

1-1-2007

## Anselmian Eternalism: The Presence Of A Timeless God

Katherin Rogers

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

---

### Recommended Citation

Rogers, Katherin (2007) "Anselmian Eternalism: The Presence Of A Timeless God," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 24 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol24/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

# ANSELMIAN ETERNALISM: THE PRESENCE OF A TIMELESS GOD

Katherin A. Rogers

Anselm holds that God is timeless, time is tenseless, and humans have libertarian freedom. This combination of commitments is largely undefended in contemporary philosophy of religion. Here I explain Anselmian eternalism with its entailment of tenseless time, offer reasons for accepting it, and defend it against criticisms from William Hasker and other Open Theists. I argue that the tenseless view is coherent, that God's eternal omniscience is consistent with libertarian freedom, that being eternal greatly enhances divine sovereignty, and that the Anselmian view supports the contention that the Bible is relevant today far better than does Open Theism.

"Now that God is eternal is the common judgement of all who live by reason," writes Boethius.<sup>1</sup> Things have changed since Boethius's day, and many contemporary philosophers of religion now question the value, and even the coherence, of supposing that God is eternal. In this paper I defend "Anselmian eternalism," the analysis of divine eternity proposed by St. Anselm of Canterbury. First I offer a little historical background, with a word about Anselm's predecessors and a quick review of some of Anselm's writing on the subject. Anselm does not devote much time to developing and explaining his views on time, and so, in the next section, I try to show some of what does, and what does not, follow from Anselmian eternalism. Then I explain why, at least on Anselm's analysis of perfection, a perfect being must be eternal. Finally I attempt to respond to a series of criticisms raised against the idea that God is timeless—those that seem to me not to have been adequately addressed in the literature to date. I am especially interested to refute the spirited attack on divine eternity mounted by William Hasker and other Open Theists.

## *A Brief History of Anselmian Eternalism*

Anselm is, to my knowledge, the first philosopher to spell out clearly the conclusion that if God is timeless, then the entire space-time universe must be immediately present to Him, with all places and all times equally real.<sup>2</sup> This is the essentially tenseless view of time. Past, present and future are not absolute, rather they are relative to a given temporal perceiver at a given time. The main alternative to this theory of time, in the Middle Ages and today, is "presentism" or the essentially tensed view of time. The present is absolute. All that exists exists in the present, since that is all there is. The past and future are absolutely non-existent. I will sometimes use the



term “four-dimensionalism” to refer to Anselm’s view. On the essentially tenseless view, from the perspective of an ideal observer who sees reality as it is, God let us say, the created universe exists “at once” in the three dimensions of time, and the fourth dimension of space. I do not insist that there are no more dimensions to creation, but Anselm posits only the four and sees divine eternity as a sort of fifth dimension, “containing” the others. So “four-dimensionalism” seems the right term in the context. Of course if one were assured that there were more created dimensions, then one would simply ascribe to God’s eternity the dimensional level which contains all created dimensions.

Anselm’s famous and influential predecessors, Augustine and Boethius, both held that God is eternal. But exactly what they mean by “eternal” is ambiguous. One possibility is that they are expressing four-dimensionalism, but less clearly than Anselm does. For example, Augustine’s famous meditation on the nature of time in Book 11 of the *Confessions* contains much that suggests the idea that all time is equally real, as being present to God. In chapter 18 he writes,

If the future and the past do exist, I want to know where they are. I may not be capable of such knowledge, but at least I know that wherever they are, they are not there as future or past, but as present. For if, wherever they are, they are future, they do not yet exist; if past, they no longer exist. So wherever they are and whatever they are, it is only by being present that they *are*.<sup>3</sup>

Boethius, too, frequently says things that suggest four-dimensionalism. In Book 5, Prose 6 of the *Consolation* he writes, for example, that divine eternity, “hold[s] as present the infinity of moving time,” and that God looks “forward on all things as though from the highest peak of the world.”

But another interpretation, consistent with presentism, is possible.<sup>4</sup> On this view God exists only in the present moment, since all that there is is the present. He is “eternal” in the sense that His nature and His life are identical and perfectly simple, and He does not change at all. He is omniscient in that, at each present instant, He knows simultaneously and in complete detail, all that is, was, and will be. He knows it in the present, all in one, changeless and everlasting act of knowing. On this interpretation, it is not the case that all of time is actually present to God, since all that exists is the present. How, then, could He know a future which has not yet happened? For Augustine and Boethius this question does not pose a problem. Both hold that God is the cause of everything that happens, so He can know the future in knowing His own intentions.<sup>5</sup> But how, as many contemporary philosophers have asked, could such an unchanging God know what time it is right now? Neither Augustine nor Boethius addresses this question. If they are indeed propounding the presentist, rather than the four-dimensionalist, view of time, then I do not see that they can answer it. In explaining four-dimensionalism and responding to criticisms, I will show how the Anselmian can deal with these questions.

Anselm’s four-dimensionalism is unambiguous, as a brief look at a few proof texts will demonstrate. First, though, a quick sketch of Anselm’s theological commitments and methodology will be helpful. Anselm is a

classical theist. Today “classical theism” has come to mean the view that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent, on many possible analyses of those attributes. The traditional, classical theism of Anselm—and Augustine and Aquinas—insists upon more. For our purposes the important points are that God is simple and immutable, and divine creation means the sustaining in being from moment to moment of everything which is not God. There is nothing, not a being, nor a positive property, nor even a proposition, which is not either God or dependent upon God’s nature or will.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding methodology, Anselm, as the beginning of the famous *Prologion* argument shows, takes it as non-negotiable that God is “that than which a greater cannot be conceived.” Nothing less could be a proper object of worship. In analyzing the relationship of God to creation, and eternity to time, the starting point is the perfection of God, and the method is to unpack that concept. If it can be shown that some (logically and metaphysically possible) attribute is entailed by perfection, then we know that God has that attribute. And if a certain (logically and metaphysically possible) view about the world follows from God’s having this attribute, then we know that that is indeed how the world is. So, for example, Anselm takes it that the tenseless view of time follows from the divine perfection of eternity, and so we know that time is tenseless. This is quite a different approach from that taken by many contemporary philosophers of religion who, recognizing the connection between divine eternity and the tenseless view of time, start their argument from an analysis of the nature of time, find the tenseless view problematic, and conclude that time is tensed and God must be temporal.<sup>7</sup>

Anselm would see this as going about the project backwards, since theories about the way the world works are simply less important than an adequate conception of God. Certainly if it could be shown that the tenseless view of time is inherently contradictory, or conflicts with some deeply important commitment—to a robust analysis of human freedom and moral responsibility, for example—then the tenseless view of time, and the understanding of divine eternity which entails it, might be on the negotiating table. But otherwise, since perfection seems to entail eternity, we should conclude that God is timeless and time is tenseless. Later I will address the problem that four-dimensionalism is almost unimaginably strange. Anselm does not find this a terribly pressing problem. If reason shows *that* something is the case, we ought to accept it, even if we limited human beings cannot comprehend *how* it is the case.<sup>8</sup>

But does Anselm really insist that God is timeless? In the *Monologion*, his first philosophical work, Anselm argues that God must be “in” all places and times, in that for them to exist He must be presently causing them. But He is “in” no places or times if by “in” we mean He is limited to a given place or time as spatio-temporal creatures are. It is quite impossible that God should exist wholly at a single time, since He is simple and hence His being and His life are identical. Were His life stretched out across time it “would not exist all at once, but rather in parts, extended through the parts of time.” And we cannot say this because, “His eternity is nothing other than His very self . . . if His eternity has a past, present, and future, it would follow that His very being has a past, present, and future.”<sup>9</sup> But that is impossible since God is simple.

In the *Proslogion* he reiterates what he had said in the *Monologion*. Chapter 19 is entitled, "That He is not in place or time, but all times and places are in Him." Here he writes,

In your eternity is there anything past, so that it does not exist now, or anything future as if it does not exist yet? It is not that you existed yesterday and will exist tomorrow, but yesterday, today and tomorrow, you exist. On the contrary, you exist neither yesterday, nor today, nor tomorrow, rather you are simply beyond all time. For yesterday, today and tomorrow are nothing other than temporal. You, however, although nothing exists without you, are not thereby in place or time, but everything is in you. Nothing contains you, but you contain everything.

What especially suggests four-dimensionalism in these texts is the parallel way in which space and time are treated. When Anselm writes that all places are present to God he certainly means that all actual places are equally real, "contained in" God in the sense that He keeps them immediately in being. If all actual times are present to God, all "contained in" the simple and immutable unity of divine eternity, then it follows that they are all equally real.

His last completed philosophical work, *On the Harmony of the Foreknowledge and the Predestination and the Grace of God with Free Will*, offers the clearest statement of four-dimensionalism. In Book 1, chapter 5 he writes, "Just as the present time contains all place and whatever is in any place, in the same way the eternal present encloses all time and whatever exists in any time. . . . For eternity has its own unique simultaneity in which exist all the things which exist at the same place or time, and whatever exists in the different places and times." Time is a fourth dimension containing all of space, and divine eternity is a sort of fifth dimension containing all time and space.

The reason that Anselm finds himself discussing the nature of time in a book about freedom and foreknowledge is that, as I will explain below, the four-dimensionalist position allows him to hold that it is the event of our actual free choice which causes God's knowledge of the choice. Since all times are present to God, my actual choice at the time when I make it tomorrow can be the causally originating source of God's "fore"knowledge today. But the fact that eternalism solves the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge is really icing on the metaphysical cake for Anselm. As he explained in his earlier works on the nature of God, eternity is a necessary attribute of a perfect being.

#### *Anselmian Eternalism Further Explained*

Anselm discusses time and eternity more than this quick glance might suggest, but he does not write a separate treatise on the question or really try to develop four-dimensionalism.<sup>10</sup> In this section I hope to clarify the entailments of Anselmian eternalism. I adopt the term "Anselmian" to indicate that I intend my unpacking of the concept of four-dimensionalism, while not based on Anselm's text, to be in keeping with his views. On the

question of freedom and foreknowledge, however, I will not need to go far beyond his text, since he himself explains what is, to my mind, a very plausible eternalist solution.

What then is Anselmian eternalism? First it will help to note how time seems to us. This is not actually how it *is*, according to the Anselmian, but temporal appearance is a good place to start, and then we can move to temporal reality, and then to eternity. The more obvious view of time, what could be called the “common-sense” view, is presentism. All that exists is the present, and time is essentially tensed.<sup>11</sup> The past does not exist since it is no longer present, although it may be “fixed” in that what happened, happened and cannot be undone. The future does not exist since it is not yet present, and it is “open” in that there are alternative possibilities relative to what will happen.<sup>12</sup> On this common-sense view we, and all that is, must exist only at the present instant since that is all there is. This is a very tenuous sort of existence since the present is an extensionless point at which the non-existent future becomes the non-existent past. And thus, all there is to anything is the ever-changing, thin and flickering present existence.<sup>13</sup>

This is how time appears, but appearances are deceiving. The common-sense view, on the Anselmian understanding of things, is the result of the very limited perspective of temporal perceivers.<sup>14</sup> In fact time is essentially tenseless. What we temporal perceivers call present and past and future are relative to a given perceiver at a given point in time. What any given perceiver at any given time perceives as present is not ontologically privileged over what that perceiver holds to be past or future. In fact all times exist equally. This does not do away with the temporal relations of “before,” “after,” and “at the same time as.” The Civil War is always objectively before the First World War, but whether or not “today” is in 1863 or in 1918 is relative to the temporal perceiver.<sup>15</sup> In analyzing the nature of temporal things, the standard division is between endurantism and perdurantism. According to the former view an object or event is wholly present at a given time, but exists, perhaps as “repeated,” at each of the times at which it exists. The latter view holds that temporal objects and events exist four-dimensionally across time as a series of what can be called “time-slices.” Each time-slice at each moment constitutes only a part of the whole, while the whole consists in the sum of all the time-slices. Happily, the purposes of this paper do not require a decision between these two options. I find perdurantism a bit more natural, and so I will assume that analysis, but I think the basic arguments I will make could be couched successfully in endurantist terms as well.<sup>16</sup>

When we try to map this view onto our lived experience it is exceedingly strange. I seem to myself to exist only at the present instant, but in fact the “I” of an instant ago really exists and perceives an instant ago as the present instant, and the “I” of an instant hence really exists and perceives an instant hence as the present instant. And these successive time-slices of “me” do not have access to one another. Perhaps I-at-present-at-t1 can affect what I-at-present-at-t2 will be, but only by action at t1. And yet, I-at-present-at-t2, and all the other slices of “me” have the same ontological status. On the traditional Christian understanding of an embodied, and so presumably temporal, immortality, there are an infinite number of time-slices of any human

being stretching into what to us is the future, and each as real as any other time-slice starting with conception.<sup>17</sup> Very, very strange.

Four-dimensionalism presents a peculiar-looking universe, but it is entailed by the Anselmian conception of divine eternity. God is timeless, and thus we have what Hasker calls, "Anselm's barrier" since, "God neither exists, nor acts, nor knows in time." But, it would be a mistake to emphasize "Anselm's barrier" without also noting what might be called "Anselm's bridge." Although God is "timeless" in that His life is not stretched out four-dimensionally across time as our lives are, it does not follow that He is incapable of being related to the temporal universe. Anselm is adamant that all of time is "contained in" divine eternity, which is to say God knows and acts causally upon all of space-time in one, eternal, act. That a timeless God can know and interact with the created universe is a view that has been adequately defended in the contemporary literature by a number of philosophers, including Hasker, and I do not think it necessary to repeat the various arguments here.<sup>19</sup>

Two medieval spatial analogies for this "outside of yet present to" relationship of time and eternity are helpful, although Anselm does not use them. One is the circle, where, according to rather mystical Neo-platonic geometry, the center point is the causal source of the circumference.<sup>20</sup> The center is not on the circumference, but it is related to each and every point on the circumference equally. So God is the source of each temporal instant. He is not contained in any of the temporal instants, but is directly, causally and cognitively related to each and every one of them equally. Another analogy is the observer on the highest peak who sees all the objects and events in the plain below.<sup>21</sup> Those below can perceive only what is in their immediate environs. They do not have cognitive or causal access to all the objects and events in the plain because most are too distant spatially. But the keen observer above, because of his unique perspective, can perceive each and every one of them equally.

I do not say that those who employed these spatial analogies necessarily adopted the tenseless view of time, but just that the analogies suggest four-dimensionalism. All the points of the circle are equally real. They must be since each stands in the same relationship to the center which is its source. All the objects and events on the plain are equally real. They must be, else the observer on the height could not perceive them all at once. Anselm's analysis of eternity as a fifth dimension present to all of four-dimensional space-time offers a less concrete image. Perhaps, though, it comes closer to being a description of the actual situation than do the rather distant spatial analogies. Divine eternity, "encompasses all time and whatever exists at any time."<sup>22</sup> And if all times are equally real in the eyes of God, they are equally real simpliciter, since it is God's perspective that determines ultimate reality.<sup>23</sup>

Note that the claim that all times and places exist with equal reality in God's eternity does not entail that each spatio-temporal object and event exists twice, once in time and once in eternity. Hasker seems to express such an entailment when he writes that temporal things exist for only a brief period *in time* "but they also possess an existence in eternity that knows no temporal bounds . . . all the familiar things and events of everyday life do not really pass away, as we seem to see them do, but instead persist

eternally — . . . the existence of my chalk-stub is as enduring as that of the Andromeda galaxy.”<sup>24</sup> This is a misunderstanding. Consider the analogy with space. All of space is within God’s omnipresence in that it is all immediately cognitively and causally present to and absolutely dependent upon God. This is how the terminology, “exists in” or “exists within” should be understood. But spatial things do not possess a double existence, one spatial and one non-spatial, or become more spatially extended, or even omnipresent, because they “exist in” God’s omnipresence. Nor do temporal things possess a double existence or become eternal because they exist in God’s eternity. The claim that all of space-time exists equally in immediate causal dependence on God does not entail that the spatio-temporal events and objects cease to occupy their locations in space and time. Hasker’s chalk does not add any more time slices to its span of existence by being immediately present to divine eternity. It and the Andromeda galaxy are equally present to eternity, but the chalk does not “endure” (or perdure) as long as the Andromeda galaxy since to endure is to last across time. The Neo-platonic circle analogy is helpful here. That all the points on the circumference of the circle exist equally in causal dependence on the center point does not in any way alter their position on the circumference or allow them to occupy more than a single point. Nor does it bring them into the center, or give them a dual existence in both the circumference and the center. So each thing at each place and time is immediately present to God, but that does not somehow remove it from its position in place and time.

#### *Perfection Entails Eternity*

But why suppose that God is eternal in this Anselmian sense which entails that time is essentially tenseless? There are a number of reasons, and I will try to sketch several, but first it should be noted that a desire to set God outside the hurly-burly of this changing world is most emphatically *not* among them. Some among the Open Theists have opined that the reason earlier Christian philosophers insisted upon the eternity of God was that they were taken with the Hellenistic view of a God who does not dirty His hands in the world of time and space.<sup>25</sup> Certainly the early Christian thinkers were heavily influenced by Greek thought, but it is a mistake to suppose that acceptance of divine eternity was inspired by a desire to remove God from contact with His creation. It is Augustine who begins the serious philosophical effort to hammer out the doctrine of divine eternity. The motive for his work is to show that a God who is immutable can nonetheless be an agent who acts in the world and who knows his individual creatures and what they are doing. Though Anselm is the first unambiguous four-dimensionalist, Augustine’s recognition that an eternal God could be both immutable and an actor in the world constitutes an inestimable contribution to Christian thought. This becomes clear if one compares his views to those of the later Islamic Aristotelians like Avicenna and Averroes who held that God is immutable but assumed, following Aristotle and apparently without question, that time was essentially tensed. God’s being timeless, then, meant that He exists only in the present since that’s all there is, but He is absolutely unchanging. This led them to conclude that God just does not interact with creation, and in fact does not even know individuals at all.



So the criticism of the Open Theists is well-taken if aimed at these Islamic Aristotelians (Al-gazali beat them to the punch by about a millenium), but it misunderstands the Christian tradition pioneered by Augustine.

Boethius discusses time and eternity in his *Consolation of Philosophy*. He is trying to make the case that, in spite of the fact that he has lost everything and is in prison awaiting a brutal execution, all will be well because human freedom can be reconciled with a genuinely good and sovereign God who acts in the world and knows what happens even in the future. In other words, he is arguing the very opposite of the view that God is aloof from the world of time and change. Presumably a philosophy which concluded to the latter sort of God would not be very consoling. As Christians, the late classical and medieval eternalists were absolutely committed to a God who interacts with creation, answers prayers, becomes incarnate, judges the nations, etc. And so long as you get the right theory of time, as Anselm does, you can have all of that, plus everything "Hellenistic" you might have wanted in the way of a perfect being, without contradiction.

So the issue is not to remove God from His creation. Why, then is being eternal a perfection? Well, as Augustine argued, an eternal being can be both immutable and an agent who acts and reacts in the world. Why insist that God is immutable? One Anselmian argument depends on unpacking the concept of a necessarily perfect being. Obviously a perfect being cannot get better. Nor can He get worse since He'd be corruptible now if He could. Many contemporary philosophers of religion argue that that leaves plenty of room for lateral change. God does not do or become better or worse, but just other. The Anselmian response trades on assumptions which are rather at odds with the *Zeitgeist*, but perhaps that in itself is a good reason to discuss it. On Anselm's understanding of the universe, drawn from Augustine, all that has ontological status of any sort is actively good.<sup>26</sup> The universe is imbued with value, and all objects and events are either good, or suffer from a privation of the good they ought to have and hence are bad. The very concept of value neutrality is un-Anselmian. But surely it doesn't matter whether we choose chocolate or pistachio? No, it probably doesn't, but either choice is either good or bad depending on the circumstances. There is nothing neutral about eating ice cream. God could not gain a new property or perform a new action without that property or action adding to His goodness as a being or as an agent. And the classical conception of essential perfection is that a genuinely perfect being necessarily possesses to an unlimited extent all the "great-making" properties—Anselm in the *Proslogion* expresses it as those properties which it is intrinsically and absolutely better to have than to lack. Thus there is no room for any additions.

For example, take the question that motivates Augustine's discussion of time in Book 11 of the *Confessions*: What was God doing before He made the world? If originally He was not creating, and then He became a creator, He would become better. And there's a difference between intending to create and creating, so if God goes from being someone who intends to create to being someone who creates He's changed for the better. But then He does not possess perfection as a necessity of His nature. If time is tensed, as Avicenna and Averroes assume, such that God has always

existed in the past, and God, being perfect, cannot change, then it follows that God forever in the past has been doing just what He does now. The universe has always existed and has been going on in essentially the same way as it goes on now, and God does not step in as an actor on the world stage. This was the gist of the Aristotelian side in the bitter debate over the "eternity" of the world which divided Christian, Jewish, and Islamic philosophers in the Middle Ages. But if God is eternal in the Anselmian sense, and time is tenseless, then He does all He does in one immutable act which encompasses the creation "in the beginning," the parting of the Red Sea, the Incarnation, the Last Times etc. So if God is unlimited perfection He must be immutable. And if He is an actor in the temporal world, then He must be eternal as Anselm understands the term, where all of space-time is present to Him.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, if God is perfect, then He must exist in the most perfect way. Again, the Spirit of the Age might suggest that things either exist or they don't, and there are not degrees of existence. Certainly Anselm appreciates the distinction between existence and non-existence. But he holds, with at least a certain amount of intuitive plausibility, that there can be degrees in ontological value. For example, the famous *Proslogion* argument requires that it is greater to exist in reality outside the created mind, than to exist only as a fictive object dependent on a created mind. Regarding ontological status the claim is that eternal existence is higher on the scale of being than temporal existence. We have seen that if time is essentially and absolutely tensed then any existent thing exists only at the extensionless point at which the non-existent future becomes the non-existent past. Even if a being should remain essentially the same, its past is gone and its future is not yet. This seems a very limited sort of being.

If time is essentially tenseless, then even temporal creatures have a more robust sort of existence than that possessed by (almost?) any being on the tensed assumption. I would tentatively suggest that it may be that in the tenseless universe even an instantaneous temporal creature all of whose existence consists in a single time-slice may be better off ontologically than any citizen of tensed-world, in that, while what is present to it is brief, it does not cease to be in an absolute sense. It is always real in four-dimensional space-time there at its own instant. The possible exception relative to this ontological superiority would be an everlasting being in tensed-world in that, though it exists only at the present instant, it does not come into being or cease to exist. In tenseless-world a being that exists across many time-slices would presumably be ontologically superior with regard to temporal status to the instantaneous being since there is just more to it. It should be noted, though, that the superiority in question here is relative *only* to temporal status. A cat might be shorter-lived than a boulder, but the Anselmian holds that there is "more to" the cat than to the boulder, since the former not only exists but lives a sentient life, and it is probably safe to say that on the Great Chain of Being, sentience trumps longevity. But this point cannot be used to show that God might be perfect without existing in the best way regarding temporal status, since God must have *all* perfections perfectly. Anselm's doctrine of eternity proclaims God's being to be simple and immutable, lacking in nothing, and yet infinitely rich in that all that is not God is ever-present to Him. Unless

eternity entails some logical or metaphysical impossibility, if it is the most ontologically perfect way to exist, then God is eternal.

Hasker notes that, on the hypothesis of an essentially tenseless time, temporal creatures have a more ontologically robust existence than they would on the tensed assumption, and he takes this to count *against* the view that God is eternal in the Anselmian sense.<sup>28</sup> He suggests that it is “metaphysically extravagant” to posit a superior existence for temporal things than the tensed view entails, but I do not see how this criticism is to be developed. If the proposal that things in tenseless-world have a superior sort of being to things in tensed-world is correct, that would seem to be a reason for God to prefer to create tenseless-world over tensed-world, if He had the choice. (I take it that this is actually one choice He does not have, since He is necessarily eternal and the tenseless view of time is an entailment of Anselmian eternity.)

Hasker argues further that if the things in tenseless-world possess a more robust ontological status than things in tensed-world then one reason for attributing eternity to God, i.e., that it elevates Him ontologically far above the level of His creation, disappears.<sup>29</sup> But this does not follow. True, there is more to us ontologically than meets the temporal eye, and surely that is good news for us. Yet God is still vastly superior to the citizen of the essentially tenseless spatio-temporal universe. His life is not spread out in a succession of radically limited slices, and it is His knowledge and causal activity which sustains all the moments of space-time in being as immediately present to Him.

And then there is the question of God’s knowledge and power. Anselm holds, and Hasker agrees, that God’s knowledge is direct. Hasker writes, “It seems to me there is a strong case for regarding directness or immediacy *in itself* [Hasker’s italics] as a ground of cognitive excellence.”<sup>30</sup> That is, contrary to the standard view in contemporary philosophy of religion, divine omniscience is not best understood as God’s believing of all true propositions that they are true and of all false propositions that they are false. To describe God’s knowledge this way is to ascribe to Him a radically limited way of knowing. Anselm and traditional classical theists in general hold that God knows *things and events themselves*, and He knows them directly. He does not know things and events through any sort of discursive process, nor through propositions about them. He is immediately aware of all things and events. Traditional classical theism insists that it is God’s thinking that sustains everything in being from moment to moment.<sup>31</sup> Discursive and propositional knowing is far more limited than direct knowing. If direct knowing is possible, then that is how a perfect being knows. And of course, it is better to know everything knowable in the best possible way. Hasker holds that God is in time and hence can have direct knowledge only of the universe at the present instant. He must remember the past and anticipate, but not know, the future. On Anselm’s view God, being a perfect being, must know what is to us past, present, and future, and He must know it all directly. This is possible on the view that God is eternal and that time is essentially tenseless.

It is often said that a timeless God cannot be omniscient because He cannot know what time it is *now*. But this criticism presupposes the essentially tensed view of time. On the tenseless view it is true that God cannot know

what time it is at some italicized “now,” but that is because there is no such thing. God can know that at any time, the time slice of the temporally aware creature located at that time perceives that instant as “now.” And, in knowing us, God may know the phenomenology of our experience of “now.” But there simply is no ontologically privileged *now*. It is our limited perspective which leads us to believe that there is. Analogously, someone who thought that only his “here”—the location immediately available to his present experience—really existed might insist that an omnipresent God cannot be omniscient because He cannot know what place it is *here*. But it is this spatially limited perceiver who has made the mistake, since existent space is not confined to what is “here” for him. God knows what the spatially aware creature means by “here,” but there just is no absolute here to be known. If the criticism is that God cannot know what it is to experience things in exactly the way a limited, temporal creature knows it, that is by being limited and temporal, than that is true, but innocuous. God cannot do the logically impossible.<sup>32</sup>

An argument to eternity analogous to the one from omniscience can be made from omnipotence. Immediate causal power is clearly less limited than causal power which requires intermediaries to achieve its effects. And a being who is able to act immediately upon all of what we call past, present, and future, is more powerful than a being whose activity is confined to the present instant. And again, this is only possible if God is eternal and time is essentially tenseless. Hasker, in discussing “simple” foreknowledge presents an argument which might be used to show that being eternal would not increase the scope of God’s causal power, but this possible criticism, to which I respond below, stems from a misunderstanding of the Anselmian position. So the Anselmian view ascribes to God the most perfect mode of acting, of knowing, and of being, and this perfection entails divine eternity and the tenseless view of time. I will argue below that, as an added bonus, this view also allows us to reconcile libertarian freedom with divine “fore”knowledge.

Admittedly the tenseless view is very, very strange, but strange is not logically or metaphysically impossible. The universe of contemporary physics is mind-bogglingly bizarre, especially in comparison to the cognitively manageable, mechanistic universe of the nineteenth century. But this wildly strange universe with which the physicists confront us is the one entailed by our scientific commitments, and few dispute the science on the grounds that its consequences are too weird. Given that an analysis of “that than which a greater cannot be conceived” pushes the limits of human reason, we should not really expect it to result in anything short of the almost unimaginable. Are there, however, insurmountable difficulties with Anselmian eternalism? A number of problems with the theory of divine eternity have been raised recently, especially by William Hasker and other Open Theists. I now turn to these criticisms.

### *Is Anselmian Eternalism Just Too Strange?*

I said above that we should be prepared to accept strangeness in trying to analyze the relationship of creation to the Creator. But if the strange strays over into incoherence, perhaps that is reason to reject the strange view.

Hasker apparently finds it self-refuting for someone to claim, as I do, that she finds herself a four-dimensional being in a tenseless universe. A possible avenue of defense might be from the natural sciences. Contemporary physics offers arguments in support of the tenseless view of time, and I think the Anselmian is justifiably charmed to find physics on her side. But I am not competent to assess the arguments, nor do I think it is wise, in doing philosophy of religion, or metaphysics in general, to depend too heavily on the more theoretical claims of the natural sciences. Scientific theories come and go. More importantly, the Anselmian is committed to the position that there is just more to the universe than is covered in the subject matter of the natural sciences—God, objective moral truth, that sort of thing—so that while the sciences tell us a great deal about how things really are, they do not tell us all. In the unlikely event that tomorrow the community of physicists should conclude that the universe seems to be absolutely tensed after all, the committed Anselmian will quickly get over the disappointment and continue to hold that all time is present to God and hence tenseless.

Moreover, Hasker's concern is aimed at the world as we experience it. In doing philosophy of religion, surely this is where the heart of the discussion should take place. The real worry is that we cannot make sense of our experience as persons in relationship to a personal God, if God is eternal and time is tenseless. Whatever physics may say, our faith requires that our philosophy cohere with the world of experience in which we eat our dinners and raise our children. Hasker, I take it, holds that the tenseless view of time cannot be squared with lived experience, and this is a criticism that needs to be addressed. If I am understanding him correctly he associates the tenseless view with the position that "our experience of the passage of time is wholly illusory" and with a denial that "I experience sequence and change in my experience."<sup>33</sup> But that is not correct. I do experience the passage of time, sequence and change. On the tenseless view I analyze that experience, at least in part, as my experience at t1 being different from my experience at t2. What I deny is that the whole of my being is exhausted by existence at t1 or at t2. Rather I exist at both and at all the other times over which my existence extends, and none of the times has an ontological status which is privileged over any other.

That there should be space-time slices of me existing at what I now (that is the space-time slice typing at this instant) call past and present is bizarre, but the first thing to note is that there is no non-bizarre theory of time. As Augustine remarked, as far as our experience goes, even what I have called the "common sense" view seems exceedingly strange when you begin to try to make sense of it. I find it close to unthinkable that what there is to me, and *all* there is to me, is what exists at this unextended present at which the non-existent future becomes the non-existent past.<sup>34</sup> So in defending the tenseless view I do not propose to replace a theory we can comfortably grasp with one that almost eludes our thinking. We are confronted with two very difficult analyses of time. For the sake of argument, allow that the tenseless view is somewhat *more* difficult. If the stranger theory fits better with the hypothesis that God is a perfect being, I do not think the modest increase in bizarreness should count against it.

Secondly, it is possible to make some sense of our experience in a tenseless world. Hasker writes, “even if all such facts are ontologically exactly on a par and neither come into being nor pass away, there remains the fact that *I experience* these facts in a certain order” [Hasker’s italics].<sup>35</sup> I take it that what seems appallingly odd is that there should be *me* existing at all the times across which my life extends, such that each time-slice of me experiences its own instant, all the instants exist equally, and I, at each instant, cannot access the experience I have at each other instant. But here is an attempt to make this proposal less incredible. Take the closest human analogue to the eternal God’s-eye-point-of-view, that is the experience of the time-traveler. All of time is not present to him at once as it is to God. Still, he has more freedom of access to the four-dimensional block of space-time than the rest of us, and so his case can be instructive. In order for the analogy to be helpful we need to make a distinction standard in the time-travel literature. There is what can be called objective or “clock” time, that is the normal sequence of events as they are experienced by humanity as a whole (with the possible, sometime exception of the time-traveler). Call this HST, Human Standard Time. And then there is the sequence of events as experienced by the time traveler. Call this PT, Personal Time. The fifteenth century is before the nineteenth century in HST, but a time-traveler who went to the nineteenth century and then to the fifteenth century would experience the nineteenth before the fifteenth in PT.

Let us say there is a time-traveler. Call him Bill. Bill is outside the Circle K convenience store at t1 HST when a time machine appears and out steps Bill. The Bills both exist at the same time HST, but let us say that the Bill who steps out of the time machine is at a later point PT than the Bill who watched the machine arrive. The earlier PT Bill will get into the time machine, travel a bit, and then return to the Circle K, as the later PT Bill, to step out and confront the earlier PT Bill. What we have at t1 HST are two PT time-slices of Bill existing at the same time HST. But because they exist at different times PT, Bill at t1 (PT) does not have any immediate, inner, experiential access to Bill at t2 (PT) and vice versa. (Although Bill at t2 (PT) remembers being Bill at t1 (PT).) From the perspective of personal time, what Bill at t1 (PT) experiences as the present is different from what Bill at t2 (PT) experiences as the present. But the two slices at the same time HST exist equally and neither is ontologically privileged. Fans of time-travel stories and films run into this sort of situation all the time and seem to make sense of it. My claim is that if we find it coherent that Bill at t1 (PT) and Bill at t2 (PT) are both genuinely Bill, with different “presents” (PT), without immediate access to the inner experience of the other, and without one having an ontologically privileged status over the other, it is not incoherent to propose what would be the norm regarding human life on the four-dimensionalist view: Bill at t1 (HST) and Bill at t2 (HST) can be equally real, with different “presents” (HST) but not have access to “each other.” Of course, that a scenario figures in a film does not make it scientifically, or perhaps even metaphysically, possible. But if the criticism of the tenseless view of time is that it is inconceivable, I think the time-travel analogy offers some conceptual help.

*Does Anselmian Eternalism Conflict with Libertarian Freedom?*

Anselmian eternalism does entail the odd position that time is tenseless, but unless that view can be shown to be logically contradictory this entailment should not lead us to abandon eternalism. It is time to turn to Hasker's criticisms of eternalism itself. Divine eternity does not seem to be an intrinsically contradictory divine attribute. Above I argued that it is a real perfection. Assuming Anselm's method of taking the perfection of God as the non-negotiable starting point, denying eternity to God would have to be justified by pointing to some contradiction between the ascription of eternity and other attributes of God, or other equally non-negotiable commitments. Sometimes it is asserted that an eternal God could not act upon or react to the objects and events in time. There is a long literature on this topic, but to my knowledge the debate has largely proceeded without the assumption of the tenseless view of time, and so has not really spoken to the Anselmian claims.<sup>36</sup> I hope the explanation of eternalism and tenseless time above has made clear that this assertion is mistaken, but perhaps just a bit more elaboration is in order.

Presumably the subscriber to the essentially tensed view of time supposes that God in the present acts and reacts to present events. For example, if Hasker is correct to hold that God knows present things directly, then God in the present causes me to exist in the present, and, at the same present moment, my freely choosing to type in the present causes God to know that I am typing. So Hasker should be comfortable holding that God in the present acts and reacts to present events. Thus, regarding the relationship of God to creation, action and reaction do not necessarily involve relations of past and future.<sup>37</sup>

The subscriber to the essentially tenseless view of time makes a minor adjustment to the proposed picture of God's acting and reacting in the present, and simply adds that all of time is present to God. God is causing the universe's first day, and the parting of the Red Sea, and the Incarnation, and He is listening to Monica's prayers that Augustine should abandon that Manichean nonsense, and He is keeping in being whatever you will have for breakfast tomorrow etc. etc. etc., and He is doing it all in one eternal act. Unless you pack into the definitions or analyses of causing, acting, and reacting that they must involve temporal relations of past and future, there is nothing contradictory in saying that God acts upon and reacts with all temporal objects and events as immediately present to Him. And the Anselmian method entails that adherence to the goal of preserving the most robust picture of divine perfection settles the debated issue of how to define or analyze causation, acting, and reacting. If we agree that it would be more perfect for God to cause, act, and react in a single, eternal act, then we have excellent reason to adopt a theory of causation, acting, and reacting, that does not conflict with that view of God.

There is nothing in the Anselmian doctrine of eternity to conflict with the non-negotiable commitment that God is a real agent in the universe. But what of human agency? Hasker argues that the Anselmian view renders human libertarian freedom impossible. Were this the case it would indeed be powerful reason for rethinking eternalism. Anselm is the first Christian philosopher to attempt a systematic defense of libertarian freedom. He

takes libertarian freedom to be extremely important, and defends both facets of the libertarian account; the human agent chooses between genuinely open options, and the ultimate source of the choice is the agent himself.<sup>38</sup> So Anselm himself would literally be the first to hold that if divine eternity conflicts with libertarian freedom, it may be the former rather than the latter that has to go. Happily, the apparent conflict can be resolved without abandoning either commitment. I make this argument at more length elsewhere, but I would like to offer an outline of the argument here in the interests of completeness.<sup>39</sup>

The problem concerning eternity and libertarian freedom is analogous to the dilemma of freedom and divine foreknowledge, so it will be helpful to look first at the latter, more familiar, argument. Informally, it goes like this: God knew in the past that you would choose to do *x* tomorrow. God's knowledge is infallible. The past is necessary in that it is now unalterably "fixed." Therefore, by a "transfer of necessity," it is necessary that you choose to do *x* tomorrow.<sup>40</sup> But if it is necessary, then you cannot do otherwise. And since the ability to do otherwise is requisite for libertarian freedom, you are not free with respect to choosing to do *x*. And so for all future choices on the assumption that God knows the future. Nor will it suffice to say that God's knowledge does not entail or involve causal determinism. Even if the necessity in question is not a causal necessity, still you cannot do otherwise and so you are not free.

That, in outline, is the dilemma of freedom and divine foreknowledge. Anselm takes it that supposing that God is eternal solves the problem. But how? Hasker argues, as do many contemporary philosophers of religion, that the claim that God is eternal does nothing to mitigate the difficulty. Eternity is just as "fixed" as is the past and so an analogous argument can be run where "God knew in the past . . . is replaced with "God knows in eternity. . . . And it does seem to follow that if God knows in eternity that you choose to do *x* at *t*, then necessarily you choose to do *x* at *t*, you cannot do otherwise and you are not free. Hasker says that "divine timelessness can be reconciled with libertarian freedom only if the following proposition is true: *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 those things*" [Hasker's italics].<sup>41</sup> The proposition is false, so God is not timeless.

But this is all a bit too fast. To see this it is helpful to look at an argument which parallels the dilemmas concerning freedom and divine knowledge, whether past knowledge or timeless knowledge, but which makes only the modest supposition that God has *present* knowledge of what you choose at present. This parallel argument introduces the very plausible premise that the present is just as fixed and necessary as the past or eternity. That is, if you choose to do *x* at the present moment, it follows by necessity that you choose to do *x* at the present moment. No one can bring it about that it is not the case that you choose to do *x* at the present moment. But then it follows that if God knows at the present moment that you choose to do *x* at the present moment, since it is impossible that God's present knowledge should be other than it is, it is impossible that you choose otherwise than to do *x*, and hence you are not free. Hasker, given that he holds God's knowledge of the present to be direct, must suppose that God in the present has knowledge of your choice in the present. If



that is the case then apparently God's present knowledge conflicts with your present freedom. If God knows now that you choose to do  $x$  now, then necessarily you choose to do  $x$  now, you cannot choose otherwise, and you are not free. We can reconstruct Hasker's challenge to the eternalist as a challenge to someone who holds that God has present knowledge of a present choice: God's knowledge of the present can be reconciled with libertarian freedom only if the following proposition is true: *there are present things that God presently believes which are such that it is in my power, now, to bring it about that God does not presently believe those things*. The proposition is false and so apparently libertarian freedom cannot be reconciled with God's present knowledge.

One might accept the argument and conclude that God does not have present knowledge of present events. Instead, just like the rest of us, He learns through a temporal process such that things happen and God comes to know about them a short time later. This is such a radical downsizing of divine omniscience that it is surely an unattractive move. Hasker, I presume, would object to it since it would mean that God has no direct knowledge at all. It is more reasonable to conclude that something is wrong with the argument. My proposal is that, while it is true that if God knows you choose to do  $x$  at present, then necessarily you choose to do  $x$  at present, this is not the sort of necessity that conflicts with the most robust "ability to do otherwise" which is requisite for libertarian freedom. It is, to adopt Anselm's terminology, merely a "consequent necessity," that is the sort of logical necessity by which  $A$  follows (*sequitur*) necessarily upon the positing of  $A$ .<sup>42</sup> In the case of the consequent necessity of the free choice, not only is it non-causal, but it is *self-imposed*.<sup>43</sup> Suppose that you now choose to do  $x$  with libertarian freedom. The claim is that it is *your now choosing to do  $x$*  that causes God's present knowledge. True, "God knows you now choose to do  $x$ " entails "necessarily you now choose to do  $x$ ," but you, yourself are the ultimate source of the necessity. And clearly it is not a necessity that conflicts with your libertarian free choice since it was the libertarian free choice that caused the divine knowledge of the libertarian free choice which entailed the necessity of the libertarian free choice. (Note that the Molinist will not be able to appeal to this concept of a self-imposed and hence innocuous necessity, since the Molinist holds that it is not in fact the actual choices of free agents which ground the truth of the "counterfactuals of freedom" through which God can know the future.)<sup>44</sup> In terms of preceding causes, there was no causal determination. You had open options. In choosing to do  $x$  you render it impossible that you choose otherwise than to do  $x$ , but the choice comes from yourself. The requirements of libertarianism are satisfied.

What has all of this to do with eternity? The Anselmian claim is that all of time is present to God. Thus God knows that you choose to do  $x$  at  $t$  because  $t$  is present to Him and He "sees" you choose to do  $x$  at  $t$ . Your choice is the source of God's knowledge. So we can say that if God timelessly knows that you choose to do  $x$  at  $t$ , necessarily you choose to do  $x$  at  $t$ . Or, from our temporal perspective, if God in the past knows that you will choose to do  $x$  in the future, necessarily you will choose to do  $x$  in the future. But this consequent necessity is entirely consistent with libertarian freedom since it is both non-causal and self-imposed.

Those familiar with the medieval tradition will recognize that the claim that our choices can be the cause of God's knowledge is summarily rejected by many important philosophers including Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas. They argue that God cannot possibly learn from or be affected by creation. Anselm, however, is willing to allow the consequences of his libertarianism. He holds that our choices are the ultimate cause of God's knowledge of them. He writes, "although it is necessary that whatever is foreknown and predestined [“predestination” for Anselm consists in God's causing what He causes, and *permitting* what He does not cause] should happen, nevertheless these foreknown and predestined things do not result from any necessity which precedes the event (*rem*) and makes it happen, but rather from [the necessity] which follows upon the event (*rem sequitur*), as we said above."<sup>45</sup>

*Does Anselmian Eternity Really Enhance God's Power?*

So God's timeless knowledge does not conflict with libertarian freedom. But there is a further question regarding God and the future. I argued above that God's being eternal allows Him the fullest scope for His power in that He can act immediately on all of time, what is to any temporal creature at any given time, past, present, and future. An argument which Hasker makes regarding "simple" foreknowledge suggests he would dispute this claim. Hasker argues that it is a mistake to hold that God's knowing the actual future enhances divine sovereignty by allowing Him to use that knowledge to affect the outcome of things. Divine foreknowledge, he argues, if it is "simple" foreknowledge, i.e., it is a matter of God's seeing what in fact is going to happen, is absolutely useless in that God cannot use that knowledge to change the future. If, *per impossibile*, He could change the future, then what He had seen as happening in the future is not what happens in the future. Absurd. Hasker cites the case (borrowed from David Basinger) of a woman, Susan, seeking guidance with regards to marrying Tom. Suppose God sees that the future marriage will not be happy. Should God warn Susan not to marry Tom? "A moments reflection will show this to be incoherent. What God knows is the *actual* future, the situation in which she is actually married to Tom. So it is nonsensical to suggest that God, knowing the actual future, could on the basis of this knowledge influence things so that this would not be the actual future, which would mean that God would not know Susan as being married to Tom."<sup>46</sup> Thus, "Simple foreknowledge . . . simply does not 'help' God in providentially governing the world."<sup>47</sup>

Hasker is not speaking here specifically of the Anselmian position, but someone could argue along similar lines that if God knows all that will happen because He eternally sees it happening in tenseless time, such knowledge is useless because God can only perceive the actual, and so He cannot *change* what will be. But, at least on the Anselmian analysis of the relationship of God to creation, this argument rests upon a misunderstanding. True, God cannot *change* the future, any more than He can change the past or the present. That is, He cannot make what happens at *t*, not happen at *t*, whether *t* is, from our perspective, past, present or future. This is not a limitation on His power since even God cannot do the

logically impossible. If you choose to do  $x$  at  $t$ , then you choose to do  $x$  at  $t$ , and it is logically impossible that it is not the case that you choose to do  $x$  at  $t$ . But if He cannot change what happens, what use is it to God that all of space-time is immediately present to Him?

In fact, it makes Him far more powerful than if He were circumscribed by the present instant. He cannot undo what happens at  $t$ , but He can *bring about* what happens at  $t$ . And having all of time immediately present to His power and His knowledge gives Him enormous power to bring things about. Again the analogy of the time-traveler can help make this clear. Let us say that time-traveler Ted at  $t_2$  (HST) realizes that in order to achieve his purposes he needs a certain set of keys. Being a clever fellow he figures out how to make time-travel work for him and, at  $t_2$ , formulates a plan. He decides to wait until  $t_3$  (HST), and then go back to  $t_1$  (HST), before  $t_2$ , and "borrow" the keys. Between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  he'll hide the keys in a convenient place, so they'll be there when he arrives on the spot at  $t_2$ . Immediately upon formulating the plan at  $t_2$  he checks the likeliest hiding spot, and sure enough there are the keys! He starts to worry that he might forget to go back from  $t_3$  to  $t_1$  and hide the keys, but then realizes that he *does* remember, since there are the keys. Note that Ted has not *changed* anything about what is to him the past, present, or future (HST or PT). That is logically impossible. Nonetheless the ability to travel in time gives him a great deal more power to achieve his purposes than he would have otherwise. He can't make what happens not happen, but he can do a lot more towards bringing about what happens. And of course, the same is true of God only to an almost infinitely greater degree. For example, seeing how people respond to Him as Incarnate, and recognizing that it is difficult for people to accept Him as the Messiah He can inform the prophets concerning what are to them future events ("They cast lots for his garments," for instance) so that when He comes, His coming has been foretold, and the prophecies make it easier for people to believe that Jesus is the promised one. Envisioning all of this "seeing," acting, and reacting, as one eternal act is beyond human imagining, but that is a limitation of the temporal creature. And, again, unimaginable is not logically contradictory.

The Anselmian will insist that being eternal allows for a much more robust divine sovereignty than does the Open Theist view in which God does not have power over any time but the present, and does not know the future. However, it must be granted that the Anselmian does side with the Open Theists on the question of whether or not God "takes risks." Either God determines our actions or He does not. If He does not, then it is up to us what we choose, and in creating us God takes the risk that we will choose against His will. On the Anselmian account God knows what we choose only *because* we choose it, and so He cannot know, "before" creating us, what we will choose and then decide accordingly whether to create us or not. It might seem, then, that the Molinist approach is preferable to the Anselmian. Doesn't the Molinist analysis preserve libertarian freedom while defending a more absolute divine sovereignty? On the Molinist account God can survey all the "counterfactuals of freedom," see what any possible free agent would choose in any possible situation, and then decide which agents and situations to actualize. Does He not then have much more control on the Molinist view?

Not at all! The Anselmian account admits that God has limited options, in that He cannot control the free choices of free creatures and He knows the choices only because they are made. But these limitations are ones which God *chooses*, motivated by His love and goodness which lead Him to create the great good of a world containing rational, free creatures who, in their created independence, can rise to the level of images of the divine. Thus the Anselmian view, subscribing to traditional, classical theism, holds that all there is is God and what God has freely chosen to produce. (The tradition of Augustine and Anselm and Aquinas held it that the laws of logic and morality do not exist independently of God, nor are they created by Him, but rather they reflect His nature as absolute Being and Good.) On the Molinist account God's options are absolutely limited by the "counterfactuals of freedom." These are contingent truths which exist as brute facts independently of God's will. He did not create them and cannot affect them. His sovereignty is radically limited and *not* by His own choice. In comparison to Anselm's God, the God of the Molinists is rather like someone born in prison. He may be free in that he can choose which corner to sit in, but he has no power over the bars which circumscribe his actions.

*But Is Anselmian Eternalism Biblical?*

A final problem raised by Hasker and other Open Theists is the question of scriptural warrant for Anselmian eternalism. Were it the case that God's being eternal entailed that He could not act as an agent in the world of space and time, then of course the Christian philosopher would have to abandon the view. But there is no contradiction. To say that God interacts with all of space-time in one eternal act is to explain how, not to deny that, a timeless and immutable God acts in creation. True, the texts which imply that God does not know the future or that He truly changes His mind, if taken in their *prima facie* sense, would conflict with the Anselmian position, but everyone who takes scripture seriously recognizes that some passages require interpretation. Which passages ought not be taken in their *prima facie* sense, how to read them, and who is to do the interpreting, are difficult and divisive issues, to grossly understate the point.

Open Theists grant that there are texts which, taken in their most obvious sense, conflict with their position that God cannot know future free choices, such as those which seem to say that God or His prophets foresee a future free choice.<sup>48</sup> The Open Theist must work to interpret these texts in a way consonant with his philosophy. Take, for example, the passage where Christ tells Peter that he will betray Him three times before the cock crows. Assuming people have libertarian freedom, this seems a very specific instance of God's foreknowing a free choice. But if you accept the philosophical arguments against God's knowing future free choices then you will have to read this passage in some less than obvious sense. Perhaps this is one of those cases where the predicted choice is actually causally determined. In that case Peter has no reason to regret and weep, since he didn't freely betray Christ. Or perhaps Christ is saying that Peter *might* betray him, or that Peter will, if certain other factors hold. All of these readings are possible, though a bit contorted. My point is not to dispute

the passage but to illustrate the claim that everyone who takes scripture seriously agrees that interpretation is required. The Open Theists have their preferred texts and interpretations, but so do all the rest of us Bible-believing Christians. It is unlikely that a persuasive case can be made to decide the issue between the Anselmian and the Open Theist on the basis of scripture.

There are, however, two important reasons related to our biblically inspired faith to prefer the Anselmian position. First there is the question of our participating in the saving sacrifice of Christ. Speaking for myself, I have always assumed, (though I had not always conceptualized it clearly) that Christ died for *my* sins. That is, as He hung on the cross, somehow, in His divine nature, He knew *me*. Perhaps not all Christians share this perspective. It may be that it is an assumption rooted in my own tradition of Roman Catholicism which insists upon an actual, physical participation in the historical death and resurrection of Christ through the Eucharist. But in any case, the Open Theist cannot hold, as the Anselmian can, that Christ at the moment in history when He suffered for His people, actually knew those for whom He died.<sup>49</sup> Presumably the Open Theist can say that He, in His divine nature, knew that plenty of people would exist in the future. He could know that He would not let the race die out prematurely. What He could not know is just which individuals would exist. The Open Theist can hold that, when Christ died, He died for *somebody's* sins, but it is the Anselmian who can hold, what seems to me the more religiously adequate view, that He died for *our* sins.

And there is a second important point to be made about the Bible. The Open Theist holds that God does not know the future. Discussing the question of seeking divine guidance using the example of a student wondering what to study, David Basinger writes that, "given that God may not know exactly what the state of the economy will be over the next five or ten years, it is possible that what God in his wisdom believes at present to be the best course of study for a student may not be an option that will allow her after graduation to pursue the profession for which she has prepared."<sup>50</sup> God's guidance is not entirely trustworthy since He really doesn't know what the future, even the near future, will hold. The Open Theists must be commended for not attempting to water down or white wash the radical consequences of their view. Basinger's statement here of the practical implications of God's ignorance of the future certainly sets the Open Theists at odds not only with the philosophical tradition of Christianity, but also, I take it, with the basic assumptions of most ordinary believers. But note especially the implications of Open Theism with respect to the importance of the Bible. The New Testament was written close to two thousand years ago, and the Old Testament is a compilation of texts from earlier periods. If God's knowledge is shaky regarding the economic scene five years hence, He probably knows very little about what the world will be like in two thousand years. But then why suppose that what He had to say two thousand plus years ago is relevant to us? With each passing generation we move further and further from the state of the world as God knew it when He inspired the writers of those old books. This may not entail that what the Bible has to say is exactly in error, but it casts serious doubt on whether or not it should be taken as a sound guide to how we,

today, should live our lives, since God did not know that you and I and the world in which we live would exist when He inspired the Bible.

There are, of course, some schools of Christian thought that would welcome such a consequence, since it would conform nicely with their inclination to mold their reading of scripture to whatever best suits the Spirit of the Age. My impression is that the Open Theists aim to interpret scripture in a way consonant with the intent of the inspired authors, and that they also assume that the Bible is relevant to our concerns today. But given their philosophical views, these two positions are at least somewhat at odds. Undoubtedly the Open Theist can argue that the Bible has some broad and indirect relevance to us since it is important for us to know what Jesus and the early Christians said and did, and it is probably useful to us to see the truth as God understood it two thousand years ago. But it is the Anselmian who can hold that the Bible is immediately relevant to us today.<sup>51</sup> Although the sacred books were written long ago, they were written with *us* in mind.

Anselm's version of eternalism is not defeated by the criticisms raised by Hasker and other Open Theists, it is entailed by the most robust conception of divine perfection, and it allows us to understand the Bible as a work of immediate relevance to us today. True, as Anselm was the first to recognize clearly, it requires us to adopt a four-dimensionalist view of time, but it is well worth that modest price.<sup>52</sup>

*University of Delaware*

## NOTES

1. *Consolation of Philosophy* Book 5, Prose 6. I am following the Tester translation in the Loeb Classical Library Edition (1973).

2. This connection is rare among contemporary philosophers of religion as well. Though divine timelessness has had its recent defenders, almost none accept the conclusion that time is essentially tenseless. Paul Helm is an exception. In *Eternal God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), though he does not devote a great deal of time to expressing and defending the tenseless view of time *per se*, it seems to function as an underlying assumption. He writes, for example, speaking of creation, that, "The production of the universe is thus not the production of some event or complex of events in time; it is the production of the whole material universe, time included" (p. 69). Helm expresses the tenseless view of time more clearly in a recent article, "Divine Timeless Eternity" (*Philosophia Christi* Series 2 Vol. 2 (2000) pp. 21–27). See especially the discussion of God's creating the temporal order as a B-series rather than an A-series (pp. 26–27).

3. I am following the Pine-Coffin translation in the Penguin Classics Edition (1961).

4. In an article published several years ago, "St. Augustine on Time and Eternity" (*American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 70 (1996) pp. 207–23), I interpreted Augustine as a whole-hearted four-dimensionalist. Subsequent research has caused me to modify my former understanding. Richard Sorabji (*Time, Creation and the Continuum* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983) pp. 258–60), in a very careful and knowledgeable discussion of Augustine's

view on time, does not interpret Augustine as a four-dimensionalist. Sorabji himself does not consider the four-dimensionalist solution to the problem of immutable omniscience, and argues that a timeless and omniscient God is just impossible since He could not know what time it is *now*. Nor does Boethius seem to whole-heartedly embrace four-dimensionalism. Frequently he speaks of God's knowing future things, not as actually present, but "as if" they were present. He writes in Book 5, Prose 6 that God sees things "as present to him just such as in time they will at some future point come to be."

5. For Augustine on God's absolute sovereignty see my "Augustine's compatibilism" *Religious Studies* 40 (2004) pp. 415–35. For the proof text on Boethius' acceptance of the position that everything is caused by God see the end of Book 5, Prose 6 of the *Consolation*.

6. Anselm argues in Book 1, chapter 7 of *On the Harmony of the Foreknowledge and the Predestination, and the Grace of God with Free Will* (hereafter, *On the Harmony*) that created agents are responsible for negative properties of things, but the evil in something is not a thing at all since it is just the absence of the good that ought to have been there.

7. For example, Garrett DeWeese follows this line of argument, explaining that, "if we have good reasons to reject tenseless time, then we will have good reasons to reject all theories of divine atemporality." "Timeless God, Tenseless Time," *Philosophia Christi* Series 2 Vol. 2 (2000) pp. 53–59; see p. 54.

8. *Monologion* 64.

9. *Monologion* 20, culminating a discussion of God's relationship to time and place which began in *Monologion* 14. Translations of Anselm's text are my own.

10. In both the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion* the discussion of divine eternity extends through several chapters. In *On the Harmony* the key texts on time and eternity are preceded by an explanation of the notion of "consequent" necessity. The use to which Anselm puts the idea entails a tenseless view of time. Anselm talks about consequent necessity in *Cur Deus Homo* as well and, in Book 2, chapters 16–17, uses the concept to address a puzzle dear to the heart of the time-travel enthusiast, backwards causation. He holds that the Blessed Virgin is made pure by her faith in Christ's saving sacrifice, and it is because she is pure that He is able to be conceived within her. His interlocutor notes that in that case the sacrifice, at the time it occurs, is absolutely necessary, for if it does not take place, Christ cannot have been born! And if it happened as a matter of necessity it is not free. Anselm responds that it is necessary, but only in the sense that what happens, happens.

11. I do not know that the "common-sense" view is really the consensus among educated people at present. I find that my students are sufficiently influenced by contemporary physics and by all the time-travel stories in popular culture, that they do not find the essentially tensed view of time more intuitive or obvious than the tenseless view.

12. An alternative view holds that, while the future is indeed not yet existent, the past has the same ontological status as the present and so reality "grows" as time passes. I find this a puzzling position, and to my knowledge it has not played much, if any, role in the debate over divine eternity.

13. This is how Augustine expresses the common-sense view in his famous meditation on the nature of time in *Confessions* 11.

14. Anselm does not elaborate, but he does suggest this difference between created and divine perspective regarding time in *On the Harmony*, Book 1, chapter 4, when he writes that God's action could be "expressed according to the immutable present, . . . or according to time, as when we say that . . ."

15. What gives objectivity to these temporal relations is a difficult question which lies outside the scope of this paper. I think the most promising avenue

for development along these lines would rest upon a robust notion of causal relations which cannot be reducible to mere relations of counterfactual dependence. The theist, of course, will add that God recognizes these temporal relations, and perhaps that in itself is enough to ground objectivity.

16. Anselm does not explicitly address the issue, but the little he does say suggests that he assumes endurantism for objects and perdurantism for events. He writes in *Monologion*

20 that the whole human being exists yesterday, then today, and then tomorrow. He goes on to say that if God's life were temporal like our lives, "His life . . . would not exist all at once, but rather in parts, extended through the parts of time." So the human being exists wholly at a time, but the human life is a series of time-parts. But God is simple. He is identical with His life, and His life cannot have parts. So God is not temporal.

17. This might entail an actual infinity, but unless such a thing can be shown to be logically or metaphysically contradictory, this does not count against the Anselmian position.

18. William Hasker, "The Absence of a Timeless God" in *God and Time* ed. Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) pp. 182–206; see p. 183.

19. William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989) pp. 144–58. Other examples include Helm, *Eternal God* pp. 56–72; Alan G. Padgett, *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1992) pp. 56–81. Padgett ultimately rejects divine timelessness because it can be rendered coherent only on the view that time is essentially tenseless, what Padgett calls the "stasis" view, and he rejects the stasis view.

20. Plotinus *Enneads*, 1,7,1; 5,1,12; 4, 5, 4–5 and 11; 6, 8,18; 6, 9, 8. Boethius, *Consolation* 4, Prose 6, ll. 80–81. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1,66,7.

21. Boethius, *Consolation* 5, Prose 6, ll. 68–72. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1, 14, 13 ad.3.

22. *On the Harmony* Book 1, chapter 5.

23. Some philosophers recently have used the theory of relativity to attempt to speak of divine eternity as a different perceptual framework from ours. Brian Leftow, for example, in discussing the relationship of God and time, appeals to the "framework-relativity of simultaneity" such that two events simultaneous in one frame of reference may not be simultaneous in another. He writes, "If we take eternity as one more frame of reference, then . . . Events are present and actual all at once in eternity, but present and actual in sequence in other reference frames" (*Time and Eternity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991) pp. 234–35). This does not seem the best way to express the relationship of God to time in that the divine framework is not one among many, but is the ultimate reality which constitutes all others. Stump and Kretzmann ("Eternity" *The Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981) pp. 429–58) also employ relativity. Their analysis of the relationship of God's eternity to time is difficult to assess. Most commentators see them as holding the essentially tensed view of time. Sometimes, however, they speak in a way that seems to imply that they hold the Anselmian position that time is tenseless. They write, for example, that "from the eternal viewpoint every temporal event is actually happening" (p. 457). Given that God's viewpoint is what makes everything to be, this seems to entail that in fact, "every temporal event is actually happening." But elsewhere they seem to accept the essentially tensed view, see n.20 p. 444.

24. Hasker (2002) pp. 196–97.

25. John Sanders in his chapter on "Historical Considerations" in *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994) writes that in using Greek philosophy to defend the faith, "the fathers exhibit a subtle shift of emphasis from the God of revelation history to the God beyond history" (p. 72).



26. Chapter 12 of Book 7 of the *Confessions* offers a beautiful expression of this point.

27. If one assumes that an appropriate principle for interpreting philosophical texts is the validity of their arguments, then perhaps one ought to conclude that Augustine is indeed a four-dimensionalist in the *Confessions*. Only four-dimensionalism allows God to be an immutable agent who acts in the created world.

28. Hasker (2002) pp. 196–97.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 196–97.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

31. As Anselm argues, this does not entail that God determines free choice. Though He keeps the created agent, its will, and its conflicting motives in being, He leaves it to the agent which motive will “win out.” The created agent does not bring anything new into being, nonetheless it controls its choice. Here Anselm prefigures Robert Kane’s concept of “plural voluntary control.” I make this case in *Anselm on Freedom for Theists*, a monograph currently in progress.

32. Helm (1988) pp. 73–94.

33. Hasker (2002) p. 199.

34. Alan Padgett argues that the tensed view of time is more consonant with our sense experience. He writes that, “we are wise to accept the reality of past, present, and future as our senses present temporal passage to us.” (“God the Lord of Time” *Philosophia Christi* Series 2 Vol.2 pp. 11–20, see p. 16.) But he does not elaborate, so it is difficult to see what sense evidence he is appealing to which would establish the essentially tensed view over the tenseless view. Our senses present change to us, but both theories accept the reality of change if change means roughly the gain or loss of a property from one time to another.

35. Hasker (2002) p. 199.

36. The exception is Helm (1988), but Helm denies libertarian freedom.

37. Hasker (1989) does indeed allow that a timeless God may act in and react to things in the world of time ( p. 158).

38. I argue this case in *Anselm on Freedom for Theists*, in progress.

39. “The Necessity of the Present and the Eternalist Response to the Problem of Theological Fatalism,” currently in progress.

40. For the Transfer of Necessity Principle see Linda Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) pp. 7–8.

41. Hasker (2002) p. 198, (1989) p. 176.

42. *On the Harmony*, 1.2. Boethius mentions a similar idea, conditional necessity (*Consolation* Book 5, Prose 6), but he is not a libertarian and does not develop the argument along the same lines as Anselm.

43. Anselm does not use the term “self-imposed” but my proposal here is inspired by Anselm’s discussion of freedom and necessity in *On the Harmony* 1.2–3. I make a similar suggestion in “Omniscience, eternity, and freedom,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (1996) pp. 399–412.

44. Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998) pp. 123–24.

45. *On the Harmony* 2.3. This means it is the actual choice itself which originates the causal chain leading to God’s knowledge. I make this case at length in *Anselm on Freedom for Theists*.

46. William Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective,” chapter 4 of *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994) p. 149. See also, Hasker (1989) pp. 59–63.

47. Hasker (1994) p. 150.

48. Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective" chapter 1 of *The Openness of God*. It is fair to assume that Hasker sees the biblical question in a way similar to Rice, since the point is made in the preface to the book (p. 10) that all the contributors are in general agreement on the various issues, unless otherwise noted.

49. I thank my former student, Nicholas Cohen, for pointing this out to me.

50. "Practical Implications," chapter 5 of *The Openness of God*, p. 165. Note that there is no reference to any disagreement among the co-authors of the book.

51. I do not insist that *only* the Anselmian can say this. The Molinist can hold that, if God did not have *us* in mind in the past, at least He had true propositions *about* us in mind. But Molinism is fraught with difficulties.

52. I would like to thank anonymous readers of this journal for very helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper, and I would especially like to thank William Hasker for comments and for his great generosity in devoting time to argue with me at length over the issue of time and divine eternity.