

Eleonore Stump. *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers*. Milwaukee, MN: Marquette University Press, 2016. 109 pp. \$15.00 (hbk).

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The God of 'Classical Theism' as depicted by Augustine, Boethius, Aquinas, and other Western medieval and early modern philosophers is eternal (in the sense of 'timeless'), immutable, and 'simple' (in the sense of being identical with each of his properties). God, as depicted in the Bible, does one action yesterday and a different action today, and is present to every human at each different moment of time; has some properties, such as omnipotence, in virtue of his nature, but other properties by choice, such as being the Creator of the physical universe. In this 2016 Marquette Aquinas lecture Eleonore Stump defends Classical Theism and denies that it is in any way in conflict with the Biblical picture. She claims to show that 'the God of Classical Theism is the engaged, personally present responsible God of the Bible' (18-9), and blames any appearance of inconsistency on misrepresentations of Classical Theism. She summarizes views which she has developed at much greater length elsewhere; and unsurprisingly, but fairly in a very small book, takes Aquinas as her only example of Classical Theism.

She begins by outlining the apparent conflict; and then goes on to describe Aquinas's doctrine, especially as presented in his Biblical commentaries, of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in each human being who does not resist God, infusing into them faith and love. Having thus shown that Aquinas believes God to be an interactive loving being, she writes that she does not 'see how anyone could suppose that Aquinas is guilty of so great an inconsistency as to maintain this view of God...and yet also to hold that God is immutable, eternal, and simple, if by these attributes Aquinas means what some contemporary philosophers and theologians, friendly or unfriendly to classical theism, suppose Aquinas to mean' (55). She argues – to my mind, plausibly – that it is a mistake to suppose that Aquinas claimed that 'God is not entity (an *id quod est*, but only being, *esse*) alone'; but then goes on to argue in the rest of the book – to my mind, implausibly – that all the apparent incompatibilities disappear when that point is acknowledged. Many contemporary 'analytic' philosophers of religion, including myself, have written a lot on these matters; and all I can do in a short review is to show why I find Stump's attempt to deny the apparent incompatibilities, unsatisfactory.

I begin with eternity. Aquinas follows Boethius in holding that God's eternity is his 'complete possession all at once of illimitable life'. But it seems evident that this contradicts the biblical view that God is present at each of the moments of a human life which are not simultaneous with each other. For simultaneity is transitive; if – as 'all at once' implies – every moment in God's time is simultaneous with every other moment, and if – as 'present at' implies – each moment of a human life is simultaneous with God's awareness of it, then each

moment of a human life is simultaneous with each other moment – which manifestly it is not. To suppose otherwise requires ‘a special sense of simultaneity’ (61). Further, Stump interprets Aquinas, no doubt correctly, as holding that ‘God’s life consists in the duration of a present that is not limited by either future or past’ (59); and that involves ‘duration’ being understood ‘analogically with temporal duration’ (59). Now one cannot just appeal to analogy to avoid a contradiction in a theory. One must make it plausible to suppose that there is an analogical sense of the requisite word in which it is logically possible that the sentences of the theory could be true. In her well-known 1981 article ‘Eternity’, co-authored with Norman Kretzmann, she attempted to do this for ‘simultaneity’ by claiming that in the Special Theory of Relativity Einstein provided us with a viable sense of simultaneity relative to a frame of reference; and claimed that ‘simultaneity’ in his sense provides a good analogy for a sense in which two earthly moments which are not simultaneous with each other relative to the frame of the Earth are simultaneous relative to God’s frame. In the present book Stump tries to give sense to the supposed analogy by using the intuitively comprehensible story of Flatland, in which each Flatlander is aware of himself as existing ‘here’ in one particular small region of two-dimensional Flatland, while – ‘if Flatland were small enough’ (62) – each human observer in the three-dimensional world would see all Flatland in one glance from above, and regard all of it as ‘here’. So likewise, Stump suggests, God, existing on a line of a two-dimensional time could see all of the world of our one-dimensional time at one glance, but have endless duration in the second dimension. This analogy is in effect the same analogy as Aquinas’s analogy of God as an observer looking down from a mountain on a road at the bottom of the mountain, and seeing at one glance all the travellers at different places along the road, though Aquinas did not make the point that the observer could change his position up or down and be equally well placed to watch the travellers – which would provide an analogy for God’s ‘duration’.

Stump’s pattern of argument seems to be to show that Classical Theism’s view of God’s eternity is closely analogous to evidently logically possible suppositions, and so is probably itself logically possible. However neither of these ‘analogies’ get anywhere near being close analogies for Classical Theism’s view of God eternity. In Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity, it is only events which are not causally connectible (that is, which are so far apart that no signal having a velocity allowable by that theory could connect them) are such that whether one is simultaneous with the other depends on the frame of reference. So if one earthly event E is earlier than another earthly event F which it causes, E is earlier than F in all frames of reference, including God’s; and so God causing some effect must precede the occurrence of the effect. And while humans and Flatlanders may have narrower or wider conceptions of the boundaries of ‘here’, so may any human have a different conception from any other human of those boundaries. ‘Here’ may refer to any volume of space that includes the speaker, some of these volumes being very much larger than others. Likewise ‘now’ may refer to any segment of time that includes the speaker’s utterance, some of these segments being very much larger than others. But that shows nothing about the metaphysical relativity of the present, only something about the vagueness of human language. The human looking down on Flatland would, like any Flatlander, view any two places viewed as distinct by Flatlanders as really distinct places. So there is no analogy to the claim of Classical Theism that God views as simultaneous events which

earthlings view as successive. And while one might be able to find some sense in the notion of a dimension of space additional to the familiar three dimensions, I cannot find any sense in the notion of a second dimension of time – what would it be like for events simultaneous with each other on the familiar dimension to be ‘before’ or ‘after’ each other in a different dimension?

The closest analogy to which Stump refers is the ever-useful doctrine of wave/particle duality central to quantum theory, rightly claiming that we can ‘see how to frame a quantum metaphysics, just as we can work out the mathematics of a quantum physics, even if our mode of speaking about light is analogously imprecise’ (92). Yes, we are right to believe that an electron is in an analogical sense a ‘wave’ and also in an analogical sense a ‘particle’, even though it cannot be both a wave and a particle in literal senses of these words. We are right to believe this, because – if we assume that it is logically possible that an electron can be both a ‘wave’ and a ‘particle’ in analogical senses of these words, then a theory which claims that electrons are both ‘waves’ and ‘particles’ in analogical senses is much more probable on the evidence of the phenomena considered by Quantum theory than any rival theory, and so still on balance more probable than any rival theory, even when we build into it this assumption. A theory with an additional assumption, as is the theory that there are analogical senses of ‘wave’ and ‘particle’ in which it is logically possible that an electron can be both, needs more evidence in its favour to make it as probable as an otherwise equally probable theory without such an assumption. So its probability – if the assumption about logical possibility were correct – would need to be greater than that of any evidently logically possible rival theory of the same phenomena, if it is to be as probable overall as any such theory. (On this, see my *The Coherence of Theism*, second edition, 2016, 67-75.) So if the theory of a timeless God were to be logically possible, would it be more probable on the evidence of the phenomena which it seeks to explain, than the theory of a temporal God? I see no reason to think so; and so I have no reason to think that it is logically possible. The crucial factor which would make wave/particle duality a close analogy to Classical Theism’s ‘simultaneity’ and ‘duration’ – its significantly greater explanatory power than that of more evidently logically possible theories – is missing.

I move briefly to consider Stump’s defence of the other two properties among those which Classical Theism ascribes to God, which she discusses – immutability and simplicity. God’s immutability would be entailed by his eternity, and – in my view – raises a further problem for Classical Theism. Stump is right to deny that God being immutable entails that his response to some free action of ours would be independent of which action we do. But being a response which is part of God’s total response all-at-once to all our actions, his response to any action of ours is inevitably coloured by his knowledge of how we will respond to his response and generally how we will behave in future years. And that to my mind means that if God knows at the same time as I sin, that I will eventually freely repent of my sin, he cannot regard my sin as just as serious as a sin of the same kind committed by some other human whom God knows will by his own free choice never repent and so be damned. Hence God cannot respond to the two sinners in the same way; and so cannot respond to one of us with the reaction appropriate to that one as he sins. He cannot interact with all humans at each moment of their lives as they are then; and so cannot be fully present to us as we are when we sin. I suggest that only a God who changes his attitude to me as I

change, can be fully present to me as I change. Only a God, mutable in his non-essential properties, can be a truly interacting God.

That brings me to divine simplicity. God is surely as simple a god as it is logically possible to be; and that, according to Aquinas, involves God being the same as his properties and these being the same as each other. Now there is a way of giving a coherent interpretation to each of God's essential properties being the same as each other – that God having any one such property entails God having any other such property. And there is a way of giving a coherent interpretation to God being the same as his essential properties – that God is who he is solely in virtue of his essential properties; he does not have 'thisness'. Understandably Stump does not discuss these issues in this short book. But what she does discuss and try to defend is Aquinas's view that divine simplicity entails God having no accidental properties; and she claims that this is consistent with Aquinas's view that God is able to do other than he does. She rightly argues that the latter requires Aquinas's point that God is not just being (*esse*) but also an entity (*id quod est*); yet claims that 'since it is right to say that God is *esse*, even if God's real nature is not correctly and precisely specified as identical to *esse*, then it is also right to say that God has no accidents' (90). But if so, then to speak 'correctly and precisely', God does have accidents; and, since Aquinas certainly aims to speak 'correctly and precisely', he should have said so. If God can create or not create the universe, whichever he freely wills (as Aquinas holds), then being Creator of the universe is a contingent property of God, and so an 'accident'.

This is a short readable book, and no one can bring to life Aquinas's view of God as a very loving interactive God as well as can Eleonore Stump. But all humans, even Aquinas, are open to the temptation to ignore apparent inconsistencies in their belief systems, especially when – like Aquinas – they are deeply sensitive to the plausible features of two contrasting parts of their system, and would very much like each part to be true. And in the view of this reviewer, Aquinas's Classical Theism is inconsistent with the Biblical picture of God; and nothing that Stump has written leads me to suppose otherwise.