

The Openness of God: Eternity and Free Will

Introduction

The understanding of God's mode of existence as eternal is foundational for many other views of God in the history of philosophy of religion. The doctrine of divine eternity also makes a significant difference to a variety of issues in contemporary philosophy of religion, including, for instance, the apparent incompatibility of divine omniscience with human freedom and of divine immutability with the efficacy of petitionary prayer. But the doctrine of eternity has come under attack in current philosophical discussion as inefficacious to solve the philosophical puzzles for which it seems so promising. Although in the early 6th century Boethius thought that the concept could resolve the apparent incompatibility between divine foreknowledge and human free will, some contemporary philosophers, such as Alvin Plantinga, have argued that eternity gives no help with this problem. Other philosophers, such as William Hasker, have argued that whatever help the doctrine of eternity may give with that puzzle is more than vitiated by the religiously pernicious implications of the doctrine for notions of God's providence and action in time. In this paper, I want to examine these arguments against the doctrine of eternity. I will focus especially on Hasker's position, but I will look briefly at Plantinga's as well.

In various publications, Hasker has argued for what he calls 'the openness of God'. It is part of the openness of God, in Hasker's view, that God does not have comprehensive knowledge of the future; in particular, the God of open theism lacks knowledge of the future free choices of human beings. The proponents of open theism, Hasker says,

"portray God 'as majestic yet intimate, as powerful yet gentle and responsive, as holy and loving and caring, as desiring for humans to decide freely for or against his will for them, yet endlessly resourceful in achieving his ultimate purposes.'"¹

For Hasker, the openness of God means that although

¹ William Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, (London and New York: Routledge: 2004), p.97

"God knows an immense amount about each one of us.. he does not, because he cannot, plan his actions toward us on the basis of a prior knowledge of how we will respond... And this means that God is a risk-taker; in expressing his love toward us, he opens himself up to the real possibility of failure..."²

Hasker sees his position as an alternative to classical theism, as represented, for example, by standard Thomism, which Hasker rejects. There are two main reasons for his rejection. First, as he sees it, the Thomistic God cannot be intimate with human beings or responsive to them.³ Second, Hasker thinks that the Thomistic account of God as timeless solves the problem of foreknowledge and free will only at the cost of making God's timeless knowledge useless to God in interaction with the temporal world.⁴ Hasker says,

"I ... regard the doctrine of timelessness as coherent and intelligible... But divine timelessness... does not help... in

² Hasker 2004, p.101.

³ Cf. Hasker 2004, p.100. For a defense of the claim that the God of Thomism can be responsive, see my "Simplicity and Aquinas's Quantum Metaphysics," in *Die Metaphysik des Aristoteles im Mittelalter - Rezeption und Transformation* (Philosophie der Antike), ed. Gerhard Krieger, (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2014). For a defense of the claim that the God of Thomism can be maximally intimate with human beings, see my "Omnipresence, Indwelling, and the Second-Personal," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 5/4 (2013), pp. 63-87.

⁴ There are others who make similar claims. See, for example, Alvin Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out", *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986) 235-269 (reprinted in Thomas V. Morris, ed., *The Concept of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 171-200), and Linda Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); see also Linda Zagzebski, "Foreknowledge and Free Will", in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2011 Edition), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/free-will-foreknowledge/>.

enabling us to understand God's actions in providence and prophecy."⁵

In what follows, I will examine the second of Hasker's reasons for rejecting the Thomistic account of God and classical theism in general.⁶ I will first consider Hasker's argument for thinking that free will and timeless knowledge are compatible, and I will give reasons for concluding that his argument is itself incompatible with the doctrine of eternity. Then I will try to show that considerations derived from the doctrine of eternity yield a more effective way to argue for the same conclusion. Finally, I will use those same considerations to undercut Hasker's conclusion that timeless knowledge could be of no use to God in guiding his actions in time.

Eternity

Because the doctrine of God's eternity makes a significant difference to the questions at issue in this paper, it is important to be clear about it at the outset.

For Aquinas, God is not so much timeless as eternal. Boethius, who gives the classical definition of eternity, says that eternity is "the complete possession all at once of illimitable life".⁷ As Norman Kretzmann and I have argued elsewhere, eternity is a timeless mode of duration. Nonetheless, nothing in the concept of eternity denies the

⁵ Hasker 2004, p.100.

⁶ Others have argued for this conclusion too. See, for example, Michael Rota, "The eternity solution to the problem of human freedom and divine foreknowledge," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 2:1 (Spring 2010): 165-186, and "A Problem for Hasker: Freedom with respect to the Present, Hard Facts, and Theological Incompatibilism," *Faith and Philosophy* 27:3 (July 2010: 287-305). Rota's approach to Hasker's conclusion is very helpful, and I have learned from it. But I myself take a somewhat different approach here.

⁷ The translation of Boethius's definition is one Norman Kretzmann and I constructed; see our "Eternity" (with Norman Kretzmann), *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), pp. 429-458.

reality of time or implies that temporal duration or temporal events are illusory.⁸

In Erwin Abbott's *Flatland*, a sentient square in Flatland comes into conversation with an inhabitant of a three-dimensional world, who has a terrible time explaining his three-dimensional world to his new friend, the two-dimensional square. If there were such a thing as Flatland, then there would be more than one mode of spatial existence. There would be both the Flatland mode of spatial existence and the three-dimensional mode of spatial existence. That sentient creatures such as human beings are three-dimensional would not mean that sentient creatures in Flatland were really somehow three-dimensional or that their mode of spatial existence somehow really had any of the three-dimensional characteristic of the three-dimensional mode of existence. The two spatial modes of existence, that of Flatland and that of three-dimensional human beings, would both be real; and neither would be reducible to the other or to any third thing. Nonetheless, the two worlds might interact.

Boethius and others who accept the concept of eternity suppose that an analogous point holds as regards modes of duration. From their point of view, reality includes both time and eternity as two distinct modes of duration, neither of which is reducible to the other or to any third thing. Nonetheless, it is possible for inhabitants of the differing modes of duration to interact.

To understand the nature of the interactions, it is important to see that, as Boethius and others in the traditions of the major monotheisms understand it, eternity is a mode of existence characterized by both the absence of succession and also limitless duration.

Temporal events are ordered in terms of the A-series - past, present and future - and the B-series - earlier than, simultaneous with, later than. Because an eternal God cannot be characterized by succession, nothing in God's life can be ordered in either of those series. Moreover, no temporal entity or event can be past or future with respect

⁸ See our "Eternity", *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), pp. 429-458; "Prophecy, Past Truth, and Eternity", in James Tomberlin (ed.), *Philosophical Perspectives*, 5 (1991), pp. 395-424; and "Eternity, Awareness, and Action", *Faith and Philosophy*, 9 (1992), pp. 463-482.

to, or earlier or later than, the whole life of an eternal God, because otherwise God would himself be part of a temporal series.

On the other hand, eternity is also characterized by limitless duration, that is, the duration of a present that is not limited by either future or past. Because the mode of existence of an eternal God is characterized by a limitless and atemporal kind of presentness, the relation between an eternal God and anything in time has to be one of simultaneity.

Of course, the presentness and simultaneity associated with an eternal God cannot be temporal presentness or temporal simultaneity. Taking the concept of eternity seriously involves recognizing that it introduces technical senses for several familiar words, including 'now', 'present', and 'simultaneous with', as well as for the present-tense forms of many verbs. The relations between eternity and time therefore require a special sense of 'simultaneity'.

In earlier work, Norman Kretzmann and I called this special sort of simultaneity 'ET-simultaneity', for 'simultaneity between what is eternal and what is temporal'. A relationship that can be recognized as a kind of simultaneity will of course be symmetric. But, since its relata have relevantly distinct modes of existence, ET-simultaneity will be neither reflexive nor transitive. In particular, each of two temporal events can be ET-simultaneous with one and the same eternal event without being ET-simultaneous with each other.

Given the doctrine of eternity, God does not have foreknowledge. He knows any given thing or state of affairs that is a future contingent with respect to us only as it itself is temporally present, and not as it is future. For the same reasons, God cannot change the past or act on the future. Such actions require a temporal location, without which there can be neither past nor future. Nonetheless, the proponents of the doctrine of eternity thought that, in the eternal present, God can directly know and affect events that are past or future with respect to us in time. For example, God can will in the eternal present that something occur or that something come into existence at any particular point in time, including those points that are past or future with respect to us.

If Flatland were linearly ordered with an absolute middle, there might be an absolute Flatland *here*, which in

the Flatland world could be occupied by only one Flatlander at a time. Nonetheless, if Flatland were small enough, then from the point of view of a human observer in the three-dimensional world, all of Flatland could be *here* at once. And yet it would not follow and it would not be true that all of Flatland would be *here* with respect to any occupant of Flatland. So it could be the case both that only one thing in Flatland could be *here* at once (with respect to the occupants of Flatland) and also that all of Flatland could be *here* at once (with respect to the inhabitants of the three-dimensional world). The reason for this apparently paradoxical claim is that all of Flatland can be encompassed within the metaphysically bigger *here* of the three-dimensional world.

An analogous point holds with regard to the present, on the doctrine of eternity. With respect to God in the eternal present, all of time is encompassed within the eternal present, insofar as all of time is ET-simultaneous with the eternal present. But it does not follow and is not true that all of time is present with respect to anything temporal at any particular temporal location.

It may help to make this point clear if we briefly consider the question: "Does an eternal God know what time it is now?" For the sake of discussion, suppose that the indexical 'now' is ineliminable and that there is an absolute temporal present, as distinct from a present that is merely relative to some particular temporal entity. Could an eternal God know what time it is *now* in the absolute now?

On the supposition that there is an absolute present, then in time there is a fact of the matter about how far history has unrolled, so to speak. With regard to the inhabitants in time, at any given moment in time as that moment in time becomes present, history has unrolled *that* far. And this is something an eternal God can know. Furthermore, because the whole of eternity is ET-simultaneous with each temporal event as it is actually happening, an eternal God can know all the events actually occurring at any particular time as well as the temporal location of that time and its being experienced as absolutely present by temporal entities at that time.

But after these things, there is nothing further for God to know about what time it is now. There is no time in the eternal now; and, from the standpoint of the eternal present, every temporal event, as it is part of the absolute temporal present, is present at once to the whole life of eternal God. In the life of an eternal God, no *temporal* moment has any more claim than any other to be *for God* the absolute present.

A rough image may help make the point more intuitively available. Imagine two parallel horizontal lines, the upper one representing eternity and the lower one representing time; and let presentness be represented by light. Then, with respect to things in time, we might say propaedeutically, the temporal present is represented by a dot of light that moves along the lower line, which is lighted successively, moment by moment. The eternal present is represented by the upper line's being entirely lighted at once. For any temporal present, with respect to something in that temporal present, the whole line of eternity is lit up at once; but time is lit up only instant by instant. On the other hand, with respect to an eternal God, the entire time line is lit up at once.

So a particular moment in time may be both lit and not lit - only not at the same time. Just as in the example of Flatland and the three-dimensional world, once eternity is introduced, there are two different but equally real modes of duration; and *presentness* becomes relational. In relation to the unrolling of history, a moment of time may be not yet present. But in relation to the enduring and encompassing present of eternity, that same moment in time may be present to God, insofar as one and the same eternal present is ET-simultaneous with it.

With this much review of the doctrine of eternity, we can now turn to a sketch of Hasker's position as regards God's eternal knowledge of future free choices.

Hasker's Position

Hasker begins the development of his position as regards God's timeless knowledge by examining a much-discussed argument of Alvin Plantinga's which attempts to show that taking God's knowledge to be timeless does not

solve the problem of foreknowledge and free will.⁹ In this argument, Plantinga is making use of a common intuition, namely, that divine eternity is somehow now as fixed and determinate as the past is.

Linda Zagzebski puts that intuition this way:

"[W]e have no more reason to think we can do anything about God's timeless knowing than about God's past knowledge. The timeless realm is as much out of our reach as the past."¹⁰

And so, she says, "the timelessness move does not avoid the problem of theological fatalism since an argument structurally parallel to the basic argument [for the incompatibility of foreknowledge and free will] can be formulated for timeless knowledge."¹¹

Here is Plantinga's version of such an argument (with some dates changed for the sake of the discussion here):

"Suppose in fact Paul will mow his lawn in 2095. Then the proposition *God (eternally) knows that Paul mows in 2095* is now true. That proposition, furthermore, was true eighty years ago; the proposition *God knows (eternally) that Paul mows in 2095* not only is true now, but was true then. Since what is past is necessary, it is now necessary that this proposition was true eighty years ago. But it is logically necessary that if this proposition was true eighty years ago, then Paul mows in 2095. Hence his mowing then is necessary in just the way the past is. But, then it neither now is nor in future will be within Paul's power to refrain from mowing."¹²

⁹ William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989. Hasker takes himself to have given conclusive arguments for his view of eternity and free will in this book, and so I will here concentrate on his arguments in that book.

¹⁰ Zagzebski 2011.

¹¹ Zagzebski 2011.

¹² Alvin Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out", *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986), p. 239 (Reprinted in Thomas V. Morris, ed., *The Concept of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 171-200.)

Plantinga thinks that since this argument makes use of the notion of God's *eternal* knowledge and nevertheless leads to the conclusion that Paul's "mowing [in 2095] is necessary in just the way the past is..., the claim that God is outside of time is essentially irrelevant"¹³ to any solution to the problem of foreknowledge and free will.

Plantinga's argument depends on taking the past truth of the proposition *God eternally knows that Paul mows in 2095* as a hard fact about the past, to which the fixity of the past applies. But Hasker objects that whether or not this is a hard fact about the past depends on whether the proposition *God eternally knows that Paul mows in 2095* is itself a hard fact. From Hasker's point of view, the success of Plantinga's argument depends on whether or not "propositions about the eternal acts of God [are] 'necessary' in the same way in which the past is necessary."¹⁴

On the one hand, in the spirit of the intuition expressed by Zagzebski, Hasker claims that it certainly seems as if they are. He says,

"as of the present moment, it is in many respects *not yet determined* how the future shall be.... God's timeless eternity... certainly cannot be open in this way; every fact is determined to be as it is, and not in any other way."¹⁵

On the other hand, however, Hasker claims that when an eternal God looks at time: "God distinguishes necessities and contingencies [in time] even though there is no contingency left in the latter in the form in which they reach His gaze."¹⁶ And so God looks at all of time as a temporal being would look at the temporal past.

Hasker thinks that it follows from this that we are related to God's eternal present as we are related to the future:

"if God in his eternity looks upon our time as one would look back on the past, it follows that in a certain respect

¹³ Plantinga 1986, p. 240.

¹⁴ Hasker 1989, p.174

¹⁵ Hasker 1989, p.174.

¹⁶ Hasker 1989, p.175. Hasker is here quoting Arthur Prior, who himself attributes the thought to Anselm.

we can view, or rather conceive of, eternity as we conceive of the future!¹⁷

And from this claim, Hasker goes on to infer that "eternity is like the future, and unlike the past, in that *it is still open to our influence.*"¹⁸

Consequently, Hasker says, "facts about God's eternal knowledge ... are not hard facts. ... [P] *There are things that God timelessly believes which are such that it is in my power, now, to bring it about that God does not timelessly believe these things.*"¹⁹

And he concludes this way: "If, and only if, this proposition [P] is possible, is the doctrine of divine timelessness consistent with libertarian free will."²⁰

So, Hasker thinks Plantinga's argument is unsuccessful. If it is not a hard fact that God eternally knows that Paul mows in 2095, then the necessity of the past does not apply to it; and so the inference in Plantinga's argument to the conclusion that it is necessary that Paul mow is invalid.

Nonetheless, Hasker thinks, this rebuttal of Plantinga's argument should give no joy to the proponent of God's timelessness, because it comes at a considerable cost. That is because it is impossible that God should use a knowledge "derived from the actual occurrence of future events to determine his own prior actions in the providential governance of the world."²¹ Even if God's timeless knowledge of the future is not incompatible with human free will, on Hasker's view, God cannot use that knowledge in interacting with human beings.

Plantinga's Argument and Hasker's Objection

Although Hasker is trying to defend the doctrine of eternity against Plantinga's argument, his objections to Plantinga's argument are themselves hard to square with the doctrine of eternity. In particular, the premises of Hasker's argument for his crucial claim that facts about

¹⁷ Hasker 1989, p.175.

¹⁸ Hasker 1989, p.175-6.

¹⁹ Hasker 1989, p.176.

²⁰ Hasker 1989, p.176.

²¹ Hasker 1989, p.176.

God's eternal knowledge are not hard facts seem incompatible with the doctrine of eternity.

Consider, to begin with, Hasker's statement that when God looks at time, he looks at it as if it were the temporal past, in which no contingency is left in anything that was once contingent. On the doctrine of eternity, it is not possible for God to be related to anything as past. On the contrary, everything in time is ET-simultaneous with the whole of God's life. For the same reason, it is not true that for an eternal God all contingency has gone out of contingencies in time. God is related to contingent things as they are present, but nothing about this relation renders the contingent things past or non-contingent with respect to God.

Someone might worry here that even if contingent things are present with respect to God, there is still the necessity of the present. But however exactly we are to understand the necessity of the present, it does not take away contingency. If Paula in the temporal present sees Jerome smile at her, it does not follow that Jerome's smiling at her loses its contingency because it is present. What makes Jerome's smiling contingent is the fact that he might not have smiled; her seeing his smile does not entail that any state of affairs prior to his smiling made his smiling necessary. And that fact about the contingency of his smiling stays the same even though his smiling is present. Analogously, for God in the eternal present, the contingencies of time remain contingent even when in the eternal present God is related to them as ET-simultaneous with the whole of eternity.

By parity of reasoning, the doctrine of eternity also rules out Hasker's claim that, with respect to things in the temporal present, eternity is future or relevantly like the future. On the doctrine of eternity, it is not possible for anything in eternity to be future with respect to time. The only relation that holds between the eternal present of God and any events in time is ET-simultaneity. At any point of time, the whole of eternity is present to that time with ET-simultaneity; nothing about the eternal present is future with respect to any time.

Finally, consider the conclusion Hasker draws from these premises: "There are things that God timelessly believes which are such that it is in my power, now, to bring it about that God does not timelessly believe these things." In other words, on Hasker's view, in the eternal

present God believes p; but I have it in my power in the temporal present to bring it about that in the eternal present God does not believe p.

But, on the doctrine of eternity, this is also impossible. There is no succession in eternity. And so it is not possible for an eternal God first to believe p and then to believe not-p. If there are things that God believes in the eternal present, those are the things that God believes; and it is not possible for God to change the beliefs that God has. A fortiori, it is not in anyone's power in the temporal present to bring it about that in the eternal present God believes things different from those that he had believed in the eternal present.

So, it seems that the premises of Hasker's argument against Plantinga are not compatible with the doctrine of eternity, and the conclusion he draws from them seems incompatible with the doctrine as well. Consequently, Hasker's attempt to rebut Plantinga's argument and defend the compatibility of free will and God's eternal knowledge is not successful.

Plantinga's Argument and the Doctrine of Eternity

Nonetheless, in my view, Hasker's evaluation of Plantinga's argument is right: Plantinga's argument does not succeed in demonstrating that there is an incompatibility between free will and God's eternal knowledge. The compatibility of free will and God's eternal knowledge can be defended against Plantinga's argument in a way different from Hasker's.

From the past truth of a proposition about God's eternal knowledge of a future event, Plantinga's argument tries to show that the future event is somehow fixed or inevitable now, before the event occurs. In my view, the doctrine of eternity renders this move problematic.

To see what difference the doctrine of eternity makes to this move, consider Plantinga's move on the supposition that God is temporal. On this supposition, if

(a) In 1932

(g) *God knows that in 2095 Paul mows*
is true,

then in 1932 there is a state of affairs that corresponds to (g). And that state of affairs is God's knowing in 1932

that in 2095 Paul mows. Furthermore, in 1932 God knows that in 2095 Paul mows only if in 2095 Paul mows. So since in 1932 God does know this, then in 1932 the world must be the way God knows it to be. If in 1932 there were no mowing in 2095, then in 1932 the world would not be the way it must be for God in 1932 to know that in 2095 Paul mows; and so it would not be knowledge that God had in 1932. But since God does have this knowledge, then in 1932 it is the case that in 2095 Paul mows. Consequently, it is now (where, for purposes of this discussion, *now* is after 1932 and before 2095) the case that in 2095 Paul mows.

If God were temporal, then, these inferences would be valid:

- (a) In 1932
 - (g) *God knows that in 2095 Paul mows* is true.

Therefore, (b) in 1932 God knows that in 2095 Paul mows.

Therefore, (c) in 2095 Paul mows.

Therefore, (d) it is now the case that in 2095 Paul mows.

But once we add in the doctrine of eternity, the inference from a suitably reformulated version of (a) to (b) is invalid, and it no longer supports (d) either.

On the doctrine of eternity, the state of affairs of God's knowing that in 2095 Paul mows obtains in the eternal present. God's eternal knowledge does not obtain in 1932, because it does not obtain at any temporal location whatsoever. In 1932, (g) is true only because in the eternal present God has the relevant knowledge, and the eternal present is ET-simultaneous with 1932.

So, from

- (a') In 1932,
 - (g') *God in the eternal present knows that in 2095 Paul mows* is true,

it does not follow that

- (b) in 1932 God knows that in 2095 Paul mows,

because God's knowledge cannot be temporally located in 1932.

So much is relatively uncontroversial. It is also the case, however, that if (a) is suitably reformulated as (a'), it no longer supports (d).

When the object of the knowledge God has in the eternal present is something temporal, then what is known by an eternal God has a temporal location; but it does not share that temporal location with God's knowing of it. Instead, God's knowing is ET-simultaneous with the temporal location of what is known. God's knowing in the eternal present that in 2095 Paul will mow is ET-simultaneous with the time in 2095 when Paul mows.

Certainly, God's knowing in the eternal present that in 2095 Paul mows requires that in 2095 Paul mows. If there were no mowing on Paul's part in 2095, then it would not be knowledge that God has in the eternal present. But it is not the case that if *in 1932* there were no mowing in 2095 to correspond to God's knowing, then it would not be knowledge that God has in the eternal present.

In order for it to be knowledge about Paul's mowing that God has in the eternal present, it is sufficient that there be a relation of ET-simultaneity between God's eternal present and the temporal location in which Paul mows. And there is, since God is ET-simultaneous with every time, including the time in 2095 when Paul mows. But it does not follow that it is the case now, in the temporal present, that in 2095 Paul mows. In order to ground God's knowledge of Paul's mowing in 2095, it is not necessary that Paul's mowing in 2095 somehow obtains or is fixed already in the temporal present. What grounds God's knowledge obtains in 2095; and, unlike God, the temporal present is not simultaneous in any sense with respect to 2095.

In other words, from

(a') In 1932

(g') *God in the eternal present knows that in 2095 Paul
mows*

is true,

it follows that

(c) in 2095 Paul mows.

But it does not follow and is not true that

(d) it is now the case that in 2095 Paul mows.

Of course, from the denial of (d) it does not follow that

(e) it is now the case that in 2095 Paul does not mow.

Because in the eternal present God can be ET-simultaneous with future events that do not yet obtain in the temporal present, God's knowledge can have a grounding in something future with respect to us without its being the case that the future event is already fixed in the temporal present. Now, in the temporal present, neither Paul's mowing nor his not mowing is fixed. Nonetheless, in the eternal present God can know that in 2095 Paul mows, since God is ET-simultaneous with the time in 2095 at which Paul's mowing occurs.

Claim (a') is true because there is a relation of ET-simultaneity between the eternal present and 1932, a time past with respect to us. And claim (g') is true because there is a relation of ET-simultaneity between the eternal present and Paul's mowing in 2095, a time future with respect to us. But ET-simultaneity is not a transitive relation. From the fact that 1932 is ET-simultaneous with the eternal present and the eternal present is ET-simultaneous with 2095, it does not follow that 1932 is simultaneous with 2095. And so Paul's mowing in 2095 is not something that is the case in 1932. It is therefore also not the case that, because of God's timeless knowledge of it, it is necessary with the necessity of the past. The intransitivity of ET-simultaneity invalidates all inferences of the form 'It was true that God knows *p*; therefore, it is now the case that *p*', where '*p*' ranges over future contingents.

So the crucial claim of Plantinga's argument can be true:

Necessarily, if *God eternally knows that Paul mows in 2095* was true eighty years ago, then Paul mows in 2095;

and yet the conclusions Plantinga derives from this claim can be false. It follows from this claim that in 2095 Paul

mows, but it does not follow that it is now necessary that in 2095 Paul mows or that Paul has no power over whether or not he mows in the future.

God's knowledge in the eternal present of events that are present to God but future with respect to us does not imply that those future events are the case in the temporal present, fixed somehow before they actually occur in time. And so God's knowledge in the eternal present of events future with respect to us is compatible with human free will in those future events.

Hasker on the Uselessness of Eternal Knowledge

Careful consideration of the logic of the doctrine of eternity also undercuts Hasker's reasons for rejecting the usefulness of God's eternal knowledge to God's ability to act in time.

What Hasker actually says is,

"it is impossible that God should use a knowledge derived from the actual occurrence of future events to determine his own prior actions in the providential governance of the world".

Here Hasker is presupposing that God's actions are prior to the occurrence of future events, but this presupposition is impossible on the doctrine of eternity. Nothing in the eternal life of God is prior with respect to anything in time, and nothing in time is future with respect to anything in the eternal life of God.

We can, however, reformulate Hasker's reasons so that they do not inadmissibly attribute temporal succession to an eternal God. Hasker's thought seems to be or to depend on the other side of the coin of the intuition expressed in the quotation from Zagzebski above: the present is fixed and determinate, the eternal present as much as the temporal present. In either mode, once something *is* present, it seems that nothing can be done to alter it, not even by God.

On Hasker's way of thinking about it, when God knows future events, they are *already* there for him to know; and so Hasker is attributing a temporal ordering to the relation between future events and God's knowledge. But even if there is no temporal succession as between future events and God's knowledge, there is a logical order; an

event's obtaining is logically prior to God's knowing it. So even if the future events are not *already* there for God to know, it still seems as if the future events must be *there* in order for God to know them. And, in that case, Hasker's point still seems to apply: since a future event must be *there* for God to know it, it seems that God cannot use his knowledge of that future event to act on it. And for that reason, God cannot act on a future event in light of his knowledge of it.

And so we have the conclusion Hasker wants, without attributing succession to an eternal God. Even if it is eternal, God's knowledge of things future with respect to us seems useless for any action of God's on future events.

In fact, we can make Hasker's point stronger. On Hasker's way of thinking about the matter, it seems that an eternal God cannot act in time at all. *Every temporal event* is ET-simultaneous with the whole of an eternal God's life. So any act of God's intended to have a causal effect at a particular time is ET-simultaneous with the things at that time. But then the things at that time are present to God. And if they are present, they are *there*, too. So in what way could God do anything about them? On Hasker's approach, then, not only is an eternal God's knowledge useless for guiding his interactions with things in time, but in fact God cannot act in time at all, with or without the guidance of knowledge.

Here we might profitably stop to consider how anything in time acts on anything else in time. Consider a relatively simple case, drawn from neurophysiology, of causal interaction between two neurons: neuron 1 causes neuron 2 to fire. Here is how the causal interaction works. In the axon of neuron 1, there are seminal vesicles, small membrane-enclosed sacs. Each seminal vesicle contains molecules of a neurotransmitter -say, serotonin, for the sake of the example. When neuron 1 fires, the membranes of some of the seminal vesicles in the axon of neuron 1 fuse with the membrane of neuron 1's axon at the axon terminal, the end of the axon. When a seminal vesicle's membrane fuses with the membrane of the axon terminal, the seminal vesicle is opened; and its contents, the serotonin molecules, are spilled into the synaptic cleft, the small space between neuron 1 and neuron 2. Once in the synaptic cleft, a serotonin molecule moves to dock into a receptor on the cell membrane of a dendrite of neuron 2. When it does, the receptor opens up and allows ions to enter into

neuron 2, thereby changing the transmembrane potential and contributing to the firing of neuron 2.

Suppose that we think just about three temporally ordered events in the causal sequence in this example.

Event 1 at t1: causal interaction between the membrane of a seminal vesicle in neuron 1 and the cell membrane at the axon terminal of neuron 1 brings it about that the membranes fuse and the seminal vesicle open.

Event 2 at t2: causal interaction between the serotonin molecules in an opened seminal vesicle and molecules in the synaptic cleft brings it about that the serotonin molecules in that seminal vesicle move across the synaptic cleft between neuron 1 and neuron 2.

Event 3 at t3: causal interaction between a serotonin molecule in the synaptic cleft and a receptor on the membrane of a dendrite of neuron 2 brings it about that that receptor opens.

Two things about the exercise of causal power in these events are worth noting.

First, in each event, the thing exercising causal power co-exists with the thing on which its causal power is exercised. In event 1, the membrane of the seminal vesicle and the membrane of the axon terminal both exist at t1. And the same point holds about the serotonin molecule and the molecules in the synaptic cleft in event 2 and about the serotonin molecule and the receptor in event 3. In these ordinary kinds of cases, the thing that exercises causal power is simultaneous with the thing its causal power is exercised on.²²

Secondly, event 3 at t3 happens at least in part because of event 2 at t2, and event 2 at t2 happens at least in part because of event 1 at t1. But the *because of* relation here should not be confused with a temporal relation. As things are in the temporal world, the *because of* relation obtaining between one of these events and another takes place in a temporally ordered series. But it is the *because of* relation that is doing the work.

²² My point is not that causal power is always exercised in this way, only that it can be and ordinarily is exercised in this way.

Both these conditions can be met by an eternal God.

As regards the first condition, although God himself is not located at a time, God can meet this condition for causal influence on things in time in virtue of being ET-simultaneous with any thing in time. In the eternal present, God can will that there be a causal influence on things at a time; and the things at that time, whatever that time is, will be ET-simultaneous with God's willing in the eternal present.

And God can meet the second condition as well. Temporal things cannot happen after an eternal God wills them to happen, but they can happen because an eternal God wills them to happen at a time.

By way of a help to intuition here, consider a petitionary prayer for healing made at t_1 . Someone might suppose that an eternal God could not respond to this prayer because a response to prayer has to come *after* the prayer, but an eternal God cannot do anything after anything else. This supposition is mistaken, however. For something to be a response to a prayer, it has to occur *because of* the prayer. But this is not the same as occurring after the prayer, even if in the temporal world a response that occurs because of a prayer typically occurs after the prayer. In one and the same the eternal present, God can be aware of the prayer for healing at t_1 and will that there be healing at t_2 . In this case, although God's willing of healing is not later than the prayer, it is nonetheless because of the prayer. And being because of the prayer is sufficient for God's willing to count as a response to the prayer.

Analogously, the movement at t_2 of serotonin molecules across the synaptic cleft happens because of the fusing of the membrane of the vesicle with the membrane of the axon of neuron 1 at t_1 . It is true that the exercise of causal power at t_1 is temporally located prior to the effects of the exercise of that causal power at t_2 . But the effects at t_2 happen because of the causal influences operating at t_1 , and not in virtue of the temporal location of the things exercising the causal influence.

Consequently, an event 2 at a time t_2 could happen at least in part because of what God wills to have happen at a time earlier than t_2 , even if God's willing is earlier than t_2 . For example, God in the eternal present could will to ward off some cause that (but for God's causal intervention) would have destroyed neuron 1 and all its

contents right after the fusing of membranes at t1 and right before the release of the serotonin into the synaptic cleft. Then what happens in event 2 at t2 happens at least in part because of what in the eternal present God wills to have happen before t2, even though God's willing is not temporally ordered with respect to t2.

So the fact that event 2 is ET-simultaneous with God's eternal present does not mean that God gets to event 2 too late to act on it, as it were. It is a mistake to suppose that God is unable to exercise causal influence on event 2 on the grounds that, for God, event 2 is *there* and fixed with the necessity of present. Because God is ET-simultaneous with what is prior to event 2, event 2 is what it is at least in part because of what God in the eternal present wills to happen at times prior to t2.

Since God is ET-simultaneous with every moment of time as that moment is present, God can exercise causal influence in the same manner at any time. What happens at t_n+m happens at least in part because of the casual effects which God in the eternal present wills to happen at t_n . In this way, without being himself in time, in one and the same eternal present, God can will in such a way that he exercises causal influence over the whole temporally ordered causal sequence of events in time.

This explanation of an eternal God's *actions* in time can be applied also to an eternal God's *knowledge* of things in time.

In the example above, it is true that there is a logical dependence between event 2 at t2 and God's knowledge of event 2. God knows event 2 because event 2 obtains, and not the other way around.²³ But, in the eternal present, which is ET-simultaneous with t1, God wills to exercise causal influence at t1 in such a way that event 2 at t2 happens at least in part because of what God wills to happen at t1. God's knowledge of event 2, then, depends on event 2 at t2; but event 2 itself depends on God's causal influence on events at t1. God's knowledge of event 2 therefore includes knowledge of his own causal influence on things at t1 that helped to bring about event 2 at t2.

And, clearly, this conclusion generalizes. Suppose that time has an end, as well as a beginning, and that

²³ Cf. "Eternity and God's Knowledge: A Reply to Shanley", *The American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998), pp. 439-445.

there is a last time, t_n , as well as a first time, t_1 . And suppose that at t_n there is a last event E_n . Although God knows E_n because it is there, E_n is there for God to know at least in part because of what God in one and the same eternal present wills to happen in the whole of time before t_n . And, in the eternal present, God wills what he does with respect to all those causal influences on E_n in light of everything God knows in the eternal present about every other event in time, which has also occurred at least in part because of what God in the eternal present wills to occur in the period prior to t_n .

Since God's knowledge of E_n takes place in the one eternal present that is the whole of God's life, the knowledge that God has when God acts with respect to E_n is the same knowledge that God has with respect to events taking place at t_1 . Consequently, for any events, from t_1 to t_n , God can use his knowledge of an event at one time to shape the events of a later time. With respect to any event, although God knows that event because it is there, the event is there at least in part because of the causal influence that in the eternal present God exercises in time. Since God in the eternal present knows everything that he wills to occur as a result of his causal influence in time, what happens happens at least because of God's knowledge of it. So when God knows E_n , E_n is there for God to know at least in part because of the causal influence God in the eternal present exerts at times prior to t_n .

The flaw in Hasker's argument for the uselessness of God's eternal knowledge is the supposition that the logical dependence of God's knowledge on the events known obviates God's ability to use his knowledge to shape his actions. On the doctrine of eternity, the logical dependence of God's knowledge on the events known does not rule out the causal dependence of those events on God's acts, and those acts are included in God's knowledge. And so, in this sense, the events are dependent on God's knowledge. Because God is not temporally ordered with respect to events in time, God's act of will with respect to any event at a time t_m will be made in light of God's knowledge of all the events in time, including those future with respect to us.

Conclusion

In various other places, I have argued against Hasker's view that the God of classical theism is

religiously inadequate or disappointing.²⁴ In those places, I have tried to show that a simple, eternal, immutable, impassible God can be as intimate with human beings and responsive to them as any open theist could desire. For a classical theist such as Aquinas, God is a risk-taker, too.

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²⁴ See, most recently, "Eternity, Simplicity, and Presence," in *The Science of Being as Being: Metaphysical Investigations*, Gregory T. Doolan, (ed.), (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), pp. 243-263 (Reprinted as "Eternity, Simplicity, and Presence" in *God, Eternity, and Time*, Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier (ed.), (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 29-45.) See also the chapters on simplicity and on grace and free will in my *Aquinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), and the papers listed in footnote 3 above.

²⁵ The Thomistic God may, however, not be a risk-taker in precisely Hasker's sense. Hasker defines divine risk-taking this way:

"God takes risks if he makes decisions that depend for their outcomes on the responses of free creatures in which the decisions themselves are not informed by knowledge of the outcomes." (Hasker 2004, p.125)

The Thomistic God is a risk-taker in the sense that he makes decisions that depend for their outcomes on the responses of free creatures, when those responses are not themselves determined by God. So Aquinas accepts both the biblical claim that God wants all human beings to be saved and the doctrine that some human beings are not saved. That this is so explains why Aquinas needs to distinguish between God's antecedent and his consequent will. His antecedent will is what God would have willed if things had been up to him alone; his consequent will is what God in fact does will given what creatures freely will.

From my point of view, the version of risk-taking engaged in by the Thomistic God is sufficient for real risk. Hasker says that God is a risk-taker in the sense that "creatures' decisions may be contrary to God's wishes, and in this case God's intentions in making those decisions may be at least partly frustrated." (Hasker 2004, p.125). If we substitute 'God's antecedent will' for 'God's wishes' in Hasker's claim, then Aquinas's views commit him to the same claim, without the implication of frustration, since

In this paper, I have not recapitulated those arguments for classical theism. Instead, I have focused on the second of Hasker's reasons for rejecting classical theism, namely, that even if it could reconcile God's timeless knowledge of the future with human free will, it has to do so in a way that makes God's knowledge of the future useless for God's governance of the world. As I have tried to show, the doctrine of eternity can resolve the problem of divine foreknowledge and free will without the cost Hasker supposes it to have.

God's consequent will is in harmony with the way the world is.