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## TIME AND ETERNITY IN THE GREEK FATHERS

DAVID BRADSHAW

University of Kentucky  
Lexington, Kentucky

ONE OF THE MOST familiar phrases of medieval philosophy is the definition of eternity given by Boethius: "the complete possession all at once of unlimited life."<sup>1</sup> As is well known, this definition would seem to derive from that of Plotinus, who defines eternity (αἰών) as "the life which belongs to that which exists and is in being, all together and full, completely without extension or interval."<sup>2</sup> The Plotinian definition, in turn, was a distillation of a longstanding consensus among the Platonists of antiquity, one that neatly synthesized the conception of eternity in the *Timaeus* with that of Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* (book Λ) and *De Caelo*. (I shall return to this subject below.) Seen in that light, the Boethian definition is the fruit of a rich and deeply rooted tradition.

What is surprising in Boethius's discussion of eternity is not the definition itself, but the way in which it is applied to God. Boethius prefaces it by the statement: "Now that God is eternal is the common judgement of all who live by reason. Therefore let us

<sup>1</sup> Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, book 5, prose 6: "interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio."

<sup>2</sup> "ἡ περὶ τὸ ὄν ἐν τῷ εἶναι ζωῇ ὁμοῦ πᾶσα καὶ πλήρης ἀδιάστατος πανταχῇ" (Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.7.3.37-39; trans. A. H. Armstrong [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966-88], 3:305). For Boethius's knowledge of Plotinus and the sources of his teaching on eternity see Pierre Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers and Their Greek Sources* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 281-83, 312-16. Courcelle thinks that Boethius did not read Plotinus directly but received his Neoplatonism through later authors. I am not convinced on this point, but if it is correct a likely source for the definition would be Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 52 (not cited by Courcelle).

consider, what is eternity; for this makes plain to us both the divine nature and the divine knowledge."<sup>3</sup> For Boethius, eternity is a feature of the divine nature; indeed, one could even say that eternity is the divine nature. As he explains in his theological tractates, in God there is no distinction between substance and attribute, so that for God to be just, good, or great, and simply to be God, are one and the same.<sup>4</sup> Although in these discussions Boethius does not mention eternity, there can be little doubt that, in his view, for God to be eternal and to be God are also one and the same.

The place of eternity in the Plotinian system is sharply different. For Plotinus eternity is a characteristic of the second hypostasis, Intellect, and as such is wholly derivative from the One. As he goes on to explain in the treatise containing his definition, the nature that is eternal "is around the One and comes from it and is directed towards it," so that eternity is "an activity of life directed to the One and in the One."<sup>5</sup> Since eternity arises only at the level of the second hypostasis, in the process of emanation from the One, the One itself is no more eternal than it is temporal. As Plotinus states elsewhere, the One "was what it was even before eternity existed."<sup>6</sup> Both eternity and time are "contained" in the One as in their source, but precisely because it is their source it transcends them both.<sup>7</sup> What Boethius has done, from the perspective of Plotinus, is to equate God with Intellect. The One as the first principle of Intellect—a first principle that can be approached only apophatically, in a noncognitive way of knowing—has simply disappeared from the picture.

Boethius was not the first Western theologian to adopt this radical simplification of Neoplatonism. A similar tendency to

<sup>3</sup> Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, book 5, prose 6 (trans. S. J. Tester, Loeb Classical Library [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973], 423).

<sup>4</sup> Boethius, *On the Trinity* 4, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 18; Boethius, *On the Hebdomads*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 50.

<sup>5</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.7.6.2, 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.8.20.25.

<sup>7</sup> For the One as containing what is in Intellect, but in a simpler way, see *ibid.*, 5.3.16.42-43; 6.8.18.17-38.

equate God with Intellect, accompanied by a rejection of apophaticism, can be found in St. Augustine.<sup>8</sup> For Augustine, too, God is a wholly simple being identical with his own attributes. As he writes in *On the Trinity*:

God is not great by partaking of greatness, but He is great by Himself being great, because He Himself is His own greatness. Let the same be said also of the goodness, the eternity, and the omnipotence of God, and in short of all the attributes which can be predicated of God as He is spoken of in respect to Himself, and not metaphorically or by similitude.<sup>9</sup>

Later Augustine extends the identity to include the very being (*esse*) and essence (*essentia*) of God. What we normally speak of as different divine attributes are in fact different names for the single eternal act by which God is. Although Augustine develops this point particularly in relation to wisdom, it applies to eternity as well:

In God, to be [*esse*] is the same as to be wise. For what to be wise is to wisdom, and to be able is to power, and to be eternal is to eternity, and to be just to justice, and to be great to greatness, that being itself is to essence. And since in the divine simplicity to be wise is nothing else than to be, therefore wisdom there is the same as essence.<sup>10</sup>

One could equally well say that "eternity there is the same as essence." Augustine draws this very conclusion in his homilies on the Psalms, where he states directly that "eternity is the very substance of God."<sup>11</sup> No doubt it is from Augustine that Boethius

<sup>8</sup> See especially Augustine, *On the City of God* 8.6, and my discussion of this text in David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 224-26.

<sup>9</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity* 5.10.11; translation in The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 1, ed. Philip Schaff (repr.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), 3:93. Although I quote this series and the Ante-Nicene Fathers series because they are readily available, I have freely modified quotations from them for the sake of style or to bring out features of the original text that are important to my argument.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.1.2 (NPNF1, 3:106). For further statements on divine simplicity see *ibid.*, 15.5.7-8; 13.22; 17.29; Augustine, *Confessions* 12.15.18; *idem*, *On the City of God* 8.6; 11.10.

<sup>11</sup> Augustine, "Homily 2 on Psalm 101," ch. 10, in *Expositions of the Psalms* (PL 37:1311).

derives his understanding of divine simplicity, and indeed the entire framework in which God is conceived in terms characteristic of Plotinian Intellect.<sup>12</sup>

The overwhelming influence of Augustine and Boethius in shaping the Western theological tradition needs no demonstration here. On the subject of eternity, in particular, the Boethian definition, along with the Augustinian and Boethian framework in which it was placed, became part of the common heritage of Western Scholasticism. Anselm, Peter Lombard, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Aquinas are among those who adopt both the doctrine of divine simplicity and the identification of God with his own eternity that is its corollary.<sup>13</sup>

Thus there would seem to be an impressive consensus on this subject within Christian thought through at least the later thirteenth century. Or is there? An important fact that is not often enough remarked is that in the Christian East neither Augustine nor Boethius had any appreciable influence.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly one might expect to find there a somewhat different approach to time and eternity. Just how different it could be becomes apparent on examining the *Divine Names* of St. Dionysius the Areopagite.<sup>15</sup> The *Divine Names* is of particular importance because, of the works we shall discuss, it was one of the few available in Latin translation during the Middle Ages. It is therefore an appropriate

<sup>12</sup> Note, for instance, that Boethius adopts the Augustinian understanding of God as *vere forma* and *ipsum esse* (*On the Trinity* 2). This is not to deny that there are also non-Augustinian aspects of Boethius; see Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 115-17.

<sup>13</sup> Anselm, *Monologion* 16; *Proslogion* 18; Peter Lombard, *Sentences* 1.73; Albert the Great, *Summa de Creaturis* II, q. 3, a.3; Bonaventure, *Journey of the Mind to God* 5.5-7; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 10, a. 2.

<sup>14</sup> The earliest translation of either author into Greek was in the late thirteenth century, when Augustine's *On the Trinity* and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* were translated by Maximus Planudes. It is also likely that Maximus the Confessor read Augustine during his sojourn in Carthage, although the traces of Augustine's influence in his work are rather scanty. See Dom E. Dekkers, "Les traductions grecques des écrits patristiques latins," *Sacris Erudi* 5 (1953): 193-233; G. C. Berthold, "Did Maximus the Confessor Know Augustine?" *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982): 14-17.

<sup>15</sup> I adopt the traditional practice of regarding the author of the Areopagitic corpus as a saint, regardless of whether he was identical with the Dionysius of Acts 17. The prefix "pseudo" seems to me superfluous, as there is no body of writings deriving from the biblical Dionysius with which the later corpus might be confused.

place to begin in getting a sense of the relationship between the Western tradition and the non-Augustinian theology of the East. After beginning with Dionysius, I will turn to other Greek Fathers both before and after him. Ultimately I hope to show, first, that the Eastern tradition contains a radically different view of time and eternity from that of the West; and second, that there are considerable reasons to recommend the Eastern view.

## I. DIONYSIUS VERSUS THE WEST

To come to Dionysius from Augustine and Boethius is to step into a different atmosphere of thought. The differences are largely determined by a different way of appropriating Neoplatonism. For Dionysius it is axiomatic that God is both "the being of beings" (τῶν ὄντων οὐσία) and "beyond all being" (πάσης οὐσίας ἐπέκεινα).<sup>16</sup> In other words, God is to be described *both* in terms appropriate to Intellect *and* in those appropriate to the One. This does not indicate a duality of hypostases, of course, but only that God, as creator, both constitutes the perfections of creatures and is beyond these perfections as their source. God is not only Being (τὸ ὄν), but the transcendently Being (τὸ ὑπερούσιον); not only the Good, but the transcendently Good (τὸ ὑπεράγαθον); not only Wisdom, but the transcendently Wise (τὸ ὑπέρσοφον); and so on. The latter member of each pair asserts "a denial in the sense of superabundance" (2.3.640B). As for the first member, Dionysius refers to the perfections that God shares with creatures in a variety of ways: as divine irradiations (ἐλλάμψεις), processions (προόδους), manifestations (ἐκφάνσεις), powers (δυνάμεις), and providences (προνοίας).<sup>17</sup> The interpretation of these terms has been much disputed. Here I will merely state my belief that they should not be taken as referring to creatures or created effects, on the one hand, nor to "emanations," on the other, if by this is meant something possessing a subsistence distinct from that

<sup>16</sup> Dionysius, *Divine Names* 1.3.589C, 1.1.588B. I use the text of Beate Regina Suchla, Günter Heil, and Adolf Martin Ritter, ed., *Corpus Dionysiacum* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990-91), vol. 1.

<sup>17</sup> For these terms see *ibid.*, 1.2.588D; 1.4.589D; 2.4.641A; 2.7.645A; 5.2.817A.

of God. They *are* God as he is manifest in his activity.<sup>18</sup> Significantly, even to say that God is simple is for Dionysius not an assertion about the divine nature, but about how God is manifested in his activity: to call him monad or henad means that by "the simplicity and unity of his supernatural indivisibility" he imparts oneness to all things (1.4.589D; cf. 13.2-3).

Of course God's activity takes place within and among creatures. Hence to understand the divine processions in the way that I suggest still implies that they are refracted, as it were, through the created order. This observation becomes important when one turns to Dionysius's teaching on time and eternity. Dionysius seems somewhat ambivalent regarding whether time and eternity are creatures or divine processions. On the one hand, God "transcends both time and eternity, and all things in time and eternity" (5.10.825B); on the other, "He is the time and eternity of all things" (10.2.937B).<sup>19</sup> To say both that God is x and that God transcends x is how Dionysius typically speaks of the divine processions. Yet he never actually lists time or eternity among the processions, and in the continuation of the last passage cited he seems to regard them as creatures, or, more precisely, as modes of the being of creatures. He writes:

Scripture does not call eternal [αἰώνιος] [only] things that are altogether and absolutely ingenerate and eternal [ἀίδιος], and imperishable, immortal, immutable, and so forth. For instance, there is "Rise up, you eternal gates [πύλαι αἰώνιοι]" (Ps. 24:7, 9), and the like. Often it calls things that are very ancient by the designation of eternity, or, again, it sometimes designates as eternity [αἰών] the entire span of our own time, inasmuch as it is characteristic of eternity to be ancient, immutable, and to measure the whole of being. . . . Moreover the Scriptures sometimes praise temporal eternity [ἔγχρονος αἰών] and eternal time [αἰώνιος χρόνος]. Yet we know that more properly they discuss and denote by eternity the things that are, and by time the things that come to be. It is necessary therefore to understand that the things called eternal are not simply co-eternal [συναίδια] with God who is before eternity [θεῶ τῷ πρὸ αἰῶνος]. Following without deviation the sacred Scriptures, one must take such things as both

<sup>18</sup> See Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 179-82.

<sup>19</sup> To the former passage one may add Dionysius, *Divine Names* 2.10.648C (God is "the measure of eternity and beyond eternity and before eternity"); and to the latter *ibid.*, 5.4.817C ("the eternity of things that are, the time of things that come to be").

eternal and temporal, in the ways appropriate to them, and as between the things that are and those that come to be; that is, as things which in one way partake of eternity, and in another of time. But one must praise God as both eternity and as time, as the cause of all time and eternity, and the Ancient of Days; and as before time, and beyond time and the immutable "seasons and times," and again existing before the ages [πρὸ αἰώνων], inasmuch as He is before eternity and beyond the ages, and His kingdom "is a kingdom of all the ages." Amen. (10.3.937C-940A)

Plainly Dionysius is struggling here to be faithful to scriptural usage. In Scripture one finds αἰών used of both a specific age (as in "the present age" or "the age to come") and of all time understood as a whole (as in the expression εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, "for all eternity"). God is both eternal (αἰώνιος) and before the ages (πρὸ αἰώνων); indeed he is the maker of the ages (ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας).<sup>20</sup> This range of meanings persists throughout patristic literature, and, although the context usually makes the meaning clear, one must always keep the different possibilities in mind. There is also the term αἰδίο, which in both classical Greek and Scripture is roughly synonymous with αἰώνιος.<sup>21</sup> By the time that Dionysius was writing the pagan Neoplatonists had drawn a distinction between the two terms, using αἰδίο for the everlasting through time and αἰώνιος for the timelessly eternal, but Christian authors generally did not adopt this convention.<sup>22</sup>

Dionysius has his own way of attempting to bring order to this rich but confusing diversity. He distinguishes "the things that are," which are eternal in the proper sense, from those *called* eternal in Scripture. The reference to the "eternal gates" indicates that among the latter he has in mind primarily the angels and the

<sup>20</sup> Heb 1:2; cf. Ps 54:20; Rom 16:26; 1 Cor 2:7, with further references and discussion in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:197-209.

<sup>21</sup> Wis 7:26; IV Macc 10:15 (some MSS.); Rom 1:20; Jude 6; cf. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 1:168.

<sup>22</sup> The distinction is not in Plotinus, who raises the question of whether there is a difference but concludes that there is not (*Enneads* 3.7.3.1-4; 5.12-17). It appears first in Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, props. 48-49, 52-55 (especially the corollary to prop. 55); cf. *Commentary on the Timaeus*, ed. Diehl (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903-6), 1:277.32-278.13.

heavenly realm.<sup>23</sup> The identity of the “things that are” is not immediately apparent, but since they are “absolutely ingenerate” and thus cannot be creatures, I would suggest that he has in mind the divine processions.<sup>24</sup> This does not rule out that eternity itself is among the processions, for the processions (like the Forms in the *Sophist*) can blend or partake of one another in various ways.<sup>25</sup>

Having made this distinction, Dionysius then uses it to clarify the status of eternal creatures such as the angels and the heavens. They are “between the things that are and those that come to be,” partaking both of eternity and of time. As regards the angels, he probably has in mind not only that they act in time, but also that even in heaven they grow in the knowledge of God.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, God is not to be located at any particular point within this structure. He permeates and encompasses the whole, being identical to both eternity *and* time, and yet prior to them both. As I have mentioned, this is the characteristic form of his relationship to the divine processions. In stating that creatures are eternal (αἰώνιος) but not coeternal (συναίδια) with God, Dionysius might seem to suggest that there is a general distinction between αἰδίοις and αἰώνιος; if so, however, he does not clarify it. The most natural way to take these statements is simply that God is eternal (whichever term is used to indicate it) in a way different from that of creatures, by himself being eternity. He is thus also the *source* of eternity, for creatures are eternal, to the extent that they are, by participating in him.

This raises an interesting question. Would it not follow by parity of reasoning that since God is also time, he must be

<sup>23</sup> See Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 304-7; and idem, *The Angels and Their Mission* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1957), 38-41.

<sup>24</sup> Dionysius most frequently uses τὰ ὄντα in an indefinite way, meaning “the things that are, whatever they may be.” There are at least two passages, however, where it must refer to the divine processions (5.4.817D1; 5.5.820A9). The first of these exhibits both uses: God is the source of τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐσιν ὄντα, “the things that are in the things that are.”

<sup>25</sup> See *Divine Names* 5.5.820B-C, where Dionysius recognizes that the other processions partake of Being.

<sup>26</sup> See *Celestial Hierarchy* 7.3.209B-D; *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 6.3.6.537B-C.

*temporal* in a way surpassing that of creatures? Dionysius does not quite draw this conclusion, but he comes close while discussing the relationship between God and being in chapter 5.

God is the the source and measure of being and eternity (αἰών), since He is before substance and being and eternity, and the substance-making source, middle, and end of all. That is why in Scripture the truly Pre-existent is multiplied [πολλαπλασιάζεται] in accordance with every conception of beings, and “was” and “is” and “will be” [τὸ ἦν καὶ τὸ ἔστι καὶ τὸ ἔσται] and “became” and “is becoming” and “will become” [τὸ ἐγένετο καὶ γίνεται καὶ γενήσεται] are properly hymned of Him. For, to those who hymn them in a God-fitting way, all these signify that He exists supersubstantially in accordance with every conception, and that He is the cause of all that in any way are. (5.8.824A)

Since God is the source of all being, and being can take on temporal modalities, temporal language must apply to Him.<sup>27</sup> Yet it does so only as signifying that “He exists supersubstantially in accordance with every conception, and that He is the cause of all that in any way are.” Thus its purpose is not so much to render a neutral description of God as to praise him as the source of temporal being.

This passage is all the more striking because earlier Dionysius had explicitly denied that temporal language—including not only “was” and “will be,” but even “is”—applies to God (5.4.817D). Such simultaneous affirmation and denial is typical of Dionysius’s use of language as a way of reorienting the reader away from the attempt simply to describe God, and toward the attempt to render him fitting praise. Temporal language, in particular, is for Dionysius a way of “multiplying” God, and therefore necessarily fails to be adequate to him in his unity. The “multiplication” here is much like that in Neoplatonism of each higher level of reality

<sup>27</sup> Dionysius probably has in mind particularly Revelation 1:4 and 8, where God is “He who is and was and is to be” (ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος). This phrase is a synthesis of Exodus 3:14 (God is “He who is”), John 1:1 (the Word “was” in the beginning), and Psalm 118:26 as applied to Christ (“blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”). The use of ὢν rather than ἔστι is suggestive. I suspect that Dionysius would have found in this verse simultaneously both an affirmation of the temporal (“was” and “is coming”) and a denial (“being” rather than “is”).

within the subsequent level.<sup>28</sup> The difference is that, since there is no distinction in hypostasis, any temporal affirmation must always be balanced by the apophatic insistence that God is beyond time as its source. This tension is one that Dionysius embraces, for he finds in it the only language adequate to God as both truly present in creation and beyond it as its cause.

Clearly the distance separating Dionysius from Augustine and Boethius is immense. Far from identifying eternity with the divine nature, Dionysius regards it as either a divine procession, or as an attribute of the processions, or (most probably) as both. Time is also a divine procession, so that creatures partake of God not only insofar as they are eternal, but also insofar as they are temporal. Since God is time, but also is beyond time, temporal language must be both affirmed and denied of him. Finally, looming behind these differences is a divergence in attitude toward theological language. Boethius offers his definition of eternity in order to "make plain the divine nature"; Dionysius wants not so much to state what God is, as to show how he should be praised.

The medieval Scholastics were well aware of Dionysius. Surely, one would think, they must have recognized these differences and attempted to adjudicate them. A full exploration of this subject would require a careful review of medieval treatments of time and eternity in relation to the *Divine Names*. Rather than attempt that here, I will merely note how medieval treatments of this topic tended to be skewed by problems of translation. The most widely used translation of the Areopagitic corpus, that by John Sarracen, renders Dionysius's terminology pertaining to eternity in a way that is systematically misleading. The change can be observed in the following table:<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> See Porphyry, *Sententiae* 33 (ed. Erich Lamberz [Leipzig: Teubner], 36.4), where the intelligible is multiplied (πολλαπλασιάζειν) within sensible objects; Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, props. 27, 152, 155 (ed. E. Dodds [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963], 32.8, 134.7, 15, 136.18).

<sup>29</sup> I am indebted to Professor John Jones of Marquette University for help in compiling these statistics. They cover the entire corpus, although the great majority of occurrences are in the *Divine Names*.

### Dionysius

αἰδῖος 8

συναἰδῖος 2

αἰώνιος 13

αἰών 47

### Sarracen

*aeternus* 6

*sempiternus* 2

*coeternus* 2

*aeternus* 11

*aeternaliter* 1

*aeternalis* 1

*aevum* 36

*saeculo* 11

Two points are of note here, one minor and one significant. The minor point is that Sarracen does not preserve the distinction between αἰδῖος and αἰώνιος. This need not in itself lead to misunderstanding, for even in Dionysius the meaning of these terms is fluid and must be drawn from the context. Far more important is the bifurcation of the closely related pair αἰών and αἰώνιος into two unrelated terms, *aevum* and *aeternus*. The effect of this is not only to obscure the connection between the noun and the adjective; it is to create the impression that Dionysius is speaking of a distinct concept, the *aevum*, which is different from *aeternitas* in the proper sense. Thus, where I have interpreted Dionysius as stating both that God is eternity and that he transcends eternity, and have taken this as a deliberately paradoxical statement about God's relationship to one of his own attributes, the Latin reader would find instead that God is the *aevum* and transcends the *aevum*.

Precisely what this means will naturally depend on what one takes to be the *aevum*. Beginning in the early thirteenth century, there seems to have been a consensus that these Dionysian occurrences of the term are to be interpreted in light of its use by Augustine to designate the form of eternity characteristic of the

angels.<sup>30</sup> Since on this view the *aevum* belongs securely to the level of created being, Dionysius accordingly appears to be discussing the relationship of God to an attribute of creatures. Aquinas, for example, identifies God as the *aevum* in that he is the measure of permanent being, and as prior to the *aevum* in that he is its cause.<sup>31</sup> The *aevum* in turn he identifies as *participated* eternity, that is, as the attributes of creatures (such as lengthy duration or immutability) which give them a resemblance to divine eternity.<sup>32</sup> There is nothing particularly paradoxical about this; indeed, it fits neatly into Aquinas's reading of Dionysius as a proponent of theology as science.<sup>33</sup>

The question of precisely how these ingredients contributed to the understanding (or misunderstanding) of Dionysius is a fascinating one that deserves closer study. At this point, however, we must leave the West aside and begin the rather different task of attempting to place Dionysius into his historical context. Recent scholarship has emphasized that Dionysius was not the splendid but isolated voice that he appeared to the Scholastics, but instead fits securely within the Greek patristic tradition.<sup>34</sup> His

<sup>30</sup> See Carlos Steel, "The Neoplatonic Doctrine of Time and Eternity and Its Influence on Medieval Philosophy," in *The Medieval Concept of Time: Studies on the Scholastic Debate and Its Reception in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Pasquale Porro (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 3-31; Pasquale Porro, "Angelic Measures: *Aevum* and Discrete Time," in Porro, ed., *The Medieval Concept of Time*, 131-59; Italo Sciuto, "Il concetto di *aevum* nel pensiero medioevale," in *Il tempo in questione: Paradigmi della temporalità nel pensiero occidentale* (Milan: Geurini e Associati, 1997), 130-41.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *X De Div. Nom.*, lect. 2 (Marietti ed., 862-63); cf. *II De Div. Nom.*, lect. 5 (Marietti ed., 203). Note also that in his *Commentary on the Book of Causes* Aquinas interprets the statement that the First Cause is beyond *aeternitas* as indicating that *aeternitas* is here equivalent to *aevum* (prop. 2).

<sup>32</sup> Aquinas, *X De Div. Nom.*, lect. 3 (Marietti ed., 875); cf. *STh I*, q. 10, aa. 3 and 5; *I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 2, a. 2; d. 19, q. 2, a. 1. (There is also a more robust sense of "participated eternity" in Aquinas, as discussed below in section 6.)

<sup>33</sup> See further John Jones, "(Mis?)-Reading the *Divine Names* as a Science: Aquinas's Interpretation of the *Divine Names* of (Pseudo) Dionysius Areopagite," forthcoming in *Sr. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*.

<sup>34</sup> See especially Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989); Alexander Golitzin, *Et introibo ad altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita* (Thessalonica: Patriarchikon Idruma Paterikon Meleton, 1994); idem, "The Experience of God in Eastern Orthodox Christianity," *Pro Ecclesia* 8 (1999): 159-86; idem, "Dionysius Areopagita: A Christian Mysticism?" *Pro Ecclesia* 12 (2003): 161-212; and John Jones, "An

theology is in many respects a development of that of his predecessors, particularly Clement of Alexandria and the Cappadocian Fathers, and was carried further by his successors, such as St. Maximus the Confessor, St. John of Damascus, and St. Gregory Palamas. This means that, alongside (and embracing) the question of the relationship of Dionysius to his commentators, there is also that of the relationship of the Greek patristic tradition as a whole to the fundamentally Augustinian theology of the West. My hope is that, by placing Dionysius within this context, we will be able both to understand his views better and to determine to what extent they were characteristic of the Greek tradition as a whole. Having done so, we will also be in a position to assess whether this tradition provides an appealing alternative to that of the West.

In the remainder of this article I approach this task chronologically. Section II deals with the most important pre-Christian sources (Plato, Aristotle, and Philo of Alexandria); section III with the early Greek Fathers; section IV with the Cappadocians; and section V with the reception of Dionysius by John of Scythopolis and Maximus the Confessor. In sections VI and VII I discuss the relationship of the two traditions, arguing that that of the East is both distinctive and philosophically promising.

## II. THE CLASSICAL SOURCES

There can be no question that Plato is fundamental for both the Eastern and the Western traditions. As regards time and eternity, Plato established the concepts and terminology that later authors drew upon even when (as in Dionysius) they did so in order to deny their adequacy to God. Plato must therefore be our starting point.

Plato's most explicit treatment of time and eternity is in the *Timaeus*. There the creation account begins by positing that the sensible world is modelled on an original that is eternal (*αἰδίων*),

unchanging, and grasped by intellect or reason rather than opinion (27d-28a, 29a). These statements alone do not imply that the model is eternal in any sense other than everlasting; however, two further points soon complicate the picture. One is that the model is in some sense alive, a Living Creature that "embraces within itself all the intelligible living creatures" (30c). The other is that time is a property solely of the image, and not of the Living Creature itself. As is well known, the Demiurge creates time as a "moving image of eternity" (30d). We might expect that this would mean that eternity (αἰών) is a property solely of the Living Creature, and not of the sensible world. However, that would be to overlook the crucial fact that the sensible world is an *image* of the Living Creature and therefore replicates its properties in a derivative way. Specifically, as regards eternity the sensible world is "an eternal image, moving according to number, of eternity remaining in unity" (30d).

Thus Plato implicitly distinguishes two kinds of eternity (αἰών): that of the sensible world, which is derivative and temporally extended, and the "eternity remaining in unity" of its intelligible model. He clarifies the difference by adding that terms such as "was" and "will be" apply properly only to the sensible world, whereas only "is" is appropriately said of its intelligible model (37e-38a). Undoubtedly these statements are to be read against the background of Plato's general distinction between the being of the Forms and the becoming of the sensible world.<sup>35</sup> Nowhere in the *Timaeus*, however, is there any explanation of what it means to say that intelligible reality is *alive*, indeed a "Living Creature," or how we are to understand the relationship between its life and its eternal being.

Whatever Plato may have thought about these questions, in most of subsequent Greek philosophy they were approached through a complementary set of concepts introduced by Aristotle. Aristotle's Prime Mover is like the Living Creature of the *Timaeus* in two crucial respects: it is alive, and it is without change or

<sup>35</sup> The sense in which the Forms are eternal has been subject to dispute. I follow the more or less traditional view upheld by Richard Patterson, "On the Eternality of the Platonic Forms," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 67 (1985): 27-46.

movement. Aristotle explains this seemingly paradoxical combination in the statement that "life is the activity [or actuality, ἐνέργεια] of intellect."<sup>36</sup> This statement must be understood against the background of the *Metaphysics* (*Metaphys.* Θ.6). There Aristotle distinguishes ἐνέργεια from movement (κίνησις) partly on the grounds that an ἐνέργεια is intrinsically atemporal, in that it does not require time to reach completion.<sup>37</sup> Among the examples of ἐνέργεια that Aristotle cites is νόησις, the activity of intellect. Νόησις is thus not a movement or change, but a form of activity that is intrinsically atemporal. Furthermore, as Aristotle explains at length later in the *Metaphysics* (*Metaphys.* Λ.7 and 9), the Prime Mover is simply the self-subsistent act of νόησις. This means that it is alive and eternal, and that it is the latter both in the sense of enduring everlastingly through time and in the stronger sense of existing independently of time and requiring no time in which to fulfill its existence. One could say of the Prime Mover, just as Plato says of the Living Creature, that it has no "was" or "will be," but simply "is."<sup>38</sup>

Aristotle also provides a way of approaching Plato's distinction between the temporally extended eternity of the sensible world and the "eternity remaining in unity" of the Living Creature. In a remarkable passage of *De Caelo*, he observes that "outside the heaven" there is neither place nor time, and that the things there "continue through all eternity [διατελεῖ τὸν ἅπαντα αἰῶνα] with the best and most self-sufficient life" (1.9.279a22-23). The reference to "there," a place where there is no place, and to things there "continuing" where there is no time, give us warning that language is here being pushed to its limits. (The reference to a place beyond the heaven may in fact be a deliberate echo of the

<sup>36</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Λ.7.1072b27.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Θ.6.1048b18-34. For a detailed explication of this passage see Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 8-12.

<sup>38</sup> See further David Bradshaw, "In What Sense Is the Prime Mover Eternal?" *Ancient Philosophy* 17 (1997): 359-69. There I take issue with a number of scholars (Kneale, Whittaker, Tarán, Sorabji) who have held that the Prime Mover is sempiternal only. All seem to me to overlook the crucial role of the ἐνέργεια - κίνησις distinction.



Charioteer myth in the *Phaedrus*, another sign that the language here is quasi-mythic.) The passage continues:

Indeed, our forefathers were inspired when they made this word, αἰών. The end [τὸ τέλος] which circumscribes the life of every creature, and which cannot in nature be exceeded, they named the αἰών of each. By the same analogy also the end of the whole heaven, the end which circumscribes all time even to infinity [τὸ τὸν πάντα χρόνον καὶ τὴν ἀπειρίαν περιέχον τέλος], is αἰών, taking the name from "always being" [ἀεὶ εἶναι]—the αἰών that is immortal and divine. In dependence on it all other things have their existence and their life, some directly, others more obscurely. (1.9.279a22-30)<sup>39</sup>

Here Aristotle, like Plato, distinguishes two kinds of αἰών. The distinction is not quite the same as Plato's, for the first kind of αἰών is simply the lifespan of a living creature. The real question is what to make of the second kind. Aristotle introduces it by analogy with the first, so that the second kind of αἰών would appear to be, roughly, the lifespan of the cosmos. Yet immediately we have to qualify this statement, for αἰών in the second sense "circumscribes all time even to infinity." This means that it is not a "span" at all, for it has no beginning or end. The point is confirmed by the derivation of αἰών from ἀεὶ εἶναι, "always being." Clearly this phrase is not to be read merely as everlastingness through time, for Aristotle has already told us that in the realm of which he is speaking there is no time. On the other hand, neither is it to be taken in the sense of unchanging static facticity, like that of, say, the truths of mathematics. As the analogy with the lifespan of a living creature indicates, the immortal and divine αἰών is a form of *life*—a life that embraces or circumscribes all of time, but is not itself dependent on temporal process. It would seem that we are here very close to the description of the Prime Mover in the *Metaphysics*.<sup>40</sup> We are also

<sup>39</sup> The translation is that of W. K. C. Guthrie, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939), 93, modified.

<sup>40</sup> Note also that "in dependence on it [the immortal and divine αἰών] all other things have their existence and their life." This closely parallels the statement about the Prime Mover that "on such a principle depend the heaven and the world of nature" (Aristotle, *Metaphys.* A.7.1072b13). See also Bradshaw, "In What Sense Is the Prime Mover Eternal?", 366-67.

close to Plato's αἰών that "remains in unity," of which the αἰών of the sensible world is an image.

What we find in Plato and Aristotle, then, is a highly suggestive set of elements which, although they do not quite cohere into a single doctrine, certainly point in that direction. Both authors agree in distinguishing a higher, transcendent eternity from the temporal passage of the sensible world. Plato approaches this eternity from the top down, as it were, positing it as the original of which time is an image. Aristotle approaches it from the bottom up, conceiving it as the whole span of infinite time taken together as a whole. Accordingly, whereas for Plato there are two types of αἰών, that of the intelligible model and that of its sensible image, for Aristotle there is a single αἰών which somehow embraces within itself all temporal extension. I have suggested that this synthetic unity can be understood through the ἐνέργεια – κίνησις distinction. Since the life of God is νόησις, a paradigmatic case of ἐνέργεια, it is both temporally extended (in possessing duration) and yet whole and complete at each moment, and in that sense independent of time. Thus for Aristotle eternity is the life of God, conceived as embracing time, whereas for Plato it is the life of the intelligible world, conceived as the archetype of time. Both agree that it is a kind of *life*, indeed of divine life, and both agree that time is in some sense dependent upon it.

Let us turn now to Philo of Alexandria, the first author to synthesize these themes from Greek philosophy with Scripture. Our brief survey of Plato and Aristotle will help to explain some otherwise puzzling dualities that run through Philo's references to eternity. Like other Middle Platonists, Philo adopts the Stoic definition of time as the extension or interval (διάστημα) of the movement of the cosmos.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly he views the physical universe as the "father" of time, and God, the maker of the

<sup>41</sup> Philo, *On the Making of the World*, 26; cf. idem, *On the Eternity of the World*, 4, where this definition is recognized as Stoic. For discussion of the definition see J. M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 273-83. References to Philo are to Philo, ed. and trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1929-62), 10 vols.

physical universe, as its maker or (continuing the metaphor) its grandfather.

God is the maker of time also, for He is the father of time's father, that is of the universe, and has caused the movements of the one to be the source of the generation of the other. Thus time stands to God in the relation of a grandson. For this universe, since we perceive it by our senses, is the younger son of God. To the elder son, I mean the intelligible universe, He assigned the place of firstborn, and purposed that it should remain in His own keeping.<sup>42</sup>

Philo follows Plato in distinguishing the sensible from the intelligible cosmos, but unlike Plato he identifies God as the creator (or "father") of both. Most significantly for the subject of time and eternity, he continues:

And thus with God there is no future, since He has made the boundaries of the ages subject to Himself. For God's life is not time, but eternity [αἰών], which is the archetype and pattern of time; and in eternity there is no past nor future, but only present existence.<sup>43</sup>

This passage is not only Platonic, in its understanding of time and eternity as image and archetype; it is also Aristotelian, in its identification of eternity with the life of God.

Keeping this dual background in mind will help explain the difference between this statement and another elsewhere, where Philo identifies eternity, not with the life of God, but with that of the intelligible world. Commenting on the phrase "the other year" in Genesis 17:21, Philo explains that it is not "an interval of time which is measured by the revolutions of sun and moon, but something truly mysterious, strange and new, other than the realm of sight and sense, having its place in the realm of the incorporeal and intelligible—the model and archetype of time, that is, αἰών." He continues: "The word αἰών signifies the life of the intelligible world, as time is the life of the perceptible."<sup>44</sup> This is a different view from that in the previous passage, for the intelligible world

<sup>42</sup> Philo, *On the Unchangeableness of God* 31 (Colson and Whittaker, trans., 3:25-27).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>44</sup> Philo, *On the Change of Names* 267 (Colson and Whittaker, trans., 5:279; translation modified).

is not God. Philo identifies it with the mind or reason (λόγος) of God as he is engaged in creating, or (equivalently) with the pattern that God has in mind as he creates.<sup>45</sup>

Is Philo simply inconsistent? If so, the inconsistency would be easy to understand in light of his sources. For Aristotle eternity is the life of God; for Plato it is that of the intelligible world, which Philo identifies with the divine mind engaged in the act of creating. It would not be surprising if Philo failed to keep these two views entirely separate. Nonetheless, there is a possible reconciliation. Philo regards the term 'God' (θεός) as a name, not for God as he is in his own nature—for which Philo typically uses 'That Which Is' (τὸ ὄν) or 'He Who Is' (ὁ ὢν)—but for the first of the two divine Powers, also known as the Creative or Beneficent Power.<sup>46</sup> These Powers are not truly distinct from God, but are God apprehended in the limited way characteristic of the human mind.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps, then, in saying that eternity is the life of God, Philo does not mean to identify it with the life of God *simpliciter*, but rather with that of the Creative Power—that is, God as he is manifested in the creative act.

This interpretation not only brings the first passage close to the second; it also fits well with the apophatic character of Philo's theology. One of the most characteristic features of Philo's theology is his view that God is ἀκατάληπτος, ungraspable by the human mind.<sup>48</sup> The divine Powers give us knowledge, not of *what*

<sup>45</sup> Philo, *On the Making of the World*, 24-25; *idem*, *On the Migration of Abraham*, 102-3. See David Bradshaw, "The Vision of God in Philo of Alexandria," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 52 (1998): 483-500, especially 494-95.

<sup>46</sup> The second is the Kingly or Punitive Power, which we have in view in referring to God as Lord. See Philo, *On the Confusion of Tongues*, 137; *idem*, *Who Is the Heir of Divine Things*, 166; *idem*, *On the Change of Names*, 15-17, 28-29; *idem*, *On Abraham*, 121.

<sup>47</sup> Philo, *On Abraham*, 122-23; *idem*, *Questions on Genesis* 4.2. For a general discussion of the divine Powers see John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 161-66.

<sup>48</sup> Philo, *On the Posterity of Cain*, 169; *On the Unchangeableness of God*, 62; *On the Change of Names*, 15; *On Dreams*, 1.67. On the philosophical sources of Philo's apophaticism see John Dillon, *The Transcendence of God in Philo: Some Possible Sources* (Berkeley: Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1975). I have discussed the biblical sources (though without specific reference to Philo) in David Bradshaw, "The Divine Glory and the Divine Energies," *Faith and Philosophy* 23 (2006): 279-98.

God is, but only *that* he is. As Philo writes in *On the Posterity of Cain*: "all that follows in the wake of God is within the good man's apprehension, while He Himself alone is beyond it, beyond, that is, in the line of straight and direct approach . . . but brought within ken by the Powers that follow and attend Him; for these make evident not his essence but his subsistence [ὑπαρξιν] from the things which He accomplishes."<sup>49</sup> In general, Philo holds that only the fact of God's existence can be known, and that any positive statement regarding the divine attributes must be taken as referring to the divine Powers.<sup>50</sup> There is no reason to think that eternity is an exception to this rule.

In sum, Philo adds little directly to the doctrine (or proto-doctrine) of eternity found in Plato and Aristotle. His achievement lies instead in incorporating this doctrine within a fundamentally apophatic framework.

### III. FROM CLEMENT TO ATHANASIUS

The early Greek Fathers adopted both aspects of this synthesis. Often their apophaticism is expressed, as with Philo, in the relatively simple statement that God has no "proper name" but is named only indirectly through his works or deeds.<sup>51</sup> It was with Clement of Alexandria that apophaticism became a more prominent and carefully developed theme. The following passage from Clement is especially significant:

The One is indivisible [ἀδιαιρέτον]; wherefore also it is infinite, not considered as untraversable [ἀδιεξήτητον], but as having no division [or dimension, ἀδιάστατον] and not having a limit [πέρας]. And therefore it is without form or name. And if we name it, we do not do so properly, terming it either the One, or the Good, or Mind, or Absolute Being, or Father, or Creator, or Lord. . . . For

<sup>49</sup> Philo, *On the Posterity of Cain*, 169 (Colson and Whitaker, trans., 2:429).

<sup>50</sup> Besides the passage just cited, see also Philo, *The Worse Attacks the Better*, 89; *On the Unchangeableness of God*, 55-56, 62; *On Flight and Finding*, 164-65; *On the Change of Names*, 7-9; *On the Special Laws*, 1.32-50, *On Rewards and Punishments*, 39-40.

<sup>51</sup> Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 6; Pseudo-Justin, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 21; Theophylus, *To Autolycus* 1.4-5; Origen, *On Prayer* 24.2-3.

each [name] by itself does not express God; but all together are indicative of the power [δυνάμει] of the Omnipotent.<sup>52</sup>

This statement strikingly anticipates the doctrine of Dionysius that the divine names refer to the divine powers or processions. It is also notable for its use of the term ἀδιάστατον in reference to God. Clement would seem to mean by this either "without division" or "without dimension," or perhaps both.<sup>53</sup> As we shall see in a moment, ἀδιάστατον will be adopted by the Cappadocians as a key term for distinguishing God from creatures, including creatures that are eternal.

It would be interesting to know how Clement understands divine eternity and how he relates it to his apophaticism. The only passage that sheds light on this point is one in which he remarks that eternity "presents in an instant" (ἀκαριαίως συνίστησι) the past, present, and future.<sup>54</sup> Plainly Clement means to endorse the traditional view that God's knowledge is not temporal. Since he does not dwell on the point, however, we cannot say precisely what he would make of eternity as a divine attribute.

Clement's great successor at Alexandria, Origen, is similarly hard to pin down. He defines the αἰών of someone as, in general, the time that is coextensive (συμπαρεκτεινόμενον) with the

<sup>52</sup> Clement, *Stromata* 5.12.81-82 (trans. Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson [repr.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986], 2:464); see Otto Stählin, ed., *Clemens Alexandrinus: Stromata Buch I-VI* [Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1960], 380-81). See also *Stromata* 2.2.5: God is remote in essence (οὐσία) but near by his power which holds all things in its embrace.

<sup>53</sup> John Whittaker, "Philological Comments on the Neoplatonic Notion of Infinity," in *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, ed. R. Baine Harris (Norfolk, Va.: Old Dominion University, 1976), 155-72, argues that ἀδιάστατον in this passage means "infinitely small" (156). Not only is this not a standard meaning of the word (one for which Whittaker fails to provide any other instances), but the notion that God is "infinitely small" would surely require explanation. Clement's other uses of the word fit its normal meanings of either "continuous, uninterrupted" or "without division" (*Stromata* 4.22.136; 6.12.104; 7.12.70; *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 8.3). There is also a third normal meaning, "without dimension." Of these three candidates, the first can be excluded as making little sense in the context, leaving the second or third. (Granted, "without division" would repeat the claim already made by ἀδιαιρέτον, but that may be what Clement intends.)

<sup>54</sup> *Stromata* 1.13.57 (Stählin, ed., 36; ANF 2:313).

structure of his life.<sup>55</sup> If this definition can be applied to God, then the divine eternity will be, not strictly timeless, but the infinite expanse of time that is coextensive with the divine life; in other words, we shall have returned to the "all time even to infinity" of Aristotle. That is indeed the view Origen maintains. Commenting on the verse, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (Ps. 2:7, Heb. 1:5), he explains:

There is no evening for God, I believe, since there is also no morning, but the time which is coextensive with His unoriginate and eternal [ἀιδίω] life, if I may so put it, is the day which for Him is "today," in which the Son has been begotten. Consequently there is no finding of the beginning either of His generation, or of His day.<sup>56</sup>

Although he speaks of time as coextensive with the divine life, Origen is not here simply equating divine eternity with sempiternity. Like Aristotle he approaches eternity from the bottom up, understanding it as the summation of all time gathered together in a single "day." This would seem to be rather different from Clement's view that God is ἀδιόστατον. Elsewhere we learn that for Origen God is not strictly ἀκατάληπτος and the divine names are not names only of the divine powers.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless Origen affirms that the Trinity transcends "all time and all ages and all

<sup>55</sup> Origen, *Exposition of Proverbs* 10 (PG 17:189A); *Commentary on Ephesians*, frag. 9, as printed in *Journal of Theological Studies* 3 (1902): 403. Time is not mentioned explicitly in the first of these passages, but it would seem to be implicit. There is much information about Origen in Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *The Concept of Time in Origen* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991); and idem, "Origen and the Stoic View of Time," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52 (1991): 535-61, although Tzamalikos considerably exaggerates Origen's originality.

<sup>56</sup> Origen, *Commentary on John* 1.204 (Erwin Preuschen, ed., *Origenes Werke*, vol. 4 [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1903], 37).

<sup>57</sup> In *On First Principles* Origen affirms that God is incomprehensible and escapes the grasp of the human mind (1.5). Nonetheless, he goes on to add that "there is a certain affinity between the mind and God, of whom the mind is an intellectual image, and that by reason of this fact the mind, especially if it is purified and separated from bodily matter, is able to have some perception of the divine nature" (1.7) (Origen, *On First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth [Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973], 13). He also holds that God's power is finite, for if it were infinite God could not understand even himself (2.9.1). Similar reasoning would imply that the divine nature is also finite. It is presumably for this reason that we do not find Origen repeating such statements of Clement as that God is "without dimension" and "without form or name."

eternity," and that it "exceeds all comprehension, not only of temporal but even of eternal intelligence."<sup>58</sup> In general, although Origen is not as rigorously apophatic as Philo or Clement, he too is very far from identifying eternity with the divine nature in the manner familiar to later theology.

Origen is also important in that he was the first Christian theologian to affirm explicitly that the begetting of the Son by the Father is eternal, so that it is false to say "there was a time when the Son was not."<sup>59</sup> The Son is begotten by the Father "as an act of will proceeds from the mind, without either cutting off any part of the mind or being separated or divided from it."<sup>60</sup> Yet these statements must be tempered by, on the one hand, Origen's subordinationism, according to which the Son is God in only a derivative sense; and, on the other, by his belief that the creation too has always existed, so that one equally cannot say "there was a time when the creation was not."<sup>61</sup> Thus although for Origen there is no "separation" or "interval" between the Father and Son, this is not for him a distinguishing feature of God as against creation.

The debates of the Nicene era forced Christian thought into clarity on this point. The Arian slogan, "there was when the Son was not" (ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν), was taken by the orthodox as implying the existence of a temporal interval (διάστημα) during which the Father had not yet begotten the Son.<sup>62</sup> It is not clear that Arius himself would have accepted this implication, for he also says that the Son was created or generated before time and that time was made through Him.<sup>63</sup> Possibly Arius was attempting to articulate a view like that of the Platonist Atticus, who found

<sup>58</sup> Origen, *On First Principles* 4.4.1 (Butterworth, trans., 316).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 2.1.2 and 9.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 2.1.6 (Butterworth, trans., 19).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 1.2.10; 1.4.3-5 (where, however, he appears somewhat less certain). Origen's subordinationism was largely erased from the translation of *On First Principles* by Rufinus, and must be reconstructed from various statements quoted by Jerome and Justinian (Butterworth, trans., 20 n.5, 27, 33-34).

<sup>62</sup> Alexander of Alexandria, *Epistle* 6 (PG 18:557A-B); cf. the Symbol of Antioch set forth in 345 A.D. (PG 26:729A).

<sup>63</sup> Athanasius, *Orations against the Arians* 1.14; Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.4.

in the *Timaeus* a distinction between a precosmic time and the time that came into being with the creation of the world.<sup>64</sup> Even on this view, however, there was an interval of some kind (although not one measured by time) between the Father and the Son.

Saint Athanasius, in his rebuttal of Arius, refuses to concede even this much. He observes that in Scripture Christ is the maker of all the ages (αἰῶνες), and so must be before *any* sort of interval whatsoever:

The words addressed to the Son in the hundred and forty-fourth Psalm, "Thy kingdom is a kingdom of all ages," forbid anyone to imagine any interval [διάστημα] in which the Word did not exist. For if every interval in the ages is measured, and of all the ages the Word is King and Maker (Heb 1:2; 11:3), therefore, whereas no interval at all exists prior to Him, it would be madness to say, "There was once when the Everlasting was not."<sup>65</sup>

Creatures, he says, "have a beginning of existence connected with an interval" (διαστηματικὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ εἶναι ἔχει), in that they were created "from some beginning when they were not yet."<sup>66</sup> The Word, by contrast, "has no beginning of its being . . . but has always been."<sup>67</sup> It will be noticed that Athanasius does not rule out the possibility of some sort of quasi-temporal order prior to that of the physical cosmos. His concern is solely to insist that no interval, whether temporal or otherwise, intervened between the Father and the Son.

The question all of this raises is how God's adiaesthetic existence is compatible with his somehow embracing and being present to all of time. This issue did not arise for Plato and Aristotle, for they start from a framework in which time and eternity bear an intrinsic and organic relationship. Clement and Athanasius, although with different motivations, each arrive at a

<sup>64</sup> See E. P. Meijering, "ἮΝ ΠΟΤΕ ΟΤΕ ΟΥΚ ἮΝ Ο ΥΙΟΣ: A Discussion of Time and Eternity," in his *God Being History: Studies in Patristic Philosophy* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing, 1975), 81-88.

<sup>65</sup> Athanasius, *Orations against the Arians* 1.12 (trans. NPNF2 4:313; PG 26:37A-B).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 2.57 (trans. NPNF2 4:379; PG 26:268C).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. (PG 26:269A).

view of the divine life that emphasizes its simplicity, wholeness, and lack of division. How can this life be related to something as extended and divided as time? One of the tasks facing the subsequent tradition will be to answer that question.

#### IV. THE CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS

The Cappadocian Fathers—St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory Nazianzen—were the primary defenders of Nicaea against the Arians of the later fourth century. They made the Athanasian denial that there is διάστημα between the Father and the Son a recurrent theme. Saint Basil argues that the Father possesses paternity coextensively with his own eternity (τῇ ἑαυτοῦ αἰδιότητι συμπαρεκτεινομένην); and since paternity implies the existence of a Son, the Son is present with the Father without interval.<sup>68</sup> Saint Gregory of Nyssa makes a similar argument.<sup>69</sup>

More importantly, Gregory also extrapolates this point of Trinitarian theology into a general distinction between the divine life as adiaesthetic and the diastemic existence of creatures. Creation "journeys to its proper end through intervals of time [χρονικῶν διαστημάτων]," whereas the life of God "has no extension [διαστήματος] accompanying its course and therefore no span or measure."<sup>70</sup> It seems likely that Gregory is influenced here, not only by Clement and Athanasius, but also by pagan Neoplatonism, for one finds in Plotinus and Porphyry a similar distinction between the adiaesthetic life of the intelligible world and the diastemic character of sensible existence.<sup>71</sup> Gregory in much the same way views the distinction as a philosophical truth

<sup>68</sup> Basil, *Against Eunomius* 2.12 (PG 29:593B-C); cf. similar arguments at *Against Eunomius* 1.20; and Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 6.14.

<sup>69</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 1.344-58, 685-88.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 1.365-66 (trans. NPNF2 5:69). For the text see *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, ed. Werner Jaeger et al. [= GNO] (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960-96), 1:135.

<sup>71</sup> See (besides the definition of eternity cited above, n. 2) Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.5.7.23-31; 3.7.2.31-34; 3.7.3.14-20; 3.7.6.35; 3.7.11.54; 5.8.9.20; 6.2.4.22; etc.; Porphyry, *Sententiae*, sect. 33 and 44.

grounded in God's being what he is without participation. As he writes in *Against Eunomius*:

Wide and insurmountable is the interval that fences off uncreated from created nature. The latter is limited, the former has no limit [πέρας]. . . . The latter is stretched out by a certain degree of extension [διαστηματική τινι παρατάσει συμπαρεκτείνεται], circumscribed by time and place; the former transcends all conception of interval [πᾶσαν διαστήματος ἔννοιαν], baffling curiosity from every point of view . . . [It is] ever the same, established of itself, not traveling on by intervals [οὐ διαστηματικῶς διοδεύουσα] from one thing to another in its life. Nor does it come to live by participating in the life of another, so that one could consequently conceive a beginning and limit of its participation. But it is just what it is, Life made active in itself [ζωή ἐν ἑαυτῇ ἐνεργουμένη], not becoming greater or less by addition or diminution.<sup>72</sup>

Elaborating on the distinction between creatures as diastemic and God as adiaesthetic, Gregory goes so far as to say that "διάστημα is nothing other than the creation itself."<sup>73</sup> Since all creatures are bound in their thinking by their own diastemic perspective, there is no possibility for a creature to apprehend the preeternal (προαιωνίου) and adiaesthetic nature of God. Gregory likens one attempting to do so to a mountain climber whose foot suddenly steps off a precipice.<sup>74</sup>

This sharp distinction between the diastemic creation and adiaesthetic Creator raises the question of how we are to understand the eternity of creatures such as angels, who are not subject to the temporal order of the physical cosmos. The Cappadocians respond by distinguishing the eternity of the angels from that of God in a way that seems, at first at least, to anticipate the medieval theory of the *aevum*. Basil defines time as the interval

<sup>72</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2.69-70 (GNO 1:246; NPNF2 5:257).

<sup>73</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on Ecclesiastes* 7 (GNO 5:412).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. (GNO 5:413-14). For further references and discussion of this theme in Gregory see Brooks Otis, "Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocian Conception of Time," *Studia Patristica* 14.3 (1976): 327-57; David L. Balás, "Eternity and Time in Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium*," in *Gregor von Nyssa und Die Philosophie*, ed. Heinrich Dörrie, Margarete Attenburger, and Uta Schramm (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 128-55; T. Paul Verghese, "ΔΙΑΣΤΗΜΑ and ΔΙΑΣΤΑΣΙΣ in Gregory of Nyssa: Introduction to a Concept and the Posing of a Problem," in Dörrie et al., eds., *Gregor von Nyssa und Die Philosophie*, 243-60.

coextensive with the existence of the cosmos (τὸ συμπαρεκτεινόμενον τῇ συστάσει τοῦ κόσμου διάστημα), by which all movement is measured.<sup>75</sup> He adds that what time is for sensible objects, the nature of the eternal is for supercelestial beings, so that διάστημα is the constitution common to both time and eternity.<sup>76</sup> Plainly eternity (αἰών) here is not a characteristic of the divine nature, but a mode of created being characteristic of the angels.

There is a more detailed explanation of this point in Basil's *Hexaemeron*.<sup>77</sup> Prior to the creation of this world there existed "an order suitable to the supercelestial powers, one beyond time [ἡ ὑπέρχρονος], eternal and everlasting [ἡ αἰωνία, ἡ ἀίδιος]." To this order at last was added the succession of time, connate to this physical world, "always pressing on and passing away and never stopping in its course."<sup>78</sup> The invisible and intellectual world, no less than the visible and sensible, belongs to "the things that have come to be" and is transcended by its Creator.<sup>79</sup> Later, commenting on the statement of Genesis 1:5 that "the evening and the morning were one day," Basil observes that God made the week "revolve upon itself," forming it out of one day revolving upon itself seven times. He adds, "such is also the character of eternity [αἰῶνος], to revolve upon itself and to end nowhere." Indeed, the reason the Septuagint refers to "one day" rather than the "first day" is to show the kinship of this primordial day with eternity. Echoing Plato, Basil refers to the first day as an image (εἰκόνα) of eternity, the "first fruit of days" that is the basis for all others.<sup>80</sup> Throughout this discussion eternity is the mode of being of the angels, one that transcends our time but is no more characteristic of God than is time itself.

<sup>75</sup> Basil, *Against Eunomius* 1.21 (PG 29:560B).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 2.13 (PG 29:596C).

<sup>77</sup> Unlike most of the other works cited in this section, the *Hexaemeron* was available during the Middle Ages in a Latin translation (PL 53:865-966). In the translation, however, αἰών is rendered as *saeculum*, considerably obscuring Basil's meaning.

<sup>78</sup> Basil, *On the Hexaemeron* 1.5 (PG 29:13A-B).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. (PG 29:13C); cf. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 6.14.

<sup>80</sup> Basil, *On the Hexaemeron* 2.8 (PG 29:49C, 52B); see also a similar explanation in Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 27.66 (quoted below in section VII).

The two Gregories likewise insist upon the diastemic character of the eternity of the angels and its kinship to our own time. Saint Gregory Nazianzen defines the αἰών as "a certain timelike movement and extension" (τι χρονικὸν κίνημα καὶ διάστημα) that is coextensive with eternal beings (τοῖς αἰδίοις), although not itself divided or measured by any motion.<sup>81</sup> He observes that when the mind considers God as both beginningless and endless, it naturally calls him eternal (αἰώνιον); nonetheless, this conception of God, like all others, is only a mental image (φαντασία). Citing Exodus 3:14, Gregory explains:

In Himself [God] sums up and contains all being, having neither beginning in the past nor end in the future; like some great sea of being, limitless and unbounded, transcending all conception of time and nature, only adumbrated by the mind, and that very dimly and scantily—not from the things directly concerning Him, but from the things around Him [οὐκ ἐκ τῶν κατ' αὐτόν, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῶν περὶ αὐτόν]; one image [φαντασία] being got from one source and another from another, and combined into some sort of presentation of the truth, which escapes us when we have caught it, and takes flight when we have conceived it.<sup>82</sup>

The distinction between "the things directly concerning Him" and "the things around Him" is roughly equivalent to that between the divine essence and Powers in Philo, or the supersubstantial divine being and divine processions in Dionysius. The "things around Him" are not creatures, but God himself as he is manifested in his acts of creating, sustaining, and governing the world.<sup>83</sup> What Gregory emphasizes here is that these acts give us only a partial and elusive grasp of their transcendent source, and that we can never forget the role of our own mental faculties in forming even this limited apprehension.

Gregory of Nyssa, too, views our understanding of eternity as inevitably tinged by our own temporal being. Commenting on biblical phrases such as that God's kingdom is "before the ages"

<sup>81</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations* 38.8 (PG 36:320B); cf. *Orations* 29.3.

<sup>82</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations* 38.7 (PG 36:317B-C); cf. a similar statement at *Orations* 30.17.

<sup>83</sup> See Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 166-68.

(πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων) or "extending beyond the ages" (ὕπὲρ τοῦς αἰῶνας ἐκτεινομένην), he observes:

Human life, moving through intervals, advances in its progress from a beginning to an end, and our life here is divided between that which is past and that which is expected . . . so we speak in this way, though incorrectly, of the transcendent nature of God; not of course that God in His own existence leaves any interval [διάστημα] behind, or passes on afresh to something that lies before, but because our intellect can only conceive things according to our nature, and measures the eternal [αἰδίον] by a past and a future.<sup>84</sup>

Gregory, like Clement and Athanasius, adheres strictly to the adiaesthetic character of the divine life. He takes this term not as implying a kind of pointlike existence, however, but as indicating a higher way of being of which we can form no conception. To speak of the divine life as "extending" in any way, even as extending beyond the ages, is a concession to the inevitably temporal framework of our own understanding.

We also note in passing that Gregory in this passage seems to reserve the term αἰδίος for the eternity of God that transcends all the ages. This seems on the whole to be Gregory's terminological preference.<sup>85</sup> Basil at one point draws a similar distinction, defining αἰδίος as "more ancient in being than all time and every age [or eternity, αἰῶνος]." <sup>86</sup> This tendency in the Cappadocians is probably the source of the similar tentative distinction in Dionysius. On the whole, however, the biblical precedent for describing God as αἰώνιος was too strong for this attempt at clarification to catch on very widely.

Regardless of terminology, the Cappadocians consistently agree that the eternity of God transcends even the nontemporal (but diastemic) eternity of the angels. In this there is common ground with the West. On the other hand, for the Cappadocians whatever eternity we ascribe to God is not itself the divine nature, but one of the "things around God." We have seen that Gregory

<sup>84</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2.459 (GNO 1:360; trans. NPNF2 5:296).

<sup>85</sup> See *ibid.*, 1.666; 3.6.3; 3.6.67-68; Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 1 (GNO 3:2); *idem*, *On Infants' Early Deaths* (GNO 3:77).

<sup>86</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2.17 (PG 29:608C).

Nazianzen regards the description of God as eternal as a  $\phi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha\iota\alpha$ —meaning not that it is false, but that it must be supplemented by other equally limited and partial images to arrive at “some sort of presentation of the truth.” For Gregory of Nyssa, all the divine names signify not the divine essence or nature but the “things around God,” or, equivalently, the divine energies ( $\epsilon\nu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$ ).<sup>87</sup> Although I have not found Gregory applying this general point specifically to divine eternity, he comes close in stating that among the “things around God” are God’s infinity and being without beginning.<sup>88</sup> It seems likely that Dionysius derives from the Cappadocians, as well as perhaps from Clement, his own understanding of the divine names as referring to the divine processions.

Even as regards angelic eternity, there are important elements in the Cappadocians’ views that are not found in the West. We have seen that Basil contrasts angelic eternity to time, which is “always pressing on and passing away and never stopping in its course.” Evidently the eternity of the angels, although it is diastemic, does not involve the “knife-edge present” of temporal succession. Gregory of Nyssa develops this thought in a passage of his *Homilies on the Song of Songs*. Distinguishing God and the angels as two species of the “intellectual nature,” he explains:

The intellectual nature that is brought into being by creation always looks toward the first cause of beings and by association with its superior is forever kept in the good and in a manner of speaking is always being created [ $\kappa\rho\iota\varsigma\tau\alpha\iota$ ] because of its increase in goodness through its alteration for the better, so as never to possess any limit or be circumscribed in its growth toward the better by any boundary. But its ever-present good—however great and perfect it may seem to be—is the commencement of an additional and greater good, so that in this respect the apostolic word seems to be true, when it speaks of forgetting the acquisitions of the past in reaching forth to the things that are before (Phil. 3:13). For he who is always finding a greater and supreme good and devoting all

his attention to his share in it, is not allowed to look to the past, and just because of his enjoyment of what is more precious loses his memory of what is less so.<sup>89</sup>

For the angels, whatever good has been acquired is always only the beginning of an even greater good; hence they have no need of memory, for the past good is always contained within that of the present, even as they strain forward to the yet more comprehensive good to come. Thus although their state is diastemic (insofar as it is one of perpetual progress), they are not constrained to the knife-edge of the present. Elsewhere Gregory gives a similar description of the life of the blessed in heaven, describing it as an expansive ever-growing enjoyment of the good in which all need for memory or hope is left behind.<sup>90</sup>

This sheds some light on what it means to speak of time as an image of the eternity of the angels. We may think of time as narrowing into a moving point, as it were, the ever-growing enjoyment of the Good that constitutes the angelic life. Yet precisely as an image time also points forward to its heavenly archetype. Time is not only linear but also circular, “revolving upon itself” in a weekly pattern that points to the Eighth Day, the day of the new creation.<sup>91</sup> This means that time and eternity are not entirely distinct modes of being, but instead constitute, respectively, a more partial and a fuller arena in which the ever-forward movement into God is accomplished.

We can summarize the Cappadocians’ teaching in the following points. (1) God is adiaesthetic, creatures (including angels) diastemic. (2) As a consequence, any conception we can form of divine eternity is merely a mental image ( $\phi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha\iota\alpha$ ) that does not represent its real nature. (3) Divine eternity is one of the “things around God,” not the divine nature itself. (4) The eternity of the angels, by contrast, is diastemic and time-like in a way that

<sup>87</sup> See ibid., 2:582; 3:5:58-60; Gregory of Nyssa, *On Not Three Gods* (GNO 3:1, 43-44); also Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 161-64.

<sup>88</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2:89.

<sup>89</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Song of Songs* 6 (GNO 6:174). The translation is taken from Otis, “Gregory of Nyssa,” 344, slightly modified.

<sup>90</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (PG 46:92A-96C); *Homilies on the Song of Songs* 8 (GNO 6:245-47); cf. the discussion in Otis, “Gregory of Nyssa,” 344-46.

<sup>91</sup> On the Eighth Day see Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 255-75.



permits an unending progress into God. (5) Angelic eternity is the archetype of which time is an image.

This teaching is in many ways a natural extension of the apophaticism of Philo and Clement. Its most original feature lies in identifying as archetype and image, not divine eternity and time, as in Philo, but *angelic* eternity and time. In light of the Cappadocians' understanding of the divine life as adiaesthetic, the earlier, Philonic approach could hardly have been retained without alteration. Although relating angelic eternity and time in this way is a fruitful idea that proved important in other areas, such as mystical theology, it leaves us with the same question we had in regard to Clement and Athanasius: How can the adiaesthetic divine life possibly embrace or be present to all of time? For an answer we shall have to turn to the Fathers who wrote after Dionysius.

#### V. IN THE WAKE OF DIONYSIUS

Clearly there is much in the earlier Fathers that directly anticipates Dionysius. In particular, what I have called Dionysius's framework—his denial that anything can be said of the divine essence, his careful balancing of the apophatic and kataphatic, his assignment of the divine names to the divine processions—is already present in the Cappadocians, and to a lesser extent in Clement and even Philo. So too is his insistence that God transcends eternity just as much as he does time. Finally, since Dionysius sees the angels as both growing in knowledge and acting in time, he would presumably agree with the Cappadocians' description of angelic eternity as diastemic. Indeed, since he sees the blessed as "equal to the angels" and "partakers of eternity," it seems likely that he would accept Gregory of Nyssa's understanding of perpetual progress, including its application to the blessed.<sup>92</sup>

There remain several points that are original to Dionysius. First is the symmetry of his teaching *both* that God is eternity *and* that

<sup>92</sup> Dionysius, *Divine Names* 1.4.592C; 10.3.937D.

he is time. It had long been traditional to identify God with various perfections such as goodness, being, and wisdom, but Dionysius was the first to extend this pattern to time and eternity. He does so by regarding them both as divine processions, and thus as perfections that are participated by creatures. To view them as processions was a critical innovation, for it reestablished the link between the eternity of God and that of creatures that had been missing in earlier authors. For Dionysius, the angels are eternal by participating in eternity, just as they (and all creatures) are temporal by participating in time. Clearly there is much here that needs explanation, but the originality and importance of Dionysius' ideas cannot be denied.<sup>93</sup>

How were the more original aspects of Dionysius's teaching received? We are fortunate to have the evidence on this point of the scholia on the Areopagitic corpus traditionally attributed to St. Maximus the Confessor. It has long been known that many of these scholia were in fact by John of Scythopolis, an ardent defender of Chalcedon whose career spanned roughly the first half of the sixth century. Recent work by Beate Regina Suchla and others has made it possible to identify precisely which scholia were written by John and which by Maximus. It has also revealed that their influence was even more widespread than previously thought, for the original recension of the scholia (containing those written by John) was already incorporated into most manuscripts of the corpus by the mid-sixth century.<sup>94</sup> We will take first the original scholia and then those added by Maximus.

<sup>93</sup> Dionysius's notion of the dual participation of the angels in time and eternity *may* have been influenced by the Procline doctrine that souls are eternal in their οὐσία but temporal in their ἐνέπρετα (*Elements of Theology*, props. 50, 106-7, 191-92). However, the resemblance is really not very close. I do not agree with Carlos Steel ("Dionysius and Albert on Time and Eternity," in *Die Dionysius-Rezeption im Mittelalter*, ed. Tzotcho Boiadjev, Georgi Kapriev, and Andreas Speer [Turnhout: Brepols, 2000], 317-41) that Proclus was the major influence on Dionysius's treatment of time and eternity. Such a conclusion can only be reached by ignoring the patristic antecedents.

<sup>94</sup> See Paul Rorem and John Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 2, 36-39. In identifying the scholia by John I use the collation in *ibid.*, 264-77.

John defines eternity (αἰών) as “unextended and infinite life” (ἀδιαιτάτου καὶ ἀμείρου ζωῆς), or more fully as “the life that is unshaken and all together at once, already infinite and entirely unmoving, standing forth as a unity.”<sup>95</sup> Here he would seem to have in mind the eternity of God rather than that of the angels, for he notes repeatedly that God is eternal (αἰώνιος) by himself being eternity, whereas creatures are eternal by partaking of eternity.<sup>96</sup> Later he observes that the term αἰώνιος has a range of meanings, but that only God is absolutely διδιος.<sup>97</sup> This might suggest that John understands there to be a general distinction between αἰώνιος and διδιος; if so, however, he does not explain it. Instead, commenting on the statement in chapter 10 of the *Divine Names* (10.3) that things called eternal in Scripture are not absolutely coeternal (συναιδία) with God, John explains that although the incorporeal powers (that is, the higher angels) are eternal (αἰώνιοι), they were produced by God and so are not coeternal with Him.<sup>98</sup> Thus he identifies two major differences between the eternity of God and that of creatures: first, God is eternal by being eternity, whereas creatures are eternal by participation; and second, even eternal creatures have a cause of their being.

The identification of God with eternity is reminiscent of Augustine and Boethius. However, John does not overlook the other side of Dionysius’s teaching, namely that God can also be identified with time. Immediately after the definition of eternity just quoted, he continues:

<sup>95</sup> Τὴν ἀρετὴν ἐκείνην καὶ ὁμοῦ νέαν ζωὴν, καὶ ἀμείρου ᾧν καὶ ἀδιαιτὴ νέαν, καὶ ἐν ἐνῇ, καὶ ποσειδάων (John of Scythopolis, *Scholion on the Divine Names* [PG 4:313D, 316A]). The phrase ὁμοῦ νέαν is an echo of Plotinus (above, n. 2) and ultimately derives from Parmenides. For John’s knowledge of Plotinus see Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis*, 119–37.

<sup>96</sup> *Scholion on the Divine Names* (PG 4:208B, 229A–B, 313D, 385C–D).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* (PG 4:388A); cf. the reference to God’s eternal thoughts (αἰδίοις νοήσεσιν) at PG 4:324A.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* (PG 4:388C–D). For a translation see Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis*, 238–39.

Thus also time, being once at rest in He Who Always Is, shone forth in its descent [καθ’ ὑποβασιν] when later it was necessary for visible nature to come forth. So the procession [προόδου] of the goodness of God in creating sensible objects, we call time. For the movement of intervals [ἡ κίνησις τῶν διαστάσεων] into portions and seasons and nights and days is not time, but homonymous with time. Just as we are accustomed to call by the same name that which measures and that which is measured, so is it here—as for instance, when that which is measured by a cubit, such as a foundation or wall, we call a cubit. According to the verse, “let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for years” (Gen. 1:14), the motions of the stars were made by God for us for the sake of clear division and distinction [of time]. Hence the One who ordered them is Himself these things, supereternally [ὑπεραιώνιος] and timelessly, as their cause.”<sup>99</sup>

There are here two distinct ways in which God can be referred to as time. One is in reference to time in the proper sense, “the procession of the goodness of God in creating sensibles.” Time in this sense is God just as any of the divine processions is God, although he also remains beyond it as its source. (Indeed, it was “once at rest in He Who Always Is,” prior to its shining forth in the creation of the sensible world.) Second there is time as “the movement of temporal intervals,” that which is measured by time in the first sense. God can also be called time in this sense, just as he can be called by the name of any of his creatures, since they preexist in him as their cause. By way of analogy, we might distinguish two ways in which God can be referred to as the Good: goodness as a divine procession, and “the good” as referring collectively to those creatures which partake of the Good in the first sense. John is careful to qualify this second way of referring to God as time by the adjectives “supereternally and timelessly,” so as to make it clear that in using the name of creatures for God there is no diminishment of divine transcendence. Even more striking is the light that this passage sheds on the relationship between divine eternity and time. Time *qua* divine procession is the unfolding of divine eternity—the life of He Who Always Is—within the act of creating sensible beings.<sup>100</sup> Contrary to the normal tendency in Dionysius, eternity and time are here

<sup>99</sup> *Scholion on the Divine Names* (PG 316A–B).

<sup>100</sup> John frequently repeats the traditional derivation of αἰών from ἀεί ὢν, “ever being” (PG 4:208B, 209A, 313C).

decidedly asymmetric, for eternity is identified with the divine life, whereas time, although it is equally a divine procession, comes forth only as God creates. John may well have been inspired at this point by Plotinus, for whom eternity is the life of Intellect and time the life of Soul.<sup>101</sup> Unlike Plotinus, however, John does not assign time and eternity to separate hypostases, but views them both as different forms of divine self-manifestation. In fact the logic of John's position would seem to call for a distinction between types of eternity parallel to that between types of time. First, there is eternity as a divine procession, albeit one that exists independently of creation; second, there is eternity as the "timelike movement and extension" (in the phrase of Gregory Nazianzen) that is coextensive with the life of the angels. Eternity in the second sense is, as it were, the mode in which creatures partake of eternity in the first sense.

Let us turn now to St. Maximus. One point in Dionysius that John does not comment upon is the insistence that God is "properly hymned" through the use of temporal language. Maximus adds a long scholium on this point. Commenting on the statement in chapter 5 of the *Divine Names* (5.8) that "was," "is," and "will be" are "properly hymned" of God, Maximus writes:

'Was' and every conception accompanying it are fitting to no one other than to God, because in Him 'was' is contemplated as higher than every first principle. And 'is' and 'will be' [are also fitting to Him] as entirely unchangeable and in every way immutable, whence also He is called supersubstantial [ὑπερουσίος]. . . . How is it that earlier Dionysius said that neither 'was,' nor 'is,' nor 'came to be,' nor 'is coming to be,' nor 'will come to be' are said of God [5.4.817D], but here he says that 'is' and 'will be' and 'came to be' and 'is coming to be' and 'will come to be' are properly hymned of Him? Does Saint Dionysius contradict himself? By no means. Above he said that God is the creator of every existence, subsistence, substance, nature, and time. He was right to order around Him 'was' and the others, so you would understand that neither from time, nor in time, nor with time did God begin to be, but that He is higher than being itself; for he said that "being is in Him" [ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ εἶναι]. But here, since he has said that God is multiplied in accordance with every conception, he rightly says that 'was,' 'will be,' and the rest apply to Him, so that whatever season or time you consider, you will find God there, and beyond the things that are, and preexisting, and the

<sup>101</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.7.11.43-57.

cause and maker of the things that are—not something among them, as we say, because He is not one of the things that are, and yet He is in all.<sup>102</sup>

Maximus juxtaposes to the passage affirming temporal language of God (*Divine Names* 5.8) one denying it (ibid. 5.4). He does not find in this pair a contradiction, but a reaffirmation of the fundamental Dionysian theme that God is both present in all things and beyond all things. In this way God is "multiplied in accordance with every conception." The most radical statement Maximus makes is at the beginning of the passage, where he goes beyond even Dionysius in asserting that 'was' and other temporal conceptions are "fitting to no one other than to God." Maximus is here applying to temporality the Dionysian principle that "caused things preexist more fully and truly in their causes."<sup>103</sup> He concludes that God "was" in a higher sense than creatures, for all "was-ness," all temporality, derives from him.

There is also a point on which Maximus gently corrects the earlier scholia. John had taken chapter 10 of the *Divine Names* (10.3) as teaching that the angels are simply eternal (albeit they are so by participation), whereas the things that partake of both eternity and time are the heavenly bodies.<sup>104</sup> There is really no hint of this in the text. Maximus therefore suggests a different reading, on which the things that partake of both eternity and time are angels and souls. The "things that are," which are eternal in the proper sense, he takes as the things "around God," meaning presumably the divine processions.<sup>105</sup> As I suggested in section I, this reading fits better not only the passage in chapter 10 (10.3) but also the general context of Dionysius's theology.

Despite this difference, it is clear that both Maximus and John fully embrace the innovations of Dionysius. Partly through their influence, the Dionysian legacy became authoritative for the Eastern tradition as a whole. The last developments of the

<sup>102</sup> *Scholia on the Divine Names* (PG 4:328A-C).

<sup>103</sup> Dionysius, *Divine Names* 2.8.645D.

<sup>104</sup> *Scholia on the Divine Names* (PG 4:389A-B).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. (PG 4:389B-C) (the beginning of Maximus' remarks is marked by ἄλλως). It is interesting to note that Aquinas, in his comment on this passage, ignores the interpretation of Maximus and adopts that of John (*X De Div. Nom.*, lect. 3 [Marietti ed., 875]).

tradition relevant to our subject are to be found in the works of Maximus other than the scholia, particularly his *Questions to Thalassius* (on difficult points in Scripture) and *Ambigua* (on difficult points in the writings of Gregory Nazianzen). There we find a further extension of the Dionysian legacy, including above all its application to eschatology. The central concept used by Maximus is one in the *Divine Names* on which we have not yet touched, namely, that of the rational principles (λόγοι) of beings. In an important passage in chapter 5, Dionysius identifies the paradigms of creatures with "the rational principles [λόγους] which produce the substance of beings and preexist in a unified way in God." He adds, "theology calls them predeterminations [προορισμούς] and divine and good acts of will [θελήματα] which produce and define things, by which the supersubstantial one predetermined and led forth all beings."<sup>106</sup> Here Dionysius in effect redefines the Platonic paradigms as divine acts of will which predetermine the being of creatures.

The Dionysian understanding of the divine λόγοι became fundamental for the ontology of Maximus. Maximus adds to it the further point, derived from Origen and Evagrius, that the λόγοι of beings are unified within the single divine Logos.<sup>107</sup> He thus understands them as the multiply refracted presence of the Logos within creatures. Each individually constitutes the Creator's intent in creating a particular being, so that taken collectively they constitute the entirety of the Creator's "uttered word." As Maximus writes in *Ambigua* 7:

The highest, apophatic theology of the Logos being set aside (according to which He is neither spoken nor thought, nor in general is any of the things which are known along with another, since He is supersubstantial and is not participated by anything in any way), the one Logos is many λόγοι, and the many are one. The One is many by the goodly, creative, and sustaining procession of the One into beings; the many are One by the returning and directive uplifting and providence of the many to the One, as to an almighty principle, or a center

<sup>106</sup> Dionysius, *Divine Names* 5.8.824C.

<sup>107</sup> For references see Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup and Ejnar Munksgaard, 1965), 77 n. 1.

which precontains the principles of the rays that go out from it, and as the gathering together of all things.<sup>108</sup>

It is the "procession of the One into beings" that multiplies the single Logos into many λόγοι, and the "returning and directive uplifting and providence of the many to the One" that returns them to unity. Despite this fundamentally Neoplatonic scheme, the procession of the Logos into the λόγοι is not a necessary emanation, but a free act of the divine will. Elsewhere Maximus speaks of it as a kind of "cosmic incarnation" of the Logos, one parallel to (and anticipatory of) his historical incarnation in Christ. Through it the Logos, "having ineffably hidden Himself in the λόγοι of beings for our sake, indicates Himself [ὑποσημαίνεται] proportionately through each visible thing as through certain letters."<sup>109</sup> This means that the procession of the Logos into the λόγοι is as much a free expression of God's own being as is the Incarnation itself. Obviously we are here very far from any conception of a necessary emanation.

What is most important for present purposes is that the λόγοι are not so much Platonic paradigms or Aristotelian essences as dynamic principles governing the growth of creatures into the fulfillment of the Creator's intent. In other words, they are, in their expressed, diversified form, intrinsically temporal. When he has this aspect in view Maximus often prefers to speak of the "λόγοι of providence and judgment," or, more simply, the "λόγοι of time." Although Maximus nowhere explicitly defines the relation of the λόγοι of providence and judgment to the λόγοι of beings, it would appear that, just as the latter are the Creator's intent as expressed in the diversity of creation, the former are his intent as expressed in and through historical processes. They are thus the principles governing divine action within history and

<sup>108</sup> Maximus, *Ambigua* 7 (PG 91:1081B-C). There is a complete translation of this treatise in Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, trans., *On the Cosmic Mystery of Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 45-74.

<sup>109</sup> Maximus, *Ambigua* 33 (PG 91:1285D). For a translation of the entire passage see Paul M. Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy in Maximus the Confessor* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 119-20.

within the life of each person, principles that are a diversified expression of his own being.<sup>110</sup> Building upon this understanding of the λόγοι of providence and judgment, one could say that for Maximus the temporal realm is above all that in which God expresses his being in a new mode. As such it is intrinsically directional, being aimed toward a culmination in which the unity of the λόγοι in the Logos will be existentially (ὁπαρκτικῶς) realized.<sup>111</sup>

Maximus's fullest statement on this point occurs in the course of an allegorical interpretation of the appearance of Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration. He takes them as figures, respectively, of time and nature, each appearing in order to pay homage to Christ. Moses is a particularly apt figure of time because he did not himself enter into the Holy Land with those he had escorted to it. Maximus explains:

For such is time, not overtaking or accompanying in movement those whom it is accustomed to escort to the divine life of the age to come. For it has Jesus as the universal successor of time and eternity. And if otherwise the λόγοι of time abide in God, then there is manifest in a hidden way the entry [into the Promised Land] of the law given through Moses in the desert to those who receive the land of possession. For time is eternity, when it ceases from movement, and eternity is time, whenever, rushing along, it is measured by movement; since by definition eternity is time deprived of movement, and time is eternity measured by movement.<sup>112</sup>

Although Moses (time) does not enter into the Promised Land, the laws given through Moses—that is, the λόγοι of time—do so, inasmuch as they “abide in God.” Historically, the Law entered the Promised Land precisely to the extent that it was embodied within the practice and observance of the Israelites. If we are

<sup>110</sup> See further Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 69-76; Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy*, 107.

<sup>111</sup> Maximus, *Ambigua* 7 (PG 91:1089B); for the resonances of this term in Maximus see Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Origenism* (Rome: Herder, 1955), 188 n. 15.

<sup>112</sup> Maximus, *Ambigua* 10 (PG 91:1164B-C). The translation is that of Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 130-31, somewhat modified.

justified in pressing this feature of the allegory, then the λόγοι of time return to their unity in God through their embodiment in the lives of those who enter into “the age to come.” Although Maximus does not make this point explicitly, it is in keeping with the high role he elsewhere assigns to human obedience as the means by which God “takes shape” in the world and “is called and appears as human.”<sup>113</sup> At a minimum, there can be no question that eternity and time are here seen as reciprocal, and indeed almost interchangeable: time becomes eternity when it ceases from movement, and eternity becomes time when it is set in motion. (“Become” here indicates a definitory relationship, as a circle “becomes” a sphere when it is rotated through a third dimension.) Jesus transcends them both, not only as their source, but as their “successor”—that is, the one toward whom they are aimed and in whom they find fulfillment.

It is important to note that for Maximus eternity or “the life of the age to come,” although it is without movement, is not a static condition but is ordered toward fulfillment in God. Maximus elaborates this theme extensively elsewhere. He speaks of the state of the blessed as one of “ever-moving stability” (ἀεικίνητος στάσις) and “stable sameness-in-motion” (στάσιμον ταυτοκίνητον).<sup>114</sup> It takes place in “the infinity around God,” a region which, although it is uncreated, is yet infinitely transcended by God as its source.<sup>115</sup> Maximus also describes this state as a participation in the divine activity (ἐνέργεια), although he is careful to explain that such participation in no way undermines—and indeed, is ultimately required by—creaturely self-determination.<sup>116</sup> This “unmoving motion” of the blessed in the “infinity around God” would appear to be Maximus's version of the perpetual progress of Gregory of Nyssa. However, Maximus emphasizes

<sup>113</sup> Maximus, *Epistle* 2 (PG 91:401B); cf. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 197-201.

<sup>114</sup> Maximus, *Questions to Thalassius* 59 (PG 90:608D), 65 (PG 90:760A). Neither Liddell and Scott nor the *Patristic Greek Lexicon* of G.W.H. Lampe includes an entry for ταυτοκίνησις, but the latter does define ταυτοκίνητος (a term Dionysius uses of the angels) as “moved uniformly.”

<sup>115</sup> Maximus, *Ambigua* 15 (PG 91:1220C).

<sup>116</sup> Maximus, *Ambigua* 7 (PG 91:1076B-D); cf. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 194-95.

more than does Gregory that such "stable sameness-in-motion" is also a state of *rest* that constitutes the *telos* of creaturely motion.<sup>117</sup> What makes possible this fusion of the concepts of rest and motion is that the "motion" he has in view is ἐνέργεια. As I observed earlier, Aristotle's distinction of ἐνέργεια from κίνησις isolates ἐνέργεια as a form of activity that is timeless and intrinsically complete. Maximus understands the life of the blessed as a state of ever-growing participation in such ἐνέργεια, and hence as both restful and experienced subjectively as unending growth.

## VI. THE EAST AND WEST COMPARED

When one places the Eastern tradition bearing on time and eternity in juxtaposition to that of the medieval West, at least two differences leap to the eye. One is the more apophatic orientation of the East. No one in the Eastern tradition identifies God with his own eternity in the manner of Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas; instead the constant refrain is that God is as much beyond eternity as he is beyond time. However, this simple comparison must immediately be qualified. Eastern authors have no hesitation in identifying God with eternity, provided that the identification is understood as referring to a divine power, procession, or energy, rather than the divine essence or nature. For them the force of the identification is to make it clear that God is eternal by himself being eternity, rather than by participating in eternity as do creatures. In fact, it would be fair to say that the assumption that creatures do participate in divine eternity is an axiom that determines much of the rest of their thought. If there is to be such participation, then that which is participated must be God in some sense (for otherwise it is not *divine* eternity), but cannot be the divine essence (for to participate in the divine essence is to be God by nature). Hence the view that it is a divine power, procession, or energy—that is,

<sup>117</sup> See Paul Blowers, "Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of 'Perpetual Progress,'" *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 151-71.

an act in which God manifests himself and gives himself to be shared by creatures, while remaining beyond this act as its source.

Since the use of these terms by the Greek Fathers has often struck interpreters as problematic, I should perhaps say a word as to why I do not think that it is. Of course there is a great mystery in how God can give himself in a way that enables creatures actually to participate in his life. About this one can only say that God is God and he is able to do such things. Once the fact of such giving is accepted, however, to describe it in terms of essence and energy (or comparable terms) introduces no additional difficulty. Any agent is "beyond" his acts as their source, simply because he is the agent who performs them. That does not prevent the acts from constituting a real manifestation of his character. The traditional term for sharing in the activity or energy of another is 'synergy' (συνέργεια). As I have observed elsewhere, the possibility of divine-human synergy is clearly affirmed in the New Testament and elaborated in detail by the Greek Fathers.<sup>118</sup> I believe that it is because the Greek Fathers understand the distinction of essence and energy in such straightforward (and largely biblical) terms that they use it freely, without seeming to feel that it needs special explanation.

From the Eastern standpoint, the notion that eternity could be "the very substance of God" is plainly unacceptable, for it would mean that creatures could not actually participate in eternity. A Western author such as Aquinas, however, would find here a false dichotomy. Aquinas affirms just as firmly as do the Greek Fathers that the blessed participate in divine eternity, but he holds that they do so through a form of participation that the Greeks apparently do not envisage. His view is that in the beatific vision the blessed take on the divine essence (and hence divine eternity) as an intelligible species. As he explains in the *Summa contra Gentiles*:

Acts are specified by their objects. But the object of the aforementioned [beatific] vision is the divine substance in itself, and not a created likeness of it, as we

<sup>118</sup> See Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, chaps. 6-9; also David Bradshaw, "The Divine Energies in the New Testament," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 50 (2006): 189-223.

showed above. Now, the being of the divine substance is in eternity, or rather is eternity itself. Therefore, this vision also consists in a participation in eternity.<sup>119</sup>

In the background of this passage is the Aristotelian thesis of the identity of the act of understanding with its object. Since the blessed apprehend the divine essence in an intellectual act, they in a sense participate in the divine essence, but not in a way that would make them God by nature. As Aquinas has explained earlier, the blessed are united to God not "in the act of being, but only in the act of understanding."<sup>120</sup> Thus the Thomistic view fully satisfies the desideratum that there be a form of participation in divine eternity that does not involve deification by nature.

The reason this possibility does not occur to the Greek Fathers is simply that they do not regard God as an intelligible object. For Aquinas, God is the highest intelligible object; indeed his argument for the beatific vision is predicated on this assumption.<sup>121</sup> In this he merely follows Augustine, for whom God is the "first Form" (*prima species*) and as such is intrinsically intelligible, however much we may be unable to apprehend him in our current state.<sup>122</sup> Thus the difference between the Eastern and Western traditions regarding participation in divine eternity stems from their different stances toward apophaticism. Each tradition identifies a form of participation that is consistent with its own understanding of God, in the one case as beyond intellect, in the other as the highest intelligible object.

These observations will help explain why, despite the linguistic kinship of the Greek *αἰών* and Latin *aevum*, the two are really not very similar. Aquinas thinks of the beatific vision as the *telos* (in the Aristotelian sense) of all rational creatures, and therefore as an *end*, a state of "unmoving stability" in which all natural desire is

<sup>119</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* III, c. 61 (trans. Anton Pegis [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975], 3:200-201).

<sup>120</sup> *ScG* III, c. 54.

<sup>121</sup> *ScG* III, c. 25; III, c. 37; III, c. 51; *STh* I, q. 12, a. 1.

<sup>122</sup> Augustine, *City of God* 8.6; cf. Aquinas's adoption of a similar description in *STh* I, q. 3, a. 2; and in *De spir. creat.*, c. 8.

at rest.<sup>123</sup> Accordingly he argues that there can be no progress in beatitude.<sup>124</sup> This means that the *aevum* is not for Aquinas, as the *αἰών* is for the Greeks, the realm of an expansive, ever-growing progress into God. Its role is limited to that of serving as a measure for the natural angelic acts, that is, the angels' acts of being, of self-knowledge, and their natural knowledge of creatures. The act of beatitude (the vision of the divine essence and of creatures as seen in the divine essence) is measured not by the *aevum* but by participated eternity, and as such is wholly without succession.<sup>125</sup> Obviously, then, Aquinas does not see human beatitude as coming to share in the angelic *aevum*. Since there is no progress in the beatific vision, either for angels or for human beings, the *aevum* is irrelevant to beatitude.

Aquinas in effect presents a three-story universe in which God, angels, and temporal beings each occupy a different level. The distinctions between them are ontological and as such are not affected by an intentional change such as the achievement of beatitude. Hence the measures of their respective beings—eternity, *aevum*, and time—are similarly fixed and distinct. Aquinas states this threefold distinction succinctly in the *Commentary on the Sentences*:

It is clear therefore that act is threefold. To one type there is not appended any potency; such is the divine being and its operation, and to it there corresponds in the place of measurement, eternity. There is another act in which there remains a certain potency, but there is nevertheless a complete act obtained through that potency; and to it there corresponds *aevum*. Finally there is another to which potency is appended, and there is mixed with it the potency for a

<sup>123</sup> *ScG* III, c. 48; cf. the comparison with the movement of a body toward its natural place in *ScG* III, c. 25, and the denial that there is succession in the vision of creatures as seen in the divine essence in *ScG* III, c. 60.

<sup>124</sup> *STh* I, q. 62, a. 9.

<sup>125</sup> *ScG* III, cc. 60-61; *STh* I, q. 12, a. 10. The angels do progress in other acts, such as local motion and the knowledge of temporal events, but these are measured by a discrete or noncontinuous time not commensurable with our own time. For the complexities here see James Collins, *The Thomistic Philosophy of the Angels* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 346-67; Carl J. Peter, *Participated Eternity in the Vision of God: A Study of the Opinion of Thomas Aquinas and his Commentators on the Duration of the Acts of Glory* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964), 12-34; Porro, "Angelic Measures: *Aevum* and Discrete Time."

complete act according to succession, receiving the addition of perfection; and to it corresponds time.<sup>126</sup>

God, angels, and temporal beings all have different sorts of *esse*—the one wholly without potency; the second complete but nevertheless containing a certain potency (i.e., that of existence), which has been actualized by an efficient cause; the third achieving completion only through temporal succession. These are basic ontological distinctions which do not admit of transition from one to another. Accordingly, although Aquinas endorses the traditional notion that the blessed are “equal to the angels,” he generally adds that they are equal in glory or in the act of beatitude, rather than in being.<sup>127</sup>

This brings us to the second of the major differences between the Eastern and Western traditions: the sense of continuity between time and eternity in the Eastern tradition, as opposed to their separation in the West. Richard Dales has observed that the question of how time and eternity are related was one that the thirteenth-century Scholastics found virtually unsolvable.<sup>128</sup> When Aquinas treats of them both, as in question 10 of the *Prima Pars*, he generally simply moves from one to the other without attempting to describe any genetic or intrinsic relationship between them.<sup>129</sup>

This sense of an arbitrary conjunction has left its mark in contemporary philosophy of religion. Broadly speaking, contemporary discussion of how time and eternity are related tends to focus around three questions: (1) How can God, being

<sup>126</sup> Aquinas, *I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 2, a. 1 (ed. Pierre Mandonnet [Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1929-47], 1:467); cf. *I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 2, a. 2.

<sup>127</sup> E.g., *ScG III*, c. 57; *I De Div. Nom.*, lect. 2 (Marietti ed., 67).

<sup>128</sup> Richard Dales, “Time and Eternity in the Thirteenth Century,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49 (1988): 27-45.

<sup>129</sup> In this connection it is interesting to note that a genetic relationship was developed sketchily by Augustine in *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis*, which gives the “heaven of heavens” (that is, the angelic realm) a role in mediating the creation of time roughly similar to that of Soul in Plotinus. See Katherin Rogers, “St. Augustine on Time and Eternity” in idem, *The Anselmian Approach to God and Creation* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 131-49. It does not appear that this account had much influence in the thirteenth century.

eternal, act at specific times? (2) How can God know temporally indexed propositions (if indeed he does know them)? (3) How can he possess personal or quasi-personal attributes such as life, will, and intelligence? Although I cannot here attempt a full survey of the literature, it is worth tracing the main outline of the traditional Western approach to these issues in order to distinguish it from that of the East.

As regards God’s action in time, Augustine already recognized that, if God is simple and immutable, he does not so much act at particular times as perform a single act that has multiple temporal effects.<sup>130</sup> Aquinas similarly holds that God’s will and action are perfectly simple and unchanging.<sup>131</sup> More recently, the notion that God performs—or better, is—a single eternal act with multiple temporal effects has been vigorously upheld by contemporary Thomists such as Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann.<sup>132</sup>

The question of God’s knowledge of temporally indexed propositions was not as widely discussed in the classical sources, but the constraints on an answer are clear. Augustine and Aquinas are emphatic that there can be no succession, temporal or otherwise, in the divine knowledge.<sup>133</sup> This might seem to imply that God cannot know, say, what time it is now, for the latter is an inescapably temporal fact. Katherin Rogers has suggested that this was indeed the view of Augustine.<sup>134</sup> According to Rogers, the absence of such knowledge in God merely indicates that he does not (and cannot) know in the way that temporal creatures do. She argues that this is no more an imperfection than the fact that he cannot *act* as temporal creatures do, that is, with pain, effort, and the possibility of failure. Stump and Kretzmann, on the other hand, hold that God does know temporally indexed propositions. Their argument is based on the view that eternity is (in a special

<sup>130</sup> Augustine, *City of God* 12.17; *Confessions* 11.8.10; 11.10.12; 12.15.18; *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis* 4.33.51-35.56; 5.23.44-46.

<sup>131</sup> *ScG I*, cc. 74-77, II, cc. 8-10; *STh I*, q. 19, aa. 2 and 5.

<sup>132</sup> Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Eternity,” *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429-58; “Absolute Simplicity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 353-81.

<sup>133</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* 11.31.41; *City of God* 11.21; Aquinas, *STh I*, q. 14, a. 13.

<sup>134</sup> Or at least that it fits well with his views; see Rogers, “St. Augustine on Time and Eternity,” 136-37.



sense they define) simultaneous with every temporal event. Since "from the eternal viewpoint every temporal event is actually happening," God knows that it is now 3:50, *and* that it is now 3:51, *and* that it is now 3:52, and so on.<sup>135</sup> Whether this is an acceptable solution I leave for the reader to judge. Stump and Kretzmann are surely correct that it is the only way to attribute such knowledge to God while maintaining that his knowledge is without succession.

The third point is perhaps the most difficult of all. Aquinas argues that God is a personal being (my term, not his) in three stages: first, God has life and intelligence; second, God has will; third, God has free choice (*liberum arbitrium*). It is not necessary to repeat his arguments here. For our purposes the important point is that, if the question is whether God is a personal being of roughly the sort depicted in the Bible, then the first two stages alone are insufficient. Aristotle's Prime Mover has life and intelligence, and indeed, Aquinas borrows Aristotle's arguments at this point. Likewise, the One of Plotinus has will, at least in the broad sense defined by Aquinas, that of a rational appetite for the Good.<sup>136</sup> Yet neither of these is very much like the biblical God. The real weight is borne by the third point, the assertion of free choice. Unfortunately it is precisely at this point that severe difficulties arise. Aquinas, reasonably enough, understands free choice as involving the capacity to do otherwise. The question then is how God *could* do otherwise, given that his will and his action are identical to his essence. It would seem that if he were to will or do anything differently than he actually does, then he would be different in essence. That would make God's essence depend on his relationship to creatures, a view that is wholly unacceptable to traditional orthodoxy.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Stump and Kretzmann, "Eternity," 457.

<sup>136</sup> In the case of the One this "appetite" is its self-directedness, and "rational" must be understood as in a way beyond intellect; see *Enneads* 6.8, "On Free Will and the Will of the One."

<sup>137</sup> See Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 247-50, 259-62. A further difficulty is that, if creatures possess libertarian freedom, then their choices would affect God's activity and thereby also the divine essence. See on this point Katherine Rogers, "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 32 (1996): 165-86.

Admittedly, the problem here pertains most directly to divine simplicity, and to divine eternity only by implication. A more immediate sign that there is difficulty reconciling the Western understanding of eternity with divine personhood is the widely felt desire to reconceive of eternity as in some way extended. Stump and Kretzmann observe that "it would be reasonable to think that any mode of existence that could be called a life must involve duration," and accordingly their own interpretation of Boethian eternity takes it as "beginningless, endless, infinite duration."<sup>138</sup> This view has been challenged both on exegetical grounds and as regards its internal coherence.<sup>139</sup> Nonetheless, it is hard to deny that a completely unextended and durationless life seems *prima facie* impossible. It is striking that Brian Shanley, having argued in detail that Aquinas does not regard eternity as extended, nonetheless suggests (following a proposal of Brian Leftow) that we should think of it as "both an indivisible extensionless point and an infinitely extended duration," much as physicists think of light as both particle-like and wave-like.<sup>140</sup> This seems to me a suggestion of even more doubtful coherence than that of Stump and Kretzmann. It is further evidence, if any is needed, that even the most acute and historically informed scholars find great difficulty in reconciling the traditional understanding of eternity with any meaningful belief in God as a living and personal being.

## VII. FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON THE EASTERN VIEW

One lesson of our historical review is that the very way in which these debates have taken shape is a product of the sharp distinction between time and eternity that is characteristic of the Western tradition. Eternity is posited as one way of being, time as

<sup>138</sup> Stump and Kretzmann, "Eternity," 433.

<sup>139</sup> For example, Kathryn Rogers, "Eternity Has No Duration," *Religious Studies* 30 (1994): 1-16; Brian Shanley, "Eternity and Duration in Aquinas," *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 525-48; William Lane Craig, "The Eternal Present and Stump-Kretzmann Eternity," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 73 (1999): 521-36.

<sup>140</sup> Shanley, "Eternity and Duration," 547.

another, and the question then is how the two, being so different, could possibly overlap or intersect. A similar question can legitimately be asked of the Greek tradition prior to Dionysius, with its strong emphasis on the adiaesthetic character of the divine life. However, since the Greek tradition was not committed to identifying divine eternity with the divine essence, it had considerably more room to maneuver. Ultimately the impasse was overcome by Dionysius and his commentators. Recognition of this fact has been the crucial element missing from contemporary discussions of time and eternity.

The central innovation of the mature Eastern view lies in the understanding of time and eternity as divine processions that are not simply parallel and distinct, but genetically related. To quote again John of Scythopolis: "time, being once at rest in He Who Always Is, shone forth in its descent when later it was necessary for visible nature to come forth. So the procession of the goodness of God in creating sensible objects, we call time."<sup>141</sup> Time is here a procession that comes forth as God creates the sensible world; however, even before that creation it was already present implicitly, "at rest" within divine eternity. John then goes on to distinguish from time as a procession the "movement of intervals into portions and seasons and nights and days" which is measured by time in the first sense, and can itself be called time homonymously. As I suggested earlier, one could similarly distinguish between divine eternity and the "timelike movement and extension" that is the eternity of the angels. In each pair, the latter member is the mode in which creatures participate in the first member.

Putting these elements together, we arrive at a fourfold structure:

- (1) (a) Eternity as a divine procession, "the life that is unshaken and all together at once, already infinite and entirely unmoving, standing forth as a unity."  
(b) Angelic eternity, the "timelike movement and extension" coextensive with the life of the angels.

- (2) (a) Time as a divine procession, "the procession of the goodness of God in creating sensible objects."  
(b) Time as a creature, the "movement of intervals into portions and seasons and nights and days."

There are several links binding this structure together. As I have mentioned, (2)(a) is the unfolding within the creative act of (1)(a), and in each pair (b) is the mode in which creatures participate in (a). Furthermore, according to Basil, (2)(b) is an image or icon (εἰκών) of (1)(b). (We shall return to this point in a moment.) One way to summarize these various relations is to recognize here a repeated pattern of procession and return. (1)(a) and (2)(a) are the processions of God within the intelligible and sensible creations; (1)(b) and (2)(b) the corresponding acts of return. In adopting this Neoplatonic language, however, one must be careful not to import any suggestion either of necessary emanation or of a hierarchy of being in which the lower levels serve only as a ladder to the higher. Both eternity and time are ways in which the unknowable God freely manifests himself. It is true that time is an "icon" of eternity, but this means only that it finds there its final meaning and consummation, not that it is valueless in its own right. The teaching of Maximus is particularly salutary on this point, especially if (as I suggested earlier) it is precisely through their embodiment within the lives of the faithful that the λόγοι of time are taken up and subsumed into the age to come.

To Western eyes at least part of this structure looks familiar, for the definition of divine eternity is much like that of Boethius. This is hardly surprising, since both were probably inspired by Plotinus. However, since on the Eastern view divine eternity is not the divine essence, but a procession, it can be interwoven—or rather, unfolded—into the rest of the structure in the ways indicated. That is what makes all the difference. Because of the genetic relationships binding the structure together, there is nothing within it that is foreign to God. Indeed, there is nothing that is not God, when understood properly as a form of divine self-manifestation.

<sup>141</sup> Cited above, n. 99.

If we return now to the three issues that have proven so problematic in the West, we find not so much that they are problems for which we have found a solution, as that they do not even arise. *Of course* God is present and acts at every moment of time, for time itself is his action. There is no need to attempt to understand his various temporal acts as the effects of a single eternal act, for the premise that made this seem necessary—the identification of God's activity with his essence—has been removed. Likewise, *of course* God knows what moment it is now, for he is the cause of this moment, as of every moment. Since he acts both "all together at once," *qua* eternity, and within and through the succession of time, his knowledge likewise takes both forms. This means that there is no need to fear attributing succession to the divine knowledge. The succession is as real as time itself; yet, like time, it is an unfolding of that which is already precontained within divine eternity.<sup>142</sup>

The third issue is more subtle. The problem facing the Western tradition has been to prevent the doctrine of divine eternity from seeming to present God as an impersonal first principle much like the Prime Mover. As I mentioned earlier, the strategy of Aquinas (which I will take as representative) is to start from a roughly Aristotelian basis and attempt to show that God also possesses attributes such as will and free choice. This strategy is on the face of it rather unpromising. The trouble is that the God of the Bible is not the sort of being whom one can construct by taking the conception of some lesser being and adding to it. What makes the God of the Bible "personal" is not just his possession of a list of attributes—intelligence, will, and so forth—but that he acts as one who is sovereign and has an absolute claim to our love and obedience. His actions are never a neutral manifestation, but are instead a summons to stand in his presence and live as one who is answerable to him. Seen in this light, God is personal only in the sense that he is One before Whom we must stand. Our concept of person is not a genus under which he falls; on the contrary, it is

merely an image (*εἰκοναί*) that we have formed in the attempt to stand before Him. He can no more be defined in terms of it than by any other human concept.

Since the Christian East did not start from an Aristotelian foundation, it did not face the problem of attempting to "save" divine personhood. Instead its problem was the obvious (indeed, inescapable) one of how to speak meaningfully about a God who transcends all human concepts. Its answer was the balance—or rather, the careful interweaving—of the apophatic and kataphatic. As I have argued elsewhere, this framework provides a natural way in which to articulate the content of biblical revelation.<sup>143</sup> On the Eastern view, God is not so much a person possessing life, intelligence, and will, as One who erupts into the human sphere in a way that we can only apprehend, partially and inadequately, through these concepts. As Gregory Nazianzen put it, they are images which have to be "combined into some sort of presentation of the truth, which escapes us when we have caught it, and takes flight when we have conceived it."

One way of reacting to this view would be to see it as a counsel of despair. If God so radically transcends human concepts, and our most carefully crafted descriptions of him largely miss the mark, what hope is there that we can know him as he is? To appeal to the afterlife merely puts the problem back a stage, for even in the afterlife we will still be finite minds that operate within a network of concepts. Besides, the Greek Fathers deny that there is direct knowledge of the divine essence in the afterlife. It is in keeping with their apophaticism that the verbal descriptions of God they do offer are often left to stand with hardly any supporting explanation. We have seen that John of Scythopolis adopts the Neoplatonic conception of divine eternity as "the life that is unshaken and all together at once, already infinite and entirely unmoving, standing forth as a unity." Unlike Western authors, however, he does not attempt to clarify the meaning of this rather paradoxical description by offering

<sup>142</sup> See Dionysius, *Divine Names* 7.2.869A-C. I leave aside questions pertaining to divine foreknowledge and human freedom, which require a separate treatment.

<sup>143</sup> See Bradshaw, "The Divine Glory and the Divine Energies" (above, n. 48).

metaphors, whether they be of something line-like, point-like, or anything else. He allows it to stand as a mystery.

Oddly enough, no one in the Eastern tradition seems to have felt a need for further explanation. If we are to understand this outlook we must search not at the conceptual level, but at that of praxis. Here is where the iconic relationship between time and eternity becomes crucially important. Instead of conceptual guidance in understanding divine eternity, the Greek Fathers offer a way of life in which time is *experienced* as an icon of eternity, so that one has, in one's own experience, a foretaste of the direct participation in divine eternity of the age to come. This practical orientation is evident in the very passage of *On the Holy Spirit* where St. Basil speaks of time as an icon of eternity. The context is that he is explaining the importance of unwritten traditions that have been handed down in a mystery (ἐν μυστηρίῳ, 1 Cor 2:7) from the apostles. One of them is that of praying without kneeling on Sunday.

We make our prayers standing on the first day of the week, but all do not know the reason for this. For it is not only because we are risen with Christ and that we should seek the things which are above, that on the day of the Resurrection we recall the grace that has been given us by standing to pray; but also, I think, because this day is in some way the image [εἰκὼν] of the future age. This is why also, being the first principle [ἀρχή] of days, it is not called the "first" by Moses, but "one." "There was," he says, "an evening and a morning, one day," as though it returned regularly upon itself. This is why it is at once one and the eighth, that which is really one and truly the eighth, of which the Psalmist speaks in the titles of certain Psalms, signifying by this the state that will follow the ages, the day without end, the other aeon which will have neither evening, nor succession, nor cessation, nor old age. It is, then, in virtue of an authoritative claim that the Church teaches her children to say their prayers standing on this day, so that, by the perpetual recalling of eternal life, we may not neglect the means which lead us to it.<sup>144</sup>

To pray without kneeling on Sunday is not only a commemoration of the Resurrection, but a foretaste of the age to come, as befits Sunday, which is itself an icon of that age. In such

<sup>144</sup> Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 27.66 (PG 32:192A-B); translation in Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 263.

an act one deliberately lives within the iconic meaning of time, accepting time as the expression, within our current sensible existence, of the immeasurable fullness of eternal life.

What is true of this single act is also true, on a larger scale, of the entire liturgical ethos of the Eastern Church. Here is another passage on the iconic nature of time, this one from St. Gregory Nazianzen. He is discussing the feast of the Octave of Easter, when the newly baptized removed the white robes they had worn since their baptism on Holy Saturday. This feast possessed far greater importance in the ancient Church than today, for it was seen as a symbolic recognition of the passage from earthly time into the new creation.

That Sunday [Easter] is that of salvation, this is the anniversary of salvation; that was the frontier between burial and resurrection; this is entirely of the second creation, so that, as the first creation began on a Sunday (this is perfectly clear: for the Sabbath falls seven days after it, being repose from works), so the second creation began on the same day, which is at once the first in relation to those that come after it, and the eighth in relation to those before it, more sublime than the sublime day and more wonderful than the wonderful day: for it is related to the life above. That is what, as it seems to me, the divine Solomon wishes to symbolize when he commands (Eccl 11:2) to give a part, seven, to some, that is to say, to this life; and to others, eight, that is to say, the future life: he is speaking of doing good here and of the restoration of the life beyond.<sup>145</sup>

According to ancient conventions of counting, the first Sunday after Easter is also the eighth day after Easter. That is what makes it "more sublime than the sublime day and more wonderful than the wonderful day," for it is the first to pass beyond the seven-day cycle of our present time and into the life to come. Gregory, building on rabbinic tradition, associates with this feast Ecclesiastes 11:2, "give a part of it to seven and even to eight."<sup>146</sup> The part one is to give to seven, that is to this life, is good works; the "eight," which one cannot give but can only receive, is resurrection. Through this rather odd exegetical digression Gregory finds within the feast not only a celebration of the life to

<sup>145</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations* 44 (PG 36:612C-613A), translation in Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 269.

<sup>146</sup> See Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 268.

come, but a reminder of how one must live in order to attain that life.

These two passages typify the sense of time that permeates the Eastern tradition. The significance of time is not to be found in its external features, such as its ability to serve as a measure of movement, but rather in the opportunity it offers of standing within God's presence. Such "standing" may be highly active, as in the doing of good works mentioned by Gregory, but it is nonetheless a way of being that finds in our temporal existence an icon of something higher. That is why, for the East, divine eternity is not a philosophical concept requiring explication, but a mystery that can be known only by living within it.

## GIVING A GOOD ACCOUNT OF GOD: IS THEOLOGY EVER MATHEMATICAL?<sup>1</sup>

LAURENCE PAUL HEMMING

*Heythrop College, University of London  
London, England*

SOME YEARS AGO I examined a thesis for the Catholic University of Leuven written purporting to offer a definitive mathematical proof for the reality and necessity of the Divine Trinity. At its heart lay an equation, which—it was argued—if factored on both sides, produced the result that three is equal to one. On first acquaintance I was impressed, if a little baffled, until I took myself again through the steps of the proof (enlisting the help of a banker, someone for whom mathematics really counts). Offering only the reason (quite correctly) that factors may be used to simplify equations, my candidate had divided by a factor of three on one side of his equation and nine on the other. The numerically agile will know that this indeed yields the result that three is equal to one. The candidate had neglected to ensure that *the same* factor was used on each side of the equation to which factors are applied: the thesis, mathematically at least, was false.

Nevertheless the underlying instinct for this student's argument stands in a tradition that stretches back at least as far as Descartes, if not all the way to Plato and the Pythagoreans: that the mathematical may inform the theological, and even be used to demonstrate (or in Descartes's case, prove) certain kinds of theological truth. What is at issue here is the relationship between

<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was given at the Cambridge 'D' Society on 10 March 2006, by kind invitation of Dr. Douglas Hedley and Dr. Chris Insole of the Cambridge University Divinity Faculty.