. Strictly speaking, talk about a 'future event', so far as it is genuinely future, is misleading because it does not refer to an actual event but to something or other that will occur within a range of possibilities. 'What' is still future does not have the fixed, precise 'whatness' of a determinate event. It is always to some extent fuzzy, vague, imprecise and unfocussed. References to what is a *present* event refer to what is at the final point of what is determinate. A present event may thus be defined either as an event at that point where the extending range of future indeterminacy has its origin, or as an event at that point where the succession of events that have been actual and hence determinate ends.

8. The above view of time implies that there can be no straightforward answer to the question, 'Is there an absolute now?'

In one respect the answer is 'No'. There is no cosmic or universal 'now' which unites various events as being simultaneous in an absolute way because they are all 'now', i.e., because they occur at the same moment as measured by a universal clock. This agrees with the way in which the theory of special relativity understands the relationship between events in the physical world. In another respect, however, the answer is 'Yes'. The term 'now' may be appropriately used, if its significance is carefully defined, to describe the state of

14 an event each of whose predecessors is wholly determinate and each of whose successors is indeterminate to some, even if minimal, extent.

The property of being 'now' thus refers to the property of an actual event which is finally and totally determinate, which prehends determinate members of a route of events as constituting its past but which has no immediate successor to whose concrecence it contributes as a determinate object in that successor's past. 'Nowness' is thus not a quality which is shared by a number of events as a common property which binds them together in a specific way — like the property of being in the same room. Being 'now' is, rather, a property that belongs to individual events — except, perhaps, in the sense (which will be discussed later) that God, as that being which is immediately aware of the determination of each occasion will be aware of each 'now' of determination of each occasion as it happens. In relation to quantum descriptions of physical reality, it follows that where there are no determinates (i.e., no actual events), there are no 'nows'; there are just ranges of possibilities awaiting determination.

9. One final point, since physical communication between realities (including causal influence) is not instantaneous, the causal (and hence the temporal) relationship between actual events depends upon the perspective from which it is viewed. While, however, this is true of physical modes of communication between physical realities, it seems an inappropriate limitation on the cosmic awareness of the divine and therefore neither it nor what follows from it can be regarded as a metaphysical truth.

Bearing in mind the characteristics of reality which have been outlined, let us consider what follows from them for a credible understanding of the temporal aspect of the relationship between God and the processes of reality. There are eleven points which I want briefly to note in this respect.

1. Since the notion of space-time is a way of describing certain relationships between events, the complexity of those relationships (and hence the complexity of what is describable in terms of space-time) increases as the number of determinate events increases.

The asymmetry of the relationship between past and future events in respect of the present thus provides grounds for rejecting the notion that time and space are aspects of a constant, perhaps infinite, continuum (a block-universe container) in which the drama of the universe unfolds and which exists independently of the actuality of any events constituting that drama. Instead time and space are to be seen to be reifications of abstractions derived from the relationships between events. The so-called 'continuum' of space-time is accordingly to be regarded as an abstract description of the form of the possible relationships between events. Furthermore, so far as the abstraction 'space-time continuum' is an acceptable and useful concept, it is to be understood as a way of

describing what extends in scope or 'size' as new events occur and thereby come to be related to previous events. The notion of 'being now' refers to being a point at the boundary of that developing 'continuum'.

It is possible, furthermore, that some events are not thus relatable to other events. Some events may belong to one cosmic order and other events to another, totally independent and unrelated cosmic order. Of course, if other such cosmic orders exist, the events constituting them can only be speculated about: by their very nature there is no way by which members of one cosmic order can become aware of the contents of another. God, however, as aware of all, must presumably be aware of the contents of all cosmic orders.

2. The temporal relationship between events has one direction which corresponds to the asymmetry of that relationship. The movement is from determinate past events to indeterminate future events.

On the grounds that concurring events as effects take into themselves the forms of their causes, Whitehead describes the 'passage of the cause into the effect' as 'the cumulative character of time'¹. Replying to the possible objection that what is built up from determinate units can in principle be broken down into those units, Hartshorne argues that the temporal relation is irreversible because each concurring event incorporates past events in a creative synthesis whose form is only finally determined in the actual concurrence of that concurring event. The event is thus more than the sum of its parts and is not divisible without remainder into those parts.

While, however, the temporal relationship is uni-directional, it is conceivable that the development within the cosmos of the relationships described by space and time may be uneven (or bumpy) rather than smooth. It may not, that is, develop evenly like the expansion of a balloon made of uniform rubber as the air-pressure inside it increases. The successive states of 'nowness' in the routes of different series of events or of different groups of series of events may produce an uneven pattern so that the surface of the expanding 'balloon' of all the relationships between all events in a cosmic order is marked by bumps and hollows, some of them possibly forming peculiarly shaped protuberances and cavities (comparable, perhaps, to the result of inflating a rubber glove whose material is itself uneven).

Although, according to certain physical theories, there are more than three dimensions of spatial relationship, there is only one dimension of temporal relationship between events. The reason for this lies in the asymmetry of that relationship. What is not yet determinate is not determinate in any relationship. Furthermore, while the abstraction space as a way of expressing the relationships

¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 237.

16 between determinate events may be conceived to have any number of dimensions, the distinction between past events and future possibilities in the processiveness of reality means that the abstract notion of a space-time continuum must be considered to refer a continuum which continually extends as more events occur. By itself, then, the notion of time may be regarded as a description of the direction of growth (namely, always outwards) of such a space-time continuum as well as defining one aspect of a relationship (namely, the causal relationship) between events within that continuum. It must be emphasised, however, that all talk about such a continuum refers to what is an abstract way of describing the relationships between events.

3. God is not to be considered to be the creator (or maker) of time (nor of space) — as if (one of) the first act(s) of God as creator was to make a kind of container (i.e., the space-time continuum) in which to construct the world as a further act of divine creativity. Consideration of what is meant by the temporal relationship between events provides various reasons for considering that it is a mistake to think of God as ‘creating’ time:

a. ‘time’ is not a reality to be created. It is an abstraction. What can be ‘created’, whatever that verb connotes, are the events whose relationships with each other are abstractly describable in one respect in terms of temporal order;

b. the notion of an act of creation which means that a state where there was no time being followed by a state which is temporally ordered is incoherent if creation is an intentional act of God. As such it must be an act with a ‘before’ and an ‘after’ and hence intrinsically presupposes a temporal relationship. Since, therefore, the act of creating entails a series of events which are temporally ordered, time itself cannot coherently be understood as something which can originate in an act of creation;

c. if God is to be conceived as being without beginning and without end and as essentially creative, it is incoherent to think of the divine creativity as having had a first temporal point ‘before’ which God did not create and at which point God (in a supposedly ‘timeless’ mode of being) decided to create. Similarly it is incoherent to conceive of God as eventually having a final temporal point after which nothing at all will or even could occur — a state of ‘nothing’ which is absolute and so means, *inter alia*, that there are then no distinguishable states of consciousness in the divine.

Consequently while it is coherent to conceive of there being a start and an end to this current cosmic epoch, it is not coherent to conceive of there being a start and an end to the divine creativity unless it is held that God as well as events ‘just started’ and will eventually ‘just end’. This, however, is to deny an essential characteristic of theistic understanding, namely, that God exists neither accidentally nor derivatively but necessarily since the only mode of existence appropriate to God is that of ontological (not logical) necessity. Furthermore, if God is correctly understood to be everlastingly and essentially

loving, the divine reality cannot coherently be conceived as being without objects of love. From this it follows that God's creative activity is not to be conceived as ever being *ex nihilo*. Every creative act of God is in reality a response to what is there. The notion of there being a first, *ex nihilo* act has only theoretical significance.

4. Truth is definable in terms of what God knows to be the case, for God is aware of all events without error or omission. This being so, it is appropriate to hold that for theism the standard for correct understanding of temporal relationships is the ordering of events as perceived by God. This standard, however, does not mean that there is ultimately an absolute temporal order, namely a *single* order in which God's awareness comprehends all events. Rather there are as many temporal orders as there are events being temporally related: God's awareness is an awareness of each of them.

5. God cannot change events that have actually happened. Whatever was actual and so determinate is unchangingly known and remembered as such by God. Accordingly, in whatever way God may seek to use what has happened, God does not and cannot make what has happened in a sequence of determinate events not to have happened, nor what did not happen in such a sequence to have happened. Furthermore, as each event occurs, God's awareness of it becomes a determinate and unchangeable constituent of what Whitehead calls the 'consequent nature' of the divine. Since, therefore, God embraces and incorporates all that occurs (i.e., all events) in the divine experience, no experience of actual being, no matter how trivial, ever finally perishes. Its character is forever experienced, known and preserved by God without loss or error.

6. Just as the definitive character of past events and their relationships is what is determinate for God, so the definitive character of future (i.e. possible) events in relation to other events is what is indeterminate for God. The asymmetrical nature of the relationship between present and past events in comparison to that between present and future events is a metaphysical truth. It is, therefore, true for all modes of reality, including that of the divine reality. In this respect God, as Whitehead puts it, is not 'an exception to' but the 'chief exemplification' of ultimate metaphysical principles¹. Hence there are possibilities for God. As ontologically necessary God will be present to and in all future states, but the contingent aspects of the actuality of those states will be open so long as the events which will constitute them are still future and so indeterminate within a range of possibilities. From this it follows that while God is to be conceived as aware of the limits of what is possible and of the probabilities that a course of future events will develop in one rather than another direction, the precise forms in which those future events will be actualized are not already

¹ Ibid., p. 343.

18 'known' by God as determinate, not even as determinate possibilities. As omniscient God knows all that is knowable at any moment but not what is not knowable — and this includes the determinate form of what, as future, is still to be determined. Genuine creativity in the processes of reality (and hence even the possibility of surprise) is thus properly attributable to the divine experience.

Troubling as some theists may find it, there is therefore some uncertainty about future events even for God. While God limits the range and will be co-present with whatever future events may happen to be, God does not know beforehand exactly what determinate form future events, as *future*, will actually take. Future events are accordingly not to be thought of as hiding in regions of space-time waiting to be discovered as their 'nows' come to light. So far as the notion of a space-time continuum is an acceptable abstraction, events should only be considered to become part of it (or, rather, the space-time continuum considered to extend to embrace those events) as they occur. References to future events thus refer to the ranges of unknowable (although more or less accurately predictable) events that lie within ranges of possibility outside that continuum — the genuine *terra incognita* for all existence as temporally ordered since there is no *terra* to be *cognita*. What theism maintains is not that what, as future, is unknowable is nevertheless knowable by God but that whatever events happen in the future, they will be subject to the limitations of occurring as a divinely-grounded mode of existence with which God is necessarily co-present.

7. God's awareness of and response to events is not limited by the nature of physical processes. God does not have a physical location nor, in order to be aware of what has happened in the cosmos, does God have to wait for information to arrive by processes whose speed cannot be faster than that of light. Divine omniscience, as knowledge of all that is knowable, knows as determinate what has become so knowable immediately it becomes so knowable. From this it follows that God, as knowing immediately all that becomes determinate throughout the cosmos, knows an event as determinate in one spatial location 'now' (i.e., as having determinate predecessors but no determinate successors) which will only become physically prehensible by an event in a second spatial location which is a distant future successor (in a route of inheritance) of some other event in that second location which God also knows to be 'now' (i.e., which God knows to be determinate but to be prehended as determinate by no other actual event).

God is thus to be considered to be co-present with all the states of 'now' (i.e., with all states which have wholly determinate predecessors and no wholly determinate successors). There is, however, a fundamental difference between the relationship of God to spatially distinguished events and the relationship of God to temporally distinguished ones. This is because spatial relationships are symmetrical but temporal relationships, as we have noted, are asymmetrical. In

the case of spatially distinguished events, it is coherent to speak of God as immediately present to all of them. In the case of temporally distinguished events, God is only present to those that are currently concurring (and as such necessarily apprehend the divine as part of the data of their situation). God is not present to past events because they have perished into objects in the divine memory, nor to future possible events for they have not yet come to be.

8. God's knowledge of an actual event is immediate at that event's moment of actuality in the process of reality. At that moment the event inherits what is determinate for it but is without any determinate successors in the route of occasions which constitutes the identity of the enduring object of which it is a constituent. God's awareness is thus to be thought of as internal to the actuality of the concurring event. This understanding of the divine reality is described by Hartshorne as 'panentheistic'. It follows that God's perspective on the processes of reality embraces the perspectives of all events. There is no one privileged perspective: rather God is to be understood as experiencing each event in its situation as each event experiences it. Accordingly it is more appropriate for theistic understanding of God's awareness to speak of God's perspectives in the plural rather than to speak of God's perspective in the singular as if there were a single, absolute perspective from which God is aware of everything.

9. God knows the relationships between events according to what is fixed and determinate for each event and what is indeterminate for each event. God is also aware that within the cosmos the range of the physical causal influence which a determinate event can have for still to be determined events is governed by the rates of physical processes and by the character of relativity. Since, therefore, God knows all that is actual as actual, and all the ranges of what is potential as potential, the divine knowledge is enormously complex. It is to be thought of as embracing all temporal relationships with other events as perceived from the standpoint of each event rather than as instantiating a single temporal perspective extending throughout the cosmos as if there were a standard cosmic clock with slave dials spread throughout the cosmos. There is no cosmic 'now' which permits a timeslice which joins events in a cosmic simultaneity and which could be measured by such a clock. What for God, as for all others, is *now* in the case of 'a' is the limit of determinations of a route of events inherited by 'a' and leading to 'a what is now in the case of 'b' is the limit inherited by 'b' and leading to b; etc.

In view of this it is useful to distinguish *now* as referring to the point in the history of a route of occasions between what is wholly determinate and what is to some degree indeterminate, and *simultaneity* (or contemporaneity or co-actuality) as referring to the state where two (or more) events can neither influence nor be influenced by each other.

10. God's awareness is not limited by physical factors. While, therefore, the future causal range of an event 'a' does not include event 'b', God can know that the determinate event 'a' will be able to influence whatever become determinate successors to event 'b' at some future times. This is because God knows the causal ranges of all determinate events and not just the causal range of one particular event or group of events. For example, in knowing me now and considering my future, God knows determinates which can only enter the past causal range of a successor to me now.

This is the basis of what may be described as the 'Noah case'! As God's mode of awareness and communication is not limited by physical factors, God both knows what is concurring on a star 'n' light-years away from earth and that what is happening there will only be visible to observers on earth in 'n' years. (The situation reminds me of a visit which I once made to a student group to play to them a taped lecture about God's knowledge. Before the tape was played, the chairman of the group prayed about what was to be said. I found myself thinking 'O God! You know what is on the tape is not like that at all!') This is the proper understanding of the notion of God's *foreknowledge*. Furthermore, since God knows how 'contemporary' events will enter the past causal ranges of successors to those events, it is coherent to conceive of God as seeking to urge a person to act in a way that will minimize damage to that person's successors from some event though the person is incapable of perceiving the grounds which justify that urging. While, however, it is possible thus to envisage God as acting on the basis of what is determinate and what is predictable cosmically, it is a debatable question whether God does so act and, if so, how!

11. In view of what has been said, it is interesting to consider what may be the nature of God's awareness of all that is. In particular, it may be asked whether, since God perceives every event immediately from within, it is coherent to conceive God as co-ordinating all the perspectives of all events into an understanding of one universe as a whole — and, if so, what is the nature of that awareness. To these questions I can only find one satisfactory reply, namely, 'God only knows'. But then it should not surprise those who believe in God to admit that thought about God raises questions which profoundly puzzle us.

VI

As previously noted, consideration of God's awareness of the temporally ordered processes of reality raises the further question of what God *does* about what God is aware of. This, however, is a question which this paper will not even attempt to tackle!

In one of the Goon Shows (a BBC radio comedy series of some decades ago) Eccles was asked the time. He hunted for a piece of paper and showed it to the questioner who remarked, 'It says eight o'clock'. Eccles replied, 'Yes. That was the time when I asked him to write it down for me'. It is good comedy. Since I fear that I may be the Eccles of discussions about God and time, it might be safest for me to hide behind Augustine's remark, 'When no-one asks me, I know what time is; but when I am asked, I cannot tell'!

10th May 1991