

GOD AND TIME

Related exam questions:

- 'Only a God who was timeless, or simple, or both, could be truly immutable.' Discuss. (2000/4)
- Can a non-bodily being create a physical world? Can an eternal being create a temporal world? (2002/11)
- 'God is either timeless or personal, but not both.' Is this correct? (2004/3)
- 'Even though ... a being of supreme perfection includes existence in the concept of its essence, yet it does not follow that its existence is anything actual'. Does Descartes give an adequate reply to this objection? (2005/4)
- 'The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies outside space and time.' (WITTGENSTEIN) Is this what it means to say that God is infinite and eternal? (2006/10b)
- Does it make sense to maintain that God is outside time but acts in history? (2007/3)
- Could an eternal God have created time? (2008/12)
- Does God exist 'in' or 'outside' time? (2009/2, 2013/2a)
- If there is a God, is He atemporal? (2011/4)
- Is it inconceivable that action can be truly attributed to what is timelessly eternal? (2012/2)
- Could anything both be a person and be atemporal? (2014/5)

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Terminology:

eternalism = God is 'outside' time

sempiternalism = God is in time but everlasting (without beginning or end)

There are three potential motivations for the belief that God is 'outside' time. The first is tradition: this doctrine seems to have been upheld by bigshots like Augustine, Aquinas, and a number of other distinguished figures. More systematically, there at least two reasons in favour of it:

- There is the hazy but powerful intuition that if God were in time like we are, then God would be subject to some power other than himself, namely the passage of time. One way to spell out this worry is to claim that if God were in time, then God would be subject to change, contradicting the traditional dictum that God is changeless.
- God's temporality seems to interfere with omniscience. Specifically, it seems to preclude foreknowledge and hence prophecy. For if God is not 'already' (or 'timelessly') part of the future, then it is hard to see how God could know what is going on in there, hence God it is hard to see how God could know the future, hence it is hard to see how God could be omniscient.

Please read:

Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann: "Eternity"

This is a famous paper that tries to make rigorous sense of what it means for God to exist in a separate eternal 'now'.

and

Anthony Kenny: "Omniscience, eternity, and time"

Argues that if God is outside time, God is not omniscient, (roughly) because God does not know what time it is now.

Optional readings (on Dropbox)

Brian Leftow: "Eternity" (gives a short intro to the subject, lists reasons against eternalism, and indicates how some of them can be resisted)

William Kneale: "Eternity and time in theology" (on the history of eternalism in theology)

Stump and Kretzmann: "Eternity, awareness, and action" (S&K's replies to objections to their original paper)

Nicholas Wolterstorff: "God everlasting" (makes roughly the same point as Kenny, but extends it to promising and recollection, and introduces a technical vocabulary)