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Book Review: Eternal God

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in classical Christianity is therefore false)? To show that it doesn't, Yandell constructs the following argument. (1) If God exists, God now knows whether He will choose to sin or not. (2) If He knows that He won't sin, He won't and "so deicide does not occur." (3) If He knows that He will sin, then He also knows that He sins in the future and does nothing now to prevent it. (4) If He knows that He sins in the future and does nothing now to prevent it, He "is not morally perfect even now, and so has committed deicide already" (which is impossible). Hence, (5) If God exists, He never commits deicide. Given that (6) no other being can "surprise" or "overcome" Him, and so destroy Him, it follows that (7) God is indestructible. Therefore, (8) "if God ever exists, He always exists." But this won't do; for if the argument is valid, its premises also entail that God can't sin. Since Yandell thinks 8 is necessarily true, he must also think his premises are necessarily true. Since his premises are necessarily true, 5 is necessarily true. There is no possible world in which God exists and commits deicide. God, therefore, *can't* commit deicide. But sinning and deicide are logically coextensive. If God sins He commits deicide and (since "deicide would be wrong") if God commits deicide, he sins. Hence God, and thus the incarnate Logos, *can't* sin. If He can't, then (on Yandell's view), Jesus isn't a responsible moral agent. "Plain theism" turns out to have no advantage over Anselmian theism.

I am enthusiastic about this collection. All of the essays are good and some are outstanding. Anyone with an interest in philosophical theology should read it.

NOTES

1. Charles Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Eternal God, by Paul Helm. NY: Oxford University Press, 1988. Pp. xv + 228, \$34.95.

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The Western monotheisms agree that God is eternal. But their philosophers disagree about what eternity is. While most now think that God's eternity is His existing through all time, virtually all thinkers up to Aquinas' day held that God's eternity is His existing timelessly—i.e., existing, but existing neither before, after, nor at the same time as any temporal event. As Paul Helm understands this doctrine of timeless eternity (DTE), a timeless God is to time as an author is to the time-frame of that author's novel (30-31): in

Crime and Punishment, Raskolnikov's crime may occur before his punishment, but this does not entail that Dostoevsky wrote about the punishment before he wrote about the crime, and there is no good answer to the question "was Raskolnikov's punishment simultaneous with Dostoevsky's writing about it?" DTE has until now had no book-length defense. Paul Helm's *Eternal God* seeks to provide one.

Helm argues that though the Scriptures do not explicitly affirm or deny DTE, DTE provides useful metaphysical underpinning for theses they do teach, e.g., that God is the Creator. Helm neatly explains how one can refer to a timeless God and argues cogently that one can sensibly apply a range of personal predicates ("knows," "wills," "acts") to a timeless God. Helm also makes a good case that a timeless God can know what is happening now—though He cannot use the indexical "now" to express His knowledge of temporal events, since whoever tokens with truth such a claim as "Helm is now writing a book" exists at the time to which "now" refers. But Helm just grants what many may find the most damaging charge against DTE, that it is not compatible with human libertarian freedom (95-98).

Some may feel that DTE menaces *divine* freedom. These may think, for instance, that as a choice to act must occur before one acts and nothing is before any action of a timeless God, a timeless God who acts cannot choose His actions. Thus Helm devotes a chapter to divine freedom. Many may find his views on this unlovely. Helm argues that God can be said to choose in that He does what He does for a reason (178), but also holds that God necessarily acts as His supremely good nature dictates (189), so that "what God actualizes...is necessitated...by his own nature" (187). On Helm's view, God's freedom consists not in an ability to choose otherwise but in His ability to act in accord with His nature without coercion or hindrance (174), and the universe's existence is really (as vs. epistemically) contingent only if God's existence is. But whether it exists contingently or necessarily, on Helm's view God must create our universe: its existence is "the inevitable outcome of God's choice which is itself...inevitable" (182).

DTE does not require Helm's view. Even if DTE is true, it can be metaphysically possible that God do other than He has done. DTE entails only that God never was *actually* going to do other than He has done. It allows that God *could have been* going to do so, and even that He may have tendencies to do so, i.e., have desires such that had He acted on them, He would have done other than He has in fact done. This is well for DTE, for Helm's view renders God's power problematic. Helm wants to claim that God has the power to actualize any consistent state of affairs (henceforth SOA) (188). But on Helm's view, either ours is the only universe God has the power to create, or God has the power to actualize an inconsistent SOA. For on Helm's view, only the creating of this universe is compatible with God's having His

nature. So if God can actualize another universe, either He can actualize the inconsistent SOA which is His having His nature while having created another universe, or He can effect it that He does not have the divine nature. Now let “Yahweh” denote the individual who bears the divine nature. In no world in which Yahweh does not bear the divine nature is it up to Yahweh whether Yahweh bears the divine nature (else something which is not God has control over who is God). So Yahweh can effect it that He does not have the divine nature only if He can first have and then cease to have the divine nature. Yahweh has this power only if DTE is false, since it requires some real change on Yahweh’s part. So as Helm upholds DTE, he must either say that this universe alone is within God’s power or say that God can do the impossible.

Helm tries to support DTE by arguing that DTE alone can preserve divine foreknowledge and strict omniscience (73-143). He also contends that the nature of time itself supports DTE (37-39):

1. Either time extends backward infinitely or time had a first moment.
2. If God exists in time and time had a first moment, God’s existence had a first moment.
3. If time extends backward infinitely, an infinite series of events has occurred prior to the present moment.
4. It is impossible that an infinite series of events has occurred.
5. Hence there has not been an infinite backward extent of time.
6. Hence time had a first moment.
7. It is impossible that God’s existence had a first moment.
8. Hence it is not the case that God exists in time.

But this argument has problems. For one, (3) is false. If time extends backward infinitely, all that follows is that either an infinite series of events has occurred or at least one event of infinite duration has occurred or there was an infinite stretch of empty time before the first event—nor is it clear how to rule out the latter two alternatives. Again, (4) is debatable and yet is backed by only a footnote reference to controversial work by Pamela Huby and William Craig. Finally, (7) is debatable. If (7) *seems* obvious, this may be because having a first moment of existence seems to entail coming into existence at that moment, or having a limit of existence, or being unable to exist if time did not exist: divine perfection rules out all of these. But conceivably God could have a first moment of existence without any of these. William Craig has argued that God exists in time once time exists, but would have existed even if it did not. If this is true, the first moment of time was the first moment at which God existed, and yet God did not then come into existence, and would have existed if time did not, and so is in no way limited in existence (unless temporality itself is limiting—which if true is a *different* argument for DTE).

Helm also tries to support DTE indirectly in several ways, including by contending that if certain arguments for divine temporality are sound, parallel arguments enforce the unacceptable conclusion that God is in space (41-55). Consider the claims that

9. The kettle is boiling,
10. The kettle is boiling at present, and
11. The kettle boils on 19 January.

While (9) entails (10), (11) does not, for (9) incorporates an indexical element through its use of the present tense, and the tenseless (11) does not. Helm notes that the claims that

12. The kettle is boiling here,
13. The kettle is boiling at this place, and
14. The kettle is boiling in the Old Kent Road

are related as (9)-(11) are. Some have argued that to know not just (11) but (9) and (10), God must exist in time, as using the present tense and "at present" *inter alia* locate the one who uses them in time. Helm suggests that if this is so, then if God can know not just (14) but (12) and (13), God exists in space, for using "here" and "this place" *inter alia* locate the one who uses them in space. I suggest that this last claim is false, and there is no space/time parallel here. One can only use "now" to indicate a time at which one exists. But it is not the case that one can only use "here" to indicate a place in which one exists. One can also use "here" to indicate a place which one does not occupy but which is near one. For instance, one can ask a waiter to "put the dish here," pointing at one's table, even though one is not sitting on the table. Now if this second use of "here" does not entail being located at the place to which "here" refers, one cannot infer "God is here" from a divine use of "here" as one could infer "God exists now" from a divine use of "now." Must a being which uses "here" in the second way be located anywhere in space? Perhaps not. A being without spatial location has no space between it and any place. Perhaps, then, this provides a sense in which a spaceless being is spatially contiguous with every space. If so, such a being could indicate each space with "here," and say about it just what we would say if (using the "here" of contiguity) we said "this space is here." We might have trouble knowing to which space a spaceless being is referring. But the spaceless being would surely know. Moreover, were there a real Invisible Man, we would have the same problem knowing to which space his tokens of "here" referred, even though he would exist in space. So if we are not prepared to say that an Invisible Man loses his ability to use spatial indexicals upon becoming invisible, we cannot make our problems in understanding a spaceless speaker's "here"s an objection to a spaceless speaker's using them as we do.

Eternal God is clearly written and discusses a wide range of relevant literature. But though interesting and provocative, the book is not always convincing; while it makes a cogent case that one can maintain DTE, it is less successful in arguing that one should.

Grace and Law: St. Paul, Kant, and the Hebrew Prophets, by **Heinz W. Cassirer**. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, and Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1988. Pp. xvi and 176, \$12.95.

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Most philosophers are acquainted with name of Ernst Cassirer, the world-renowned Jewish Neo-Kantian scholar. But few have ever heard of Heinz Cassirer, his oldest son, or are aware that he was a philosopher in his own right, a biblical scholar, and a convert to the Christian faith. This amazing little book tells the story of the younger Cassirer's intellectual pilgrimage from his secular Jewish and rigorous Kantian upbringing through his growing disenchantment with the Kantian account of moral experience to his confrontation with the account offered by St. Paul and the Hebrew Prophets. It culminates in his statement of his personal reasons for embracing the Christian faith.

In 1933 when the Nazis came to power, Heinz Cassirer left Germany for Switzerland. He was then 30 years old and already the author of an acclaimed study of Aristotle's *De Anima*, about which W. D. Ross wrote that it would be "hard to name a better account of Aristotle's psychology." When Cassirer took up residence in Britain the following year he could speak no English, but within six months he was teaching at Glasgow University and then at Corpus Christi, Oxford, and had begun writing a commentary on Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in English.

Like his father, Heinz considered Kant the most profound philosopher that ever lived and devoted much of his career to the mastery of Kant's work. But he also came to regard Kant's philosophy, and especially Kant's view of the role of reason in moral matters, as inadequate. In fact, it was in the course of writing a second commentary, this time on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, that Cassirer became troubled by what increasingly seemed to be the extravagant claims being made by (and for) the intellect in moral matters, and turned for possible answers to something altogether new: a study of the epistles of St. Paul in the original Greek.

There Cassirer discovered a view of human moral experience diametrically opposed to Kant's, but somehow closer to his own understanding of the