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# TIMELESSNESS, CREATION, AND GOD'S REAL RELATION TO THE WORLD

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**RÉSUMÉ :** *La question de la relation de Dieu au monde fait difficulté aujourd'hui, tout autant que dans la perspective traditionnelle. Elle soulève à neuf la question du temps et de l'éternité et appelle un examen approfondi de cette dernière.*

**ABSTRACT :** *The question of God's relation to the world raises a number of difficulties, no easier to face today than in the traditional view. It brings up anew the question of time and eternity which must be tackled again thoroughly.*

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## THE OBJECTION TO TIMELESS, DIVINE CREATION

A great many contemporary thinkers would agree with Nelson Pike's judgement that "A timeless individual could not *produce, create, or bring about* an object, circumstance or state of affairs," since so doing would temporally locate the agent's action.<sup>1</sup> To be plausible, Pike's claim must be taken *in sensu composito*, that is to say, what is impossible is a timeless being's producing a temporal object. So understood, Pike's claim does seem to raise a significant problem for the contention that it may be truly asserted that God is timeless. For it is essential to Christian theism that any reality *extra Deum* is the product of God's creative activity. So if some temporal object *O* begins to exist at a time *t*, that event is the result of God's action of creating *O* at *t*. *Prima facie* the phrase "at *t*" qualifies the gerund "creating," thus dating God's creative action. But if there is a time at which God acted to create *O*, then God's act has a temporal location. Since one's acts cannot be divorced from one's being, it therefore follows that God has a temporal location, that is to say, He is temporal.

Opponents of divine timelessness can therefore be understood as claiming that 1) God is timeless ; and 2) God is creatively active in the temporal world are broadly

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1. Nelson PIKE, *God and Timelessness*, New York, Schocken Books (coll. "Studies in Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion"), 1970, p. 110 ; Pike's influence is evident on Stephen T. DAVIS, *Logic and the Nature of God*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983, p. 13 ; Grace M. JANTZEN, *God's World, God's Body*, with a Foreword by John MacQuarrie, London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984, p. 50.

logically incompatible, on the basis of the necessary truth of ; 3) if God is creatively active in the temporal world, God is really related to the temporal world ; and 4) if God is really related to the temporal world, God is temporal.

Since (2) is essential to Christian theism, (1) must be abandoned.

Why think that (3) and (4) are necessarily true ? With respect to (3), it seems inconceivable that God's causal relation to the world and the events/things in it could be regarded as anything other than a real relation. Indeed, God's being related to the world as cause to effect seems to be a paradigm example of a real relation. As for (4), its intuitive basis is the inconceivability of divorcing an agent's being from his actions or his actions from their effects in such a way that the effects could be temporal but the agent timeless. In virtue of the real relation between a cause and its effect, the temporality of the effect entails the temporality of the cause as well.

### AQUINAS'S DENIAL OF GOD'S REAL RELATION TO THE WORLD

The classic Thomistic response to the above argument against divine timelessness is, remarkably, to deny (3). Aquinas tacitly agrees that if God were really related to the temporal world, then He would be temporal, as (4) affirms. As Liske points out, in Thomas's view relations between God and creatures, like God's being Lord, first begin to exist at that moment of time at which creatures come into being.<sup>2</sup> In the coming to be of creatures, then, certain relations accrue to God anew and thus, if these relations be real for God, He must be temporal in light of his undergoing extrinsic change, wholly apart from the question of whether God undergoes intrinsic change in creating the world. Contemporary philosophers have tended to overlook this fact, focusing the debate on Thomas's contention that God timelessly wills not merely His effects but also the times at which those effects appear in the temporal series.<sup>3</sup> But an examination of the context of Aquinas's remarks on this head reveals

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2. Michael-Thomas LISKE, "Kann Gott reale Beziehungen zu den Geschöpfen haben?," *Theologie und Philosophie*, 68 (1993), p. 224. According to Liske, the reason Thomas resisted recognizing God's real relation to the world is that "Obviously he feared that the mere temporal obtaining of a relation from God, if it is real, requires that God Himself must be temporal" (*ibid.*, p. 218).
  3. On this point see THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra gentiles* 2. 35. 3-5. Liske unfortunately conflates the question of God's undergoing relational change in creating with the question of His intrinsically changing in creating when he writes : "According to Thomas relational statements which either primarily signify or merely connote an actual relation of God to creatures first hold of God from that point of time on at which there are creatures (S.t. Ia. 13. 7 ad 1). It is natural to suppose that these relations therefore first begin to hold from a certain point of time on because the absolute reality which grounds them, God's creatorial activity, first then begins to work. [...] Since creatures [...] are first brought into being by God's activity, it seems impossible that God is already changelessly exercising His creatorial activity, but that the relation to creatures first comes to be at a certain point of time. [...] But should we suppose that God actualizes His creatorial activity temporally ? But now this surely implies a change in Him" (LISKE, "Reale Beziehungen," p. 224-225). Focusing on the question of whether the act of creating involves intrinsic change in God's will or activity to the neglect of Thomas's position on God's real relation to the world are DAVIS, *Logic and the Nature of God*, p. 12-13, and Edward R. WIERENGA, *The Nature of God : An Inquiry into Divine Attributes*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press (coll. "Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion"), 1989, p. 198. Because he softens Aquinas's doctrine of no real divine relations to the world to mean

that his concern there is to explain how God can immutably will a temporal world without that world's always existing, that is, without its having an infinite past.<sup>4</sup> Thomas's discussion of philosophical arguments for "the eternity of the world" presupposes a construal of "eternity" as only sempiternity, and thus he speaks of God's eternity even in terms that smack of temporality: "Nothing, therefore, prevents our saying that God's action existed from all eternity, whereas its effect was not present from eternity, but existed at that time when, from all eternity, He ordained it."<sup>5</sup> Even if successful, Thomas's argument at best shows that God's efficacious will remains changeless as the world comes to be and as events successively occur and pass away. He says nothing in this context (nor was that his intention) to show how the origin and unfolding of a temporal world would not taint the eternal God with temporality in virtue of His real relation to the temporal sequence of events changelessly willed by Him.

### THOMAS'S VIEW OF GOD'S RELATION TO THE WORLD

Aquinas's solution to the problem at hand is quite different: he denies that God has any real relation to the world. This *prima facie* incredible position is rooted in Thomas's doctrine of divine simplicity, which is in turn based upon Aquinas's understanding of God as *ipsum esse subsistens*, the unrestricted act of being. In Aquinas's understanding, God does not have any nature or essence distinct from His act of existing.<sup>6</sup> For if a thing has an essence distinct from its being, it must have an existential cause which sustains it in existence. But God, as the Uncaused First Cause, cannot have a cause, and therefore His nature must be identical with His existence. Similarly, any thing having an essence distinct from its existing has by that fact the potentiality for existence. But since God, as the Unmoved First Mover, has no potentiality, His essence cannot be other than His existence. Now as the pure act of being, not defined by any essence, God is absolutely simple.<sup>7</sup> From God's simplicity and the utter absence in Him of any potentiality, God's immutability follows,<sup>8</sup> and it is on the basis of God's immutability that Thomas infers God's timeless eternity:

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merely that God immutably causes the world, Yates is also forced to recur to this theme, yet without explaining how God's timelessness could be preserved in the face of His real relations with a changing, temporal world (John C. YATES, *The Timelessness of God*, Lanham, Maryland, University Press of America, 1990, p. 142, 159-160). Incredibly, Harris thinks that "Aquinas chose to ignore the whole problem" (James F. HARRIS, "God, Eternality, and the View from Nowhere," in *Logic, God, and Metaphysics*, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers [coll. "Studies in Philosophy and Religion," 15], 1992, p. 74)! Similarly oblivious to Aquinas's solution is Richard R. LACROIX, "Aquinas on God's Omnipresence and Timelessness," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 42 (1982), p. 391-399.

4. AQUINAS, *Summa contra gentiles* 2. 32-38.

5. *Ibid.*, 2. 35. 3. Cf. 2. 35. 5: "the effect of God's will was not delayed, although having been always willed, the effect was not itself always existent [...]. the creature began to exist at that time which God appointed from all eternity."

6. AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* 1a. 3. 4.

7. *Ibid.*, 1a. 3. 1-7.

8. *Ibid.*, 1a. 9. 1.

The idea of eternity follows immutability, as the idea of time follows movement [...]. Hence, as God is supremely immutable, it supremely belongs to Him to be eternal. Nor is He eternal only, but [...] as He is His own essence, so He is His own eternity.<sup>9</sup>

It is at this point that our objection arises : even if God immutably wills the creation of the temporal world, would not the origin of that world, in virtue of God's relation to it, bring God into time ?

Thomas has already implicitly invalidated such a question in his doctrine of divine simplicity. For God's being simple entails, in particular, that God transcends the Aristotelian metaphysical distinction between a substance and its accidents. For Aquinas accidents are properties which a thing, or substance, may possess either contingently or necessarily, but which do not enter into the definition of what the thing is, or its essence. Thomas bases his denial of accidents in God squarely on his conception of God as being itself or pure actuality :

[...] accidents cannot exist in God.

First, because accidents realize some potentialities of their subject, an accident being a mode in which the subject achieves actuality. But we have already seen that potentiality is to be altogether ruled out from God.

Secondly, because God is his own existence and [...] *you cannot add to existence itself* [...].

Thirdly, because what exists by nature is prior to what exists by accident, so that if God is to be the absolutely prime existent, nothing can exist in him by accident. Nor can there be accidents in him by nature, as a sense of humor exists in man by nature ; for such accidents are derivative from the essential nature of the subject. In God however there is nothing derivative, but all derivation starts from him. We are left to conclude that God contains no accidents.<sup>10</sup>

The importance of the absence of accidents in God becomes evident when we recall that one of the nine categories of accident listed by Aristotle was relation.<sup>11</sup> According to Thomas's peculiarly Aristotelian metaphysic, relations are actually monadic predicates or properties inhering in one or both of the *relata*. Though a relation might be grammatically or logically predicated of both *relata*, the ontological accident of relation might not inhere in both terms of that relation. Aquinas distinguished three possibilities in this regard : 1) the relation may exist merely in thought, not in the things themselves, as is the case with the relation of self-identity ; 2) the relation may exist in both things, as in relations of quantity ; 3) the relation may exist in one *relatum* only, being purely ideal for the other, as in the case of a knower and the object

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9. *Ibid.*, 1a. 10. 2. Cf. AQUINAS, *Summa contra gentiles* 1. 15 : "Those beings alone are measured by time that are moved. For time [...] is 'the number of motion.' But God [...] is absolutely without motion, and is consequently not measured by time. There is, therefore, no before and after in Him ; [...] nor can any succession be found in His being. For none of these characteristics can be understood without time. God, therefore, is without beginning and end, having His whole being at once. In this consists the nature of eternity."

10. AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* 1a. 3. 6.

11. ARISTOTLE, *Categories* 4.1b25-2a4. Moreover, others of the categories listed involved relations, specifically time and place. Certain relations, too, might not be confined to a certain category or predicament, but characterize all of them and so are called transcendental relations.

known.<sup>12</sup> In this third case, the relational predicate signifies something real (*res naturae*) in the one *relatum*, but only something conceptual (*res rationis*) for the other. A knower *K* has the real property of *knowing object O*, but *O* itself does not possess any real property of *being known by K*, as is evident from the fact that *O* would be intrinsically the same if *K* were non-existent, whereas *K* would be intrinsically different were *O* not to exist.

Now since God is simple and lacks all accidents, He cannot possess any relations to creatures. Therefore, according to Aquinas, while the temporal world does have the real relation of *being sustained by God*, God does not have a real relation of *sustaining the temporal world*. This latter relation, while predicated of God, in fact signifies only a conceptual relation. Startling as it may sound, God does not have any relations of Creator to creature, cause to effect, Savior to saved, and so forth. Aquinas writes :

Whenever two things are related to each other in such a way that one depends upon the other but the other does not depend upon it, there is a real relation in the dependent member, but in the independent member the relation is merely one of reason — simply because one thing cannot be understood as being related to it. The notion of such a relation becomes clear if we consider knowledge, which depends on what is known, although the latter does not depend on it.

Consequently, since all creatures depend on God, but He does not depend on them, there are real relations in creatures, referring them to God. The opposite relations in God to creatures, however, are merely conceptual relations ; but, because names are signs of concepts, certain names we use for God imply a relation to creatures, even though, as we have said, this relation is merely conceptual.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that relations between God and creatures inhere only in the latter enables Aquinas to avert the objection to divine timelessness based on God's relation to the temporal world. He explains :

[...] whatever receives something anew must be changed, either essentially or accidentally. Now certain relations are predicated of God anew ; for example, that He is Lord or governor of this thing which begins to exist anew. Hence, if a relation were predicated of God as really existing in Him, it would follow that something accrues to God anew, and thus that He is changed either essentially or accidentally ; the contrary of this having been proved [...].<sup>14</sup>

Since God is immutable, the new relations predicated of Him at the moment of creation are just in our minds ; in reality the temporal world itself is created with a relation inhering in it of *dependence on God*. Hence, God's timelessness is not jeopardized by His creation of a temporal world.

This unusual doctrine of creation becomes even stranger when we reflect on the fact that creating a temporal universe is an act of God and that action, like relation, is

12. AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* 1a. 13. 7.

13. AQUINAS, *De veritate* 4. 5. Cf. *Summa theologiae* 1a. 13. 7 ; *Summa contra gentiles* 2. 11-14 ; *De potentia Dei* 3. 3.

14. AQUINAS, *Summa contra gentiles* 2. 12. 5. Precisely the same solution is offered by Aquinas to the question of how the timeless, immutable God can become incarnate in Jesus Christ (*Summa theologiae* 3ae. 2. 7).

one of the nine Aristotelian categories. It would seem to follow that God has no real actions and therefore cannot properly be said to have created the world (though the world could have under the category of passivity or passion the accident of being created by God). Aquinas escapes this conclusion, however, by identifying God's action with His power and, hence, with His essence.<sup>15</sup> God's act of being is His power and His act of creating. Thus, in creating the world God does not perform some act extrinsic to His nature ; rather the creature (which undergoes no change but simply begins to exist) begins to be with a relation to God of *being created by God* :

Taken actively, [creation] denotes the act of God, which is his essence, together with a relation to the creature : and this is not a real but only a logical relation. But taken passively, since [...] it is not properly speaking a change, it must be said to belong, not to the genus of passion, but to that of relation [...]. Creation taken actively denotes the divine action to which the mind attaches a certain relation [...] : but taken passively, [...] it is a real relation signified after the manner of a change on account of the newness or beginning that it implies.<sup>16</sup>

According to this doctrine, then, God in freely creating the universe does not really do anything different than He would have, had He refrained from creating ; the only difference is to be found in the universe itself : instead of God existing alone sans the universe we have instead a universe springing into being at the first moment of time possessing the property *being sustained by God*, even though God, for His part, bears no real reciprocal relation to the universe made by Him.

## ASSESSMENT OF THOMAS'S POSITION

### Implausibility of the No Real Relation Doctrine

By way of assessment, I think it has to be said that Thomas's solution, despite its daring and ingenuity, is extraordinarily implausible. Wholly apart from the problematic notions of God's essence being identical with His act of being and of God's simplicity, we have this very difficult tenet that while creatures are really related to God, God is not really related to creatures. How are we to make sense of this idea ? For Aquinas a real relation is one that obtains objectively in the real world ; a mental or conceptual relation is one posited by the mind, but having no counterpart in reality. Analogously, the distinction between God's will and His existence is not real, but conceptual ; or again, we can imagine God prior to the moment of creation, but really there was no such prior time.<sup>17</sup> Now a real relation is for Aquinas a property inhering in a substance. This understanding may seem strange to moderns, since we normally conceive of relations as being polyadically, not monadically, predicated. As we conceive relations, it would seem impossible for a real relation to obtain between two

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15. *Ibid.*, 2. 9. 5.

16. AQUINAS, *De potentia Dei* 3. 3. Cf. his comment, "Consequently creation is really nothing but a relation of the creature to the Creator together with a beginning of existence."

17. AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* 1a. 19. 2 ; *De potentia Dei* 3. 1, 2.

things without that relation being real for both of them. Nonetheless, Aquinas does seem to be onto something important in distinguishing real from conceptual relations. In certain cases, the foundation of a relation between two things is constituted by the intrinsic properties of only one of the *relata*. For example, if I resent my boss, then I stand in a *resentful* of relation to him, and he stands in a *resented by* relation to me. But the foundation of these reciprocal relations lies in my intrinsic properties, not in those of my boss. This is not to say that my boss has done nothing to cause or merit my resentment ; it is simply to say that the relation itself obtains wholly because of intrinsic properties I possess, regardless of the source of those feelings. So in a sense, a relation can be said to be asymmetrically real if it is founded on intrinsic properties of only one of its *relata*. Perhaps in such a case we could say that the *relatum* on whose intrinsic properties the relation is founded has a real, intrinsic, relational property, for example, *resenting Jones*, but that the other *relatum* possesses no real, intrinsic relational property like *resented by Smith*. Such a claim seems justified particularly in view of the fact that if Smith were to die, Jones might go on possessing the intrinsic property of *resenting Smith*, whereas if Jones were to die, it would be impossible for Smith to possess the property *resented by Jones*. But if Smith fails to possess that property merely because of Jones's death, which for Smith is an extrinsic change only, then *resented by Jones* is not an intrinsic property possessed by Smith after all. Hence, it makes sense to say that among certain *relata*, not all really possess intrinsic, relational properties, though all stand in real relations to one another. Such monadically predicated properties would come close to what Aquinas understood by relations as accidents inhering in a substance.

The question, then, is whether our predicating of God at the moment of creation the relational property of *sustaining the world* is merely conceptual or ascribes a real property to Him. "Sustaining" clearly describes a relation which is founded on something's intrinsic properties concerning its causal activity, and therefore *sustaining the world* ought to be regarded as a real property acquired by God at the moment of creation. I must confess that I find Aquinas's position, that this property is not really possessed by God, but that the relevant real, relational property is *being sustained by God*, which is possessed by the world, to be quite incredible. If at the moment of creation the world begins to exist with the relational property *being sustained by God*, then how could God fail to acquire at that very moment the relational property *sustaining the world*? Aquinas's own examples seem to betray him here. In the cases of knowledge and perception and their objects, the real relation is said to inhere in the person knowing and perceiving, not in the objects known and perceived. But surely God, as the Creator and Sustainer of the cosmos, is more analogous to the person knowing and perceiving than to the objects of his knowledge and perception. One need not be a process theologian to find considerable resonance with the sentiments of Charles Hartshorne when he writes :

If, then, God is wholly absolute, a term but never a subject of relations, it follows that God does not know or love or will us, his creatures. At most we can say only that we are known, loved, and willed by him. Here all analogy fails us. "I am loved by you, but it is untrue that you love me" — does this strange combination of words mean anything, even



if we suppose them addressed to deity? All our experience supports the view that the cognitive relation, still more obviously, if possible, a relation such as love, is genuinely constitutive of the knower or the lover, rather than of the known or the loved.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, with respect to Peter Geach's example of *envious of* and *envied by* as indicating real and unreal relations respectively<sup>19</sup>; God as an active agent is much more like the jealous person than like the unwitting object of jealousy. What such examples seem to miss is the fact that God's relation to the world is a *causal relation*, and it seems fantastic to think that the relation between a cause and its effect is analogous to relations like *envied by* or *known by*. The universe's dependence upon God rather than *vice versa* seems as little reason for denying to God the real relational property of *sustaining the cosmos* as the dependence of imagined scenes in the mind's eye of the artist or daydreamer would be for denying that such persons have a real relation to the products of their imagination. If the relation of some cause to its effect is unreal, then the cause has in particular no causal relation to its effect; that is to say, the cause is not a cause, which is self-contradictory. All we can say in such a case is that the effect is really related to another object or event as the effect of said object or event. In truth there is no real cause in such a case, only a real effect. But it seems unintelligible, if not contradictory, to say that one can have real effects without real causes. Yet this is precisely what Aquinas affirms with respect to God and the world. Words like "First Cause" and "Creator" are only extrinsic denominations applied to God, that is, predicates which do not correspond to any real property but which are appropriate in virtue of real properties in creatures. Even if we adopt the

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18. Charles HARTSHORNE, *The Divine Relativity*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1948, p. 16-17. Hill points out that in this discussion the concepts of divine causality, knowledge, and love are entirely analogical (William J. HILL, "Does the World Make a Difference to God?," *Thomist*, 38 [1974], p. 155). It seems to me, however, that it is the causal relation between God and creatures which most clearly requires divine temporality. For a lucid critique of Hartshorne's extravagant inferences from the reality of divine relations to the world, see Merold WESTPHAL, "Temporality and Finitism in Hartshorne's Theism," *Review of Metaphysics*, 19 (1966), p. 550-564. Westphal shows that God's knowing and willing a contingent world do not entail that God is subject to change and dependence; nevertheless, he admits that they do entail that God is in some sense contingent (*ibid.*, p. 551), and this suffices to refute the view that God has no real relation to the world. Westphal states that according to Aquinas God possesses in addition to eternal and necessary properties eternal and contingent ones, these latter involving His relation to the world. He comments, "There is no difficulty in harmonizing this with Thomas's assertion of the divine simplicity and his denial of divine accidents, for we can and should take these latter to be restricted to God in himself (God abstract and unrelated), whereas the contingent and multiple properties of relation belong to the divine being in relation (God concrete)" (*ibid.*, p. 563). In denying that God is really related to creatures, opines Westphal, Thomas is only saying that God is related to creatures in such a way as to render invalid any inference of dependence in him (*ibid.*, p. 564). But this is manifestly untrue, since relations are accidents and God, being simple, has no accidents. The doctrine of divine simplicity permits no such distinction within God as God abstract and God concrete, except as a conceptual distinction only. As the pure act of being, God has no such relations as Westphal imagines, these being extrinsic denominations with no ontological correlates. For a discussion of the Auseinandersetzung between Hartshorne and Westphal, see Gene REEVES and Delwin BROWN, "The Development of Process Philosophy," in Delwin BROWN, Ralph E. JAMES, JR., and Gene REEVES, ed., *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought*, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1971, p. 45.

19. Peter GEACH, "God's Relation to the World," in *Logic Matters*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1972, p. 321.

Thomist view that causation takes place entirely in the effect, not in the cause,<sup>20</sup> that only underscores the reality of God's causal relation to the world, since the world is admitted to be really related to God as effect to cause, to be really caused by God, which is all that there is to causality ; nothing more needs to be added *ex parte Dei* for Him to be the cause of the world. Yet Thomism denies that God is literally the cause of the world, though the world is the effect of God — which seems contradictory or meaningless.<sup>21</sup>

The fact that we are dealing with a causal relationship between God and the world makes the present objection to divine timelessness much more powerful than similar arguments by Wolterstorff or Smith for the temporal existence of God or abstract objects on the basis of changing reference to them by temporal agents.<sup>22</sup> For clearly, relational properties like *worshiped by Jones* or *referred to by Smith* are much more akin to relations like *envied by* or *known by* than are relational properties like *sustaining the world* and are therefore more plausibly regarded as merely conceptual, not real. Therefore, against Wolterstorff and Smith it might be plausibly maintained that God or abstract objects do not really gain and lose relational properties of the sort mentioned, that the only real, relational properties involved belong to temporal agents, and that therefore the acquisition and loss of such properties by such agents do not suffice bring God or abstract objects into time. True, such timeless entities do change in their relations to temporal things, but it might be plausibly maintained that since such change is purely extrinsic it fails to temporalize such enti-

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20. William J. HILL explains : "For God to become a cause is quite simply for an effect to begin to be [...]. The realness of the transaction lies entirely on the side of the effect, serving as the basis for extrinsically denominating God as really causing. Thus for God to really cause is for the effect to really come to be" ("World Make a Difference to God," p. 156-157). What is not intelligible is why on this account the denomination of God as cause is only extrinsic, were this view not imposed *a priori* by divine simplicity.
21. Hence, I find myself constrained to agree with Schubert Ogden when he writes : "Recognizing that the God of Holy Scripture is undeniably a God who is related to his creatures, theologians have generally allowed that relational concepts may be predicated of deity, provided that they are understood analogically instead of literally. The difficulty, however, is that, on conventional metaphysical premisses, to say that God is not literally related to the world could only mean that he is literally not related to it ; and so the classical *analogia entis*, like traditional theism in general, has been continually caught in incoherence and self-contradiction" (Schubert OGDEN, *The Reality of God*, New York, Harper & Row, 1963, p. 151). Ogden errs in contrasting analogical use of terms to literal use ; the contrast to analogical use is univocal use and to literal use metaphorical use. Still he is correct that on Thomistic metaphysics God's being Creator, Lord, etc. are only extrinsic denominations because God is not related to the world.
22. Nicholas WOLTERSTORFF, "God Everlasting," in C. ORLEBEKE and L. SMEDES, ed., *God and the Good*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), p. 186-187 ; Quentin SMITH, *Language and Time*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 204-214. For a critique of such arguments, see Charles J. KELLY, "Why God Is Not Really Related to the World," *Philosophy Research Archives*, 14 (1988-1989), p. 476. See also Hugh J. MCCANN, "The God beyond Time," in Louis POJMAN, ed., *Philosophy of Religion*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1993, p. 237, who, however, fails to justify his denying that extrinsic, but real, change would be temporalizing. Leftow attempts to circumvent the present argument by maintaining that whether or not time exists, the proposition expressed by "God exists" is timelessly true (Brian LEFTOW, *Time and Eternity*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press [coll. "Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion"], 1991, p. 52). He just ignores the issue of whether God can exist timelessly and be really related to the world. His appeal to the timeless existence of numbers (p. 40-48) is vitiated precisely by the fact that numbers, unlike God, have no causal relation to the universe. Moreover, advocates of timeless truth hold that there are timelessly true propositions about temporal entities, so that the timeless truth of *God exists* does not imply that God exists timelessly.

ties. By contrast, even if God in creating the world does not change in His will or in the exercise of His power, He does acquire at the moment of creation a new relational property such as *sustaining the universe*, in virtue of the universe's being newly effected by Him at that moment.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, God must be in time, at least since the moment of creation.

### Thomistic Back-Pedaling

In response to considerations such as the above, many contemporary interpreters of St. Thomas have sought to recast Aquinas's doctrine that God has no real relation to the world in such a way as to allow that God does have such relations, yet without sacrificing His perfection. We need not dispute the claim that God's possessing real relations with the world does not entail any increase in His perfection ; but it seems to me that such re-interpretations of Aquinas completely gut Thomism and in particular undermine the doctrine of divine timelessness. Consider, for example, the construal of Aquinas's doctrine advocated by W. Norris Clarke in response to what Hartshorne has called "the divine relativity," that is, the idea that God is really related to the world in His relations of willing, knowing, and loving creatures. Adopting Aquinas's distinction between natural being (*esse in re*), that is to say, objective existence in the world, and intentional being (*esse intentionale*), that is to say, existence in consciousness as an object of knowledge, Clarke wants to say that God is truly related to the world through His intentional consciousness, but that this makes no difference to His "real being." He affirms :

[...] because of His free decision to create this possible world rather than that, to respond lovingly to this person in this way rather than that, God's field of intentional consciousness must be determinately and contingently other than it would and could have been had He decided in some other way. For free decisions are by definition contingent, could have been otherwise, and we should not have the least reluctance to affirm that in its creaturely

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23. We thereby circumvent the issues raised by John Yates in his interesting discussion of timeless causation and creation (YATES, *Timelessness of God*, chap. 5 ; cf. MCCANN, "God beyond Time," p. 238-239). Basically Yates argues that causation involves no transition from potency to act in the cause, so that changeless causing is possible. I should go further and say that causation need not involve any temporal transition from potency to act in the effect as well, so that both cause and effect could be timeless. Thus we may agree with McCann that causation is not inherently temporal or atemporal. But McCann fails to explain why God's willing or causing new effects would not be changes in Him, even though the results of His creative activity are not. When it comes to timeless creation of a temporal world, McCann and Yates at best show that God's act of creating need not be an intrinsic change in Him, but only an extrinsic change. They fail to show that an extrinsic change in God would not suffice to temporalize God. Yates's point that creation takes no time only shows that creating lacks temporal extension, not temporal location. What Yates (like McCann) needs is a robust doctrine of no real relation of God to the world, but he waffles on this (*ibid.*, p. 183). Similarly Liske feels driven to posit real relations of God to the world, but claims that the beginning or ceasing to be of a real relation need not temporalize its subject. He says that fatherhood, for example, is a real relation based on intrinsic properties of a man, but that this relation can cease to exist when the man's only child dies (LISKE, "Reale Beziehungen," p. 223-224). But at best this example only shows that God could acquire or lose real relations without any intrinsic change on His part, which I am conceding for the sake of argument.

intentional objects or terms the divine consciousness is contingently and determinately differentiated.<sup>24</sup>

Again, "His consciousness, in its intentional content, is *distinctly, determinately, and contingently differentiated* or *other* with respect to creatures because He has freely chosen this world, than it would and could have been had He chosen a different world or none at all."<sup>25</sup> Clarke thus concedes that God has a relation of personal consciousness (*relatio conscientiae personalis*) to the world, yet he insists that because this is a relation only in the intentional order, it does not affect God's "real being" and so cannot strictly be called a real relation. Remarkably, Clarke thinks that he faithfully represents Thomas's thinking on this matter since :

[...] in his strict terminology and theoretical framework such relations cannot be called "real relations," since all "real" relations for him require as their foundation some change or difference in the real intrinsic ("absolute") being of the subject related — which would not be compatible with the divine infinity, allowing, as it does, no increase or diminution of its intrinsic plenitude of real perfection. Thus, for St. Thomas, the *difference* in the divine consciousness as intentionally related to creatures does not thereby entail any *change* in the divine consciousness, let alone the intrinsic real being of God.<sup>26</sup>

Clarke's position on how God's relation to time is affected by His relation of personal consciousness to the world is nebulous. On the one hand, Clarke seems to affirm divine atemporal consciousness, writing :

[...] these relations are not first absent at one moment of time and later present at another, but simply present without change in the eternal Now of God present to all points of time. This eternal Now is itself outside the flow of our motion-dependent time, but present in its own unique time-transcending way to all points of time without internal succession in God. Difference (*this* rather than *that*) does not logically imply *change* (*this after that*).<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand Clarke seems to allow tensed change in God's consciousness, entertaining a model according to which the "divine field of intentional consciousness is constantly expanding to match the ongoing evolution of temporal history, in exact

24. W. Norris CLARKE, "A New Look at the Immutability of God," in Robert J. ROTH, ed., *God Knowable and Unknowable*, New York, Fordham University Press, 1973, p. 55. Cf. William J. HILL, "Does God Know the Future? Aquinas and Some Moderns," *Theological Studies*, 36 (1975), p. 14 : "In this sphere of intentionality, God determines Himself to be the sort of God He is by choosing to create this existing universe rather than any of an infinite number of other worlds possible to Him. This makes no difference to God's nature, not to His activity of loving and knowing, but it obviously makes a difference regarding what He knows and loves. Had God chosen not to create or to create a different cosmos than the one we have, He would *in this sense* be a different God than He in fact is." See also Mann, "Simplicity and Immutability," p. 273-275, who claims that the *content* of God's knowledge could be different from what it is, but that the content of God's omniscience is not identical to His essence ; similarly, not the content of what God wills, but God's willing power or activity is His essence.

25. N. CLARKE, "New Look at Immutability," p. 56.

26. W. Norris CLARKE, *The Philosophical Approach to God*, Winston-Salem, NC, Wake Forest University, 1979, p. 90, summarizing his earlier article. In this second piece, Clarke appears prepared to jettison the doctrine of God's having no real relation to the world, but this is appearance only, since the older doctrine he still holds to be true ; it is just that the meaning of "real relation" has changed. We shall see that it is Clarke who changes the meaning of "real relation" so as to make the traditional doctrine more credible ; but in doing so he undercuts not only the classic doctrine, but the core Thomistic conception of God.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

contemporaneity with the latter's ongoing 'now.'"<sup>28</sup> Yet because this becoming occurs only in consciousness, God's "intrinsic real being" is said to remain immutable. In a later piece, Clarke shows himself even more open to this latter model, positing a sort of divine time, distinct from our physically based time, which is founded on "the pure succession of contents of consciousness, of 'intentional being,' [...] without any 'moving around' or physical motion inside His own intrinsic being."<sup>29</sup> In the unity of God's consciousness there is a unique mode of temporal succession somehow correlated with ours. But God's intrinsic being remains immutable and incapable of increased perfection.

It seems to me painfully apparent that far from faithfully representing the teaching of Aquinas, Clarke has grossly misconstrued and contradicted it, leaving himself defenseless against the current objection to divine timelessness. Clarke's distinguishing between God's consciousness and God's intrinsic, real being is either spurious or incompatible with divine simplicity. I am inclined to say that the distinction is just spurious, based upon Clarke's confusion of the reality of an object of consciousness with the reality of consciousness of an object. The intentional object itself has no objective, independent reality, but certainly God's consciousness is a real and objective aspect of His being. Hence, it is futile to try to allow God's consciousness to be different in various possible worlds without allowing that God is different in different possible worlds. But then God has contingent properties with which He is not identical, so that divine simplicity is destroyed.<sup>30</sup> If we insist on His simplicity, then God will have the same properties in every world with respect to willing, knowing, and loving as He does, so that the price of maintaining divine simplicity is destroying divine freedom.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, given God's necessary existence, there would be only one logically possible world. Since that is absurd, God must have different properties across worlds. As Alston points out in his analysis of Hartshorne and Aquinas on this score, if we say that God's perfect knowledge would have been different had He created some other world, in that He would then have had knowledge of that world

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28. N. CLARKE, "New Look at Immutability," p. 65. So also Hill, who writes: "God becomes what He was not — not in Himself but in the world and in history. It is not simply the case that what is other than God changes, but rather that God changes — not in Himself but in the other and by way of the other. God changes not absolutely but relationally, *i.e.*, in terms of those dispositions of knowing and loving that He chooses to adopt toward a universe of creatures that in a finite and temporal way determine themselves" (HILL, "God Know the Future," p. 15). I take it that Hill means that God undergoes no intrinsic change in His activities, but that as a consequence of extrinsic change in Him due to His relations with temporal creatures God is temporal. Being temporal will entail intrinsic change in God, in that He has a changing present, but that change is explanatorily posterior to the extrinsic change that brings Him into time.

29. N. CLARKE, *Philosophical Approach to God*, p. 94; cf. p. 96.

30. A point made by Alvin PLANTINGA, *Does God Have a Nature?*, Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 1980, p. 39-40. Plantinga errs, however, in equating contingently possessed properties with accidental properties.

31. As Hartshorne protested, "It simply cannot be that everything in God is necessary, including his knowledge that this world exists, unless the world is in the same sense necessary and there is no contingency whatever" (HARTSHORNE, *Divine Relativity*, p. 14). Cf. OGDEN, *Reality of God*, p. 17.

rather than this, then divine cognitive relations to creatures are partially constitutive of God.<sup>32</sup> And that entails that God is really related to the world.

On the other hand, if we do drive a wedge between God's consciousness and His immutable nature, then God is not simple. In particular God's knowledge and will are not His essence, since these are different from world to world.<sup>33</sup> But if God is not simple, then the ground is removed for any claim that God does not have real relations to the world, for that claim was anchored, as we saw, in the divine simplicity.<sup>34</sup> Clarke asserts that divine simplicity only means that there are no really distinct ontological parts making up the absolute divine being and that this does not exclude a multiplicity of relations<sup>35</sup>; but this assertion is manifestly untrue, since relations are accidents and God, in virtue of His simplicity, is explicitly said to have no accidents. Clarke's reinterpretation thus strikes at the very heart of the Thomistic conception of God as the unmodified act of being itself. In the end Clarke himself admits that his distinction between God's relational being and intrinsic being is artificial and that God's inner being is affected by His relations with the world; Clarke would only insist that these bring no improvement to God. We need not dispute this last claim; but now no grounds remain for denying God's real relation to the temporal world.

Secondly, a word should be added about Clarke's characterization of real relations, since a number of contemporary thinkers have sought to defend the Thomistic solution to the objection under consideration by claiming, as Clarke does, that a necessary condition of a real relation is some intrinsic change in the subject having that

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32. William P. ALSTON, "Hartshorne and Aquinas: A Via Media," in John B. COBB, JR. and Franklin I. GAMWELL, ed., *Existence and Actuality*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 83-84.

33. One cannot save the situation by distinguishing with Mann God's power or activity of willing and knowing from what He wills and knows, for power and activity are not identical. Everyone agrees that God has the same power across worlds, but this is not to say that God has the same activity across worlds, since activity involves the *exercising* of some power. In worlds in which God does not create, He retains the power to create and love creatures, but in such a world He is not exercising that power. Hence, God's activity of creating and sustaining the universe is not identical with the power to do so, and His activity of loving creatures is not identical with his disposition to love them should He create them. Thus, in worlds in which God refrains from creating, He is clearly different than He is in the actual world. Hence, God is not simple.

34. This is especially clear in AQUINAS's exposition in *Summa contra gentiles* 2. 12. 2, where he argues that relations which refer to God's effects cannot exist in Him as accidents, since He is simple, nor can they (like God's action) be identical with His essence because as relational terms they would make God's very being relative to something else; "Therefore, such relations do not really exist in God." See also A.J. KELLY, "God: How Near a Relation?," *Thomist*, 34 (1970), p. 216, who affirms that "classical theism, and Thomism in particular, sees no possibility at all in there being any other relation between God and the world than that of reason alone. The pitch of the argument lies in the absolute Is-ness of God, the sheerly existent One. God cannot be said to acquire a new real relationship to anyone or anything without truly denying the ontic absoluteness of the divinity."

35. N. CLARKE, *Philosophical Approach to God*, p. 101. Of course, if Clarke's claim were true, then there is no bar to real relations accruing to the partless God. Cf. Wright's claim that God has only a relation of reason to creatures because "He gains nothing from them by causing them, no increase in goodness, perfection, or reality" (John H. WRIGHT, "Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom," *Theological Studies*, 38 [1977], p. 456) and Westphal's interpretation than in denying God a real relation to creatures, Thomas is only saying that God is related to them in such a way as to render invalid any inference of dependence on them (WESTPHAL, "Temporality and Finitism," p. 564). Such watered-down reinterpretations of Aquinas's position are a dagger in the heart of Thomism because they contradict God's simplicity, in that He has real relations and so is not being itself subsisting.

relation. Since the world's beginning to exist is said to be immutably and timelessly willed by God, its coming to be involves no intrinsic *change* in God and hence no real relation on God's part to the world. Thus, Peter Geach asserts that the denial that God is really related to the world is traditionally bound up with the denial that God undergoes change. Contrasting real change to pseudo-change, or what he facetiously calls "Cambridge change,"<sup>36</sup> Geach takes God's becoming Creator to be merely a "Cambridge change" for Him.<sup>37</sup> Geach has no criterion for discerning real change, and the examples of Cambridge change which he offers are instances of relational changes in objects undergoing no change of intrinsic, non-relational properties. Presumably, then, God at most changes extrinsically in creating a temporal world and so is not really related to the world.

Such reasoning is predicated on an incorrect understanding of real relations. Intrinsic change in a thing's properties is neither sufficient nor necessary for that thing's relation to something else being real.<sup>38</sup> Thomas's paradigm example of an asymmetric real relation, a knower's relation to the object of knowledge, not only implies no intrinsic change, but no extrinsic change either; indeed, it could be a timeless and immutable relation. On the other hand, if the object of knowledge did undergo intrinsic change, that would do nothing to make its relation to the knower real. Similarly, creation itself is not, in Thomas's lights, any change in the thing created, but a sheer beginning to exist with a real relation of dependence on God. If in-

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36. Peter GEACH, *God and the Soul*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul (coll. "Studies in Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion"), 1969, p. 71-72. The Cambridge criterion for change was: a thing  $x$  has changed if we have " $F(x)$  at time  $t$ " true and then " $F(x)$  at time  $t_1$ " false. On this account Socrates would change by becoming shorter than Theaetetus.

37. GEACH, "God's Relation to the World," p. 322-323; see also ID., *God and the Soul*, chap. 6. Cf. YATES's claim that the denial of a relation in God means only that God is not changed by creation and that in creation only a "Cambridge" change is involved (YATES, *Timelessness of God*, p. 183, 141). Although Geach thinks thus to have solved the problem of God's causal relation to the world, he does admit to "severe difficulties" with respect to God's knowledge and will. For in this case there is no real change in the object; so how can the objects of God's knowledge and will be really related to Him and how can He fail to be really related to them? Geach attempts to solve this problem by construing God's knowledge as practical, rather than observational, and so, like His will, unchangeable. But even if successful, this move only shows God's knowledge and will to be changeless, not unrelated really to the world. *Au contraire*, the knowledge and will by which God governs the world would have to be related to the world, it seems, in order to be efficacious.

38. See LISKE, "Reale Beziehungen," p. 211-112. James F. Ross adopts Geach's terminology in characterizing changes and relations, but he recognizes that calling a relation merely a "Cambridge relation" from the viewpoint of a certain thing does not imply that the things are so related only in thought, but not in reality; it only implies that from the viewpoint of a given *relatum* that *relatum* did not change as a condition of that relation's holding (James F. ROSS, "Creation," *Journal of Philosophy*, 77 [1980], p. 625). Nonetheless, Ross misleads in stating that a relation is real from the standpoint of a given *relatum* just in case that *relatum*'s undergoing a real change is either logically necessary or was logically sufficient for that relation's obtaining. There is no reason to think that "real" relations could not obtain between two timeless, immutable entities, e.g., the logical equivalence of two tenseless propositions. Thus, when Ross asserts, "The relation 'x creates y' is real from the standpoint of the creatures that begin to be, instead of not being at all, but is merely a Cambridge relation from the standpoint of the Creator (whose creation is a constant force)" (*ibid.*, p. 626), he falsely opposes "real relation" to "Cambridge relation." Not only does the beginning to be of creatures fail to satisfy his (mistaken) definition of "real relation" (since beginning to exist is not a change), but there are no grounds for contrasting a real relation with a Cambridge relation anyway, since the latter may be just as much a part of objective reality as the former, even though one *relatum* did not change.

trinsic change were a necessary condition of real relations, then God and the event of creation do not stand in any real relation at all, whether from the side of the creature or of God, which is absurd.

The immutability of God's will, knowledge, and love in relation to creatures is thus wholly beside the point with respect to the question of God's real relation to the world.<sup>39</sup> The issue is not intrinsic *change*, but intrinsic (counterfactual) *difference*: if a world of other creatures were actual, would God's will, knowledge, and love relationships be different? If we affirm this, then God has different intrinsic properties from world to world and so real relations with the creatures willed, known, and loved by Him. As Hill admits:

[...] somehow or other God with a creation and God without it are not entirely the same thing, and it appears overly facile to dismiss this as exclusively on the side of the creature. There remains the possibility of intrinsic differences in God's knowing and loving, differences which need not bespeak any transmutation of his being. No entitative transition from not-knowing to knowing or from not-loving to loving is implied.<sup>40</sup>

To be sure, God's being different in will, knowledge, and love across various possible worlds is ultimately due to His own free decree as to what sort of creatures to create. But the dependence of which creatures are actual upon God only shows that God's relation to creatures is freely chosen by Him, not that that relation is unreal. Again Hill makes the point:

God does freely determine himself to know and love this actual world rather than any of the other infinite number of possible worlds [...]. Ultimately, God is choosing, in unqualified freedom, to so specify himself. But the point is that there occurs a determination within God as knowing and loving, on which basis he is other, relatively speaking, than he would be had he determined himself in some other way.<sup>41</sup>

Wholly apart from the question of intrinsic change on God's part, then, the admission that God is intrinsically different in different possible worlds, in that what He knows, wills, and loves is diverse across worlds, demonstrates that His relation with creatures

39. The confusion of impassibility with immutability also besets Richard Creel's treatment of these problems in Richard E. CREEL, *Divine Impassibility*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986. For example, Creel admits that God's knowledge is conditioned by whatever world is actual, but he denies that this implies passibility in God because passibility is vulnerability to change induced by something distinct from that in which the change takes place (*ibid.*, p. 82). This is a wholly different conception of what it is to be impassible as he defined it on p. 11: imperviousness to causal influence from external factors or incapacity to be affected by an outside force. (*N.B.* even these disjuncts are not equivalent!) There is no reason to think that "being causally influenced" entails "being vulnerable to change" or, better that "being conditioned" entails "being vulnerable to change." If God's knowledge consists wholly of tenselessly true beliefs about the world, then it could be immutable and yet passible in that it is conditioned by which world is actual. Similarly, if, as Creel suggests, what God wills is tenseless and time-indexed, then it can be immutable (*ibid.*, p. 19); but, *pace* Creel, it is still conditioned in the sense that God wills an event  $e$  at  $t_2$  in the actual world, but not in  $W^*$ , because in the actual world some earlier event  $e'$  occurs at  $t_1$ , whereas  $e'$  does not occur at  $t_1$  in  $W^*$ . Thus, Creel is wrong when he asserts that "a passible being could not be immutable" (*ibid.*, p. 11).

40. HILL, "World Make a Difference to God," p. 157. Cf. LISKE, "Reale Beziehungen," p. 227, who trembles on the verge of admitting that the world makes a counterfactual difference to God, but pulls back because he believes that this would sacrifice God's absoluteness and make God a part of the universe — a pity he did not know WESTPHAL, "Temporality and Finitism," p. 550-564.

41. HILL, "World Make a Difference to God," p. 157.



is not merely conceptual, all the diversity residing in the creatures alone, but real because it is founded in intrinsic properties of God Himself. But if God has real relations with the temporal universe, no reason remains for denying God's temporality, even if His becoming Creator is a "Cambridge" change. For even extrinsic change can be sufficient for real relations. In Geach's example of Socrates' becoming shorter than Theaetetus due to the latter's growth, only Theaetetus undergoes intrinsic change, but Socrates's being shorter than Theaetetus as a result of that change is still a real relation. With respect to creation, we have conceded for argument's sake that God's creating the world is not the consequence of an intrinsic change on His part. Accordingly, His becoming Creator could be construed as a "Cambridge" change, resulting from the universe's springing into being. But it does not follow that the relation which accrues to God as a result is therefore unreal, since intrinsic change is not a necessary condition of a real relation. Even if God is conceived to be timeless *sans* creation, so that He cannot properly be said to *change* (even extrinsically) in virtue of the new relation He acquires at the first moment of time, still the newness of that relation suffices to bring Him into time.

Would-be defenders of Thomism who seek to soften Aquinas's position so as to allow God real relations to the world under the condition that God's perfection and causal independence be maintained actually destroy Thomism, for they thereby sacrifice God's simplicity, the identity of His essence with His pure act of being, and divine atemporality.

### God's Trans-World Similarity

Actually, Aquinas has a quite different way of eluding the dilemma of God's knowledge, will, and love's either being identical with His essence, thereby removing divine freedom and contingency, or else being accidental to Him, thereby destroying divine simplicity and His unrelatedness to the world. What Hartshorne uncritically presupposed is that God knows, wills, and loves the world. But this is precisely what Aquinas's doctrine of no real relation of God to the world denies. Bizarre as it may sound, it is the implication of Aquinas's position that God is perfectly similar across possible worlds, even the same in worlds in which He refrains from creation as in worlds in which He creates. As Zagzebski explains :

Since the primary object of God's knowledge is his own essence, and since his essence could not have been different, it follows that God's mental state of knowing is the same in all possible worlds. His knowing state would have been the same state even, in fact, if he had decided not to create a world at all.<sup>42</sup>

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42. Linda T. ZAGZEBSKI, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 88. By "knowing state" Zagzebski evidently means cognitive state, since she affirms that God's knowledge does vary across worlds ; *i.e.*, the same divine cognitive state is God's knowing *p* in one world and His knowing *not-p* in another. According to Zagzebski, "the single state of knowing his own essence that constitutes God's epistemic state in all possible worlds has the accidental property of secondarily knowing one set of contingent truths in one world and another set of contingent truths in another world" (*ibid.*, p. 89). Dependent as it is on the doctrine of divine simplicity, Thomas Flint dismisses this position as "less than promising" (Thomas P. FLINT, "Critical notice of *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowl-*

For in none of these worlds does God have any relation to anything *extra se*. In all these worlds God never acts differently, He never cognizes differently, He never wills differently ; He is just the simple, unrelated act of being.

Of course, in these various worlds different creatures have the accidents of being sustained, known, and loved by God. The entire difference between worlds is to be found there, on the side of creatures.<sup>43</sup> But that brings us back to Aquinas's doctrine of creation, which I previously characterized as unusually strange. In every world God exists in every respect the same. Even in worlds in which He does not create, His act of being, by which creation is produced, is no different in these otherwise empty worlds than in worlds chock-full of contingent beings of every order. The only difference is that in worlds in which God creates there is, from God's perspective, that *relatio rationis* to finite things.<sup>44</sup>

The notion that God is no different whether He creates or does not create and that the difference between these two alternatives lies wholly in the created being meshes nicely with the Thomistic understanding of efficient causality. Since the categories of action and passion (passivity) are taken to be identical in the real order and only conceptually distinct, causation is conceived to reside wholly in the effect produced, not in the cause. Clarke explains :

The action of the agent is shown to consist, not in any change or motion in the agent, but in the very production of the effect in the patient, or the effect itself as being produced. The productive action of the cause, therefore, takes place, properly speaking, not within the cause but within the patient : it *is* the emergence of the effect itself as from/or due to the cause. Hence, the action and the passion, the producing and the being produced, are

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edge," *Faith and Philosophy*, 11 [1994], p. 484) ; indeed, it seems to me that Zagzebski's position is self-contradictory. For as a simple being God cannot have the envisioned property, much less have it accidentally, since *ex hypothesi* God is the same across possible worlds.

43. One of the few consistent Thomists is thus Charles J. KELLY, "Why God Is Not Really Related to the World," *Philosophy Research Archives*, 14 (1988-1989), p. 472 ; cf. ID., "The Logic of Eternal Knowledge from the Standpoint of the Aristotelian Syllogistic," *Modern Schoolman*, 66 (1988), p. 29-54. But Kelly is content merely to examine the logic of statements ostensibly predicating real relations of God and to re-state accurately Aquinas's position that nothing can be predicated of God other than an activity which belong exclusively and necessarily to Him, so that all such relations really lodge in creatures. But Kelly does nothing to render this position credible. He does claim that propositions which are equivalent in the active and passive voices retain the same logical subject ; so if "was created by God" expresses a real relation in the world, then "created the world" cannot express a real relation in God ("Why God Is Not Really Related," p. 464). But this assertion is obviously false in the case of causal relations. In "John hit the ball" and "The ball was hit by John," there is no reason to take the logical subject as being the same or to infer that even if it were, only one term is really related to the other. For some discussion of Kelly's analysis of statements predicating real relations of God, see James E. TAYLOR, "Kelly on the Logic of Eternal Knowledge," *Modern Schoolman*, 67 (1990), p. 141-147 ; Charles J. KELLY, "On the Logic of Eternal Knowledge : A Rejoinder," *Modern Schoolman*, 68 (1991), p. 163-169.
44. Yates expresses the doctrine straightforwardly : "Creation [...] actively considered is only a logical relation. The divine power is God himself. When God creates he does nothing else than to be God. The being of creating is not posited in God as though it were God plus something else [...]. That God creates, and conserves, makes an absolute difference to the creature and no difference to God. This is not a mere corollary of the relationship of creation but its very essence" (YATES, *Timelessness of God*, p. 181). Since God exists in every possible world it is inexplicable why creation does not take place in every world. Cf. OGDEN, *Reality of God*, p. 17. It is no wonder that Alston cheers Hartshorne for having helped to make the traditional doctrine of creation more attractive, plausible, and coherent than it was in the Thomistic framework !

strictly identical in the real order and ontologically located in the subject affected. They are distinguished conceptually, however, in terms of the relations involved. Action is the effect-being-produced considered as from/or due to the agent. Passion is the identical effect considered as received or residing in the patient. Causing and being caused are not, therefore, two events, one taking place in the agent and the other in the patient. They constitute a single ontological event.<sup>45</sup>

Given such an understanding of causation, one can perhaps make sense of the view that the difference between God's causing or not causing the universe lies entirely in the universe itself and not in God. God's creating the universe just is the universe's beginning to be with the accidental property of being caused by God.

In the end, however, Thomas's doctrine of creation is just not credible. The Thomistic analysis of causation seems implausible in light of our own experience as causes. So long as we consider external causes, we can give Thomas's analysis a run for its money: the brick shattering the glass, for example, is in reality just the shattering of the glass by the brick. But once we consider ourselves introspectively as agent causes, the ontological identity of action and passion becomes implausible. *Causing* and *being caused by* are not just inert relations: *causing* is an activity, and as such lodges in the agent. When we act as causes, we experience action as something we do. That is not the case with the passive *being caused*. The reality of our experience of ourselves as causal agents belies the claim that action and passion are only conceptually, not really, distinct. Since God is an agent, the action of creating must be something attributable to Him, not just to His effects as produced.

In any case, even if action and passion were identical in reality, it still does not make good sense to say that in any instance of causation one has passion without any action. That would be to say that the effect is produced by nothing, which is analytically false. But in the creation of the universe, that is exactly the situation on Thomas's view. We have a passion *being produced* but no action *producing*, a real effect but no real cause. It might be said that technically speaking in creation we have no passion either, since there is no subject to receive the act of being. But then it would follow that creation is not an instance of causation at all, which only serves to cast doubt on the definition of "causation" employed. Creation is enough like causation to warrant our demanding that if there is a real creature, then there is a real Creator.

Wholly apart from the analysis of causation, however, Thomas's doctrine of creation makes it unintelligible why the universe exists rather than nothing. The reason obviously cannot lie in God, either in His nature or His activity (which are only conceptually distinct anyway), for these are perfectly similar in every possible world. Nor can the reason lie in the creatures themselves, in that they have a real relation to God of *being freely willed by God*. For their existing with that relation cannot be explanatorily prior to their existing with that relation. What is wanted is something posterior to God in the order of explanation but prior to the existence of creatures

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45. W. Norris CLARKE, "Causality and Time," in *Experience, Existence, and the Good*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1961, p. 146; cf. Id., "New Look at Immutability," p. 51.

really related to God. But in Thomas's system there is an explanatory lacuna in that middle position.

Few contemporary interpreters of St. Thomas have faced this issue squarely. John Wright does, and he finds himself forced to conclude that :

[...] we can't say that "Creator" is wholly and simply a matter of extrinsic denomination founded on the reality of an extrinsic denomination, that is, of creatures. It will not do because the reality of creatures and of their dependence presupposes, not merely logically but ontologically, the activity of God as determined to produce creatures and to produce these rather than some other possible creatures. We may call this determination what we like, but we cannot reduce it merely to a posterior construction of the human mind. To do so would be to make the actual existence of the world either absurd or independent of God (since then there is objectively nothing in the divine activity, no reason at all why creatures exist rather than not exist, or these creatures rather than some other possible ones) or else to make it the inevitable consequence of necessary divine activity.<sup>46</sup>

Making the existence of the universe the inevitable consequence of divine activity results from saying that the reason the universe exists is due to the simple essence of God ; making the existence of the universe independent of God results from saying that there is no reason why creatures exist rather than nothing ; and making the existence of the universe absurd results from Thomism, saying that God has no real relation to the world, but the world has a real relation to God.

I conclude, then, that the escape from the present objection advocated by Thomists, namely, denying the truth of (3), ultimately leads to absurdity and so must be rejected.

### A WAY OUT FOR ADVOCATES OF DIVINE TIMELESSNESS ?

One possible way of escape for defenders of divine timelessness does remain : deny the objectivity of tense and temporal becoming and therefore also the (necessary) truth of : 4) if God is really related to the temporal world, God is temporal. If one embraces (to borrow McTasggart's convenient terminology) a B-Theory of time, according to which there are no tensed facts and temporal becoming is merely a subjective feature of consciousness, then the argument is undercut. For in that case all events comprising the four-dimensional space-time manifold simply exist tenselessly, and God can be conceived to exist "outside" this manifold, spacelessly and timelessly.<sup>47</sup> Given a B-Theory of time, God either exists tenselessly without creation or

46. WRIGHT, "Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom," p. 457. Wright gives a half-hearted attempt to justify the denial of real relations in God by insisting that creatures are not the ultimate term of the relation ; since they are relative to God, God regards them as such, so that He is the ultimate term of the relation. But this defense is meritless : the relation of *sustaining* which God has to the universe is asymmetric and so terminates in creatures ; another relation links them back to God. In the end Wright accepts real relations in God, only insisting that these do not affect the divine perfection (*ibid.*, p. 460-461). Aquinas's solution becomes especially fantastic when we recall that he also employs it to explain the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity as Jesus of Nazareth, for it is incredible to imagine that God in worlds in which the Son does not become incarnate is precisely the same as in worlds in which He does.

47. As Denbigh puts it, "The B-series is as if the Deity could timelessly witness all events, laid out in order along the time coordinate, as we can witness objects laid out in space" (K.G. DENBIGH, *An Inventive Uni-*

co-exists tenselessly with creation, depending upon the free decree of His will, but no world includes both states of affairs. Thus, God, in creating the world, enters into no new relations whatsoever. He tenselessly stands in the relation of creating the Big Bang at  $t_0$ . The date  $t_0$  indicates, not the time of His acting, but the time of the effect. God does not come into the relation *Creator of* with the Big Bang singularity at  $t_0$  and then cease to stand in this relation to it at  $t_1$ ; rather He timelessly stands in the Creator of relation to all events at their respective times. By a single, timeless act God tenselessly produces events at  $t_0, t_1, t_2, \dots$ . Thus, on the B-theory of time, one can successfully divorce God's action from its effects in such a way that the action is timeless and the effects temporal. By denying the reality of temporal becoming and tensed facts, the advocate of divine timelessness undercuts premiss (4), thereby allowing one to maintain God's atemporality and His creative activity in the temporal world without denying God's real relation to that world. In fact, as I have elsewhere argued, many of the statements of classical advocates of divine atemporality seem to presuppose just such a B-Theory of time.<sup>48</sup>

The bottom line to our discussion of the objection to divine timelessness based on God's creation of the world is therefore that this objection is cogent just in case an A-Theory of time is correct. If this conclusion is correct, then significant advance of the discussion of the nature of divine eternity in light of creation can only take place by tackling the difficult and multi-faceted problem of the A- versus B-Theory of time.

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verse, London, Hutchinson, 1975, p. 30-31). Cf. Keith SEDDON, *Time : a Philosophical Treatment*, London, Croon Helm, 1987, p. 135.

48. See William Lane CRAIG, "Was Thomas Aquinas a B-Theorist of Time ?," *New Scholasticism*, 59 (1985), p. 475-483 ; ID., "St. Anselm on Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingency," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*, 42 (1986), p. 93-104.