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## God and the Nature of Time

By Garrett J. DeWeese

Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004; xii + 294 pp.; hb. £ 55.00, pb. £ 16.99; ISBN:  
0-7546-3518-x/0-7546-3519-8.

<sup>[1]</sup> If I would teach a graduate course on God and time, this would be the book that I would use. It provides an excellent, well-balanced introduction to all the major issues, and the author not merely describes the most important positions, but also indicates very clearly what, according to him, their strengths and weaknesses are. All through the book he provides frames with bullets summarizing the argument. The author may not provide a major new theory of his own, he certainly has written the best introduction to the field.

<sup>[2]</sup> In the Introduction, DeWeese himself summarizes the problem of this book as follows: 'On the one hand, it would seem that if God created time, he himself must somehow transcend time. On the other hand, it would seem impossible for a God outside of time to interact with his creation at moments of time' (1). He recognizes the following constraints on possible solutions:

1. Biblical exegesis
2. Philosophical analysis
3. The weight of the historical theological tradition
4. Pre-philosophical intuitions about the dynamic nature of time
5. Theories of modern physics
6. Greater explanatory power (5-7).

Chapter 2 is concerned with the metaphysics of time. DeWeese discusses the merits of static versus dynamic theories of time. According to dynamic theories the past and the present are real, but the future is not (yet), and temporal becoming is a genuine feature of the world, not an invention of our psyche. On static theories, the ontological status of the future is the same as that of past and present, and the passage of time is a psychological illusion. Time joins the three spatial dimensions to constitute a four-dimensional space-time continuum. Arguments for static theories include the translatability of tensed sentences to tenseless sentences and Einsteinian interpretations of relativity theory. Arguments for dynamic theories of time include our common linguistic practice, our experience of time, and the nature of causation (i.e., realist accounts of causation assume the distinction

between earlier and later). On the basis of these arguments, DeWeese concludes to a dynamic theory of time that explains both the flow and the direction of time in terms of causation.

<sup>[3]</sup> In Chapter 3, DeWeese confronts the theory of time developed in Chapter 2 with 'the three towering theories of twentieth-century physics': the special theory of relativity (STR), the general theory of relativity (GTR) and quantum mechanics (QM). It is often argued that these theories favour, or even render unavoidable, a static theory of time. In this quite technical Chapter, DeWeese attempts to show that a dynamic theory of time fits better with these three theories than its static alternative. Though he has not convinced me of that, he does make it quite clear that a dynamic theory is at least *compatible with* these three theories. I won't try to summarize his argument as a whole; the following must suffice. In his discussion of STR, DeWeese shows that certain observed anisotropies of electromagnetic radiation lend empirical support to the possibility of a privileged reference frame. If there is such a privileged reference point, the notions of absolute rest and simultaneity are tenable. When discussing the GTR, DeWeese draws on the distinction between mathematical and physical possibilities and, finally, when discussing QM he makes most of the measurement problem.

<sup>[4]</sup> Chapter 4 is devoted to the evidence from Scripture. He discusses both the terms used in Hebrew and Greek Scriptures for time and the most relevant texts, and concludes that the Bible does not favour a specific metaphysical view of time.

<sup>[5]</sup> The Medieval consensus of God as atemporally eternal – as discussed in Chapter 5 – either depends on metaphysical thought only or refers to Scripture in light of metaphysics. Two issues are important to the overall argument of DeWeese. Firstly, it is quite clear that Augustine, Boethius, Anselm and Thomas Aquinas in their articulations of God's immutability, simplicity and eternity were much indebted to Neoplatonism. And secondly, though they did attempt to uphold the reality of time in terms that remind of what we would now call a dynamic theory of time, their views of the just-mentioned divine attributes pushed them towards a static theory of time.

<sup>[6]</sup> In Chapter 6 DeWeese discusses three contemporary statements of the view that God exists atemporally - those by Eleonore Stump & Norman Kretzmann, Brian Leftow en Paul Helm – and inquires whether they can make sense of the view that God acts in the temporal order. Ordinarily, causes precede their effects, but an atemporal God cannot precede His effects. Stump and Kretzmann try to solve the problem by means of their notion ET-simultaneity; DeWeese shows that while they do not explicitly assert a static view of time, they do imply it. Leftow views eternity as a superdimension, within which temporality is a lower dimension; this view also implies a static view of time. Helm explicitly asserts a static view of time. If the three major contemporary statements of divine atemporality imply a static view of time, it can be inquired whether there is a necessary connection between the two. DeWeese argues that there is, and that 'if God is timeless, then time must be tenseless' (179). Since DeWeese argued against a dynamic view of time in Ch. 3, this counts against divine atemporality.

<sup>[7]</sup> Chapter 7 is devoted to a Medieval tradition dissenting from the consensus discussed in Ch. 5, a tradition originating with John Duns Scotus. Following Antonie Vos Jaczn.'s interpretation, DeWeese ascribes to Scotus the theory of synchronic contingency: if a state of affairs contingently obtains at *t*, this does not mean that a contrary state of affairs is impossible at *t*. This view implies a dynamic theory of time. Ockham adopted this view, and Molina, while accepting God's atemporality, defended both a dynamic view of time and libertarian human freedom. His theory of Middle Knowledge is logically independent of divine atemporality and shows nevertheless how God can have complete knowledge of future contingents.

<sup>[8]</sup> In Ch. 8 DeWeese discusses contemporary arguments in favour of divine temporality. Most of them have appeared earlier in the book already (a.g., the argument from dynamic time), and at this stage of the argument mainly function to sum up and to show that a temporalist view of God is to be preferred over an atemporalist view.

<sup>[9]</sup> In Chapters 9 and 10, however, DeWeese tries to go beyond a mere temporal view. He first argues that God is neither temporal nor atemporal nor sempiternal, but *omnitemporal*. An omnitemporal being is metaphysically temporal, exists by metaphysical necessity, and is present to all actual moments of the temporal world (252). While an omnitemporal being cannot be simple or strongly immutable, it can know the future, create *ex nihilo* and be provident. Here, DeWeese's exposition becomes rather sketchy, indicating possible directions rather than arguing for specific positions.

<sup>[10]</sup> While this book does not develop a major new theory, it is an excellent survey of the field. For a reviewer that is, in a sense, a pity: summarizing an excellent survey provides less opportunities for original arguments than criticizing a flawed survey or a highly original new theory. If, however, he has been able to convey that this is an outstanding introduction to the field, this particular reviewer is more than content.