

GOD, TIME AND ETERNITY

by

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GOD, TIME AND ETERNITY

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Abstract

If something is eternal then it neither has a beginning nor comes to an end. On this point most scholars agree, but there is little agreement thereafter concerning the relationship between eternity and time. There are two main models for this relationship. The first, and most common model, is that eternity is to be understood as existence outside time, or in other words, a timeless existence. This model of eternity has been attributed to Parmenides and Plato but is most notably stated by Boethius who describes God as possessing eternal life in this sense. The second (and increasingly common) model is that eternity is to be understood as endless endurance within time.¹ This model is the easiest to grasp since it is most like our own existence, simply extended infinitely both into the past and into the future.

Both models have been used to portray the relationship between an eternal God and time. In the first model it is postulated that God is atemporally eternal, existing wholly outside of time. In the second, it is postulated that God is temporally eternal, enduring everlastingly through time. Recently a third model has been suggested which has so far received scant attention. According to this new "combination" model, God is timelessly eternal prior to creation, and temporally eternal at, and subsequent to, creation. I argue that there are serious problems with the atemporal and the combination models. A model of the temporally eternal existence of God is defended and it is shown that no greater advantage is

¹This option is also described as 'sempiternity' or 'everlastingness.'

gained by postulating the combination model than by postulating a model in which God is temporally eternal.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Objective and Structure of Thesis

I propose to investigate three models of divine eternity. The relationship between God and time is examined by focusing on these models. If God is eternal, then in what sense is He eternal? How is God related to time? It is these questions that I hope to answer in the following chapters.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. This, the first chapter, is an introduction to the rest of the work. I give an historical overview and represent the models diagrammatically. Chapters two, three, and four analyse three models of divine eternity: the temporally eternal model, the timelessly eternal model and the recent combination model respectively. Finally, in chapter five, I draw the threads together and reach a conclusion.

The central chapters of the thesis each take one model of divine eternity and discuss it. They all have roughly the same structure. First is an explanation and statement of the model. Second, there is a discussion of reasons that have been given in support of it. When investigating a philosophical problem, it usually transpires that there are several alternatives, and one has the difficult task of evaluating them. When faced with such a task it is useful to understand the reasons that exist for adopting one option instead of another. Such understanding helps one to see which alternatives are more or less likely, more or less straightforward, which have been noetically engineered for some

philosophical end, and so on. Of course such an investigation of reasons provides no argument for or against any one option, since the reasons might be unconventional and curious, yet the option itself still actually be correct. It would be fallacious to suppose that some option is incorrect just because the reasons for adopting it were unusual. The most complex and carefully contrived philosophical view might turn out to be the most plausible one in the end. Despite these cautionary remarks, an investigation of the reasons given for adopting each of the various models of divine eternity is a useful exercise.

In each of the central chapters there is a final section which discusses objections to the model. This is important because, as Swinburne notes in the case of divine timelessness,

As with all unfamiliar views in science or metaphysics, the best way to bring out its meaning is to show what reasons can be brought forward in its favour and what objections can be made to it. The meaning should appear in and after the examination of the evidence. Why then have people wanted to say that God is outside time?¹

1.2 Motivation and Justification

The thesis is a justifiable piece of work because the recondite debate over the nature of divine eternity has been pursued with renewed vigour by philosophers in recent years as part of a more general resurgence of interest in the philosophy of religion. One upshot of this has been the emergence of a completely new model of divine eternity for the first time in some fifteen hundred years. Despite the initial strength and plausibility of the new model, I shall show that there is no greater

¹Swinburne, The Timelessness of God, p.331

incentive for adopting it, or greater advantage gained by it, than by one of the traditional models.

The topic of eternity has become fashionable again. There is much discussion on which model of divine eternity is the most plausible one. This discussion is particularly important in light of the new, third model which, to my knowledge, has not yet received critical assessment, barely having been expounded. This model is worth examining, and I have described it and criticised it here.

1.3 Some Terminology

Before embarking on any research project in which certain terms frequently occur, it is important to be clear about what those terms mean for if several interpretations are possible, one may be sure that every possibility has at least one adherent. The debate over the nature of eternity is no exception to this rule, and I want to clarify how I shall be using some important terms in this thesis.

"Eternal" can mean at least two different things. First it can mean "neither having a beginning nor coming to an end." This use is a general one and covers all the possible interpretations of the sense in which God is eternal. Accordingly, to say that God is eternal is to say that He neither has a beginning nor will come to an end, but not to be committed about the mode of his existence. The second meaning of "eternal" is "neither having a beginning nor coming to an end, outside of time." This latter meaning is more specific than the former for it explains the mode of the eternal existence. To say that God is eternal on this understanding is to say that He neither has a beginning nor will come to an end, and

that He exists outside time. Of these two meanings, the first, more general one, is the most prevalent, and the second, more detailed, meaning inevitably leads to confusion since the "outside of time" phrase is captured by other technical terms (such as "timelessness"). As J.R. Lucas succinctly explains:

Eternity is often thought of as being a very long time, or alternatively, absolutely timeless. But those concepts we already possess, and there is no need to annex the word "eternity" to either of them.¹

I shall be using the word "eternity" to cover both temporal and atemporal options for the nature of eternity in line with the majority of philosophers who have written on this topic.² (One other rather unusual use of the word "eternity" deserves mention here. Kretzmann and Stump depart from both of the two uses above in wanting "eternity" to mean something completely new, and regarding both of the above meanings as misunderstandings. What they mean by "eternity" is a specific form of timelessness.)

"Temporality" means "located within time" or "concerning time." God is described by some as "temporally eternal," which means that He neither came into existence nor comes to an end, but endures through time. This notion of divine eternal existence is captured by the terms "sempiternity," which is defined as "unending duration through time," and "everlastingness," – a new term introduced by Wolterstorff to avoid confusion with other terms. All three words, "temporality,"

¹ J.R. Lucas, *The Future*, page 216

² The following philosophers have adopted the general meaning of "eternity": William Craig, Brian Davies, Stephen Davis, William Hasker, Paul Helm, Martha Kneale, J.R. Lucas, Louis Pojman, Richard Sorabji, Stewart Sutherland.

"sempiternity" and "everlastingness" have been used to describe the eternality of God as unending duration through time. "Atemporality" is the antithesis of "temporality" and means "not located within time." The word is used synonymously with "timelessness" to refer to the (eternal) existence of God outside of time.

Finally, I want to address a worry that runs deeper than simply clarifying how certain terms are to be used. One problem in discussions of this sort is the inadequacy of language; it is very difficult to make concepts clear when the only tool available for describing those concepts is used outside any normal domain of discourse. Problems of this sort are generally not encountered whilst one is describing the everyday nature of the world, but when one wishes to discuss such concepts as the beginning of time and the nature of divine eternity, language is being used outside its normal domain. One must struggle with the language in order to deploy it effectively.

It is inevitable that language is inadequate when used for describing such concepts, but one must make the best of it; it is all that is available to us. Whilst such a realisation may be a cause for despair in some, it should be remembered that the language deployed in such domains is not necessarily misleading. Though it is a poor tool, it may still be the case that it is being deployed in broadly correct strokes. Certainly, one is reaching into the dark with language, but that does not make the language itself misleading. The purpose of much philosophical work is to make clear what was unclear by formulating a suitable vocabulary in virtue of which those problems may be discussed. Whilst one may not be able to

say a great deal with precision and certainty, one might nevertheless be speaking correctly.

What I aim to do in this thesis is build a suitable vocabulary for discussing the nature of divine eternity. I aim to deploy language so as to clarify the issues and argue for a model which satisfies most of our theological and philosophical intuitions. To this end, I examine three distinct models of divine eternity and discuss how our intuitions could be satisfied under each.

1.4 Historical Survey

Various models of divine eternity have been proposed over time, and an historical overview is appropriate to help to locate those models in the history of ideas, and to show how they developed. William Kneale goes so far as to say that in the case of eternity, "some understanding of the history of thought is almost essential for an appreciation of the problem."¹

In this section, I discuss the roots and development of each model of divine eternity. I do not claim to be presenting anything new here; this ground has been adequately covered by philosophers before me.²

1.4.1 Roots and Development of the Temporally Eternal Model

The temporally eternal model does not have any identifiable root. In fact, what marks this model off from the following two is that it cannot be precisely located in the history of ideas, whereas the following two

¹W.Kneale, "Time and Eternity in Theology."

²For example, William Kneale, 1962, and Richard Swinburne, 1965.

have definite beginnings. Prior to the introduction of the atemporal model, the temporal model of eternity was the commonly held one; it was not a remarkable idea. Thus there is very little to be written about the roots of the temporal model. It was simply a member of the set of commonly held ideas, and therefore not a noteworthy topic, just as the idea that other people have minds is not a new, strange, or noteworthy idea. William Kneale¹ points out that the roots of the word "eternity" all mean "everlastingness" or "never-ending duration through time," and that this was the natural understanding of the word.

1.4.2 Roots and Development of the Timelessly Eternal Model

In contrast to the temporal model of eternity, the view that eternity entails timelessness has fairly clear, identifiable roots. The first known use of the concept of eternity as timelessness is found in the poem of Parmenides, The Way of Truth. Parmenides of Elea was born c.515 B.C.² He says that the One "neither was at any time nor will be, since it is now all at once, a single whole."³ Parmenides clearly has the "notion of a mode of existence which allows no distinction between past, present and future."⁴ Kneale tries to uncover why Parmenides might have thought this by probing the prevalent concerns at the time Parmenides lived. That need not be a concern here, for what is important for this survey is that there does seem to be a point at which the concept of timeless eternity was introduced.

¹William Kneale, "Time and Eternity in Theology."

²This date is cited in the entry, "Parmenides of Elea," in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*.

³Quoted by William Kneale, *ibid.*, p.87

⁴William Kneale, *ibid.*, p.92

The influence of Parmenides was very great, and the writings of Plato reflect that inheritance. It is not so surprising then that the next occurrence of the concept of timeless eternity should be in Plato. In the Timæus, Plato contrasts the world in time with the timeless and changeless Forms. Timelessness is seen as a perfection, something glorious and superior to mere temporal existence. It is no secret that the writings of Plato influenced the early Church Fathers, Boethius and Augustine. In the first and second centuries, and through the Church Fathers, the concept of timeless eternity became an accepted and indispensable part of Christian theology. St. Augustine made much use of Plato and Greek ideas to help interpret Scripture. An example of this cited by Kneale¹ is Augustine's exposition of Genesis, in which explicit reference is made to the Timæus.

From Augustine and Boethius, the mediæval theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas, adopted and developed the concept. By this stage, timeless eternity was firmly entrenched in Christian tradition as the default model of divine eternity. But despite this strong tradition in Christian doctrine, "divine timelessness has fallen on hard times. Probably the most common response to this doctrine in recent philosophy of religion is to dismiss it as incoherent or unintelligible."²

So the timeless model is interesting because it has discernible roots, has enjoyed a steady development and large following, but has recently become less popular and less obviously correct. If one were to survey theists and ask them what they believed about the nature of divine eternity, I think most would respond that God exists outside time. But

¹William Kneale, ibid.

²Basker, God, Time and Knowledge, p.144



the same survey conducted amongst philosophers and theologians would reveal a dissatisfaction with the timeless model, and a tendency to adopt the temporal view of eternity.

Not all philosophers who are unhappy with timeless eternity have embraced temporal eternity however. There are some who believe that there is a third view which is correct, and it is the development of this model that I discuss in the next section.

1.4.3 The Combined Model of Eternity

The combined model of eternity is a very recent addition to the catalogue of options on the nature of divine eternity. It seems to have started with the philosopher William Lane Craig. Much of his work has been concerned with the Kalam version of the first-cause cosmological argument, and it is as a result of this work that Craig postulates the third model of divine eternity. The considerations which lead Craig to believe that the universe had a beginning also lead him to conclude certain things about the nature of an eternal God.

1.5 A Diagrammatic Overview

The figures below represent the various options available on the nature of an eternal God. The existence of God is shown in relation to the existence of time. The graphic  is used to indicate the temporally eternal existence of God, and the graphic  is used to indicate the timelessly eternal existence of God. The first option is that God is temporally eternal (Figure 1-1), which is to say He has

existed in time forever¹, both before and after creation. A necessary assumption of this model is that time never had a beginning. It is worth noting that the simplest interpretation of this model is that both before and after creation there were events in the existence of God. Some objections to this simple model will be dealt with in chapter 2. The second model is that God is timelessly eternal. If God exists outside time, then there are two possible interpretations of the model regarding the beginning of time. Either time had a beginning (presumably at creation, Figure 1-2) or time is infinite, never having a beginning (Figure 1-3). The last option is what I call Craig's combination model. According to this model, God existed eternally outside time prior to creation, and has been temporally eternal ever since. Once again, there are two possibilities concerning the beginning of time: either time had a beginning (represented in Figure 1-4) or it did not (represented in Figure 1-5). For a variety of reasons too complex to mention here², Craig adopts the model represented in Figure 1-4.

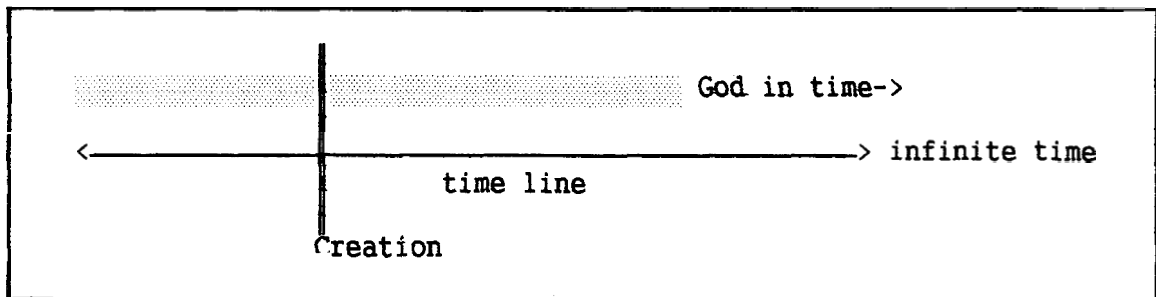


Figure 1-1 Simple Temporal Eternity Model

¹It is difficult to describe perpetual endurance without using a locution which implies temporal existence. For example, to say that God has always existed, might be taken to mean that He has existed at all times. This would be correct provided that time is infinite. But it would be incorrect to understand "always" as meaning "at all times" if time had a beginning. God and time exist forever, and there has never been a time at which God has not existed.

²See Chapter 4 for the reasons why Craig believes that time had a beginning.

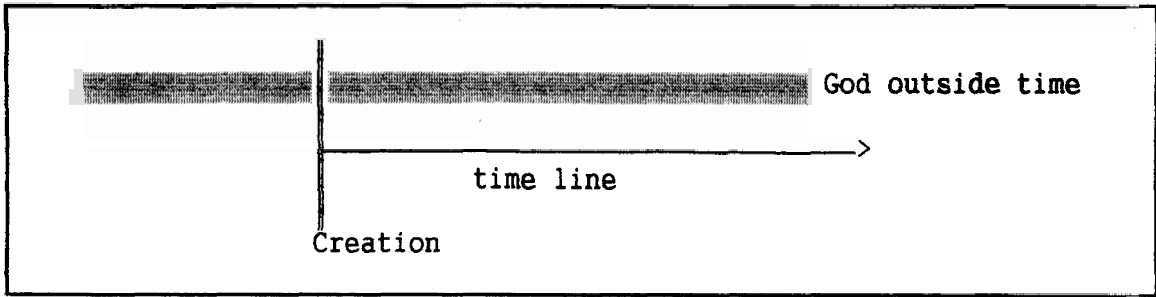


Figure 1-2 Timeless Eternity Model: Assume Time Had A Beginning

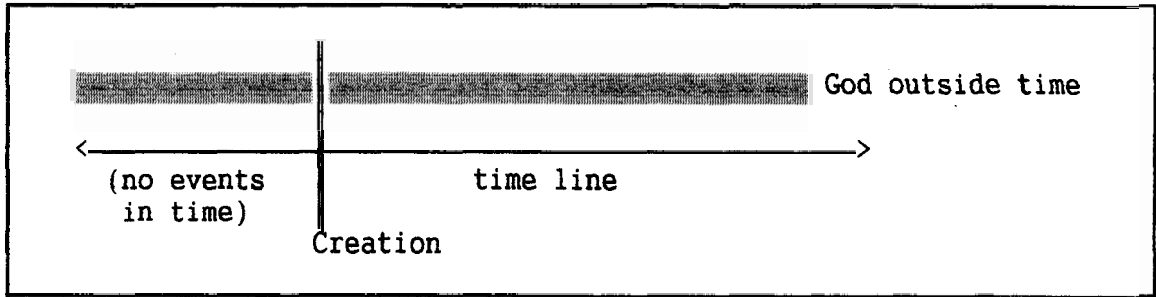


Figure 1-3 Timeless Eternity Model: Assume Time Had No Beginning

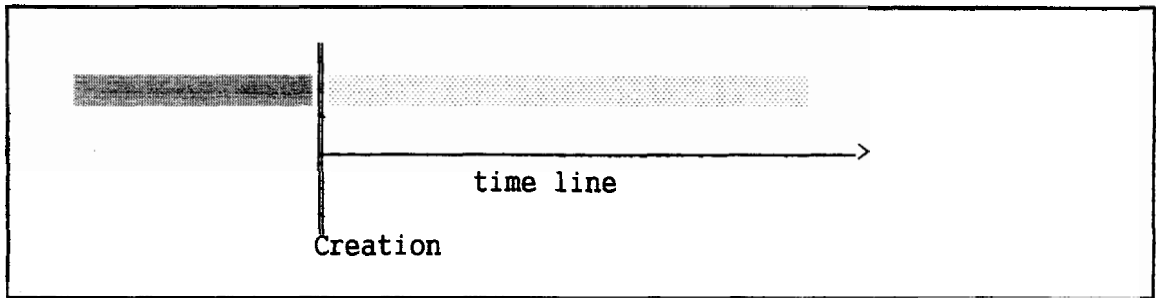


Figure 1-4 Combination Model: Assume Time Had A Beginning

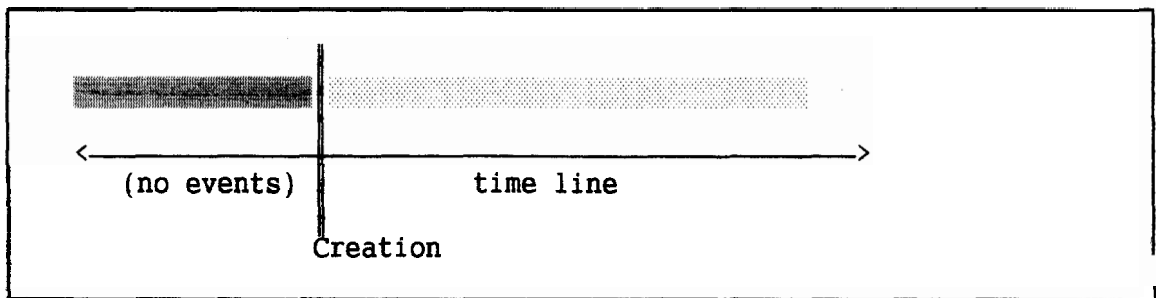


Figure 1-5 Combination Model: Assume Time Had No Beginning

Chapter 2 God in Time

2.1 Statement of Position

If God exists eternally in time, then He neither had a beginning nor will come to an end. He is everlasting, existing in time in much the same way that humans do, but not limited by a beginning or an end as we are. Everything that God does is within time. On this model, He interacts with His created world, thinks, knows and acts in time. Temporal eternity is a little easier to grasp than timeless eternity for it is merely an extension of our human, temporal perspective. God exists at the present time, and has existed at all moments hitherto, and will exist for all moments henceforth. This model is certainly a coherent one for, as Swinburne notes, if the present existence of God is coherent, then it is "coherent to suppose that he exists at any other nameable time; and, if that is coherent, then surely it is coherent to suppose that there exists a being now of such a sort that however far back in time you count years, you do not reach the beginning of its existence."¹ And, "We can surely conceive of a being now existent such that whatever future nameable time you choose, he has not by that time ceased to exist...A being who is both backwardly and forwardly eternal we may term an eternal being."²

¹ Swinburne, The Coherence of Theism, p.211

² Swinburne, ibid., page 211.

2.2 Reasons For Adopting This Model

There are two principal reasons for adopting this model. They are discussed below. No historical survey of this model is necessary; trying to write one would be like trying to give an historical survey of the view that there are other minds, or that the universe did not spring into being five minutes ago. These are default views, and have not been introduced into the history of ideas by some philosopher or other. What can be said is that the temporal model of divine eternity predominated until challenged by Plato and Parmenides who suggested the model that God exists timelessly.

2.2.1 The Simplest Model

One obvious reason for adopting the temporally eternal model is that it is the most straightforward of the three models. It is an extension of a concept that we already have, as beings existing within time. God exists in the same way, but there is no moment at which God has not existed nor will not exist, whereas I know that I did not exist in 1800, nor shall I exist in 2099. This straightforwardness is appealing and in stark contrast to the complexity of the two rival models offered in chapters 3 and 4.

2.2.2 God The Son Existed In Time

Thomas Senor has argued¹ that God is temporally eternal by considering the doctrine of the Incarnation. He presents two arguments. The first aims to show that the Incarnation and the doctrine of timelessness are

¹See Thomas Senor, 1990.

incompatible. If the two are incompatible, then it seems preferable to give up timelessness than to give up the Incarnation (at least for the Christian theist). All that Senor does in his first argument is establish that temporal predicates can be applied to Jesus Christ, that Jesus is the Son of God, and since temporal predicates do not apply to timeless things, God the Son cannot be timeless.

If this conclusion is granted, then Senor has come a long way along the road to showing that God cannot be timeless, for God the Son is one member of the Trinity, and it is difficult to see how one member of the Trinity could be in time whilst the others were outside of time.

The second argument is an argument from immutability. If God the Son changes by taking on a human nature, then God the Son is not timeless. I shall cover the argument from immutability in more detail in section 3.3.4.

These two arguments are designed to show that God the Son is temporal. Now Senor also wants to argue that since God the Son is temporal, so are the other members of the Trinity. "Does the temporality of Christ entail the temporality of the Trinity?" asks Senor.¹ Two routes are open to Senor at this point. He could argue that the temporality of the Son entails the temporality of the Father, and the temporality of these two entails the temporality of God the Spirit, or he could argue that the temporality of the Son entails the temporality of the Godhead without arguing that each individual member of the Trinity is temporal. Both of these routes seems plausible, and Senor prefers the first, showing that a

¹Thomas Senor, *ibid.*, p.159

property that the Son has must also be shared with the Father. Having shown that, Senor concludes that God is temporal.

Eleonore Stump has objected to this argument by pointing out that there is no more difficulty in saying that a timeless God became a temporal man than there is in saying that an omniscient and omnipotent God became a fallible man.¹ If this is so, then the Incarnation is no greater objection to timeless eternity than it is to omniscience and omnipotence. But I disagree. There is a big difference between the two cases. One can easily imagine giving up knowledge and power, becoming less knowledgeable about something, and becoming weaker at something, but it is not so easy to conceive of such a fundamental change as going from being timeless to being in time. For this reason, I believe Stump incorrectly considers the two cases analogous, and that there is a great deal more difficulty with the claim that a timeless God became a temporal man than with the claim that an omnipotent and omniscient God became a fallible man.

What about
how an
omnipotent
God can
be localized
in finite
space-time.

2.3 Objections and Replies

2.3.1 Temporal Eternity Constitutes An Actual Infinity

In the last chapter, I gave a diagrammatic representation of the temporal eternity model (Figure 1-1, page 10) and promised to address some difficulties arising from the simple notion that there have always been events for God, such as planning and thinking, both before and after creation. For example, one can easily imagine God planning to create the world, and being absorbed in various mental activities prior to creation,

¹Brian Leftow, Time and Eternity, p.19

and then creating the universe and subsequently acting and interacting with it. But this model has been challenged.

A major objection raised against this simple model of temporal eternity is the argument from the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things. Roughly, this objection is that if God exists eternally in time, then the number of events (whatever they are) in the life of God¹ is actually infinite. Since it is impossible (the argument goes) that an actually infinite number of things exists, it follows that God does not exist in time. I raise some doubts about the argument (and about a similar argument from the impossibility of forming an actually infinite collection by successive addition), pointing out that it hinges on the premise that an actually infinite number of things cannot exist, and for that reason is not compelling. I then show that even if one were to grant the premise that an actually infinite number of things cannot exist, the objection sketched above would still not show that God does not exist in time.

The objection relies on the argument from the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things. This argument runs as follows:

- (A) 1. An actually infinite number of things cannot exist.
- 2. A beginningless series of events in time entails an actually infinite number of things.
- ∴ 3. A beginningless series of events in time cannot exist.

The above reasoning is used in some versions of the cosmological argument. That the universe had a beginning is established by the following reasoning. If the universe never had a beginning, then the

¹I am using the term 'life of God' loosely, and shall interchange it with 'time line of God,' 'mind of God,' 'existence of God,' 'being of God,' and other similar phrases.

history of the universe is a beginningless series of events. A beginningless series of events cannot exist, so the universe must have had a beginning. I am not concerned here with whether this argument is sound, but have used it simply to introduce the argument from the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things. But I am concerned with how this argument has been used as an objection to the temporally eternal existence of God.

The following steps are needed to formulate that objection:

- (B)
1. A beginningless series of events in time cannot exist. (The conclusion of the previous argument.)
 2. It is impossible that God had a beginning. (i.e. God is eternal.)
 3. If God exists in time and God never had a beginning then His existence entails a beginningless series of events in time.
 4. Either God does not exist in time or God had a beginning. (from 1 and 3)
 - ∴ 5. God does not exist in time. (from 2 and 4)

This argument aims to show that God does not exist in time. But the whole argument hinges on (1), that a beginningless series of events in time cannot exist, since the disjunction in (4) is derived directly from (1) and (3), and without this disjunction, the conclusion, step (5), cannot be reached. Premise (1) is supported by the argument from the impossibility of an actual infinite. Generally speaking, one wants to move from premises which are straightforward and easily seen to be true to more complex and less obvious conclusions. But in this argument, premise (1) is every bit as difficult to grasp as the conclusion. To see the tension between premise (1) and the conclusion (5), imagine that a defender of temporal eternity adds the following premise:

2a. God exists eternally in time.

When this premise is added, one may conclude either (5) that God does not exist in time (from 2 and 4 above) or (5a) God did have a beginning (from 2a and 4). But the claim that God had a beginning is in conflict with premise 2, and so the introduction of (2a) has made the premises inconsistent. Which of them should be given up? Either (1), (2), or (2a) must be given up. Premise 2, that God did not have a beginning, is accepted by proponents of all three models on eternity and is the least likely candidate for rejection. To exclude (2) would be to admit that God is finite, that He had a beginning, and that He is not eternal. The choice then is between

(1) A beginningless series of events in time cannot exist,

and

(2a) God exists eternally in time.

One's intuitions here count for a great deal. The premises are so complex that neither one is clearly true; one just does not know which to prefer. Argument (B) above which shows that God does not exist in time

relies on (1) for its validity. Yet why not suppose that (2a) is true, and argue as follows:

- (C)
1. It is impossible that God had a beginning (i.e. God is eternal)
 - 2a. God exists eternally in time.
 3. If God exists in time and God never had a beginning then His existence entails a beginningless series of events in time.
 4. The existence of God entails a beginningless series of events in time. (from 3, 2a and 1)
 5. A beginningless series of events in time exists. (from 2a and 4)

It is not at all clear that this argument is any less preferable than its rival (B). The fact that it is difficult to assess which, if either, of these arguments is sound merely emphasises that the premises are extremely difficult to understand and thus do not form good bases for arguments.

If one does not find the argument from the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things compelling, there is a second argument which could be used as the basis of the objection (to temporal eternity). That is the argument from the impossibility of forming an actually infinite collection of things by successive addition. This argument is along the same lines as the argument from the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things, although it does not deny that an actually infinite number of things can exist; it denies that one could be formed by adding one thing after another. It admits the possibility that an actually infinite number of things exist, but denies that if one does exist, it was

formed by successive addition. When used to show that the universe had a beginning, the argument is as follows:

1. The series of events in time is a collection formed by adding one member after another.
2. A collection formed by adding one member after another cannot be actually infinite.
- ∴ 3. The series of events in time cannot be actually infinite.¹

The following steps are needed for the new formulation of the objection:

- (D)
1. The series of events in time cannot be actually infinite.
 2. It is impossible that God had a beginning (i.e. God is eternal)
 3. If God exists in time and God never had a beginning then His existence entails that the series of events in time is actually infinite.
 4. Either God does not exist in time or God had a beginning. (from 1 and 3)
 - ∴ 5. God does not exist in time. (from 2 and 4)²

But it makes no difference to the force of the objection to temporal eternity whether one uses argument (D) or argument (B). The essence of the objection is unchanged.

The concerns raised about argument (B) are equally applicable to argument (D). Both arguments are based on the impossibility of an actual infinite, but this impossibility has been contested³. Arguments (B) and

¹To reach the conclusion that the universe had a beginning, the argument might be extended as follows:

4. If the universe did not have a beginning then the series of past events in time is actually infinite.
- ∴ 5. The universe did have a beginning (from 3 and 4)

²An informal version of this argument is presented by Helm, "Eternal God," page 37-38

³For a brief account of the history of thought on actual infinities, see William Lane Craig, 1979, pp.65-69.

(D) would be incorrect if an actual infinite is a possibility, as some have maintained. Notice that I have not argued directly for the falsity of premise (1), but have merely challenged its use as a basis for the objection to the simple model of temporal eternity. As it turns out, although I could have argued directly for the falsity of premise (1), I do not need to do so because both (B) and (D) are unsound for quite another reason.

A strong rebuttal can be made to both forms of the objection (B) and (D). Even if one were to grant that in those arguments premise (1) is true,¹ argument (B) (page 17) would still not be sound and still not show that God does not exist in time. This is because the third premise,

3. If God exists in time and God never had a beginning then His existence entails a beginningless series of events in time,

is false. It does not follow from the fact that God exists in time and that He never had a beginning that there have been an infinite number of events in the existence of God. Let me explain. It is clear (on any creation account) that subsequent to the creation of the universe, there have been events in time such as meteors colliding and the explosion of stars. Prior to creation, the only events were those occurring in the mind of God. If God has forever existed in time, then these events took place in time. But why should one say that the series of events in the time line of God is a beginningless series? This does not follow. There is at least one other possibility, and that is that the series of events

¹premise 1: A beginningless series of events in time cannot exist.

in the life of God is finite.¹ The mere possibility of this option is enough to defeat the objection.²

But where does this rebuttal leave the simple, straightforward model of temporal eternity? How is temporal eternity to be construed if the number of divine events is finite? Figure 2-1 gives a diagrammatic representation. Granting that a beginningless series of events is impossible has

¹Several philosophers have thought there is another possibility. More complex, but still possible, is that there is a finite set of simultaneous events (which may have only one member), which never had beginning. In that case the series of events either contains only those simultaneous events which never began and will never come to an end, or consists of a first event which never had a beginning, but which comes to an end, followed by a series of finite events. See Stephen T. Davis, "Temporal Eternity" (reprinted in Louis Pojman, "Philosophy of Religion").

Similarly, Thomas Aquinas suggested that there could be at least one event of infinite duration. The point is taken up by Brian Leftow. These possibilities are sufficient to falsify premise (3), but they are considerably more difficult to defend than simply saying that there has been a finite number of events in the life of God. See Brian Leftow, "Time and Eternity" p.79, and his book review in Faith and Philosophy, 1991, p.400, and Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, II.35, quoted in Nicholas Wolterstorff, God Everlasting, p.89ff. (See also Section 3.4.2, page 51, in this thesis.)

²There is a second difficulty with premise (3) worth mentioning here. Strictly speaking, premise (3) is false because it is possible that God has not always existed in time. From the fact that He now exists in time, it does not follow that He has always existed in time. He might have come to exist in time, in which case there was a first moment in time for God, and a first event in time (in the life of God). This would then not entail a beginningless series of events in time. To avoid this difficulty, the third premise might be repaired as follows:

3. If God has always existed in infinite time and God never had a beginning then His existence entails a beginningless series of events in time.

Argument (B) would then run:

- (B')
1. A beginningless series of events in time cannot exist. (The conclusion of the previous argument.)
 2. It is impossible that God had a beginning. (i.e. God is eternal.)
 3. If God has always existed in infinite time and God never had a beginning then His existence entails a beginningless series of events in time.
 4. Either God has not always existed exist in infinite time or God had a beginning. (from 1 and 3)
 - ∴ 5. God has not always existed in infinite time. (from 2 and 4)

Even with this reparation, premise (3) is false, for it is still possible that there has been a finite number of events in the life of God. Notice also that this latter conclusion (5) gives rise to two possibilities: either there was first moment in time for God - when He came into time, or God has always existed outside time.

the ramification that there must have been a first event in the mind of God.¹

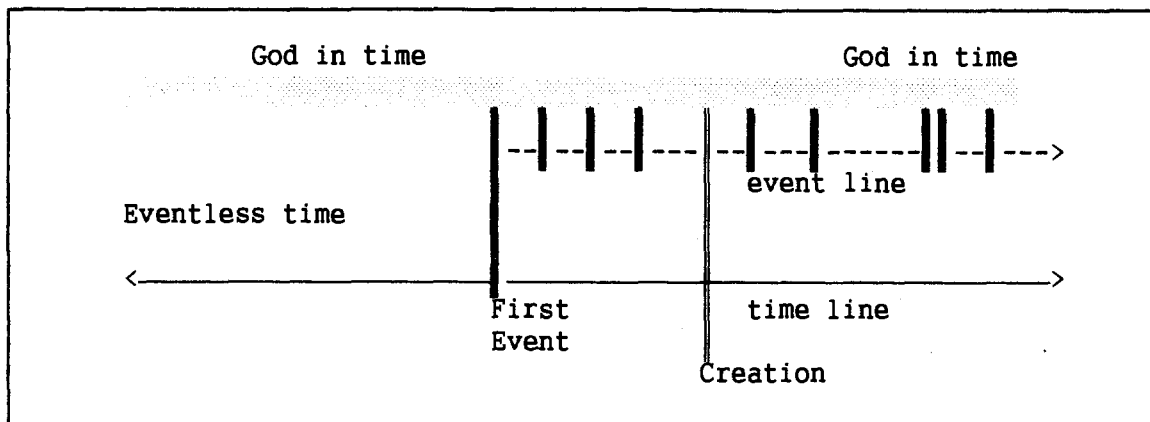


Figure 2-1 Complex Temporal Eternity Model: Assume There Was A First Event

Notice that I have clearly shown a first event in the life of God in Figure 2-1. This then is one possible picture of temporal eternity if it is true that a beginningless series of events is impossible. It is, admittedly, a strange-looking option compared to the straightforward model presented in Figure 1-1 (page 10). But remember that all that I am doing here is presenting a model on which the objection to temporal eternity (argument (B)) fails, even after premise (1) has been granted. Figure 2-1 is a direct result of granting premise (1) of that argument, but denying premise (3). It is of course, still open to the defender of temporal eternity to deny premise (1) and revert to the original, straightforward model countenancing the possibility that there has been an infinite number of events in the existence of God.

¹'First event' is frequently used to refer to Creation. I do not intend that here. By 'first event,' I mean to refer to the first event, whatever it was, in the life of God.

Let me summarise the argument so far. At the beginning of this section, temporal eternity was seen straightforwardly as eternal existence in time, with any number of events (both before and after creation) going on in the mind of God - quite possibly an infinite number. This was challenged by the objection based on the argument from the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things. I raised some concerns about the strength of the argument since it is completely reliant on the complex first premise. I then granted premise (1) and have just shown that the argument still fails to show that God does not exist in time because premise (3) of that same argument is false. It is false because the existence of God does not entail a beginningless series of events in time. There could be a finite number of events for God, and the result is the diagram in Figure 2-1.

There are a number of responses that might be made to this rebuttal, and it is these that I now want to address. First, Figure 2-1 seems rather odd, for, one wants to know, what was God doing before the first event (whatever that first event happened to be)? The only possible answer to this question, given that there was a first event, is that God was not doing anything before that first event. Some may believe that this response restricts God so severely that it would be better to return to the simple conception of divine eternity and give up the premise that a beginningless series of events in time is impossible. But it need not be seen as so restrictive. Prior to creation, God does not need to interact with humans, and there is still plenty of time for Him to plan creation subsequent to the first event.

Second, in order for Figure 2-1 to be a possibility, eventless time must be possible. One reply to the rebuttal is to show that time without events is impossible. Yet this project is a difficult one, for all that needs to be done to defeat it is to think of some plausible situation in which there is time, but no events. The best defence of the possibility of time without events has undoubtedly been made by Shoemaker.¹

Shoemaker considers an imaginary world in which the inhabitants live in three small regions, called A, B, and C. Inhabitants of each region can move between regions and observe what is going on in them. But the world has a strange phenomenon. Periodically, a "local freeze" occurs in which all processes occurring in one of the three regions stop completely. From the other two regions, the frozen region appears to have halted completely. No traveller from the other regions can penetrate a frozen region, but when one arrives immediately after the freeze is over, everything is found exactly as it was immediately before the freeze. There is no test, no artifact, or any method to tell that there has been a freeze except for someone in a frozen region who was observing another region when the freeze began. As soon as the freeze ends, it will appear that instantaneous changes have occurred in the region being observed.

The inhabitants of this world discover that every freeze lasts exactly one year. They also discover that the freezes occur at regular intervals. In region A they occur every three years, in region B, every four years, and in region C, every five years. Therefore local freezes take place in both A and B every twelve years, in A and C every fifteen years, and in B

¹See Shoemaker, "Time Without Change," 1969. I pick up this thread again in chapter 4, section 4.2, (page 61) and discuss why William Craig is motivated to reject the possibility and defend the Combination model.

and C every twenty years. But the important point to notice is that every sixtieth year there is a total freeze. Regions A, B and C are all frozen simultaneously for exactly one year. Realising that these freezes occur regularly, the inhabitants have good grounds for believing that every sixty years a year elapses during which nothing changes. What Shoemaker has done here is describe a plausible situation in which there is time without change; a period of time elapses, but no events occur.

Shoemaker's account is offered to defeat the reply that time without events is impossible. But suppose that it is objected that Shoemaker is wrong, and that the impossibility of time without events is a successful reply to the rebuttal of the objection to the complex model of temporal eternity. Where would that leave temporal eternity? On the one hand, if the opponent of temporal eternity objected to (a) the possibility of time without events, but not to (b) the possibility of an actual infinite, then it is clear that the simple model of temporal eternity represented in Figure 1-1 (page 10) is compatible with these beliefs. If, on the other hand, the opponent of temporal eternity objected to (a) the possibility of time without events, and to (b) the possibility of an actual infinite, then the defendant of temporal eternity must simply acknowledge that these two beliefs together are incompatible with both the simple and the complex models of temporal eternity.

There is a third version of the temporal model which would be compatible with both (a) and (b) above. Aquinas argued for the possibility of an event of infinite duration¹. If there were such an event, there would neither be time without events, nor an infinite number of

¹As mentioned in footnote 1, page 22.

events. Whilst this defence seems to me less plausible than the line I have taken, it is worth noting that in order to reject all forms of the temporal model of eternity, the opponent must argue that:

- (a) time without events is impossible; and that
- (b) an actual infinity is impossible; and that
- (c) events of infinite duration are impossible.

If all three claims can be successfully defended, then the result is either some model of timeless eternity or the combination model. In either of these models, the opponent of the temporal model of eternity is forced to defend:

- (d) the possibility of a beginning of time; and
- (e) the possibility of timeless existence.

Some version of the temporal model of eternity can be defended by showing the falsity of just one of the claims (a), (b) or (c). Nor is the defendant of temporal eternity committed to (d) or (e).

I conclude this section with a summary of the argument. The original objection raised against temporal eternity was that if God has existed in time forever, then there must have been an actually infinite number of events in the life of God. Since, the objection goes, it is impossible to have an actually infinite number of things (premise (1) of the argument), God could not have existed in time forever. I pointed out that the argument is not a powerful one because the first premise is just as complex as its conclusion. But this weakness is not decisive against the argument (although a full-scale attack on the first premise could be mounted). To rebut argument (B) (or the similar argument (D)), I needed to show that one of the premises is false. I did this by showing that

premise (3) is false: it does not follow from the fact that God exists in time and that He never had a beginning, that the number of events in the life of God is infinite. It does not follow because the number of events in the life of God could be finite. It could be finite in several ways. I defended the possibility that there is simply a finite number of events in the life of God. The objection to temporal eternity based on the argument from the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things is aimed at the claim that there has been an infinite series of events in the life of God. But this is wide of the mark, for that claim is not being made by the proponent of temporal eternity. The only requirement is that prior to creation there was infinite, undifferentiated time; but this is not to say that there was an infinite series of events prior to creation.¹ I also acknowledged that, as a consequence of this rebuttal, there must have been an infinite period of undifferentiated time prior to the first event. I defended this against the attack that such a period of undifferentiated time is impossible, and also showed what would result were that attack to be successful.

Figure 2-1 is one possible model of divine temporal eternity if a beginningless series of events is impossible. Some may prefer to give up that belief and revert to the simple model of divine eternity given in Figure 1-1, regarding the complex model of divine eternity as the conclusion of a reductio. But the main result of this section is that the argument from the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things as an objection to the temporal eternity model does not succeed. It does not succeed for the simple reason that an actually infinite number of

¹Helm makes this point in "Eternal God," p.38

things is not entailed by the temporal eternity model. Regardless of the truth value of the premise that it is impossible that there be an actually infinite number of things, the temporal eternity model remains both possible and plausible.

2.3.2 An Unacceptably Anthropomorphic View of God

Against the belief that the simplest model of divine eternity is to postulate God as temporally eternal, is the belief that to view God in such a way is to be unacceptably anthropomorphic about God. For Sturch, this consideration is so strong that he is moved to reject the temporal model and accept timeless eternity as the correct model. Sturch asks whether there is any reason to think that God is temporal, and answers the question this way:

The first [reason for believing that God is temporally eternal] may very possibly be the sort of notion that lies behind many people's idea of a temporal God - the notion that God is really very like a rather great and splendid man, and that since men are temporal in this way, God must be too. Obviously this has no logical force whatever. If anything, we must say that God is so unlike men that it is improbable that he is temporal in this sense!...Frankly, I think it a piece of most presumptuous anthropomorphism to insist on applying this...kind of time to the Lord.¹

A number of points can be made in response to this objection. In the first place, "the notion that God is really very like a rather great and splendid man" is not "the sort of notion that lies behind many people's idea of a temporal God." It would be much more accurate to say that many theists think that God is something like, or somewhat like, "a rather great and splendid man." Furthermore, many theists may think that God is

¹R.L.Sturch, "The Problem of Divine Eternity" Religious Studies vol.10, 1974, page 492/3.

nothing like a "rather great and splendid man," but that we are something like a rather great and splendid God.

Second, Sturch's comments do not amount to an argument but are merely an indignant response to those who suppose (roughly) that God is temporal because man is temporal. Yet those who do believe that God is temporally eternal do not do so for this reason. They do so because this is the simplest conception, one that may, for example, be readily understood by temporal beings, or for some other completely different reason.

In this chapter, I have shown that there are two arguments to support the model that God exists in time, and have replied to both the anthropomorphic objection, and the more complex objection that a temporal God would constitute an actual infinite. In the next chapter, I turn to the atemporal model of divine eternity.

Chapter 3 God Outside Time

3.1 Statement of Position

The complexity of the atemporal model makes it imperative that it be clearly stated in order to represent it favourably as a plausible model of divine eternity. Let me then begin with a very simple analogy. Imagine that you are driving along a long, straight road. Only a small portion of the road is visible in front of you, and only a small portion is visible receding behind you. But if you were to fly above the road, much more would be visible. You could see where you had been on the road, and a vast extent of the road behind and in front. Now a timeless God is so far above this road (which represents time), that He sees the entire length of it stretching back to infinity and forward to infinity. This analogy should not be taken to suggest particularly that God is supra-temporally eternal (above time). Rather, what is essential to the timeless model is that God exists wholly outside of time, although there are many accounts of the relationship between an atemporal God and time.

Timeless eternity can be more formally defined as follows. A being which is timelessly eternal has neither temporal extension nor temporal location. To say that a being has no temporal extension is to say that it lacks duration.¹ It would not make sense to say of a timeless God that He endures from day to day. Nor would it make sense to say that God is located at some time: that, for example, He existed in the twelfth

¹Duration is an essential ingredient in any discussion of divine eternity, for the notion is included in all three models, and I shall devote considerable space to fleshing out the concept (see section 3.2).

century. So God does not endure through time, nor does He exist at any time, for He is completely outside time. The implication of these two conditions is that one must make the rather strange assertion that, "God exists, but there is no time at which He exists, nor does He exist at all times."¹

I hope that by now the model of divine timeless eternity is at least comprehensible and that it is seen as a realistic possibility. But timelessness must be compatible with other traditional attributes of God, such as acting, knowing and responding.² It must be possible to say of a timeless God that He acts, knows and responds, yet it is far from clear that it would make sense to say this. Worries that timelessness is incompatible with these attributes are addressed in section 3.4. Before explaining in section 3.3 why someone might want to say that God is timelessly eternal rather than temporally eternal, what sort of advantages there are to such a move, and what the reasons for adopting this model are, I want to deal with the concept of duration.

3.2 Duration

Duration is a key concept in the debate over divine eternity because it plays a major role in the definition of each of the three models. Since it does play such a significant part, it is important to understand it in order to grasp what is being claimed for each of the three models of eternity. I show first how the concept of duration is used in the temporally eternal model and that it cannot occur as part of the

¹William Hasker, God, Time and Knowledge, pp.148-149

²Hasker, Kneale and others have made this claim.

timelessly eternal model, and then go on to discuss how some philosophers have tried to show that a timelessly eternal God can exist for some duration, although not in any straightforward sense. I argue that this less straightforward sense is incoherent and both philosophically and theologically unnecessary for timeless eternity.

If God is temporally eternal, then He endures through time. He has duration, and it makes sense to say of Him that, for example, He has existed for the duration of the Second World war. But to say that a being is timeless is to say that it lacks temporal location and that it lacks temporal extension.¹ If a being lacks temporal location, then one cannot say that it existed in 1899 or that it will exist next Tuesday. If a being lacks temporal extension, then it does not endure; one cannot say of it that it has lived for over a week, or existed during the Hundred Years war. From this formulation, it would seem clear that a timeless God could not endure, and that duration is a wholly inappropriate topic for Him. This point is made by St. Augustine in the following way: "Thy years do not come and go; while these years of ours do come and go, in order that they might come...Thy present day does not give place to tomorrow, nor indeed, does it take the place of yesterday."²

Whilst it seems fairly obvious that a timeless being could not endure, several philosophers have argued strongly to the contrary. Chief amongst those philosophers are Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump. They attempt to model eternity as atemporal, infinitely extended duration, basing their model on the definition of eternity given by Boethius. They not only

¹From Stephen Davis, "Temporal Eternity," who attributes the formulation to Nelson Pike.

²St. Augustine, The Confessions, Book XI, §13.

consider duration to be a part of the concept of timeless eternity, but state emphatically that timeless "eternity entails duration," and that the concept of "atemporal duration is the heart of the concept of eternity and...the original motivation for its development."¹ Their conviction is based not just on an understanding of the formulation of divine timelessness given by Boethius but also what they take to be the prevailing trend at the time. Kretzmann and Stump are not claiming that temporal duration is part of the doctrine of divine timelessness, but that there is another sense in which duration can be understood: it can be understood as atemporal duration. I now want to summarise Kretzmann and Stump's argument.

Why do Kretzmann and Stump go to the trouble of explicating atemporal duration? Partly because they think it is part of the Boethian definition of eternity, but more importantly because they think that duration is a necessary condition of life. The Boethian definition is that timeless² "eternity is the complete possession all at once of illimitable life."³ It is clear from this definition that such things as numbers, even if they are timeless, cannot be called eternal for they do not possess life. Life is an essential ingredient of the Boethian definition.

What convinces Kretzmann and Stump that the Boethian definition incorporates duration? They concentrate on the word "illimitable" and argue as follows. If a life is illimitable then it is not limitable, without beginning and end. "The natural understanding of such a claim is that the

¹Kretzmann and Stump, 'Eternity,' p.435

²It is clear from the passage in which the above quotation appears that Boethian eternity is timeless eternity.

³Quoted by Kretzmann and Stump, op.cit., p.431

existence in question is infinite duration, unlimited in either 'direction'."¹ But if this is the correct understanding, then Boethius apparently contradicts himself, for duration is a temporal notion, and, as we saw above, is inappropriately applied to a timeless God. Kretzmann and Stump come to Boethius' rescue, and suggest that "illimitable life entails duration of a special sort."²

Two points come to mind. First, are Kretzmann and Stump correct in their belief that the Boethian definition does incorporate duration in this sense? I do not think so. Their argument is based on what they take "illimitable" to mean. But if it means merely that something neither begins nor ends, then illimitability would be applicable to a timeless being without contradiction. Irrespective of whether God is temporal or atemporal, He neither had a beginning nor comes to an end. In other words, I believe that "illimitable" is applicable both to timeless and temporal models of divine eternity and that Kretzmann and Stump are mistaken in their reading of Boethius. The belief that illimitability is not compatible with timelessness motivates Kretzmann and Stump to suggest some special sort of duration. But, as I have shown, this motivation is ill-founded for illimitability can be understood much more simply.

Second, even if there were a direct contradiction between illimitability and timeless existence, Kretzmann and Stump's solution is not a good one. One ought to be suspicious when one is told that a word which is well understood, such as "duration," does not mean what we all thought it meant, but something new and "special" in just this instance. What

¹Stump and Kretzmann, *op.cit.*, p.432

²Stump and Kretzmann, *op.cit.*, p.433

makes the position of Kretzmann and Stump even less credible is that not only do they make this "special"-move for the concept of duration, but also for simultaneity.¹

Other scholars also disagree with Kretzmann and Stump. Sorabji, for instance, is adamant that the Boethian concept of eternal life does not involve duration of any kind. Sorabji investigates the concept of eternity from Parmenides to Boethius and advocates that an eternal being exists "not at any time, neither at any point, nor over any period of time."² His findings are contrary to those of Kretzmann and Stump, who assert that "the weight of tradition both before and after Boethius strongly favours interpreting illimitable life as involving infinite duration."³ Sorabji concludes that, "This passage [from Boethius and partially quoted above] ...has sometimes been interpreted, wrongly I believe, as allowing eternity to involve duration."⁴ I agree with Sorabji that Boethius does not allow duration, in the natural sense, to be part of eternal life, and that Kretzmann and Stump have been thrown off the scent by their investigation of "illimitable life."

Finally, Kretzmann and Stump go to considerable lengths to qualify the notion of atemporal duration, but in doing so erode the concept so much

¹For a discussion of simultaneity, see section 3.4.2.

²Sorabji, 1983, p.99.

³Stump and Kretzmann, op.cit., p.432.

⁴Sorabji, op.cit., p.119.

that there is little content left to the claim that God endures atemporally. Paul Helm summarises his criticisms as follows:

What is the value of introducing a concept and then so paring it away that hardly anything is left? Indeed, what is left except the bare claim?

Furthermore, to work so hard to make some sort of duration compatible with timelessness is fruitless because that concept does no special work for Kretzmann and Stump. The concept of a timeless God who does not endure seems no less powerful or satisfying than the concept of a God who does endure.

3.3 Reasons For Adopting This Model

In this section (and similarly in sections 2.2 and 4.2 in other chapters) I want to investigate the reasons for adopting this model of eternity. I believe that the strongest reason for adopting the model that God is a timelessly eternal being is that it provides a way to resolve the alleged incompatibility of divine omniscience and human freedom. I shall start with that problem, and then move on to other reasons that have been given for adopting timelessness as the correct model of divine eternity.

3.3.1 Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom

Many people, thinking that divine omniscience and human freedom are incompatible, have striven to reconcile the two. One possible way for human freedom to be compatible with divine omniscience is to argue that God does not have foreknowledge by asserting that He is timeless. This move relies on the following reasoning: if God is timeless then his knowledge of the future is not foreknowledge and so any problem emanating

from divine foreknowledge does not arise. Just such a line as this was taken by Boethius, Anselm and Aquinas, and is worthy of examination as a reason for adopting the view that the concept of eternity entails timelessness.

In this section I set out what this timeless-God response to the alleged incompatibility of divine omniscience and human freedom is and show that it is inadequate because questions about the compatibility of divine omniscience and human freedom would still arise even if God were timelessly eternal, and extra difficulties are introduced by the move. Finally, I show that the problem is only alleged, and that actually there is no incompatibility between the two. The upshot of the discussion is that the incompatibility of divine omniscience and human freedom provides no reason for postulating the model that God is timelessly eternal.

First, let me summarise the argument that divine omniscience is incompatible with human freedom. Suppose God foreknows that Jones will perform some action next week. Whatever God knows is true, and so it is true that Jones will perform some action next week. If it is true that Jones will perform some action next week, then there is nothing she can do to make it false; she must perform the action. Alternatively, suppose God believes that Jones will perform some action, but Jones decides not to perform it. Not to perform the action would require God to have held a false belief, or Jones to have the power to erase God's past belief or to erase God's past existence. None of these three options is possible, and so Jones must perform the action, and is not free to do otherwise.

The argument sketched above rests on the assumption that before some future event, God knows that it will occur. If it could be shown that

God's knowledge does not occur before the event, then there would be no incompatibility between divine foreknowledge and human freedom. It was in order to show precisely this that the notion of timelessness was first introduced by Boethius. If God knows timelessly, then He perceives past, present and future in one "timeless gaze" (as Boethius puts it). One cannot properly speak of God's foreknowledge. If an event is foreknown, then it is known ahead of time, before the event occurs. The concept of foreknowledge is bound up with the concept of time, and is thus inappropriate in discussions of timelessness. God knows timelessly what the future contains, but his knowledge cannot be said to be before some temporal event. In this way, the conclusion that there is no human freedom can be avoided. As long as God's knowledge of the future does not occur before the event, the argument sketched above cannot get off the ground.

The notion of a timeless God should finally lay to rest any arguments that suggest that human freedom and divine foreknowledge are incompatible. This is so because a timeless God simply does not have foreknowledge; He has knowledge of future events, but it is not knowledge before those future events. Unfortunately, the proposed solution introduces more difficulties than it solves.

First, there are problems surrounding the nature of the timeless knower and the nature of His knowledge if it is not foreknowledge. What is the nature of God's knowledge if it is not knowledge constrained by time? My main concern here is that it is extremely difficult to understand what it could mean to say that God knows timelessly. It is hard to see how God

could timelessly know the past, present and future, and equally hard to see how God could acquire this knowledge.

Second, as Helm acknowledges, there are doubts about the coherence of the idea of a timeless knower, and he goes on to argue that "even if the idea of a timeless knower is coherent, it does not enable us, supposing God to be a timeless knower, to deny his foreknowledge of human actions and thus to effect a dissolution of the prima facie incompatibility between foreknowledge and human freedom."¹ Thus, Helm argues that the proposed solution does not even do what it was intended to do.

The reason for suggesting that God is a timeless knower was to falsify the premise that God's knowledge of future events occurs before those events. But in making this move, one is paying a high price in intelligibility, and the consequences of the move may reach farther than intended. What does timelessness entail? If God is timeless then no event in his life can be in temporal relation² with any other event in his life, nor can any event in his life be in temporal relation with anything temporal, outside his life. Thus the doctrine of timelessness applies to God both internally and externally. Now this is problematic for Christian theists because not only does God know timelessly, but He is wholly timeless, and being wholly timeless means that God cannot do anything which would involve a temporal relation between Himself and His creation.

Even if one is not compelled by the above considerations to abandon timelessness as a solution to the alleged incompatibility between divine foreknowledge and human freedom, one might find the following argument

¹Paul Helm, "Timelessness and Foreknowledge" Mind 1975, vol.84, p.516-517.

²That is, no event in God's life can be before, after, or simultaneous with any other event in God's life.

decisive. No solution to the problem of the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom is needed because the two are compatible. From the fact, if it is a fact, that God knows that some event will occur, it follows only that that event will occur, not that it must occur.

When I sketched the problem of the incompatibility of divine (fore)knowledge and human freedom at the beginning of this section, I stated that in order to preserve his freedom, Jones would have to do one of three things. Either a) make God's belief false, b) erase one of God's belief or c) erase God's past existence. But this assessment¹ omits a fourth option: d) Jones has the power to act in a different way, and if she were to do so, then God would have (truly) believed differently.² With this fourth option, the problem looks rather different. Jones may now perform some future action or she may not, depending on her free will. Whatever Jones wills to do, it is that that has been foreknown by God. If God foreknows that Jones will do A, then it follows that Jones will do A, but not that she must do A. If she were to choose not to do A, then God would have foreknown that choice.

In this section I explained that one reason for adopting the view that God is timelessly eternal is the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. I showed that there is, in fact, no incompatibility between divine foreknowledge and human freedom. Given these considerations, I hope that I have dispensed with at least one reason for adopting timeless eternity.

¹The three options were originally discussed by Nelson Pike in "Divine Omniscience and Human Freedom."

²This formulation of the fourth option is taken from W.L.Craig, The Only Wise God, page 70.

A final note is in order. The doctrine of divine timelessness is a complex one, and it does not make sense to adopt such a complex position just because it is a solution to the problem of divine omniscience and free will. As Hasker comments, "To adopt such an elaborate metaphysic merely as a solution to a problem, even a fairly significant problem, is disproportionate."¹

3.3.2 God Is Greater If Outside Time

A common response to the notion that God is temporally eternal is that such a model would limit God in some way. The argument goes something like this. God is the greatest possible being, and to be outside time is greater than being within it, so God must be outside time. To support the claim that it is greater to be outside time than within it, different reasons are offered.

Perhaps what lies behind the claim that God is greater when outside time, is the belief that God would be constrained by time were He within it; He would be somehow limited. Yet this worry seems groundless. If God were limited within time, then an account of how He is so limited is required. One such account might be that God could not have created time if He were within it, and I shall address this in section 3.3.3. But I can think of no other reason to suppose that God would be limited if He were within time any more than it would limit Him if He were outside time. There seems to be no good ground here to suppose that God would be greater if it is postulated that He exists outside time, or that He would be more limited if it is postulated that He exists within time.

¹Hasker, God, Time and Knowledge, page 181.

To press this point further, it is worth noting that nothing about the nature of the Christian God is denied or lost by saying that God is not timelessly eternal. All traditional attributes of God may be maintained even if He is not timelessly eternal. One gains no advantage, no greater glorification of God, by supposing that He is timelessly eternal. As Stephen Davis notes,

I feel no need to exalt God's transcendence in every possible way. What Christians must do, I believe, is emphasize God's transcendence over his creation in the ways that scripture does and in ways that seem essential to Christian theism. And I do not believe that the Bible teaches, implies or presupposes that God is timeless. Nor do I feel any theological or philosophical need to embrace timelessness.¹

A final reason for supposing that God would be greater outside time, which I noted in passing earlier, is that, on a creation account, God is creator of everything, and therefore creator of time itself. Now He could not very well create time were He to be within it, so God must be outside time. This reason for believing that God is timeless is discussed below.

3.3.3 God Created Time

Another strong reason for believing that God exists outside time is the belief that God created time. If it is true that God created time, then clearly He could not be temporally eternal, for He could not have existed in time forever. If He has not existed in time forever, then God must, at some point, have existed outside time.

Strong as this reason is for the timeless existence of God, it does not point directly to the model that God has existed eternally outside time. If God created time, then He must, at some point have existed outside

¹Stephen Davis, "Temporal Eternity," in Pojman, p.206

time, but there is nothing in that which commits one to the atemporal model. The creation of time might equally well be a reason for adopting the combination model, as in fact it is (see section 4.2).

But even though the timelessly eternal model and the combination model differ regarding God's relation to time after creation, they both agree that God must have been outside time in order to create it. And if God was outside time at some point, then temporal eternity is false.

The difficulty here is to defend the belief that God created time. It is not sufficient to show that time had a beginning, for then it might be argued that time came into being through some other cause; one must show both that time had a beginning and that God was the creator of time.

Two questions must be addressed. First, can it be shown that time had a beginning? Second, if it can be shown that time had a beginning, can it be shown that God was the creator of time?

The answers to these two questions are important because they strongly affect whether one is likely to reject or accept the timeless model. On the one hand, if time had a beginning and God created time, then God must have been outside time when He created it. But if, on the other hand, time did not have a beginning, then God could not be the Creator of time and thus no reason exists here for accepting the timelessly eternal model. In fact, if time did not have a beginning, then the issue may be dismissed since it will not help to determine which of the three models of eternity is the correct one. This is so because infinite time is not only compatible with the temporal model of eternity but also the atemporal and combination models. In chapter 1 I showed that the timelessly eternal model does not presuppose either that time came into being or that time is

infinite (Figure 1-2 and Figure 1-3). On the one hand, God could be timelessly eternal even if time is infinite (Figure 1-3). In this case, God would co-exist along with time, but never be in it. On the other hand, God could be timelessly eternal and time could have come into being, either as a result of His creative power or by some other means (Figure 1-2). These same options also apply to the combination model (Figure 1-4 and Figure 1-5), and so, if time is infinite, then we need to look elsewhere for reasons for preferring one model of eternity over another.

3.3.4 The Argument from Immutability

The concepts of eternity, omniscience and immutability are as intertwined as the snakes on the head of Medusa. But I want to disentangle immutability from the writhing mass, and explain how one might be led from the belief that God is immutable to the conclusion that God is timelessly eternal.¹ As with most complex concepts, there is debate about what should and should not be included as ingredients of immutability. There is even debate about what exactly it is that is immutable when one says, "X is immutable." So to say, "X is immutable," or "X is changeless," in no way guarantees that every reader will have the same understanding or agree about what is thereby entailed. Immutability can be thought of in two ways. First, it could refer to the character of X, which is to say that X does not change in disposition or characteristics. Second, immutability could refer to the essential changelessness of X, in which case, nothing whatsoever about X either does change or could change.

¹ Immutability will occur again in section 3.4.2 when I discuss arguments against the omniscient of God.

This second sense is clearly the "strong" sense of immutability. On this account, it would be impossible that God could change His mind or do anything at all which would count as a change. The first sense is much weaker, and the claim that God is immutable merely entails that God, for example, will not change His loving disposition towards creation, or cease to be wholly morally good.

An argument can be generated to show that God is timelessly eternal from the strong sense of immutability. Both Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine have done so.¹ The way the argument works is by showing that being in time and immutability are inconsistent. Here it is in a formal presentation:

1. God is essentially immutable.²
2. If God exists in time, then He exists for longer than a moment.³
3. If God exists for longer than a moment, then it is possible that He undergoes change.
- ∴ 4. God does not exist in time.⁴

Premise (2) seems to be true. To deny it one would have to assert that God exists only for a moment, which no theist is prepared to admit, though it is logically possible.⁵ Furthermore, there are plenty of examples of beings that exist in time and which endure for longer than a moment.

¹ See Pike, God and Timelessness, page 41.

² This is the strong sense of immutability. To say that God is immutable in this sense is to say that it is impossible that He undergo change. "Immutability" is not to be defined as "not changing in time," because that would be to beg the question.

³ One may here define an arbitrarily short division of time as "a moment."

⁴ This is my formulation of an argument largely due to Nelson Pike, who in turn adapted an argument from Thomas Aquinas. Helm uses Pike's formulation as the basis of his discussion of the argument in Eternal God, pp.88-90.

⁵ God could be timeless, become temporal for a mere moment, and then revert to a timeless existence.

Premise (3) also seems to be true, for it is surely possible that something change if it exists in time.

This is a valid argument, and premises (2) and (3) seem to be true, but the main problem with the argument is surely premise (1). Why should one assume that God is essentially immutable - that nothing about Him changes? If God were essentially immutable, then He would surely be a very disabled being. He would not be able to act or think new thoughts, or do anything that involves change.

The argument above does show that if God is essentially immutable, then He does not exist in time, but this mode of existence is so alien to the Christian concept of an interacting, caring, personal God, that the Christian theist ought rather to see the argument as showing that God is in time, and if God is in time, then God is mutable. As Wolterstorff notes,

[I]f we are to accept this picture of God as acting for the renewal of human life, we must conceive of him as everlasting rather than eternal. God the Redeemer cannot be a God eternal [timeless]. This is so because God the Redeemer is a God who changes. And any being which changes is a being among whose states there is temporal succession.¹

The concept of immutability that I want to affirm is such that God is unchanging in His character and attitude toward His creation. Essential immutability is incompatible with personality, and for the Christian theist this counts heavily against that understanding of immutability. But there is also a positive reason for thinking that God is immutable in the sense of not changing in character. The first is that when we make

¹Wolterstorff, God Everlasting, p.78

use of the notion of immutability in everyday speech, we do not intend essential immutability. For example,

We meet an old friend, and exclaim that he has not changed one bit. But we do not mean by this that he has been in a state of suspended animation since we last saw him. We mean that his personality has not changed, that he has lost none of his endearing traits of character. But he is quite likely to have changed his income bracket, and may have bought a new suit or a new car; and it would be impossible for him to reveal the old flashes unless he was moving and talking and saying new things, and in that sense changing.¹

There is a second reason for adopting the doctrine of divine timelessness stemming from considerations of immutability, and that is that a timeless God would better support and explain the doctrine of immutability. In this case, it is being argued that if God is timeless, then He is immutable, which is a rather different claim from the one I have just dealt with above. The argument is that what is outside time is unaffected by time, and time is the measure of change. So whatever exists outside time is immutable. This reason is not a forceful one for I have already argued above that the sense in which God is immutable is not the "strong" sense but the "weak" sense. Thus there is no need to support the doctrine of ("strong") immutability at all, and so it is pointless to suppose that God is timeless for this reason alone.

In summary then, considerations of immutability lead to the following conclusions. The only way that God could be essentially immutable is if God is timeless. But there do not seem to be any good reasons for wanting to maintain that God is essentially immutable. God does indeed change in some respects (although not in character) and so God must exist in time. Essential immutability certainly is a reason for adopting the view that

¹J.R.Lucas, A Treatise on Time and Space, p.301

God is timeless, but it is a mistake to insist that God is essentially immutable, and if God changes, which He does, then God is in time.

3.4 Objections and Replies

This section contains objections to the view that God is atemporally eternal. All these objections have to do with the compatibility of the doctrine of divine timeless eternity and other properties or attributes of God. For example, God is said by theists to be omniscient, to act, to create, and to be personal. It is not clear that if He were timeless, any of these other properties could legitimately be maintained.

3.4.1 A Timeless God Could Not Be Omniscient

There are two arguments which conclude that God could not be omniscient. The first argument aims to show that an immutable God could not be omniscient. The second is the argument from temporal indexicals. This argument states that a timeless God cannot know such things as, "I am writing now" and so He cannot be omniscient.

The argument from immutability was proposed by Kretzmann.¹ He argues that an immutable God could not know what time it is. If God knows that it is now 9:30am, and in ten minutes' time that it is 9:40am, then the content of His belief about what time it is now has to change. For this argument against omniscience to succeed, it is necessary that God be absolutely (or essentially) immutable. But this requirement is a major weakness in the argument for it would be easier to give it up, as was seen in section 3.3.4, than to grant the conclusion that God is not omniscient.

¹See Kretzmann, 1966.

Kretzmann's notion of immutability is far too strict, and does not seem either theologically or philosophically useful. As Hasker points out, "the right way to take Kretzmann's argument is to see it as directed against the notion of an absolutely immutable, temporally everlasting God."¹

More formally stated, the argument is:

1. If God is timeless, then God is immutable.
2. If God is omniscient, then He knows what time it is.
3. If God knows what time it is, then He changes.
4. If God is omniscient then He changes. (from 2 and 3)
5. God is omniscient.
- ∴ 6. God is not immutable. (from 4 and 5)
- ∴ 7. God is not timeless. (from 6 and 1)

The second argument is the argument from indexicals.² If God is omniscient, but God cannot know such things as, "I am writing now," whilst existing timelessly, then God cannot be both timeless and omniscient. It would be better to give up the claim that God is timelessly eternal than the claim that God is omniscient.

¹Hasker, "God, Time and Knowledge," p.159

²This is Paul Helm's terminology. See Eternal God, p.25.

The argument from indexicals takes the form of choosing some temporal indexical, such as "now," or "over," and arguing that God could not know propositions containing these terms. Kenny gives a clear example.

'Today is Friday' on Friday does not express the same knowledge as 'Yesterday was Friday' on Saturday...What I am glad about when I am glad that today is Friday is not at all necessarily the same thing as what I am glad about when I am glad yesterday was Friday. Perhaps Friday is payday, on which I always go out for a massive carouse with my friends: when it is Friday, I am glad today is Friday, but during Saturday's hangover I am not at all glad that yesterday was Friday. Moreover, the power that the knowledge that it is Friday gives me on Friday (e.g. the power to keep engagements made for Friday) is quite different from the very limited power which is given me by Saturday's knowledge that yesterday was Friday if unaccompanied by the realisation on Friday that it was indeed Friday.

Similarly, Prior² argued that if God knows merely that the examinations end on July 1st, but not that they are now over, then God does not know what I know. Both cases show that God would be lacking knowledge that I have. The feelings that I have may be a direct result of knowing the proposition expressed by the phrase, "The examinations are now over." But this proposition does not amount to knowing merely that the examinations ended on July 1st. Now if a timeless God cannot know the propositions that I know, then a timeless God is not omniscient.

3.4.2 A Timeless God Could Not Act or Interact

In order for God to be the God of the Bible, who loves, creates, forgives, divides the Red Sea, and so on, it must be possible for Him to act. God would not be all that He is claimed to be (at least by Christian theists) if He were unable to act. So when one makes claims about the

¹This passage is quoted in Murray MacBeath, 'Omniscience and Eternity,' p.64

²A. N. Prior, 'The Formalities of Omniscience.' *Philosophy* 37, p.114-129

nature of God, one does not want to rule out such an ability so basic as acting. Yet there are arguments which allege that the property of timelessness is in conflict with the ability to act. This would be so for any timeless being, and not just for God.

In this section, I want present three arguments which show that a timeless God could not act. The first argument is due to William Kneale and concentrates on the definition of acting. The second argument deals with a specific act, that of creation, and aims to show that a timeless God could not create. Finally, I deal with the much more general concern that God, if timeless, could not have any interactions with a temporal world at all.

The first argument is from William Kneale who believes that acting is a necessary condition of being alive. Furthermore, God could not act for

to act purposefully is to act with thought of what will come about after the beginning of the action.¹

Acting refers to many activities, including mental activities, and I take Kneale to be saying that no purposeful act can be begun without prior thought of what will occur after the action is begun. Now, if there is a succession of events in the life of God, then He cannot be said to be outside time. Kneale's point is that it is impossible to act purposefully outside time, for to initiate some act, there must always be a mental act, such as planning for what will follow. If Kneale is right about what it means to act, then it is clear that the Boethian definition of eternity,

¹William Kneale, "Time and Eternity in Theology," p.99

"the complete possession all at once of illimitable life," is self-contradictory.

In response to Kneale's objection, Markus Wörner¹ argues that there are some mental acts which do not involve temporal succession. Whilst it makes perfect sense to say that one was learning German yesterday, it makes no sense to say that one was possessing knowledge yesterday. This observation leads Wörner to cast doubt on Kneale's original statement. Not all acts involve succession, and possessing knowledge is just such an example. Yet Wörner's point surely fails because "possessing knowledge" cannot properly be called an act at all.

The second argument concerns the specific act of creation. It has been objected that a timeless God could not create. The argument put forward in support of this claim is as follows:

- (1) God creates x.
- (2) x first exists at T.
- (3) Therefore, God creates x at T.

This argument is designed to show that if God creates x, then He must create at time T, when x first begins to exist. Thomas Aquinas challenged this argument by suggesting that the act of creation might occur at a time other than T, the time at which x first begins to exist. What are the possible times at which God could create x? First, God could perform the creative act either before x first begins to exist, at the moment x begins to exist, or after x begins to exist. Second, and less obviously, the act of creation might occur at all moments in time, before, after and at the

¹See Wörner, 1989.

moment that x first begins to exist. Stephen Davis¹ reads Aquinas in this second sense. In either case, Aquinas believes he has shown that (3) does not follow from (1) and (2) above. In other words, he believes it is possible that a timeless God create something temporal. Yet, as Davis points out, even if it is true that the act of creation does not occur at T , the time at which x first begins to exist, it is nevertheless true that the creation act occurs within time: either before or after T , or everlastingly (that is, before, after and at T). Thus Aquinas has not shown that a timelessly eternal God can create something temporal; he has only shown that the creative acts of a temporally eternal God may occur at times other than that at which the created thing first exists. I conclude that Aquinas has failed to show that a timeless God can create something temporal.

In the first paragraph of this section, I asked what the possible times were at which God could create x . In fairness to Aquinas, he may be unhappy with this question, since it assumes that the act of creation is going to occur at some point in time. Aquinas concludes,

Nothing, therefore, prevents our saying that God's action existed from all eternity, whereas its effect was not present from eternity, but existed at that time when, from all eternity, He ordained it.²

Whether Aquinas would be unhappy with my question largely depends on what he means by "from...eternity." On the one hand, if Aquinas believes that God is temporally eternal, then no matter which interpretation of

¹ See his article, "Temporal Eternity," in Pojman, 1989. It will be remembered that this point has already been made in section 2.3.1.

² Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, II, 35.

"from...eternity" one takes (as outlined in the second paragraph above), God creates at some time. And if God creates at some time, then He does not create timelessly. If, on the other hand, Aquinas understands God as timelessly eternal, then he is likely to be unhappy about asking when God creates, for he must insist that God creates at no particular time. In either case, Aquinas fails to show that a timeless God can create something temporal.

At this point, a defender of the timelessly eternal model may simply insist that God can create something temporal. This insistence amounts to accepting that there are timeless causes which produce temporal effects. Very clearly, the burden of proof lies with those who wish to insist upon this claim, for we have no examples of atemporal causation to call upon in support of it.¹

Thirdly and finally, there is a more general worry about the ability of a timeless God to interact. An important feature of the model of divine eternity, if it is to satisfy Christian theists, is that a timeless God interacts with the temporal world. The only way that this could be incorporated in the timeless model is to show that (some of) God's actions are simultaneous with temporal events. Despite elaborate and sophisticated attempts to produce this sort of model, I do not believe that those attempts are successful, because no atemporal event could be simultaneous with any temporal event.

In order to understand why this is so, let me concentrate on what is meant by the simultaneous possession of the whole extent of life, which Boethius includes as part of his definition of eternity. The word 'simu-

¹I take this point from Stephen Davis, 'Temporal Eternity.' p.203

ltaneous' is rendered 'all at once' in Kretzmann and Stump, and 'all together' in Sorabji. Now simultaneity is a temporal concept, and it therefore seems an inappropriate choice of words for describing the manner in which an eternal being possesses the whole extent of life outside time. It is this pitfall, I believe, which has trapped philosophers such as Swinburne when they argue that the timeless model is incoherent. Swinburne rejects Boethius (along with all models of atemporal eternity) as incoherent in the following reductio:

The inner incoherence can be seen as follows. God's timelessness is said to consist in his existing at all moments of human time - simultaneously. Thus he is said to be simultaneously present at (and witness of) what I did yesterday, what I am doing today, and what I will do tomorrow. But if t_1 is simultaneous with t_2 and t_2 is simultaneous with t_3 , then t_1 is simultaneous with t_3 . So if the instant at which God knows these things were simultaneous with both yesterday, today and tomorrow, then these days would be simultaneous with each other. So yesterday would be the same day as today and as tomorrow - which is clearly nonsense.

Swinburne's attack rests on the premise that Boethius is committed to life being possessed all at once, but that premise is false if Boethius has merely been poorly translated, and the whole notion of simultaneity is inappropriate to a timeless being. If God is truly timeless, then He is neither before, nor after, nor simultaneous with any event in time, and so the objection does not go through.

Kretzmann and Stump do for simultaneity what they tried to do for duration: interpret it in some special way, such that the concept is applicable to a timeless being. They formulate the notion of "ET-simultaneity" which differs considerably from the everyday understanding of simultaneity. Simultaneity is a relationship which holds between

¹Quoted in Paul Helm, Eternal God, page 26.

temporal events. Kretzmann and Stump need ET-simultaneity precisely because they are trying to account for the relationship, not between temporal events, but between atemporal and temporal events. Hasker points out some major difficulties with the notion of ET-simultaneity¹, but they are of no concern here.

3.4.3 The Argument from the Concept of Life

Boethius defined eternity as "the complete possession, all at once, of illimitable life."² In discussing the Boethian concept of eternity, it is easy to overlook the fact that Boethius insisted that life is a necessary condition for a thing's being eternal. For Boethius, numbers and truths are not eternal (unless they can be shown to be alive).

It is clear from the surrounding passage, that Boethius intends the concept of eternity to incorporate not only the notion of life but also timelessness. And here is the rub, for several philosophers believe that these two notions make the concept of eternity self-contradictory.

William Kneale argues that what is entailed by life makes it impossible for a being to be alive timelessly.

Anyone who, like Boethius, speaks of eternity as 'the complete possession of eternal life all at once' seems to me to be running together two incompatible notions, namely that of timelessness and that of life. For I can attach no meaning to the word 'life' unless I am allowed to suppose that what has life acts...But life must produce some incidents in time, and if, like Boethius, we suppose the life in question to be intelligent, then it must involve also awareness of the passage of time. To act purposefully is to act with thought of what will come about after the beginning of the action.³

¹ Hasker, God, Time, and Knowledge, p.164ff

² Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, Book V, §6

³ William Kneale, "Time and Eternity in Theology," p.99

What then are the conditions for life according to Kneale? Primarily, something that has life, acts. Acting is a necessary condition of being alive.¹ Secondly, whilst the notion of acting may cover a wide range of activities, including mental activities, Kneale goes on to say that "life must at least involve some incidents in time."² Finally, if the life in question is intelligent, then life involves "awareness of the passage of time."

Clearly, if Kneale is correct, then the claim that God is timeless is in conflict with the claim that God has life, unless there is a meaning of "life" which does not include the three points raised by Kneale.³ The weight of Kneale's objection rests on his assumption that acting is a necessary condition of life, and so the issue is whether a timeless God can act, which has already been discussed in section 3.4.2. The remaining conditions are that "life must involve some incidents in time," and that intelligent life also involves "awareness of the passage of time." It is worth noting that all that Kneale is doing here is stating some assumptions about life, but these do not amount to an argument; denial does not amount to refutation. William Kneale sums up his thoughts about timeless life as follows: "On the face of it, talk about life without a distinction of earlier and later is self-contradictory."⁴

¹William Kneale, *op.cit.*, p.99

²William Kneale, *Op.cit.*

³This point has been expounded by Markus H. Wörner, 'Eternity,' Irish Philosophical Journal 6, (1989), p.8

⁴William Kneale, 'Time and Eternity,' p.107

Chapter 4 The Combination Model

4.1 Statement of Position

This chapter is devoted to a fairly recent view on the nature of an eternal God, attributable to William Lane Craig.¹ I first state the combination model (as I have called it), and then discuss reasons for adopting it. These reasons largely arise from objections to the models of divine eternity presented in the last two chapters. I show that these objections do not constitute good reasons for adopting the combination model and that there is no greater incentive for adopting the combination model than for adopting the temporal model. Finally, I raise some objections to the combination model of eternity.

Perhaps the best way to understand the combination model is to return to the first view discussed in chapter 2 and then highlight the few differences between that view and this. The temporally eternal model is that God has forever existed within time, neither having a beginning nor coming to an end. A necessary condition of this model is that time never had a beginning nor will come to an end. The combination model² differs in formulation from the temporal model regarding the period before the creation of the universe. The temporal model holds that God existed within time prior to the creation of the universe, and the combination model holds that God existed atemporally prior to the creation of the

¹The clearest statement of this view is to be found in his book, The Kalam Cosmological Argument, page 152ff.

²I call it the combination view for want of a better description- perhaps 'atemporo-temporal' would be better.

universe.¹ So the only difference between the temporal model and the combination model is the relationship that God has with time prior to creation.

There is another interesting difference too. The temporal model would be seriously damaged if it could be shown that time had a beginning. But, as with the atemporal model of eternity (discussed in chapter 3), the combination model is not committed either to a beginning of time or infinite time; either option is possible. In section 1.5, I outlined the various models of divine eternity diagrammatically. For convenience, I reproduce the relevant models here.

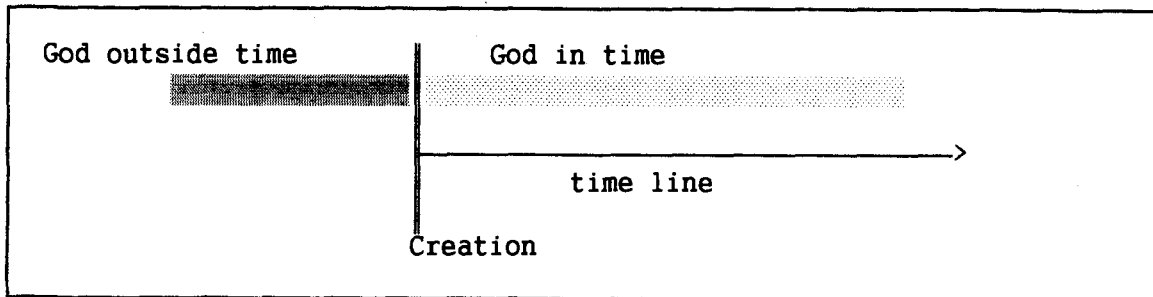


Figure 4-1 Combination Model: Assume Time Had A Beginning

I said at the beginning of the section that the principal proponent of the combination model is William Lane Craig. Figure 4-2 is ruled out by Craig for the following reasons. First, he believes that it is impossible that there be time without events. Second, he believes that God created time. This means that he believes that the position in Figure 4-1 must be

¹In speaking of 'prior to' here, one must be careful, for there is a danger of imagining that talk of a prior period is to assume that there actually was a prior period. But this is not so. One needs some locution in order to discuss the period when there was no time. Brian Ellis in his paper, 'Has the Universe a Beginning in Time?' (*Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 33, 1955) has pointed out that physicists speak of temperatures below -273°C , despite the impossibility of such a temperature.

It is to avoid such difficulties of locution that William Craig describes the combination view as follows, 'God is timeless sans creation, but in time at and subsequent to the act of creation.'

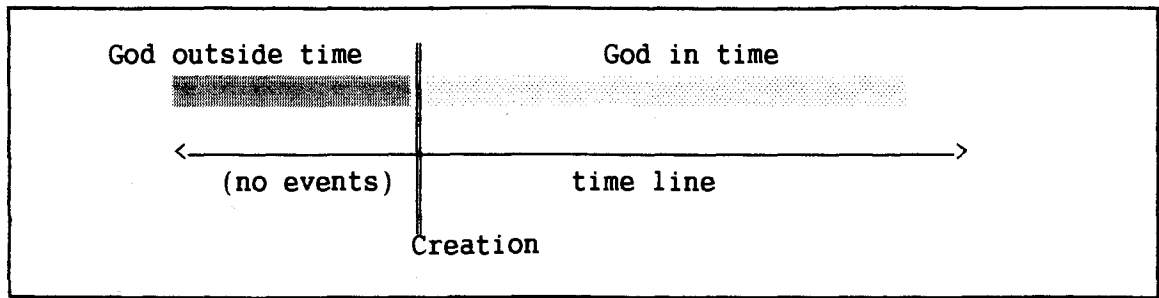


Figure 4-2 Combination Model: Assume Time Had No Beginning

the correct one, and time must have had a beginning. In the next section I shall examine how these beliefs play a role in causing Craig to reject both the temporal model and the atemporal model and to propose the combination model.

4.2 Reasons For Adopting This Model

Craig finds that the difficulties with both traditional models are sufficient to reject them, and is thus forced to think afresh. The combination model is a result of that thinking. In this section I discuss the reasons why Craig rejects the two alternative models, and show that his reasons for rejecting the temporal model are not valid, and that there is no greater incentive to adopt the combination model than the temporal model.

Why does Craig reject the two traditional models? He rejects the atemporal model because of the serious difficulties with the concept of a timeless God. One of the principle difficulties is that God could not act or interact in the temporal world, and this was discussed in section 3.4. I am inclined to agree with Craig that the difficulties with the atemporal view are insurmountable, and concur that God does not exist wholly outside time.

The temporal model is rejected by Craig on three counts. Firstly, because he believes that an actually infinite number of things is impossible. Secondly, because Craig believes that time without events is impossible. Thirdly, because he believes that time had a beginning, and that God is the creator of it.

These reasons for rejecting the temporal model of eternity are ill-founded. The main objection Craig has to the simple temporal model (Figure 1-1, page 10) is that a temporal God would constitute an actual infinite, for there would be an actually infinite number of events in the life of God. But, as I showed in section 2.3.1, this objection fails. It fails because the number of events in the past need not be infinite; it could be finite. If the number of events in the life of God is finite, then one is left with the position shown in Figure 2-1. The objection assumed that there must be an infinite number of events for a temporal God, but this is not so. There could be a finite number of events in the life of God, and if this is so, then there is no threat from the argument from the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things. So that argument at least has no sting for the temporal model, and cannot be used as a reason for adopting the combination model. But what about Craig's second belief, that time without events is impossible?

To rebut the argument from the impossibility of an actual infinite, I argued that the number of events in the life of God could be finite.¹ What is interesting about this is what follows about the nature of time. If the number of events in the life of God is finite, then there must have been a first event. And if there was a first event, yet God is temporally

¹This section of the argument begins on page 21.

eternal, then there was a time without events. There must have been an infinity of undifferentiated time (or time without events) before the first event. (Look at Figure 2-1, page 23, again to visualise this.) Now this assertion has worried some philosophers for they believe that time without events is an impossibility. Such a belief would block the rebuttal of the original objection and provide a reason for abandoning the temporal view and adopting the combination model. In section 2.3.1¹ I argued that the possibility of time without events can be plausibly defended.² But Craig would not be willing to grant this.

Whether one thinks that time without events is possible or impossible largely depends on one's view of time. If, on the one hand, one holds a relative view of time, according to which time just is the relationship between events, then clearly one will not be inclined to say that time without events is possible. On the other hand, if one holds an absolute view of time, then time can exist whether or not there are events. Those who prefer the relative view of time, including William Craig, are inclined to say that time without events is impossible. This, in turn, would lead them to reject the response that there has only been a finite number of events in the life of God, since such a response would commit one to saying that there has been undifferentiated time.

The third reason Craig has for adopting the combination model is the belief that time had a beginning. This goes hand in hand with his belief that infinite time is impossible. The claims that (a) time had a beginning and that (b) time is infinite, are inconsistent. If Craig can

¹Page 24.

²See Shoemaker, "Time Without Change," 1969.

show that time had a beginning, then it is false that time is infinite, and so temporal eternity must be false. But, as I pointed out in section 3.3.3, this has not been established.

In summary, Craig rejects timeless eternity because of serious difficulties with that model. He rejects the simple model of temporal eternity because he is convinced that it is impossible to have an actually infinite number of things. He rejects the more complex model of temporal eternity because he is convinced that time without events is impossible. All the options are defeated, and Craig must think of some new proposal. The combination model is his new proposal.

It is worth noting that Craig is more or less forced into proposing an alternative to the traditional models of eternity because he holds other beliefs which are inconsistent with them. I believe Craig correctly rejects the atemporal model, for there are serious difficulties with it. But is Craig correct to reject the (two interpretations of the) temporal model? Underlying his rejection of the temporal model are two very complex beliefs: the belief that it is impossible for an actually infinite number of things to exist and the belief that time without events is impossible. No such complex beliefs underlie rejection of the atemporal model.

The position that results for Craig is represented by Figure 4-1. If this model offered significant advantages over the other two models then one might be more inclined to adopt it. But in fact the opposite is true. There are additional difficulties to be faced with the combination view which are not present in the temporal model, and these are discussed in the following section.

4.3 Objections and Replies

Even if the reasons for adopting the combination model were sufficiently compelling to warrant its adoption, several objections would still have to be met.

4.3.1 What Was God Doing Before Creation?

At the beginning of this chapter, I showed diagrammatically that there are two interpretations of the combination model regarding the beginning of time. In the first interpretation, time had a beginning at creation, and God came into time at creation having been timeless before it. This is the view to which Craig actually adheres. In the second interpretation, time never had a beginning, and God came into time at creation having been timeless before it.

The difficulty for Craig is to explain what God was doing before creation. According to both interpretations, God was timeless before creation. What was this timeless God doing? Either He was doing nothing or He was doing something, albeit timelessly. If, on the one hand, He was doing something, then there were events prior to creation. But these events could not be temporal ones, for God was timeless. If Craig wants to claim that God was doing something outside time before creation, then he owes an account of atemporal events.

On the other hand, if He was doing nothing, then Craig faces the same difficulty that I addressed in section 2.3.1. I there showed that, if it is true that an actually infinite number of things cannot exist, then there must have been an infinite period of undifferentiated time, during which God was doing nothing. Craig would have to agree that this is so

given the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things. Difficult as this conclusion is to accept, it is no worse than the position that Craig must defend.

So Craig is left with the following dilemma. Either to defend and expound the concept of atemporal events, or to admit that God was doing nothing before creation, in which case his model is no easier to accept than that sketched to defend temporal eternity against the argument from the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things (section 2.3.1).

4.3.2 What Happens at the End Of The Created Universe?

One factor which makes the combination model more difficult to accept is that the relationship that God has with time changes. Before creation He was outside time; at and subsequent to creation, He is within time. Now if God is able to change His relation to time in this way, and does in fact do so, one wants to ask what would happen if the created universe ceased to exist. God would either remain within time or He would return to His pre-creation state of being outside time. If God stays within time, then the theist must explain why He does so. Craig believes that the reason for God coming into time was so that He could interact with creation. But that reason would not be valid if the created universe ceased to exist. If God were to return to existing outside time, then one wants to know how frequently He fluctuates between existing in time and existing outside time. To suggest yet another change in the relation that God has with time is to further weaken an implausible model. The combination model is more complex than either the temporal or the atemporal

model, without postulating further complications in the form of an additional change in the nature of divine eternity which occurs at the end of the created universe.

At the very least, the proponent of the combination model owes an account of what will happen at the end of the created universe. For the timelessly eternal model and the temporally eternal model, that account is straightforward. The nature of God does not change. If He is outside time, outside time He will remain. And if He is within time, then it is within time that He will remain. On the combination model, one must postulate that the nature of God fluctuates.

4.3.3 The Moment of Creation

According to the combination model of divine eternity, God created the universe ex nihilo at some point in the past. This is not the only thing that occurred at that moment. On this model, God had to do at least two other things: He had to create time, and He had to come into time. Thus, according to the combination model, there are at least three separate events as opposed to the single act of creation in the other two models. The natural question to ask the proponent of the combination model is in what order those three events occurred. Either the events occurred simultaneously, or one event (or events) occurred before the others (or other event).

If the combination model had allowed that time has always existed, then the moment of creation in that model would be easier to grasp. God would first have to come into time, and then create the universe. But a feature

of the combination model is that God created time, and this complicates matters considerably. The three events with which we are concerned are:

- a) creation of the universe,
- b) God coming into time,
- c) God creating time.

In which order did these events occur? To say that they occurred simultaneously seems problematic. How could God's coming into time be simultaneous with, (i.e. occur at the same time as,) the creation of time and the creation of the universe? Perhaps some special notion of simultaneity is required, but I cannot see what it would be. Craig says that (a), (b) and (c) are "just descriptions of the same event from different perspectives."¹ At one level of description of the model this may be true, but even so, it must still be explained how, within the single event, the creation of time can occur at the same time as the creation of the universe and God coming into time.

The more promising option is that the events occurred one after the other. But to say this is to say that some sort of temporal ordering existed. One event occurred before (or after) another. Now in order for there to be a temporal order of some kind, time must exist. So it seems clear that the best option for the proponent of the combination model is to say that the first event was the creation of time. But now there is still a question about the order of the other two events. Did the creation of the universe and God's coming into time occur simultaneously

¹William Lane Craig, personal correspondence, 1992.

or was one event completed before the other? The two possible orders of events are given below:

Version A:

1. God creates time.
2. God creates the universe.
3. God comes into time.

Or:

Version B:

1. God creates time.
2. God comes into time.
3. God creates the universe.

If version A is correct, then God, whilst timeless creates the temporal universe. For this to have occurred, it must be possible that a timeless being bring about temporal effects. In other words, atemporal causation must be possible. Even if there were a good account of atemporal causation, there would still be a problem, for if God comes into time after the creation of the universe, then He comes in "late," as it were. There have been some events before He comes into time. Up until the moment that God comes into time, this position is no different from the view that God is timelessly eternal: a temporal universe exists and God is outside time. So the best option for the proponent of the combination model is version B. But once again, we are owed an account of what happened at creation and need good reasons for preferring this model to the straightforward model according to which God exists within time (and, if one holds to a creation account, God created the universe in time).

Chapter 5 Conclusions

It is time to review the territory I have covered. The last three chapters have been concerned with three different models of divine eternity. I began with the most straightforward model, that God is temporally eternal, then turned to the idea that God is atemporally eternal, and finally examined the combination model. But which of the three models is the correct one?

Of the three models, the one that I have least difficulty rejecting is that God is timelessly eternal. It is no coincidence that the chapter discussing this model is by far the lengthiest in this thesis, for there are many more objections to that model, and also many more reasons why one might want to adopt it. But in working through those reasons, I have revealed that every one of them is weak. Furthermore, some of the reasons for adopting the timeless view point equally well to one of the other two models.

So I conclude that the model of timeless eternity should be rejected because of the difficulties that follow from it. Sophisticated attempts to formulate a model of timeless eternity which satisfies the (Christian) theistic requirement of God interacting with His created world have, as I have shown, been unsuccessful. If the timeless model is rejected for this reason, (or indeed any of the other objections that I have discussed,) then the two remaining options are temporal eternity and the combination view. Which of these two models is correct?

There are two important factors which might influence one's judgement here. First, there is the objection to the temporal model that an

actually infinite number of things is impossible, and that the existence of a temporal God would constitute an actual infinite. If this objection were correct, then the temporal model would have to be abandoned. Part of the force of this objection is taken from the Kalam cosmological argument. Two of the arguments used to establish that the universe had a beginning are that it is impossible to form an actual infinite by successive addition, and that it is impossible for there to be an actual infinite. If one is persuaded by these arguments, then it would be consistent to object to a temporally eternal God on the same grounds. But the discussion in section 2.3.1 showed that the objection fails for a very simple reason. Even if an actually infinite number of things is impossible, there is still a possibility that the number of events in the life of God is finite. So one principal objection to the temporal model has failed. This result not only strengthens the acceptability of the temporal model, but also weakens the combination model, for the belief in the soundness of the objection to a temporally eternal God is an important factor in Craig's rejection of the temporal model in favour of the combination model.

The second factor to take into account in assessing these two models is the complexity of the combination view in contrast to the simplicity of the temporal model. One would have to have good reasons for abandoning a simple position in favour of a complex model. But no such reasons exist. If my first point is correct then there is no advantage in postulating a model of divine eternity in which God is outside time prior to creation and in time at and subsequent to creation. The view that God is temporally eternal holds no dangers for the theist. There do not seem to

be any major pitfalls in it, and nothing is lost either philosophically or theologically. The burden of proof lies with the proponents of the combined model. They must show that the simple, temporal model is incorrect or inadequate, and that the combined view is plausible and offers advantages that the temporal model does not.

In chapter 2, the simple model of temporal eternity was challenged by the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things. Granting that an actually infinite number of things cannot exist led me to argue for the complex model of temporal eternity. This view is less attractive than the simple temporal model, and I ended that chapter with an admission that the more complex view of temporal eternity (Figure 2-1) faced the problem of what God was doing before the first event. My answer to that question was that, of necessity, since there were no events, God was not doing anything. Yet that answer may be unacceptable to those who believe that time without events is impossible.

But the combination model is no better regarding what God was doing before the first event. According to this model, God was timeless prior to creation, which was the first (temporal) event. Craig must either say that God was not doing anything prior to the first event, which is the same reply given when the question was posed for complex temporal eternity, or he must say that something was going on for God, albeit timelessly. In this case, he must give some account of timeless events. All the difficulties concerning timeless events apparent in the timelessly eternal model surface again here. Craig actually says that, prior to creation, God "could apprehend the whole content of the temporal series in

a single eternal intuition."¹ But such locution does not assist in understanding the mechanics of events of this nature. Whichever answer Craig wants to give to the question of what God was doing prior to creation, his model also faces the additional problem of explaining atemporal existence, for in that model, God exists timelessly prior to creation. It is much more difficult to comprehend timeless existence than it is to comprehend temporal existence.

The question of what God was doing before the first event is the most pressing problem for the complex model of temporal eternity. The combination model not only faces this problem, but, in addition, all the other objections discussed in section 4.3. If the combination model offered clear advantages over the other two models, then one might be more inclined to adopt it. But in fact the opposite is true. There are extra difficulties for the combination view which are not present for the temporal model. There does not seem to be any theological or philosophical advantage in adopting the combination model except that it is the only option available if one wants to maintain both that

- (1) an actually infinite number of things cannot exist,
and that
- (2) time without events is impossible.

Evaluation of the temporally eternal model and the combination model rests on the following dilemma. Either one believes (1) and (2) and accepts the extra complexity and problems of the combination model, or one

¹Craig, The Kalam Cosmological Argument, p.151.

decides that it is preferable to deny (1) or (2) (or both) and adopt temporally eternal model. Neither (1) nor (2) is clearly true. Both have been strongly contested.

The evaluation seems clear. On the one hand, the simple model of temporal eternity, in which there may very well have been an infinite number of events in the existence of God, is a straightforward and intuitively satisfying model. It is challenged by an objection based on (1). But (1) is by no means clearly true, and even if it were, the model of temporal eternity need not be given up since the objection to temporal eternity based on (1) fails for quite another reason: there could be a finite number of events in the life of God, as shown in Figure 2-1. This reply may also be challenged because (2) is thought to be true. But (2) is by no means clearly true. At least one plausible attempt shows that time without events is an intelligible possibility¹. On the other hand, the combination model is likely to appeal only to someone who believes both (1) and (2). The defender of the combination view clearly has the burden of proof, having the difficult task of defending (1) and (2), as well as addressing the extra objections and complexities present in the combination model.

At the end of this discussion, I conclude that temporal eternity remains the best model for understanding the nature of divine eternity. The timelessly eternal view does not go very far toward satisfying our intuitions in this area, and there is no greater incentive for adopting the combination model than for adopting the model that God is temporally eternal.

¹Shoemaker, 1969

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