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R.T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God*, New York: Oxford University Press 2016, 248 pp.

There is an old anecdote on a question posed to Augustine: “What was God doing before creating the World?” It seems that the venerable philosopher answered: “He was preparing Hell for curious people!” Putting aside Augustine’s wry irony, the story concerns one of the deepest questions which presses the human intellect: what is the relation between God (as intended by the principal monotheistic religions) and time? Is God outside time? What do we mean when we say that He is eternal? Was there a time in which only God existed and there was no World? Similar questions arose over the course of theological and philosophical reflection for two thousand years.

Mullins’ book has a twofold purpose: it aims both at reconstructing the debate within Christian theology about the temporality of God and at arguing that a timeless conception of God is incompatible with the God of Revelation. Although the aim is ambitious, the book keeps the promise: it is a very well written, informed, and stimulating work. Obviously, there is plenty of food for thought and I will give just a hint of the main topics discussed through the chapters and, by way of conclusion, I will sketch some reflections on it.

The introduction and first chapter are dedicated to methodological questions; straightforwardly, Mullins does not approve of many of the contemporary positions in theology exclusively based on a metaphorical and evocative use of language, alien to any discussion with modern scientific theories and recent metaphysical investigations. It is, after all, the core idea of the Analytic Theology Project (cf. for instance, Oliver D. Crisp, Michael C. Rea (eds.), *Analytic Theology. New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*. Oxford University Press 2009) to whom a series of books edited by Crisp and Rea for OUP, is dedicated.

In order to investigate the relationship between God and time, it is essential to scrutinize the concepts which occur in such relation; Mullins provides an interesting overview of the main views in the metaphysics of time and of persistence. It is an important point since many debates in the analytic philosophy of religion lack a clear characterisation of the concept of time they are assuming.

The third chapter is devoted to the analysis of eternity construed as atemporality. Accordingly three intuitions ground this concept: being beginningless, endless, and successionless. Furthermore, the intrinsic plausibility of a timeless conception of God depends on how precisely one is able to determine eternity as a mode of being. Moreover, the concept of eternity is deeply intertwined with the divine attribute of necessity and, in turn, with God’s immutability. The leading models of necessary and immutable entities, at least in Western metaphysics, are the Platonic Forms. However, immutability seems to be a feature at odds with the idea according to which God is essentially and chiefly a Person. Here, we can find, *in nuce*, one of the fundamental intuitions of Mullins’ proposal, that is, that God’s timelessness is not compatible with the features of God that make Him the God of Revelation and Faith.

Chapter four takes into account a classical topic in philosophy of religion: can a timeless God be omniscient? Kretzmann ('Omniscience and Immutability', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 63, 14, pp. 409-421, 1966) put things as a dilemma: a timeless God, if omniscient, always knows what time it is. Since the present moment is changing God cannot be immutable because His knowledge must change from time to time. Therefore, either God is immutable but not omniscient, or He is omniscient but not immutable. Mullins makes explicit the underlying metaphysics of these arguments: a dynamic conception of time. According to Mullins, presentism is the dynamic view of time par excellence and it is assumed within theological discourse. Mullins seems to agree with Kretzmann's analysis; however, according to him, the main set of reasons that refute the idea of a timeless God concern Revelation and its historical character. I will shortly come back on this point in the conclusions.

The fifth chapter focuses on the metaphysical assumptions that are necessary to support the idea according to which God creates the World ex nihilo and He sustains it at every instant. The problem with this account is the following: the Creation relation is construed as a form of dependence between God and temporal entities. But, then, since this relation essentially involves temporal entities, God Himself must exhibit some temporal features and this, according to Mullins, would lead one to accept a temporal God.

If presentism is a problem for conceiving of a timeless God, the alternative metaphysics of time, that is, Four-Dimensional Eternalism (chapter six) is similarly puzzling. Katherin Rogers (cf. for instance Katherin A. Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, Edinburgh University Press 2000) alters the explanatory order: since her intuition of God is Anselmian in character (God is the Perfect, Eternal, Immutable Being) and since this account is not compatible with a dynamic vision of reality, it follows that the World has to be four-dimensional. Unfortunately, this account shows rather serious problems for a religious conception of world. First, it is not clear how to give a meaning to the concept of Creation ex nihilo: from Rogers' point of view there is not a state of affairs including God but leaving out the World; on the other hand, she has to account for the ontological asymmetry between God and World. Generally speaking, four-dimensional eternalism entails, according to Mullins, the collapse of modality: all reality becomes a necessary emanation of God, removing, then, freedom and Grace which are at the heart of the Christian Research Program.

Eventually, chapter seven is the most theologically-oriented in character and it deals with the Incarnation. Mullins examines many Christological accounts: they differ in the anthropological and theological structure ascribed to Jesus Christ. But in each paradigm it is hard, again, to account for the fact that God the Father embodies Himself into Christ without admitting a temporal dimension within God.

As said before, there are many questions calling for discussion. I will limit myself to a couple of points, one more specific and the other more general. Mullins assumes presentism as the classical dynamical view of time. There is no doubt that this view meets the common sense requirement. Moreover, Mullins' historical reconstruction is totally plausible: classical theology assumed a presentist view of time. But presentism is a very puzzling metaphysics for those who want to include a timeless God; in fact, one supposes that God holds many kinds of relations (epistemic, of dependence, and so on) with entities which, according to presentism, do not exist since they are future entities. "God cannot act at non-existent times, nor is God eternally sustaining yet-to-exist futures times" (p. 106). Mullins is perfectly right; but presentism is not the only option which allows a dynamic metaphysics. Specifically, the

moving spotlight theory (for a recent debate, see: Ross P. Cameron, *The Moving Spotlight*. Clarendon Press 2015; Bradford Skow, *Objective Becoming*. Oxford University Press, 2015) admits the entire domain of facts (present, past and future facts) with a dynamic feature of reality, the changing now. Also, more exotic solutions such as Fragmentalism (cf. Kit Fine, 'Tense and Reality', in *Papers on Modality and Tense*, Clarendon Press, 2005.) could give an alternative solution in this regard.

The more general remark to Mullins' overall strategy is the following: doubtlessly, metaphysical properties which Perfect Being Theology ascribes to God are hardly compatible with the conception of a Revealed God. However, it could be a bit early to throw in the towel. God's eternity and God's temporality can be two modalities, equally real, of His being. The twofold perspective is discussed by Mullins but quickly discarded: "One could talk about God under the perspective of eternity and under the perspective of creation, but all such talk is a red herring because the eternal perspective is the true description of reality on the divine timeless research program." (p. 139). In my opinion, this is not a necessary conclusion. Of course, a superficial discussion of this twofold perspective is not enough; one must provide an account, a description, and ideally a model of it. But it is not sympathetic with this intuition to state that the point of view of eternity is the right one, since if one advocates this pluralist view he then allows the soundness of the other perspective too. An example could help to clarify this point. Mullins criticises the concept of eternity by echoing Kenny's argument: "All of time is simultaneous with eternity. Time t1 is simultaneous with eternity. Time t2 is simultaneous with eternity. Thus t1 is simultaneous with t2. [...] It has the high price of collapsing the chronology of time." (p. 153). But, Stump and Kretzmann (Eleonore Stump, Norman Kretzmann, 'Eternity', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 78, 8 (1981), pp. 429–458) try to provide a theory of eternity which is able to account for this objection by introducing the concept of ET-simultaneity, which is not transitive. As it is known, Stump and Kretzmann want to keep a "robust" concept of timeless God without abandoning the idea of a really temporal world; in other words, even if they do not make it explicit, they aim to provide a coherent account of a timeless God and universe characterised by A-theory. In that, the concept of ET-simultaneity is crucial: it is the temporal sui generis relation between God (the Eternal) and the World (the Temporal). So, from Stump and Kretzmann's point of view, it makes sense to say that God is intrinsically tenseless but, at the same time, He maintains genuine temporal relations with temporal entities.

It is not the purpose of this short review to investigate the feasibility of Stump and Kretzmann's proposal, but nevertheless it shows that it is possible to maintain a twofold perspective about God's timelessness and temporality. That said, I would like to reaffirm that Mullins' book is extremely informed and could be useful also as an introduction to these topics. It is, above all, a great book of theology and philosophy of religion which looks for the truth with an open mind and does not hide into any comfortable "mystery".