

7-1-2009

## Anselmian Presentism

Brian Leftow

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

---

### Recommended Citation

Leftow, Brian (2009) "Anselmian Presentism," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 26 : Iss. 3 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol26/iss3/4>

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 PRESENTISM

Brian Leftow

I rebut four claims made in a recent article by Katherin Rogers. *En route* I discuss how a timeless God might perceive all of “tensed” time at once.

Katherin Rogers’s “Anselmian Eternalism: The Presence of a Timeless God”<sup>1</sup> claims that

- (1) according to Anselm, the “present . . . is not ontologically privileged over (the) past or future . . . all times exist equally.”<sup>2</sup> I’ll call what Rogers ascribes to Anselm the thesis that time is tenseless.<sup>3</sup>
- (2) if God is atemporal, it follows that time is tenseless.
- (3) a timeless God co-existing with a time with no future or past parts (henceforth “presentist time”)<sup>4</sup> could not be “an actor in the temporal world,”<sup>5</sup> and
- (4) a timeless God co-existing with tenseless time would be more powerful than one co-existing with presentist time.

I now argue against all these claims.

## *Anselm On Time*

Rogers claims that Anselm holds time to be tenseless. But Anselm calls the present “fleeting”<sup>6</sup> and tells us that “temporally present things which

---

<sup>1</sup>Katherin Rogers, “Anselmian Eternalism: The Presence of a Timeless God,” *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007), pp. 3–27. Subsequent references to this paper will be by page number only.

<sup>2</sup>P. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Rogers often calls it “four dimensionalism” (e.g., p. 4). This is not apt. On Broad’s “growing block” view, recently revived by Tooley (Michael Tooley, *Time, Tense and Causation* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997]), both the present and the past exist, and so reality is four-dimensional, but the future is unreal, and so the present is ontologically privileged over the future. For that matter, even if only what is present exists, reality might have a fourth, temporal dimension—in which its extension is zero. And as “all times” quantifies (one presumes) only over *existing* times, even if only the present exists, all times exist equally—for only one time exists.

<sup>4</sup>I also use “presentist times” for “times occurring in presentist time.”

<sup>5</sup>P. 11.

<sup>6</sup>*Monologion* 28, in *Anselmi Opera Omnia*, ed. Schmitt, v. 1, pp. 46, ll. 12–13. My trans.



pass away become not-present."<sup>7</sup> If present things become not-present, so does the time at which they were present. So Anselm believes that the temporal present "moves," that time in some way flows.<sup>8</sup> It is possible to combine this with the view that time is tenseless: one can hold, as Broad once wrote, that

the history of the world (exists) eternally in a certain order of events. Along this . . . the characteristic of presentness (moves), somewhat like the spot of light from a policeman's bull's-eye traversing the fronts of the houses in a street.<sup>9</sup>

One need only add that presentness's lighting up an event doesn't affect its ontological status. But I'm not aware that anyone has ever held this combination of views. Friends of tenseless time tend to hold that for time to exist is just for the universe to have temporal as well as spatial extension – that all there is to time is there being a temporal dimension.<sup>10</sup> They are particularly incensed by the claim that time flows, which they often argue to be incoherent. But on this "spotlight" view, there is more to time than a fourth dimension of the universe. For the spotlight *travels* across the housefronts. The housefronts are the universe's events, extended in four dimensions. Moving across the housefronts is moving across the fourth dimension. To allow for this motion, there must be more to time than reality's being four-dimensional<sup>11</sup> – perhaps e.g., a second level or kind of time. And on the "spotlight" view, even if (as Rogers suggests that Anselm held) "there is no ontologically privileged now," it is false that (as Rogers suggests) a God who did not know "what time it is *now*" could nonetheless be omniscient.<sup>12</sup> While the spotlight does not change the ontological status of what it lights, still it is a real fact that the light is here, not there. So there is an objective fact about what time it is now, of which God could be ignorant.

---

<sup>7</sup>*De concordia* 1, 5, in Schmitt, *op. cit.*, v. 2, p. 254. My trans.

<sup>8</sup>In her recently published book, Rogers notes *Proslogion* 20's claim that for temporal creatures the future "has not yet arrived" (her trans., in Katherin Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008], p. 179). She writes that "the statement can be squared with four-dimensionalism if we take it to mean something like 'for us now in the eleventh (or twenty-first) century that future time has not yet arrived'" (*ibid.*, p. 179, n. 31). But this won't do. If time is tenseless, times don't *arrive* at all, from any temporal standpoint. They just *are*. The paraphrase still involves the notion of time-flow. The closest tenseless claim would be along the lines of "in the 11th century, that future time exists later on." And this is plainly *not* what Anselm said.

<sup>9</sup>C. D. Broad, *Scientific Thought* (London: Routledge, 1923) in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 84.

<sup>10</sup>See e.g., Robin LePoidevin, *Change, Cause and Contradiction* (Macmillan, 1991).

<sup>11</sup>As Broad noted, *loc. cit.*

<sup>12</sup>Pp. 13, 12.

Again, Anselm writes that “sometimes . . . something does not exist in time which exists in eternity, because that was in time which is not past in eternity, or will be temporally which is not future in eternity.”<sup>13</sup> This sounds as if Anselm thinks that past or future items do not exist in time (though they do in eternity—precisely because there they are not past or future). If they do not, and we can extend Anselm’s claim to events (which do not exist, but occur),<sup>14</sup> time never has past or future parts: time is presentist. Actually, even a text Rogers calls Anselm’s “clearest statement of”<sup>15</sup> time’s tenselessness does not point unambiguously toward tenseless time:

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 at 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 different places and times.<sup>16</sup>

On a tenseless view, it is *not* true that the (or a) present time contains all place, unless the universe is just an instant thick temporally. The (a) present contains all place that exists at that time. But places existing at other times are equally real, though not contained by that present time. Only a presentist, who thinks that only present things exist and so that only present places exist, would say that present time contains *all* place. To suppose that Anselm is here speaking a bit elliptically—that what he really means is just that the present time contains all present places—would greatly weaken his analogy. What he wants to suggest is that eternity contains all times, not just all times that exist at eternity; the natural analogue is a present that contains all places, not just all places that presently exist. For that matter, talk of *the* present—Rogers’s translation of a Latin which lacks the definite article—is incompatible with a tenseless, non-“spotlight” view: on such a view, there is no one *simpliciter* present, but instead every time is present at itself. But the possible alternative translations are “a present time” (which works out in the same presentist way, in context) or simply “present time,” which (at least to me) seems little different from “the present time” in this context. Again, Rogers sees *Monologion* 21 as evidence for Anselmian tenselessness:

The proof (there) for God’s ubiquity (is) that . . . places could not exist were God not present to them ... the same argument is made regarding time. God must be present to all times, and so Anselm must intend the obvious conclusion that all times exist equally.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>*De Concordia* I, 5, Schmitt, *op. cit.*, v. 2, p. 255. My trans.

<sup>14</sup>It’s hard to see why we couldn’t, for when speaking with the vulgar, one can say of an event as Anselm does of existents that it “was in time . . . or will be.”

<sup>15</sup>P. 6.

<sup>16</sup>*De Concordia* I, 5, as trans. at p. 6.

<sup>17</sup>Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, p. 180.

But this conclusion is not obvious at all. Anselm's God is present to all places where they exist—at themselves. Equally, He is present to all times when they exist—at themselves. This is compatible with presentism, on which all times “exist equally” in that time 1, when it is present, is as real as time 2, when *it* is present. The reasoning, at least so far as Rogers represents it, does not point more one way than the other.

Presentism about time is the thesis that temporal presentness and temporal existence are always coextensive. Temporal presentness and temporal existence are not now coextensive if it is now the case that temporal reality extends past the present, to the past or future. Temporal presentism denies this. It holds that all there ever is to time is what is presently occurring. It is presentist to say that “something does not exist in time” because it is past or future, and that only present places exist in time. And temporal presentism fits nicely with belief in a moving present. So I suggest that far from thinking time tenseless, Anselm is a presentist about time. In this he follows Augustine. Rogers offers as a text from Augustine that “suggests . . . that all times are equally real”<sup>18</sup> the following:

If the future and the past do exist, I want to know where they are . . . . 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>19</sup>

But the first sentence does not say that the future and past do exist. It is hypothetical. The rest seems almost to shout that only what is present exists, since it says that past and future exist only if they are in some way present.

Most temporal presentists believe in just one present, the temporal. Anselm believes in two, one temporal, one eternal.<sup>20</sup> For Anselm, no single present tense spans time and eternity. There are rather two tenses, the temporal and the eternal present, which we might express as “are<sub>t</sub>” and “are<sub>e</sub>.” Correspondingly, there are presentness<sub>t</sub>, presentness<sub>e</sub>, existence<sub>t</sub>, and existence<sub>e</sub>. For Anselm, presentness<sub>t</sub> and existence<sub>t</sub> are<sub>t</sub> coextensive. It is<sub>t</sub> not true that Anselm's God exists<sub>t</sub>, but that He exists<sub>e</sub>. Again, presentness<sub>e</sub> and existence<sub>e</sub> are<sub>e</sub> coextensive. For Anselm, neither time nor eternity ever has past or future parts: presentism twice over. Again, on tenseless theories, things are equally real at all temporal locations. This is not so on Anselm's view. For him, there are only two locations at which things are real, the temporal and the eternal present. Time *t* exists in eternity, but this does not entail that *t* and what it contains are real at *t*. Rather, *t* and what it contains are located in eternity and real in eternity.

Despite this, one can question whether Anselm's view counts as a version of presentism. Anselm holds, again, that “the eternal present encloses

<sup>18</sup>P. 4.

<sup>19</sup>As quoted at p. 4.

<sup>20</sup>If we took Anselm to task, claiming that nothing atemporal can count as present, *Monologion* 28 suggests that he would reply, following Augustine and Boethius, that really, it is time's present that has a tenuous grip on the title.

all time and whatever exists at any time." For Anselm, at the eternal present, everything temporally past, present or future is (eternally) present. So in eternity,

- (O) everything temporally past, present and future has the same ontological status

and (O) can seem to be just what tenseless theories of time claim. Rogers seems to see it this way, and so collapses Anselm's two presents into one and removes its presentness, suggesting that if in eternity, everything is present, then all things at all times (and God beyond time) exist tenselessly. But Anselm asserts that there is a simultaneity of eternity. A date is just a location for a simultaneity-class of events. So we can put Anselm's claim this way: there is a date at which all temporal things co-exist, because they are all co-present.<sup>21</sup> Were this true of a date in the far future, that would be compatible with presentism: either (O) would be false, or (O) would be true because at some time, everything ever past or future would at once be present. This would not change if the date were not in our future, but instead in a second time-series, a series of instants none ever earlier than, later than or simultaneous with any instant of ours.<sup>22</sup> Nor would it change if that second time-series were but an instant long. But in such a time-series, the present could not pass away. For if it did, it would be past. It could not be past at itself, for then it would be true that at  $t$ ,  $t$  is present and at  $t$ ,  $t$  is past—and nothing can be present and past at once. It could not be past at any other time in its series, because there are none. And it could not be past at any time in our series, for this would entail that the series were not after all two. That single, unpassing present would be an eternal present. So if Anselm asserts presentism about time and adds that all things are co-present in the eternal present, that leaves him a presentist.

For Rogers, in Anselm, rather than two presents, there are two perspectives on a single tenseless reality, those of atemporal God and temporal creatures.<sup>23</sup> But when Anselm talks of time-flow, he does not even *hint* that time just appears to flow due to how we view it. He simply asserts that time flows.<sup>24</sup> Again, Anselm writes that "sometimes . . . some-

---

<sup>21</sup>Anselm does not discuss events, but presumably he'd make the analogous claim about events co-occurring as well.

<sup>22</sup>For present purposes, we can ignore the question of whether in fact items in our time-series could exist also in another temporal series. Even if the supposition is counterpossible, it can drive philosophically significant reasoning.

<sup>23</sup>Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, pp. 181, 183.

<sup>24</sup>Rogers's *Anselm on Freedom* offers one text which Rogers thinks suggests a two-perspective account, from *de Concordia* I, 4:

when God wills or does something, whether it is said according to the immutable present of eternity, in which nothing is past or future, but all things exist at once, without any motion (as if we say . . . not that He willed or will will or did or will do something, but only "He wills" and "He does"), or according to time, as when we say that He will will or do what we know to be not yet done, He cannot be denied to know what He does and wills and to foreknow what He will will and do. (Schmitt, v. 2, p. 252, my trans.)

thing does not exist in time which exists in eternity," not that sometimes something appears not to exist in time which really does exist in time but can be seen to be there only by someone atemporal. Finally, consider the modal implications Anselm draws from his picture of time and eternity. Anselm believes in the necessity of the present—that what is, when it is, cannot be otherwise, since this would (so he thinks) require that something be and not be at once. We see this when he discusses a present volition:

The free will wills, and it is both able and not able not to will . . . .  
 Before it wills, it is able not to will, because it is free. While it wills, it cannot not will, but instead it is necessary for it to will, because it cannot both will and not will the same thing at once.<sup>25</sup>

He applies this necessity to the eternal present:

So . . . without any contradiction, something is said to be mutable in time, before it exists, which in eternity remains immutably . . . .

---

Rogers comments,

Here Anselm introduces an . . . element of the four-dimensionalist theory. There are two ways of looking at the universe. From the divine perspective everything is simply 'there' in eternity . . . . [From] the perspective of the temporal creature at a given point of time . . . some things are past, some present and some future. (*Anselm on Freedom*, p. 181)

But Anselm's reference to speaking according to eternity or to time does not involve anything about perspective. His discussion concerns how things can be said and whether certain things, said in certain ways, can be denied: that is, it concerns propositions about divine action. He observes that there are two sorts of proposition about divine action, propositions expressed in (what we may call) the eternal-present tense, and propositions expressed in temporal tenses, distinctively the past and future. He adds that neither a particular sort of eternal-tense proposition about divine knowledge nor its temporally tensed analogues can be denied. The text says nothing about the propositions being such as to express distinctive *perspectives* on a single reality. It does say that things exist in eternity without "motion," but (by implicit contrast, and with reference to an upcoming discussion in which this becomes explicit) with motion in time. "Motion" here might mean change of place or the "motion" of the present, futureward. On tenseless theories of time, whether there is motion through space does not depend on how one looks at it. In a tenseless world, there being motion consists in there being certain relations among time-slices of the universe, and those relations are there whether one sees them as they appear from a temporal perspective or from eternity. So on the first reading of "motion," whatever is going on here is not a matter of perspective. On the second, Anselm's point is simply that the eternal present doesn't pass, but the temporal present "moves." One could read this as "the temporal present appears to move" only by ignoring Anselm's uniform treatment elsewhere of temporal passage as a feature of temporal reality, not of how temporal reality appears to us.

<sup>25</sup>*De Concordia* I, 3, in Schmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 251. My trans.

[And] this is itself there eternally, that temporally something both is, and before it is, it can not-be.<sup>26</sup>

Note that “something” is called mutable in time *before it exists*. Were Anselm using “mutable” to mean “changeable,” there would be no reason for this restriction. Again, Anselm says that this fact is there in eternity, and then adds that the fact is that before “something” occurs, it can fail to occur—it can be otherwise than it winds up being. These things tell us that Anselm is using “mutable” not in the usual sense of “changeable” but in a pared-down modal sense, “able to be otherwise.” In eternity, then, this “something” really is immutable. It cannot be otherwise, by the necessity of the (eternal) present. Also there immutably is the fact that beforehand it was able to be otherwise: this is so objective a fact that it is included in the eternal present. But this would not have been a fact if the necessity of the eternal present applied to things as they are in time. Then it would instead have been the case that things could not have been otherwise even beforehand, for beforehand, they would have been settled in the future with the necessity of the eternal present. Events for Anselm have in time a modal property—avoidability—they do not have in eternity, though eternity contains the fact that in time they have it. In both time and eternity, things are mutable-beforehand, i.e., avoidable from an earlier point. But only in time are they mutable—avoidable—because only in time are there earlier points at which to realize this avoidability. In the eternal present, it is true that in a temporal present, something is avoidable: but nothing in the eternal present is avoidable. How things are in eternity *represents* things’ having the property of avoidability but does not involve anything’s exemplifying it. This is not compatible with a merely perspectival difference between time and eternity. Hard though this is to grasp, for Anselm temporal things and events *are* both in time and in eternity, involved in both a flowing and a static present, and have objectively different modal properties at the two presents.

#### *What does Anselmian Eternity Entail?*

But perhaps being presentist about time is just inconsistent on Anselm’s part. *Should* Anselm have thought time tenseless, given his claims about God’s eternity? Rogers thinks so. She reasons this way:

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>27</sup>

From the eternal viewpoint every temporal event is actually happening . . . . Given that God’s viewpoint is what makes everything to be, this seems to entail that in fact, every temporal event is actually happening.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup>*De Concordia* I, 5, in Schmitt, *op. cit.*, p. 255. My trans.

<sup>27</sup>P. 8.

<sup>28</sup>P. 25, n. 23. The first sentence is actually quoted from Stump and Kretzmann; I’ve suppressed this because it is inessential to the argument Rogers makes.



There are interpretive problems here. Consider the first quote: temporal presentism is compatible with the claim that all times are equally real— $t$  is at  $t$  as real as  $t+1$  is at  $t+1$ , though at  $t+1$ ,  $t$  is in no way real.<sup>29</sup> But given Rogers's intentions, let's take "all times are equally real" as a way to say "time is tenseless." If we then take "in the eyes of God" as alluding to the way things appear to Him, or appear to Him to be, we can read the first quote as "if time appears tenseless to God, then time is tenseless, since . . . ." But then we must ask why Rogers thinks time *does* appear tenseless to God. I think the reason lies in her interpretation of Anselm's talk of eternity's containing time:

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 . . . "exists in" or "exists within" should be understood. (So) do temporal things . . . exist in God's eternity.<sup>30</sup>

Rogers's argument, I think, is really from equal immediate cognitive presence to apparent tenselessness to tenselessness.

"God's perspective . . . determines ultimate reality" could claim that things are as they appear to God or that God has an idea of things which He then causes to be perfectly satisfied. But since "God's viewpoint . . . makes everything . . . be" plays the same role in the parallel second passage, something more puzzling and obscure may be meant. In any case, Anselm could concede that God's perspective determines ultimate reality—whatever precisely this means—but add that it determines that ultimate reality includes more than the way things are in eternity or from God's own perspective. It could be that God, from His own perspective, determines precisely that there shall be other perspectives than His own, which also determine some share of ultimate reality. It could be true precisely from God's perspective that there is more to ultimate reality than things' being as they appear to Him. (And Anselm may have just this in mind in saying that things immutably appear mutable to God, since events avoidable in time appear in eternity to be avoidable-in-time, but neither are nor appear to be avoidable in eternity.) God may bring this about in another context by creating other sentient beings, whose experiential perspectives, which He may not share, determine parts of the subjective portion of ultimate reality. There is (I take it) a way our experience appears to God—if not, then reality clearly is not as it appears to Him, for it appears absent our experience. But quite plausibly the way our experience appears to God is not the way it appears to us. I feel guilt over what I have done, but what God has is an experience of my feeling guilt over this, not of feeling guilt over this (or over what He has done) Himself.<sup>31</sup> Feeling guilt involves making (at least implicitly) and reacting to a judgment, that this act has been done by me and was bad. God cannot make this (perhaps implicit) judgment about Himself, because He cannot err. I feel awe before God, but God

<sup>29</sup>See also n. 3 above.

<sup>30</sup>P. 9.

<sup>31</sup>I owe the illustration to an audience comment at Rutgers University.

does not. Feeling awe involves making (at least implicitly) and reacting to a judgment, that this—the object of my awe—is greater than I am. Again, God cannot even implicitly judge this about Himself, as He cannot err. So God can only experience others' feeling awe, not awe. What appears to us as awesome cannot so appear to Him, though it can appear to Him that it is awesome to us. There are, then, experiences that can only be had and perhaps properties that can only appear from certain perspectives. If God can thus assure that His perspective does not include all perspectives there are on reality and that ultimate reality includes the way things appear from other perspectives, it is not true that the way things appear to God must be the only way they are.

In the second passage, Rogers may mean "is" to be tenseless.<sup>32</sup> If she does, she means us to take tenselessness as something other than a disjunction of tenses, since if from the eternal viewpoint what appears is that

(T) every temporal event was, is or will be happening,

this is fully compatible with presentism. Let's call this other sort of tenselessness radical. Then it's not clear to me that even the claim that from the eternal viewpoint

(RT) every temporal event radical-tenselessly-happens

is incompatible with presentism: (RT) is (strictly) equivalent to (T), and if it is, then if (T)'s appearing true from the eternal viewpoint is compatible with presentism, so is (RT)'s. In any case, Anselm could concede the argument to (RT) too, with a distinction: radical-tenselessly-happens *in eternity*, from which nothing follows about their status in time. But why should we think that (RT) appears true from the eternal viewpoint? Rogers fleshes out her reasoning elsewhere:

If God's knowledge is dependent upon the actual choices of free created agents, then He can know those choices only if they actually exist. If God knows future free choices, then the future is "present" to God. And if God knows all things directly, and He knows all the past, present and future equally, then all of time must be equally actual.<sup>33</sup>

This passage appeals to "direct" cognitive presence. So again, the argument seems really to be from a sort of cognitive presence to apparent tenselessness to tenselessness.

#### *The "Cognitive Presence" Argument*

Rogers does not say what immediate cognitive presence to God (or anything else) involves, so it's hard to know how to unpack her argument.

---

<sup>32</sup>Because how things are from God's perspective seems to be what "every event is . . ." expresses. If we take "is" as present-tensed, "every event is . . ." could assert that every event is occurring in the temporal present—an obvious falsehood—or that it is now true that every event tenselessly-is happening. This latter just leads us back to the text's treatment of the tenseless claim.

<sup>33</sup>Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, pp. 176–177.

Knowing truths about things isn't plausibly seen in terms of those truths' subjects being "present to" the knower. Perceiving those things is. So I suggest that Rogers intends something at least quasi-perceptual, and her inferences are really from some kind of divine direct-realist perceptual state and/or God's phenomenology of being in that state to tenseless time. If so, the assumption that God *has* any perceptual phenomenology certainly needs defense, but I'll just grant it to Rogers to see where it can take us. Rogers writes, again, that

(R) if all times are equally real in the eyes of God, they are equally real *simpliciter*.<sup>34</sup>

(R)'s antecedent is not just metaphorical but ambiguous. It could mean something like

(5a) there are times, and God knows them all to be equally real.<sup>35</sup>

(5a) and

(R\*) if there are times, and God knows them all to be equally real, they are equally real

do yield the conclusion that all times are equally real. But if (R) really includes (5a), Rogers needs to give some independent reason for us to think that God knows what (5a) says He knows. She does not. Without one, since God knows that all times are equally real just if all times are equally real, using (5a) to detach Rogers's conclusion, that all times *are* equally real, would come perilously close to begging the question. One might instead read (R)'s antecedent as

(5b) there are times, and they all appear to God to be equally real.

(5b) can be read as a claim about what judgment God is inclined to make (an "epistemic" sense of "appear to be"); so read, what was said about (5a) applies. (God is cognitively perfect, so God is inclined to judge that P iff P.)<sup>36</sup> We can also take (5b) in terms of how things non-epistemically (henceforth n-e) look. Non-epistemically looking is a notion in the broad vicinity of phenomenologically appearing. To use a stock example, a penny lying flat, viewed from three feet away and a bit above, epistemically looks circular and n-e looks elliptical. (5b) so taken is the most charitable reading.<sup>37</sup> Again, we should take "appearing equally real" as appearing tenseless, for it's dubious that one real thing can look more real than another. So let us unpack Rogers's argument as

<sup>34</sup>P. 8.

<sup>35</sup>This is a charitable reading. If there were no times, it would equally be true that God knows them all to be equally real, as God would know that no time is more real than others.

<sup>36</sup>Mere infallibility won't rule out inclinations to false belief, since having them is compatible with its necessarily being the case that these are overruled.

<sup>37</sup>This rules out a response-dependent account of this "looking." On these, for an item to look red, say, is for it to have such an appearance as to tend to elicit from a normal perceiver normally situated the judgment that it is red. This sort of account reduces non-epistemic to epistemic "looking."

- (6) If God is timeless, all things at all times immediately appear to God in one eternal perception.
- (7) For all  $x$  and  $y$ , if  $x$  and  $y$  appear to God in one eternal perception, they appear to Him "at once." So
- (8) If God is timeless, all things at all times immediately appear to God "at once."
- (9) If all things at all times immediately appear to God "at once," time  $n$ -e looks tenseless to Him. So
- (10) If God is timeless, time  $n$ -e looks tenseless to Him.
- "It is God's perspective that determines ultimate reality": that is,
- (11) things really are only as they  $n$ -e look to God. So
- (12) If God is timeless, time is tenseless.

I now argue that even if all things at all times appear in God's experience at once, they could  $n$ -e look as if time is not tenseless. If this is so, then if (9) is a material conditional, (9) needs a defense Rogers nowhere gives, and if (9) is a strict conditional, we have reason to think (9) false.

#### *How Time Looks to God*

Rogers may think that either one time or none looks ontologically special to a timeless God. It can't be that just one time looks "special" if He is timeless and cognitively perfect. For if He is timeless, He can't have how things look to Him change. But then suppose that just one time looked ontologically special: *the present*. Then if presentism or the growing block theory (see below) are true, at one instant, time would appear accurately to God. At any other time, things would not be as they looked to Him, which does not befit cognitive perfection and would leave it puzzling how He could know which time is special (if indeed He could know it at all). But if time is tenseless, time would always appear inaccurately to God; it would seem to Him that one time is special, but in fact, none would be. So it seems that if God is timeless and cognitively perfect, no time can look ontologically special to Him. If no time looks special to Him, either time never is as it looks to God or no time *is* ontologically special. But these are the only options only if God gets just one peek at the universe. If He gets more, there is a third option: that God sees all times as special.

This might seem impossible—one thinks of the Gilbert and Sullivan line, "if everybody's somebodee / then no-one's any-body."<sup>38</sup> But consider first how time might look to a timeless God on C. D. Broad's "growing block" view, on which the past exists as truly as the present, and the passage of time adds new bits of existence onto the later end of the "block" of time.<sup>39</sup> A timeless God might get as many peeks at such a universe as it has

<sup>38</sup>In "The Gondoliers."

<sup>39</sup>See C. D. Broad, "The General Problem of Time and Change," in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions* 1st ed., ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998), pp. 82–93. For simplicity I avoid relativistic complications.

distinct states over time. For every stage of the block's growth, God could "see" it just as it is at that stage: God could have a perceptual experience caused by the block's being just that large and no larger, presenting it as just that large and no larger. Then rather than simply "seeing" one four-dimensional block, God could have, at once, multiple experiences which are effectively snapshots of the block at all stages. The snaps could have among themselves some ordering-relation corresponding to the stages' temporal ordering. The snaps jointly would present accurately how the block looks across time if time passes, i.e., new bits successively appear. Each snap would catch all of the block that was there to be caught at one time. We can suppose that the contents of two snaps no more n-e look to Him like two parts of a sum of blocks than earlier and later appearances of a table n-e look to us like two parts of a sum of tables.<sup>40</sup> Again, if God sees what n-e looks like one block as it grows, He does not see what looks like a series of blocks composing anything.

There is such a thing as recognizing something perceptually. So there is such a thing as n-e looking like something one has seen before. So it could n-e look to God like this was the same block, growing. If so, time would n-e look to a God who had these experiences all at once like a block growing, its states ordered by a later-than relation (though the ordering-relation *among His snaps* is not later-than). So too, a child seen in photos taken on successive birthdays looks like a child growing. Though no individual photo of the child captures any process of growth, collectively, the photos present the process by presenting some stages in it. Collectively, God's snaps would present the process by presenting all its stages.

If this is how it goes, God sees just an instant of time at time's beginning. For every instant thereafter, He sees the block slightly larger and ending futureward at that instant. Time as a whole appears to Him in many experiences of the block, so ordered as to represent the order of instants from past to future. Each experience presents to God what exists *as of* a particular point in time. By seeing time this way, He sees each instant as it is when it is "special," i.e., is furthest futureward, and sees it *as* special, as the furthest futureward bit of a block. He also sees them as they are when they are not — i.e., also sees the block in a larger state, in which they are not furthest futureward — but that doesn't affect the point.

Some might suggest that it would n-e look the same to God if new blocks were simply replacing old (as my experience in looking at the child-photos mentioned would be the same if one of them were of the child's identical twin). This needn't be so; who knows what properties — even haecceities? — might be evident to God perceptually. But even if it were, that a second state of affairs could n-e look this way doesn't change the fact that the first could. More importantly, if one block were replacing another, time would not be tenseless: the replacement would constitute time's passing. So "like what many snaps apparently of a growing block present" is still a way "tensed" time could distinctively look.

God could also *take* many looks at a one-block universe in which all time was just tenselessly there. He could in each attend to just part of the 4D block, ignoring the rest. By doing so He could generate such a series of

---

<sup>40</sup>Of course, the *reason* for this could not be the same in the two cases.

snapshot experiences as just described. So (one might argue)<sup>41</sup> what I've described is not a way passing time could *distinctively* look; tenseless time could look that way too. But these would be experiences (partly) actively generated rather than passively received. They would present not ways the universe looks, when the observer is simply taking in what's there in the way appropriate to His perceptual system, but ways it can be made to look by manipulating that system. That other things can be made to look as an F looks doesn't alter the fact that only an F *really* looks that way. I could so alter my brain that whenever my eyes took in visual stimuli as of a dog, the ultimate experiential output made the animal appear to be a cat. That I could make dogs look like cats in my experience doesn't change the fact that only cats, robot cats, cat statues etc. really look like cats, and (genetically and surgically unmodified) dogs do not.

Some might suggest that it would n-e look the same to God if each snap were of part of a multiverse of tenseless blocks, each block a distinct time-series, and so again, what I've described isn't a way a tensed-time universe would *distinctively* look. Suppose that each snap is a view of just one block, but as each snap of a growing block is (so I claimed) caused by the block as it is at that stage, each snap of one block is caused by just that block. We can suppose too that God has all the partial snaps passively, removing any question of manipulating a perceptual system. Still, I've suggested that in the case of a growing block, there would be an *order* among the snaps, accessible to God experientially, in virtue of which it would n-e appear to Him that there was a particular sequence among the snaps. If this order were present in the multiverse case, God would suffer a deceptive mode of presentation: so I suggest that it would not be there. So even if each individual multiverse-block-snap were indiscernible from a snap a growing block would give God, the whole array of snaps, collectively, would yield a non-epistemic look in the growing-block case that would not be present in the multiverse case. I add that if the multiverse-snap were composed of the block-snaps, no block would look to Him the way a single growing block would, for they would n-e look like parts of the multiverse.

Presentist time might appear to God in snaps of an ordered array of instant-thick blocks. At time's beginning, let's say, He sees just an instant of time. For every instant thereafter, He sees a distinct, later instant-thick block. Time as a whole appears to Him in many such experiences, so ordered as to represent the order of instants. By seeing time this way, He sees every present instant as "special," i.e., as all there is to reality then. Presentist times exist to be seen only when present, when "special." God sees presentist time  $t$ , and sees no other time existing as of  $t$ . He sees  $t + 1$  the same way. He sees each as it is when it is special, and as special then. Each instant block presents to God what exists as of a particular point in time—which is simply what exists at that instant. We can suppose again that two snaps' contents no more look to God like two parts of a sum of blocks than earlier and later appearances of a table look to us like two parts of a sum of tables. I can handle objections involving how tenseless universes and multiverses might look as I did above.

---

<sup>41</sup>Dean Zimmerman made a related point in conversation.

What I've just described is not (I suggest) how time would appear to God were time tenseless. He would then see time  $t$  and all that exists as of  $t$ —namely all of time, see  $t + 1$  and all that exists as of  $t + 1$ , etc. “Snaps” of tenseless time that displayed its ontological difference from tensed time would look like snaps of the same 4D universe with a different time-slice “highlighted,” or like snaps of the same 4D universe. So (9) is dubious. Even if all times appear to God at once, they need not look as if time is tenseless. There are ways tensed time could distinctively n-e look to a timeless God.

### *Appearance and Reality*

I now turn to (11). Recall the distinction between n-e and epistemically looking: a penny n-e looks elliptical while it epistemically looks circular. If (11) is true, no property is related to any property a thing can n-e look to God like it has as being circular is related to being elliptical. Why believe this? It is no cognitive defect to have a mode of presentation which allows a distinction between n-e and epistemically looking. If God is cognitively perfect, everything n-e looks to Him as it really is. But for an F, as such, to n-e look as it really is, is for it to n-e look like an F. This is for it to n-e look as Fs really n-e look. A tree n-e looks one way to me and quite another to a bat. Both are ways it really n-e looks; how a thing n-e looks is always a function of to what sort of being it looks. The tree n-e looks visible to me but not the bat. It would be wrong for the bat to assert that since the tree is not visible to it, the tree is not visible. That a tree n-e looks as it really is to the bat entails that to the bat, it n-e looks like it has attributes it really has. It doesn't follow that the tree lacks any property it does not n-e look to the bat like it has. I don't see why things should differ when we consider how things look to God and to us. So I submit that (11) is false. That everything looks to God as it really is, does not entail that everything has only properties it n-e looks to God like it has. Some properties may be to God as being visible is to a bat. If God is omniscient, He will know that items *have* these properties, but it does not follow that they will appear to Him to have them. A suitably equipped bat could know that trees are visible, though its understanding of this claim would no doubt be limited in important ways. A suitably equipped bat could come to believe the truths about the tree we do, despite its looking different to it. If it came to the truths as easily as we did and (*per impossibile?*) understood them every way we did, there would be no cognitive advantage in having the tree n-e look to it as it does to us.

### *How All of Time Appears at Once to God*

As we look at the night sky, we see stars as they were at widely separated times. It would not be absurd to say that we see into many times at once. The stars jointly cause our experience; it does not follow that they exist at once or that presentism is false—this is obviously compatible with presentism. A God who timelessly has all things at all times appear to Him at once sees into all times at once. If it is compatible with presentism that many times be seen at once, it is compatible with presentism that all

be seen at once. There is no incompatibility that crops up just when no times are excluded from the gaze in question, as far as I can see. Imagine a time-series only five minutes long, containing a perceiver existing at the last instant whose experience then is so caused that it includes some event that happens at each instant of those minutes, including the last. (Perhaps it is instantaneously aware of having its current experience.) Such a being would see into all time at once. This seems possible, and compatible with presentism.

Temporal realities do not affect God's cognitive state by sending signals to Him across space at finite velocity: there could not be this sort of explanation of things' appearing to Him at once though they occur at different presentist times. But other sorts of explanation are possible. Suppose that time is presentist, God is omniscient and God's life is atemporal and so temporally partless. If it is atemporal, it is immutable. If it is temporally partless and God is omniscient, then in the same temporally simple bit of God's life, God logs in information from every bit of presentist time as it occurs. I type one keystroke; this is recorded in one bit of the divine life. I type the next—and it is recorded in the same simple bit. It is not recorded later in the divine life; the divine life does not have earlier and later parts. So God logs in information from distinct parts of presentist time during the same simple bit of His life. This must include information from the future. For God's life has no proper parts. During the very same (improper) part of His life which logs in what is going on now, He logs in what goes on later. But that part of His life is going on *now*—put more carefully, it is now true that timelessly, that part is going on. If it did not now contain information from the future, either God would never be omniscient or His life would after all have earlier and later parts, an earlier part in which it did not contain the information and a later in which it did. It would not be an immutable life; it would change. So the part of His atemporal life now going on includes information about what has not yet happened. All parts of time, that is, appear to God at once, though none co-exist. What explains this is simply that He is timeless and whatever makes Him omniscient.

This might not seem possible: it might seem that I've offered not an account of how different parts of presentist time could appear to a timeless God at once but a demonstration that divine timelessness and omniscience are incompatible with presentism. We want a model to show that these three are compatible. So we want to picture all parts of an extension, time, as having the same relation to an unextended point. We want to make sense of God's receiving information from the future before it occurs in some way which doesn't suppose He's timeless, and without just adopting a well-worn, controversial temporalist theory of divine foreknowledge. To do so, we can utilize a feature of the circle/circumference/center analogy Rogers discusses,<sup>42</sup> and so *inter alia* suggest that this analogy need not be read in terms of tenseless time.

No time temporally coincides with an atemporal God's life, but God co-exists with it all. No bit of a circle's circumference spatially coincides with its center, but the center exists directly opposite each. So if God is timeless, it is as if time curves in a circle around a central God who sees it

---

<sup>42</sup>P. 8.



all. If time is presentist, no two points on the circumference are ever real at once. Rather, there is just a “blip” of light travelling a circular path. If God has the impression of a circle, this is (as it were) this path’s afterimage—it is the appearing at once to God of times which do not exist at once. Temporalists will argue that as God co-exists first with a time at which the blip is at one point in its path and then with another presentist time, He acquires new temporal relations—and so is temporal, not timeless.<sup>43</sup> Rogers will pounce from another direction: surely if God is timeless, He does not acquire new temporal relations. But then He always has them, and so the temporal relata are all there, tenselessly. But one can avoid both, and one way to do so can be built on talk of circles.

Imagine that points on a circle’s circumference fire projectiles toward its center at different times, with different velocities. The projectiles leave one after another, but so differ in velocity as to arrive at the center at once. There is a relation in which the center stands to a point once and only once the projectile the point fires lands: the S-relation,  $\_$  is struck by a projectile fired by  $\_$ . This relation does not require both relata to exist: if I fire at you and wink out of existence before the bullet strikes, you still are struck by a projectile I fired. But this just mirrors a fact about cognitive relations (which we are trying to model), that we can have knowledge caused by and about things which no longer exist—as when we see stars that ceased to exist long ago. There is no time at which the center stands in some but not all of its S-relations, despite the different firing-times. Saying only so much, it seems that the projectiles will all arrive at some time after the last point fires. But now let us add a dizzying feature to the picture. Given any direction of movement around its circumference, every segment of a circle is before every other. So let’s say that every projectile was fired before every other: the firings take place in a time with a circular topology. If this is so, it shortly emerges, there never was a time when the projectiles had not reached the center all at once—and yet they were fired in sequence. Let’s now add that the points just *are* times, the time in which these firings occur is presentist, and so when each point fires, it is the only bit of the circle that is in any way real. The result is the same: the projectiles arrive at the center at once though they do not leave the circumference at once, and there never was a presentist time at which the center did not stand in all its S-relations.

Now the center enters into all of its S-relations at once. But when do points on the circumference enter theirs? There are just three possible answers.

- Perhaps points never enter them at all, as they cease to exist before the projectiles land (if the time is presentist). As we noted, the center could stand in the relation even if the firing point did not. If this is how things are, there is no relational change in the center explained by points’ entering S-relations.
- Perhaps points enter when the projectiles land. If so, then since (as will emerge) the projectiles always have landed, the points have always been in these relations. And so again, there is no relational

---

<sup>43</sup>This is just a variation on a reply Scotus made to Aquinas’s use of the circle image. See Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 39, q. 5.

change in the center explained by points' beginning to stand in S-relations, for the points never begin to stand in them.

- Perhaps points enter when they fire. The firing is before the landing. So on this assumption, when projectiles land, the firing points have already entered into these relations. But the projectiles always have landed. So the points always have stood in S-relations. There is not something further left to happen to them that might make a difference to the center.

Thus on none of these alternatives do the center's relations to the points change. So the model as so far stated is compatible with God's life's being timeless and immutable.

We are modeling God's knowledge of temporal events. Firings represent the occurrence of temporal events, minimally the occurring of presentist times, which somehow have a causal impact on God's cognitive state; landings of projectiles represent that impact taking place, and so the events' appearing to God. On the model so far, God (at the center) would seem to have knowledge only of what was, not what is,<sup>44</sup> let alone what will be. This is due to the projectiles' finite speed, which we needed to let one speed exceed another,<sup>45</sup> which in turn was needed to let projectiles fired one after another arrive at once. If the model doesn't provide knowledge of events in all parts of time, it doesn't safeguard God's omniscience.

But God does not only know the past if the time we're dealing with is truly circular, for if it is, it never began to be so (i.e., there was no first journey around the circle). Time has a truly circular topology only if the *same* events and times recur. If time just (as it were) curves around the center but never actually reaches a point it had already been at, there is no relevant difference between this and a linear time. We have a circle only if the endpoints of what would otherwise be a line coincide, i.e., are identical, and that occurs only if at least one time (and its associated events) literally recurs. If no times and events recur, but instead there are just times and events exactly similar, the time is not circular but just cyclical, and (as it were) spiral-shaped. But if identical events recur, they cause exactly what they did. This is not just to say that they make the same intrinsic contribution to onward events (if any)—which would be compatible with time's stopping at the first recurrent time. But they must also have the same extrinsic properties they came to have through their causal input's having effect at later times, or else the future-directed properties they had of being about to acquire those extrinsic properties, else (again) the original time and what we want to be its recurrence are not in fact identical. Again, if identical times recur, the same events and times precede and succeed them, else (again) there is a difference of extrinsic property, and so the times are not identical.

So if time makes even one circular journey, it makes infinitely many. Nor is this an infinite progression with a first member (like the positive integers). Consider a putative first instant of circular time. When time

---

<sup>44</sup>I owe this objection to the Editor.

<sup>45</sup>At least if we can make no sense of rates of speed involving different orders of infinity; but even this wouldn't deal with the was/is problem.

cycles round to it again, this instant comes to have the extrinsic property of having been preceded by certain other times. If this distinguishes the “second” occurrence of the instant from the “first,” then what we want to be a recurrence is not. For items are identical only if they have all the same properties at all times, and so times are identical only if they have all the same properties at themselves. So in the “first” occurrence, it must have been preceded—and so the “first” occurrence was not in fact first. Thus if the time truly is circular, there never was a time when the projectiles fired by these very times had not reached the center all at once. For they had done so on a prior journey round the circle. And so God knows of what is, that it is, when it is, because at that time, a knowledge-inducing projectile has already landed, having been fired on an earlier trip round the circle. We can suppose, if we like, that the timing on the projectiles is such that they land at the earliest instant after any one circuit is complete—i.e., at the first instant of the next circuit. Thus at the beginning of each cycle of time, God foreknows all that the cycle will contain.

The tense-logic for circular time has two levels, local and global. Locally—i.e., within any single journey round the circle, exclusive of its meeting up with its first point—things are just as they are in linear time. Globally, every time is always both future and past, and sometimes also present. So this model provides God knowledge of an event in the local future because the event is identical with something in the global past which has already had its effect on Him.

So if circular time is possible, there is a possible model for an omniscient temporal God having all parts of time appear to Him at once even if time is presentist, and having foreknowledge without Ockhamism, Molinism etc. Accordingly, a temporalist can't deny that it is possible that an omniscient God have all parts of presentist time appear to Him at once without arguing that circular time is impossible—a tall order, I think. It might seem easy to do—for if time is circular, don't all events wind up among their own causal conditions, and aren't circular chains of causation impossible? This actually doesn't follow. It's compatible with time's being circular that there be sufficient causal gaps to keep any causal chain from being circular, unless a causal theory of time is true, as I have not assumed. In any case, the was/is consequence ceases to be a problem once we *apply* the model to the target case, in which God is atemporal. If God, at the center, is atemporal, the only sense in which an event can be prior to His knowledge of it is causal. And events that cause God to know of their occurrence must be causally prior to His knowledge that they've occurred if the knowledge is observational, as I'm assuming.

Again, firings represent the occurrence of temporal events; landings represent the events' appearing to God. Thus that all parts of time appear equally or at once to God just does not entail that time is not presentist. A natural reaction to all this might be “so what? Time is linear, not circular, and Christians of all people should believe so, since it seems to follow from what they take to be revealed truths.” But recall the dialectical context. I offered a story conjoining divine timelessness and omniscience (even about the future) with presentism. I was challenged to show that God could have all parts of time appear to Him at once, be omniscient and co-exist with presentist time *without* assuming divine timelessness. It

meets the challenge to show something else possible which I can conjoin with presentism, appearing-at-once, divine temporality and omniscience to yield a coherent (if *outré*) scenario. I need not show that these things could be true in a linear time, because it is not divine temporality that I'm trying to show to be compatible with all this in linear time. It's the story of an *atemporal* God with linear time that I'm defending with the story of a temporal God and circular time.

*The "Immediate Causation" Argument*

Rogers offers a second argument for (2):

All of space is within God's omnipresence in that it is all immediately . . . causally present to and absolutely dependent upon God. . . . [So] do temporal things . . . exist in God's eternity.<sup>46</sup>

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" . . . divine eternity, then it follows that they are all equally real.<sup>47</sup>

Anselm could concede the conclusion, with a distinction: equally real in that time 1, at time 1, is as real as time 2 is at time 2—from which it does not follow that 1 is as real at 1 as 2 then (i.e., at 1) is at 2. Or he could make a different distinction: equally real in eternity, whence nothing follows about their status in time. Moreover, Anselm's analogy between eternity's containing time and time's containing place can be used against Rogers. There is no absolute "hereness" to distinguish one place from all others as here, as presentists think absolute presentness distinguishes one time from all others as now. But if there were,<sup>48</sup> it would still be true that one time contains all places. So too, even if presentness distinguishes one time from all others, Anselmian eternity contains all times. This analogy may seem to fail at a key point: what is not here still exists to be contained in one time, but on presentism, what is not temporally present does not exist to be contained in eternity. Anselm might demur. "Present" can pick out different lengths of time (the present day, year . . .). For a presentist, the present year is the present *year* as long as it includes the absolute present, even if all other parts of it don't exist. There is a way the present year contains non-existent times. So too, Anselm could suggest, there is a way the present eternity—God's eternal present—includes (temporally) non-existent times, though the way differs.

---

<sup>46</sup>P. 9.

<sup>47</sup>P. 6.

<sup>48</sup>The analogy could only be rough: for presentists, what is not present just does not exist, but "here-ists," were there any, would presumably not hold that what is not here does not exist. Again, the presentist present does not have vague boundaries, but at least as ordinarily used, "here" does not usually pick out a precisely delimited region.

He might also push the analogy further: God's omnipresence contains all places directly, not as viewed from other places. So it contains them as they are at themselves. So it contains them as they are where they are "here." That at other places they are not here but there does not matter, for God's omnipresence contains them as they are where here, not as they are where there. So too, Anselm could suggest, God's eternity contains all presentist times as they are at themselves, i.e., as they are when they are present—as existing. That at other times they are not present (and so non-existent) does not imply that they are not present as contained in God's eternity, for God's eternity contains them as they are when present, not as they are when past or future. If one rejoins that nonetheless, once they no longer exist, eternity cannot contain them, Anselm could agree, but just deny that in eternity, they no longer exist. The eternal present doesn't pass. Whatever it ever contains does not pass away either, then. So if it ever contains a time, it always contains it: in eternity, that time does not cease to exist. If the eternal present were the only present, Rogers would be right: time would not pass, but be tenseless. Anselm, though, believes that there are other, transient presents too. For Anselm, the same thing, once it passes away in time, both exists and does not. But this is no contradiction, for it is not a contradiction for something to exist at one location presentness sometime graces (say, noon today) but not another (say, noon tomorrow).

But let's approach this more carefully. It's not clear to me exactly how Rogers's argument is supposed to go. Here's one possible reconstruction:

- (13) If God is timeless, for all  $x$  at all times, God makes His immediate causal contribution to  $x$ 's coming to exist in an atemporal act.
- (14) There is no temporal separation between atemporal acts. So
- (15) If God is timeless, for all  $xy$  at all times, there is no temporal separation between God's making His immediate causal contribution to  $x$ 's coming to exist and God's making His immediate causal contribution to  $y$ 's coming to exist.
- (16) If God is timeless, for all  $x$  at all times, there is no temporal separation between God's making His immediate causal contribution to  $x$ 's coming to exist and  $x$ 's coming to exist.
- (17) For all  $xyz$ , if there is no temporal separation between  $x$ 's occurring and  $y$ 's occurring and none between  $y$ 's occurring and  $z$ 's occurring, there is none between  $x$ 's occurring and  $z$ 's occurring. So
- (18) If God is timeless, for all  $xy$  at all times, there is no temporal separation between  $x$ 's coming to exist and  $y$ 's coming to exist. So
- (19) If God is timeless, all things at all times equally exist.

But (18) tells us not that if God is timeless, presentism is false, but instead that if God is timeless, all temporal things come to exist at one instant. And (17) appears false. There being no temporal separation between two items can consist in the temporal distance between them being zero or in its being undefined—i.e., having not a zero value, but no value at all. Suppose, then, that  $x$  = the clock's striking noon yesterday,  $y$  = God's being di-

vine and  $z$  = the clock's striking noon today. Take it that  $y$  is a timeless state of affairs, and that temporal distances between timeless states of affairs and temporal events are undefined. Then there is no temporal separation between  $x$  and  $y$ , none between  $y$  and  $z$ , and a day between  $x$  and  $z$ . Again, suppose that  $x$  and  $z$  are as stated but that  $y$  = the occurring of this week. Then there is a zero temporal distance between  $x$  and  $y$  (since  $y$  includes  $x$ ) and between  $y$  and  $z$ , but still a day between  $x$  and  $z$ . Again, suppose that  $xyz$  are three consecutive chronons of a discrete time: then there is a zero temporal distance between  $x$  and  $y$ , a zero distance between  $y$  and  $z$ , and a one-chronon distance between  $x$  and  $z$ .

Perhaps the argument instead consists of (13)–(16) and

(20) For all  $x$  at all times, if there is no temporal separation between God's making His immediate causal contribution to  $x$ 's coming to exist and  $x$ 's coming to exist,  $x$  comes to exist as God makes His contribution. So

(21) For all  $xy$  at all times,  $x$  comes to exist as God makes His contribution to  $x$ 's coming to exist. So

(22) For all  $xy$  at all times,  $x$  is real as  $y$  is real. So

(23) For all  $xy$  at all times,  $x$  and  $y$  are equally real.

Here "as" is problematic. If God is atemporal, the only sense I can attach to it is that all things exist in eternity with God. Then Anselm can concede (23) about eternity, but the argument simply gives us no claim at all about how times might exist outside eternity, nor any claim that they exist only in eternity. It is simply incomplete.

#### *Atemporality and Action*

Rogers writes about (3) that

If time is tensed (and) God . . . cannot change, then . . . God . . . forever in the past has been doing just what He does now . . . . God does not step in as an actor on the world stage . . . . But if God is eternal in the Anselmian sense and time is tenseless, then He does all He does in one immutable act.<sup>49</sup>

It isn't clear why Rogers thinks God can't do all He does in one immutable act if time is tensed, or why this rules out "stepping in as an actor," which I take to mean doing new things at new times. Suppose that God timelessly, immutably wills that if  $P$  at  $t$ , then  $Q$ . Time passes. The conditional remains true (God wills it immutably).  $T$  arrives, and  $P$  is the case.  $P$  in conjunction with the divine will then brings it about that  $Q$ . If we consider God's volition a standing condition, we might say that at  $t$   $P$  "triggers" the result God wills, but it is equally true that God's volition *then* turns  $P$  at  $t$  into a partial cause of  $Q$ , "triggering" the effectiveness of  $P$ . So  $Q$  occurs at  $t$  because God timelessly, immutably wills what He does and  $t$  ar-

---

<sup>49</sup>P. 11.

rives, bearing P. God and the arrival of t jointly trigger the effect, so God is among its causes, and so God does something new, though He didn't will something new to do it. God is an actor on the world-stage: it occurs that Q, just when it does, because of what God eternally, immutably wills. God steps in: not in the sense that He first wills Q at t, but in the sense that He immutably wills what He does and Q occurs at t, not some other time, due (partly) to what He wills. Further, though God is not the complete cause of Q's occurring, He is an immediate partial cause. He does not act solely through whatever brings it about that P at t or through P's being the case at t. There are *two* immediately effective partial causes here: God's willing that if P at t, then Q, and P's being the case at t. Why not?

#### *Atemporality and Power*

Rogers suggests (4) this way:

A being . . . able to act immediately on all of what we call past, present and future is more powerful than a being whose activity is confined to the present instant.<sup>50</sup>

that all of spacetime is immediately present to Him . . . 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.<sup>51</sup>

God has all His powers "before" He makes anything, being essentially omnipotent. All spacetime is on Rogers's version of Anselm present to God *only once He makes it*. How could that affect what powers He had had "before" making it?<sup>52</sup> In any case, given presentism, a timeless God is fully able to have an effect on what is future to us—*when it is present*. He can have an effect at t *only at t*. And this is just as things are if time is tenseless. There is in either case no other time at which t exists to be acted upon. In both cases, the act which has effect at t is "from all eternity" and

---

<sup>50</sup>P. 13.

<sup>51</sup>Pp. 20–21. Rogers gives as one example of this that if God sees how difficult it is for people to accept Him as Messiah, God can inform the prophets as to future events, so as to have fulfilled prophecies to make it easier for people to believe (p. 21). But this is just an instance of a problem with simple foreknowledge she has previously acknowledged (p. 20). If God *sees* how hard it is for people to accept Him, it is "already" just that hard. He cannot make it easier by issuing prophecies. What He sees includes people having whatever reasons prophecies give them.

<sup>52</sup>A medieval might reply that God has all His *absolute* powers before making anything, but His *ordained* powers only once He makes, and in accord with what He makes: hence Rogers can be asserting that God's ordained powers are greater if time is tenseless. However, God's ordained powers are just the subset of His absolute powers that He has the opportunity of using given what He has chosen to make. It's not clear why a larger such subset would be worth having if a smaller such subset was fully adequate to God's purposes. And as the text argues, a timeless God facing presentist time has the same set of ordained powers across all time as He would were time tenseless.

has the same (lack of) temporal relations to every time. So a timeless God facing presentist time has every power He would have were time tenseless. Whether time is tenseless or not, He can't have an effect at  $t + 1$  that is located other than at  $t + 1$ . Whether time is tenseless or not, it can be true at  $t$  that timelessly, He acts and has effects at  $t + 1$ . If time is tensed, God can still for each  $t$  bring about what happens at  $t$ . Further, if timeless, He will do this all at once: there is no other way He can act. So if it is compatible with God's timelessness that time be presentist, as I've argued, it is not clear what difference in power there could be here. Perhaps the thought is that if time *must be* presentist, God's effects can only occur dripped out one time after another rather than all at once, and that is some sort of limitation. But this is also true if time is tenseless: each time's effects occur at that time, not elsewhen.<sup>53</sup>

*Oriel College, Oxford University*

---

<sup>53</sup>My thanks to the Editor and referees and an audience at Rutgers University for helpful comments.