

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA  
SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

GOD'S ETERNAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE FLOW OF TIME IN AQUINAS:  
THE EFFICACY OF HEURISTIC DEVICES

A PAPER

PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE

PHIL 881

BY

DAVID PENSGARD

APRIL 2012

Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann have revived the topic of God's relationship to time and have written extensively in defense of divine timeless eternity.<sup>1</sup> Their position is that God exists "in" eternity. This entails that God is "outside" of time and that God can see all of the moments of time "from" eternity. God creates and knows about the world "from" eternity. God's foreknowledge is actually eternal knowledge of the temporal. Stump and Kretzmann see themselves as standing in a very old tradition. They see Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas as being forerunners in the same tradition in which they currently work.

Shanley has engaged with Stump and Kretzmann over several details of Aquinas' theory.<sup>2</sup> He has argued that Stump and Kretzmann do not understand the nature of divine causal knowing in Aquinas, and so, have misapplied this principle in their interpretation of his theory. Instead, they mistakenly view God's knowledge as being limited to things and natures rather than events or states of affairs (particulars including free-will choices).<sup>3</sup> In addition, argues Shanley, as members of a group of misinterpreters of Aquinas, Stump and Kretzmann also read too much into the heuristic devices that Aquinas employs. These models can be misread to indicate two things that Aquinas never intended: that God is a passive perceptual knower, and that the world is static from the higher, eternal perspective.<sup>4</sup>

With regard to these models, Shanley ultimately concludes that they have only very limited application and that the true theory cannot be modeled comprehensively or well.<sup>5</sup> Nor can the object of

---

<sup>1</sup> Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78:8 (1981): 429-458. See also, "God's Knowledge and Its Causal Effects," in *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith*, ed. Thomas Senor (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995), 94-124; "Atemporal Duration: A Reply to Fitzgerald," *Journal of Philosophy* 84 (1987): 214-219; "Eternity, Awareness, and Action," *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992): 463-482; "Prophecy Past Truth, and Eternity," in *Philosophical Perspectives V*, ed. James Tomberlin, 395-424. Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Brian J. Shanley, "Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* LXXI:2 (1997): 197-224. For the rest of the discussion see, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity and God's Knowledge: A Reply to Shanley," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* LXXII:3 (1998): 439-445; and Shanley, "Aquinas On God's Causal Knowledge: A Reply to Stump and Kretzmann," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* LXXII:3 (1998): 447-457.

<sup>3</sup> Shanley, "Eternal," 206-207, 215.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 199-200.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

Aquinas' theory be thoroughly understood due to a certain degree of ineffability of the true relationship between God's eternity and the realm of temporal becoming.<sup>6</sup>

This is an important contemporary topic of discussion, and I take Aquinas to be a central figure in our millennia-long attempt to accurately describe the relationship between divine eternity and time. Understanding Aquinas' theory is a very important prerequisite for any philosopher wishing to do new work in this field. Toward that end, the discussion between Shanley and Stump and Kretzmann will act as an appropriate place to engage the major issues that are involved. This paper will focus on three elements of this discussion: A) the two models that Aquinas used and the efficacy of models in general, B) the role of the causal-practical account of divine knowledge in Aquinas, and C) the role that eternity plays in Aquinas' understanding of God's knowledge of future contingents.

With regard to A), I will explore the two models that Aquinas borrows from Boethius and I will argue that Shanley's conclusion is incorrect regarding heuristic devices in general. In contrast to Shanley, I will argue that Aquinas' theory can be accurately illustrated by a model and I will put forward a model intended to capture all of the relevant facets of Aquinas' theory (B and C above).

Regarding the position of Stump and Kretzmann, I will argue that they have not taken several important aspects of Aquinas' theory into account just as Shanley has suggested. They have produced an interpretation of Aquinas that entails a static view of history. Thus, they have read too much into the two models that Aquinas employs. Yet, Shanley's position is also problematic on two, and possibly three, points. First, he is wrong to conclude that Aquinas' theory cannot be modeled. Second, he is incorrect that Aquinas' theory completely addresses and solves the various problems that divine eternity creates (problems like the compatibility of: free will with foreknowledge, the causal-practical model with the presence of moral evil, and real temporal becoming with timeless eternity). Third, the manner in which Shanley applies ineffability may be inappropriate.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## Aquinas' models

I will begin by examining the two models that Aquinas uses. Models have a way of efficiently conveying complex relationships, but each model's weaknesses must be discussed verbally to steer the reader around possible misapplications. Aquinas is aware of this and has provided a context for each of his models.

I shall call the first model the watchtower model. Aquinas employs this model in his commentary on Aristotle's *On Interpretation*.

God, however, is wholly outside the order of time, stationed as it were at the summit [or watchtower] of eternity, which is wholly simultaneous, and to Him the whole course of time is subjected in one simple intuition. For this reason, He sees in one glance everything that is effected in the evolution of time, and each thing as it is in itself, and it is not future to Him in relation to His view.<sup>7</sup>

This model is a simple one. It is easily grasped, but it can be used to reach conclusions beyond what Aquinas intended. Shanley points out some of the appropriate conclusions that Aquinas intends for us to draw. First, it shows the constraints of the temporal viewer who is limited to viewing the flow of history as a succession. Second, God can view the flow of history differently; God is not limited to successive viewing. Instead, God relates to every temporal moment directly and non-successively. The ability to do this comes from the special perspective that eternity affords.<sup>8</sup> It would be a mistake to use this model to imply that history is like a timeline, static and unchanging in such a way that it is on the same ontological footing as divine eternity. This mistaken view leads one to conclude that the static nature of history is only apparent from the eternal perspective, and that temporal creatures cannot see history in this way. Stump and Kretzmann seem to fall prey to this misreading of the model.

According to Stump and Kretzmann, a different nuance is missed by Shanley. The watchtower model is intended only to convey the way that time and eternity relate. We must first understand "eternity as a mode of existence as real as time but irreducible to time or to any third mode of

---

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Peri Hermeneias*, I, L14, 20, Trans. Jean T. Oesterle. See also, *De Malo*, 16, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Shanley, "Eternal," 197.

existence.”<sup>9</sup> And, after realizing this, they argue, then the unique presentness of this moment, “now,” becomes inherently relational. On my analysis, this position appears to be a patent rejection of presentism, the view that temporal becoming is metaphysically basic and real. Temporal becoming cannot be both metaphysically basic and also inherently relational.

Thus, Shanley, and Stump and Kretzmann, seem to be making reciprocal claims. Each thinks that the other is misinterpreting the watchtower model and reaching the wrong conclusion. And, the conclusion of each is the presuppositional error that each sees in the other’s interpretation of the model. I agree with Shanley that Stump and Kretzmann are reading their eternalist<sup>10</sup> notions into the model. I also disagree with Stump and Kretzmann when they claim that Shanley misunderstands that relations are the purpose of the model.<sup>11</sup> Instead, Stump and Kretzmann seem to be adding a substantive metaphysical commitment that is not found in Aquinas. By arguing that this model is intended to show that “concepts such as *present* and *now* [are] irreducibly relational,”<sup>12</sup> they are adding the eternalist view to Aquinas. That is, they are removing the reality of temporal becoming entirely from Aquinas. In contrast, it seems to me, and to Shanley,<sup>13</sup> that Aquinas espouses presentism, which is the retention of real temporal becoming. Aquinas adds eternity to real time and does so with the express intention of not allowing his understanding of eternity to destroy time by making temporal becoming an illusion.

I shall call the second model that Aquinas borrows from Boethius the circle model. Aquinas uses this model in *Summa Contra Gentiles*:

Eternity must be present to all of time or each instant of time as present. A sort of example of this is seen in a circle: for a designated point in the circumference, even if it be divisible, nonetheless cannot coexist together at the same position with any other point since it is the order of position that constitutes the continuity of the circumference. But the center, which is outside the circumference, is directly opposed to any designated point on the circumference. Accordingly, whatever is any part of time coexists with

---

<sup>9</sup> Stump and Kretzmann, “Eternity and God’s Knowledge,” 443.

<sup>10</sup> To clarify my terms, presentists conclude that temporal becoming is metaphysically fundamental. No time but the present is real to the presentist. Conversely, the eternalist concludes that temporal becoming is an illusion. All times are equally real; all moments are on an equal ontological footing.

<sup>11</sup> Stump and Kretzmann, “Eternity and God’s Knowledge,” 443.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Shanley, “Eternal,” 199.

eternity as if present to it even though it be past or future with respect to another part of time. But nothing can coexist as present to eternity except as a whole, because eternity does not have the duration of succession. Accordingly the divine intellect sees whatever occurs during the entire course of time as present. It is not the case, however, that any part of time existed always. It therefore remains that God has knowledge of what does not yet exist in the course of time.<sup>14</sup>

Like the watchtower model, the circle model is also quite simple and easy to grasp. One aspect of this model, however, can be misconstrued. While God's eternity is simple it also has elements of extension. Thus, the "center" of the circle that Aquinas mentions must not be viewed as if it were a point. If it were a point, then either the circumference would be zero, or there would need to be mediating lines between the center and each point of the circumference. If there were no volume to the circle then there would also be no circumference. In this case, there would be no points (plural) in time for the model to represent. And, if the circumference were at a distance from the center, with mediating lines representing the relations between each point on the circumference and the center point, then there would need to be mediating relations or entities that are capable of communicating eternity to time, that is, the model would reproduce the neo-platonic difficulty of bridging time and eternity. This is the same problem that we have with the watchtower model. By representing the tower as being at a distance from the path below, the person considering the model cannot help but think of the visual images from the path traveling through the air to the watchtower. These lines that connect time to eternity are just as problematic for the circle model. But, unlike the circle model, there is a very plausible solution that can be had in terms of the model itself.

Therefore, it is better to view the center of the circle in this model as a solid area that extends to the point of contact with the circumference at each of its points. Of course, this solution produces another problem. Shanley points out, in context but without explicit connection, that "the perfect life of God's eternity is . . . pointlike."<sup>15</sup> I do not think that my understanding of the model conflicts with this understanding of Shanley's nor to the doctrine of divine simplicity. Though Shanley, and other thomists,

---

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 66, 7. I am using Shanley's translation.

<sup>15</sup> Shanley, "Eternal," 198.

might at first react negatively to my extended-center understanding of the circle model, I believe that he would agree that, according to the limitations of the model, the notion of a pointlike center adds problems to the model that could be avoided if the center were viewed as an area rather than as a point. This would merely represent the extension-like character of eternity in a way similar to the way that Aquinas allows the divine ideas to be multiple on one sense and simple in another sense. Avoiding the misconception, of a really extended conception of divine eternity (spatially or temporally), would require the addition of some verbal explanation to ensure that the wrong idea is not conveyed. This issue will come up a little later.

The circle model is another attempt by Aquinas to illustrate the very same relationship that the first model illustrates. Thus, the way that Shanley, and Stump and Kretzmann interpret this second model is comparable to the way that they treated the first. Thus, I will not belabor the analysis by repeating the same steps for this second model. It is sufficient, at this point to mention that the mutual criticism is in place for both models. This means that the two models do not raise or solve different questions.

### **Aquinas' Theory of Divine Causal Knowing**

These two models are helpful in showing how God relates to his temporal world, but they cannot stand alone because they do not include, within their graphical elements, several key concepts. Shanley correctly notes that Stump and Kretzmann err because they misunderstand two of these key concepts. The first is Aquinas' use of a neo-platonic doctrine, the causal-practical model of divine knowing. The second is Aquinas' commitment to genuine temporal becoming, presentism.

I will begin by briefly describing the causal-practical account of divine knowing using Shanley as a guide. According to this account, God knows about his temporal creation eternally as the result of being the eternal cause of the temporal world by means of actually practical knowledge, or exemplars.

As Shanley writes, “God has immediate eternal knowledge of everything in its real temporally determinate *esse* because he is the immediate eternal cause of that temporal *esse*.”<sup>16</sup> As the efficient cause of a thing, God imparts the act of being to it and knows the act of being thereby. Similarly, as the exemplar likeness of the essence of a thing God also knows the essence.<sup>17</sup> God knows all aspects of creatures by being the source of every aspect of a creature’s makeup. There is nothing to a created thing beyond what is created within it by God. This means that God does not know about his creation by means of a passive perception. Instead, God knows even more intimately than a passive viewer could know. God knows the world by knowing himself as the cause of the world. Contra Stump and Kretzmann, this includes (and must include), the activities of creatures including thoughts and choices.

Aquinas uses two principles to argue for these conclusions. First, he indicates that a cause must precontain that which it communicates to the effect. Second, he indicates that whatever is in something (the cause in this case), must be within it according to its mode. Aquinas uses these principles to argue that whatever is created by God must be precontained within God in the intelligible mode.<sup>18</sup> Thus, God knows what he produces by means of the exemplars that are used to create.

Of course, this is a superior way of knowing if and only if there is no knowledge to be had outside of what is created. Stump and Kretzmann realize this problem when they suggest that this particular understanding of divine causal knowing has trouble explaining the existence of evil.<sup>19</sup> This would quickly take us beyond the main argument of this paper, so it will have to be sufficient at this point to note that Aquinas has a way of dealing with evil that does not mitigate his account of divine causal knowing.<sup>20</sup> I think that everyone will admit that if Aquinas’ solution does not work with regard to evil, then this failure would undermine his theory of God’s relationship to time.

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>17</sup> Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univ. Press, 2008), 216. See also, *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 20.

<sup>18</sup> Shanley, “Eternal,” 208. See also, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 49.

<sup>19</sup> Stump and Kretzmann, “Eternity and God’s Knowledge,” 441-442.

<sup>20</sup> Doolan, 137-139. See also, Shanley, “Aquinas,” 447-450.



Divine causal knowing is not merely a superior way to know, but, as Shanley argues, it is essential if an eternal being is to be capable of knowing anything about a temporal world. Any kind of passive perception would entail a causal relationship in the wrong direction and this, in turn, would entail a change in something that is supposed to be eternal. Thus, against Stump and Kretzmann, I agree with Shanley that this element of Aquinas' theory is indispensable.

### **The Nature of Time and Eternity in Aquinas**

Aquinas gives no indication that he denies the reality of temporal becoming. He writes in *I Sentences*:

Nor does God only see that this thing will be future with respect to what preceded it or that it will be past with respect to what is future to it; rather God sees the time in which each thing is present and the thing to be present at this time, which cannot happen in us because our intellectual acts are successive and temporal.<sup>21</sup>

I interpret this to mean that God does not merely see the chronological order of events in time, but instead, God sees when events are present. To use the terminology that Stump and Kretzmann would prefer, this means that God has indexical knowledge of when it is now. Yet, somehow, God sees all presents in one eternal present, that is, all at once. Yet, this does not imply simultaneity by means of a transitive relation between temporal events and the eternal event.

Shanley cashes this out in terms of different kinds of presence. God's presence to events is causal, whereas our presence to events is successive and temporal. Shanley emphatically states that "[for Aquinas] the only time that has actual existence is the present."<sup>22</sup>

These positions are difficult to reconcile. How can we have a real temporal becoming and an unchanging God who knows, as present, all events even before they happen? Stump and Kretzmann resolve the problem by doing away with temporal becoming. They reduce time to a static series of moments ordered according to before-and-after relationships. In contrast, Shanley indicates that Aquinas

---

<sup>21</sup> Aquinas, *I Sentences*, 38, 1, 5. Shanley's translation.

<sup>22</sup> Shanley, "Eternal," 222.

has found a way for us to have our cake and eat it too. This is accomplished by means of a “*dynamic* metaphysical relationship between God and creation.”<sup>23</sup> But, what does a dynamic model entail? Shanley uses the term, but he does not explain how this makes a difference. I think that Shanley is hitting upon the solution with his focus on dynamism. But, before we get into the implications of dynamism, I will first conclude my analysis of the last two sections with a summary. It is important to take stock at this point because it is all too easy to miss what these various elements imply when taken together. Here are a few important conclusions that need to be drawn.

First, Aquinas’ theory provides *real* foreknowledge. The future, at this present time, has not yet been created. Thus, God’s knowledge of future events is genuinely *fore*-knowledge. However, as eternal, God knows all things in the *eternal* present. This means that God possesses all of his knowledge at all times, or all-at-once in the eternal present. We do not currently know how these concepts are compatible, but we can conclude that this is the means by which Aquinas is able to conclude that God knows things at all times within their proper temporal context. This means that God knows, as now, *this* very moment. And, God knows, as now, every other moment as present despite the fact that some “nows” are not yet.<sup>24</sup>

God knows by being the cause of what is known. This is the means by which Aquinas is able to conclude that God knows things in advance, before they occurs. Thus, there is no grounding objection as there is with Molinism. This all reduces to the following:

- God knows the content of future contingents because he is the cause of their contents.
- God knows when future contingents actually occur, in real time, because God is present to each moment of time.
  - The way that God is present to each moment of time is unusual. It is both changeless and dynamic. It is dynamic from the perspective of time and it is changeless from the perspective of eternity.

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. The emphasis is mine.

<sup>24</sup> Presumably, this does not mean that God is unable to view the past as past or the future as future, in the way that we do. I do not see why these tensed forms of knowing would need to be ruled out in Aquinas’ theory.

## **A New Model**

All the above can be brought together with a heuristic device, a new model. Contrary to the claim of Shanley,<sup>25</sup> I think that such a model can be produced to faithfully reflect all of the relevant aspects of Aquinas' theory, including its dynamism, while also minimizing the weaknesses that accompany analogies. If this is the case, then the resulting model will be very useful in understanding Aquinas' otherwise difficult theory.

What is needed is a model that is changeless from the perspective of eternity yet dynamic from the perspective of time. It must clarify the way in which God is the cause of both the act of being of creatures as well as their formal element. It must also reveal how God knows all times as present without relating to them temporally, all-at-once. Otherwise, this relation would destroy time by making temporal becoming something inherently relational. The first model was a tower atop a hill overlooking a path. The second model was more conceptual, being a circle with a center. My new model is similar to the second in that it involves a circle, the same circle in fact. I will introduce dynamism by viewing the circle as being in motion. I will refer to this model as the rolling circle model because the circle is to be imagined as rolling with time (or as time). As it rolls, the circumference of the circle leaves a line behind it like tire tracks. This line is the history of the created temporal world. The line is produced at the point of contact between the circle (God) and the line's most recent point. As the circle rolls, it produces moments of time represented by points on the line.

At first glance, this model may seem to be too simple. It is easy to overlook the multiple ways that a simple model like this can represent multiple complex concepts. If the reader will be somewhat adventurous, then perhaps the following explanation will be convincing. First, the rolling circle model is dynamic. It is not imagined simply as a changeless picture, but as a process that unfolds with real time. Thus, the model does not merely illustrate temporal becoming, but it makes use of it directly. Thus, the

---

<sup>25</sup> Shanley, "Eternity," 223.

temporal element is beyond critique, for it is as real as our experience of time is itself. Second, the model represents a God who does not change internally. The circle has no moving parts and it does not change shape in any way. Rolling is a special kind of activity that does not entail internal change. As a result of these two points, the new model depicts what the first two models did not depict. It provides both a changeless eternity in God and genuine temporal becoming in the world. Additionally, it shows how the one may interact with the other without compromising the character of either. God remains changeless intrinsically, but is also able to produce, in an extrinsic sense, a changing world.

Third, the rolling circle model provides a way to represent how exemplars produce and inform matter. This representation can be introduced in a step-wise transition from the original circle model to the new rolling circle model. As a *first* step in this transition, the circumference of the original circle model can be viewed as having two layers. The outer layer is the world, arranged in successive points, just as Aquinas described the model. The inner layer, however, can be viewed as the series of exemplars that God uses as a means of creating the various elements of the world. Thus, the points of contact between God (the center of the circle in the circle model) and the world (the circumference) is emphasized by means of a layer of exemplars between the two. Of course, divine simplicity must be maintained and verbally emphasized. Aquinas would not allow us to think of adding layers and parts to God in any real sense. However, in the same way that Aquinas attributes multiplicity to the exemplars,<sup>26</sup> it is possible to metaphorically introduce this second layer of exemplars in the new model in a way that is compatible with Aquinas overall theory. Keep in mind that, as a model, the spatially represented elements need not represent spatial separation in the object of the model. There is merely a logical separation being represented here. As a *second* step in our transition between the two models, the layers of the circumference are separated and the outer layer is laid flat so that it becomes a line. Then, as a

---

<sup>26</sup> See Doolan, ch. 3 for an extensive textual background for accounting for the multiplicity of ideas. In summary the solution is as follows: “It is because God knows his essence as imitable in diverse ways that there are diverse things . . . Ideas are not really distinct from one another precisely because they have no reality apart from the divine essence. Yet, they are logically distinct from one another.” 87.

*third* step, the circle is set in motion to roll across the line. Each point of contact is an event of creation of that moment together with all of its real contents. In a *fourth* and final step, all future segments of the line must be removed since they are not created until the circle produces them.

The steps in this transition from one model to the other shows how exemplarism, in addition to temporal dynamism and eternal changelessness, can be added to Aquinas' original circle model. In other words, it is the incorporation of these two elements of Aquinas' theory into one model. This means that, if I have not made a significant blunder, the resulting model is entirely thomistic.

Perhaps, at this point, it will be objected, along with Shanley, that no such model can capture these various elements of Aquinas' theory due to the shortcomings of models generally. To answer this objection, I note that graphic models are spatial analogies that can express logical relationships. In some cases graphic models can express relationships better than words. In many cases they can do it more quickly and/or more comprehensively. In some cases they are the only way to express the properties of a whole. In most cases they are far more intuitive than a page of text can be. And, as supplements to text, they can summarize a description of a logical relationship in a way that allows the reader to truly "comprehend" what is being said, to actually see the elements all at once within their logical structure. In these cases, where these benefits can be realized, models are extremely powerful and should be given due consideration.

Yet, sometimes concepts contain logical relationships too complex for images to capture. Or, they may be of a kind that is ill suited to a spatial analogy. I do not think that this is the case with Aquinas' theory of God and time. I reach this conclusion for three reasons. Aquinas used spatial analogies himself and found them to be very helpful, probably for the very reasons I have cited just above. The turning circle analogy accurately represents aspects of the theory in many and potentially all relevant ways. And, the new model demystifies Aquinas's theory to a significant degree by allowing us

to comprehend it quickly. After a verbal description steers the reader away from various pitfalls, the model is able to do its work. It clarifies the theory by displaying its internal relationships all at once.

Of course, the model does not clarify all aspects of the issue. The model contains, unaltered, the problem of accounting for a changeless form of life. The Boethian formula of eternity as the “complete possession, all at once, of life without end”<sup>27</sup> is not solved or clarified by this model. It provides a view of God as internally unchanging despite having within himself a real knowledge of multiple presents. In other words, God knows that it is “now” for each and every moment of time and God creates each moment in such a way that genuine “nows” are generated. Each point on the outer edge of the circle represents a now-point. These are the exemplars that have, are, or will generate a specific point in time within the world. Yet, due to divine simplicity, God is one with each exemplar and is aware of it as it contacts and generates the world. These multiple awarenesses are temporally separated in the world, but phenomenologically united in God. This means that God changelessly possesses a special consciousness of time, one that somehow possesses multiple presents. In phenomenological terms, this would mean that God possesses infinite protentional and retentional horizons resulting in an infinite retention of all phases of consciousness of both temporal objects, and of its own acts of consciousness, all at once. This extended consciousness is the circle and it influences the world without changing itself. It also is able to know about the world by means of being its cause. Nothing of the world exists beyond God’s knowledge of it.

This description of interminable, changeless life is no solution or accounting of how such a state could be called life at all. Instead, the new model shows a way around the problem. Despite being changeless, assuming that this is no impediment to divine life, the new model illustrates a way for something changeless to produce change external to itself. Real time can be generated without requiring an intrinsic change in God. The rolling represents a real temporal process that does not alter God in any

---

<sup>27</sup> Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* V.6.4. “Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio.”

way except the orientation of God relative to the world. In rolling, the circle changes so that different points of it are in contact with (and thereby generate) different points on the line. This change in orientation is not a real kind of change from the perspective of God's being. As a relational change it is merely a cambridge change, a change in extrinsic relations only.

Another important aspect of Aquinas' theory can now be quickly identified as a result of using the new model. The circle turns in a temporal dimension that is external to itself. Though God does not change intrinsically, he generates change external to himself. As the cause of the world, this need not be seen as a disadvantage, as if God were frozen and trapped while the world was free to move and change. No event occurs in the world that is not precontained in God. Aquinas rightly saw that making God the cause of all beings and events in the world removes the apparent disadvantage of being changeless relative to something that can change. Life and thought appear to require change, but if our life and thought are both entirely derivative from God's being, then we lose our grounds for viewing eternity as inferior.

What these last few paragraphs show is that Aquinas' theory cannot do without these two factors: God must be able to remain unchanging in one sense (intrinsically), while also being able to change the way he relates to the world (extrinsically). This is the core conceptual aspect of Aquinas' theory that must be clarified and tested. And, it is ably brought out for display by the rolling circle model. These are very big claims. And so, I must admit that it remains possible that the new model has gone off course at some point. Perhaps it is disanalogous in certain important ways. In addition to this avenue of defeat, it is also possible that mystery is still a better option. However, mystery, if it applies, only really applies to the true relationship between God and temporal creatures. It does not apply to Aquinas' theory. That is, we should not conclude that Aquinas may still be correct on the grounds that his theory is too mysterious to understand. Thus, with regard to the theory alone, the argument here is

that this new model captures the theory very well, with little or no room for the criticism that it is disanalogous.

### **Conclusions**

The work of Stump and Kretzmann is valuable because it helps to reveal the ways that we may understand how time and eternity are able to relate. They work with several older theories, including Aquinas' theory, and have been able to distill the fundamental conceptual issues that are in play. By doing this, they have helped to revive theories that remain viable options. Shanley's critique is also very important because it has correctly pointed out an error in the way that Stump and Kretzmann have understood two facets of Aquinas' theory: the way the causal-practical model works within the theory, and the way that divine eternity works to ensure genuine *fore*-knowledge.

Despite the valuable work done by these and many other scholars, Aquinas' theory on God and time, itself, is difficult to fully grasp. Even Shanley, a very knowledgeable scholar of medieval philosophy, despite clarifying the many positive contributions of the theory, ultimately concludes that the true relationship between God and time is, in many senses, ineffable. This makes Aquinas' theory appear insufficient as an explanation.

The work of this paper has been to make more accessible the core elements of Aquinas' theory by means of a new model. I think that this new model can be a powerful aid in bringing us quickly to the point of comprehension of Aquinas' theory. The new model emphasizes characteristics that previous models have failed to represent. In addition, the model reveals the core concept that is doing all of the work in the theory, and it does this quickly and intuitively.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Doolan, Gregory T. *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univ. Press, 2008.
- Shanley, Brian J. "Aquinas On God's Causal Knowledge: A Reply to Stump and Kretzmann." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* LXXII:3 (1998): 447-457.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal in Aquinas." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* LXXI:2 (1997): 197-224.
- Stump, Eleonore and Norman Kretzmann. "Atemporal Duration: A Reply to Fitzgerald." *Journal of Philosophy* 84 (1987): 214-219.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Eternity." *Journal of Philosophy* 78:8 (1981): 429-458.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Eternity and God's Knowledge: A Reply to Shanley." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* LXXII:3 (1998): 439-445.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Eternity, Awareness, and Action." *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992): 463-482.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "God's Knowledge and Its Causal Effects." In *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith*, ed. Thomas Senor, 94-124. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Prophecy Past Truth, and Eternity." In *Philosophical Perspectives V*, ed. James Tomberlin, 395-424. Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1991.