Journal of Anglican Studies (2024), **22**, 529–541
doi:10.1017/S1740355324000512

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355324000512 Published online by Cambridge University Press

RESEARCH ARTICLE

God's Timelessness, Our Temporal Nature

Roberta Lynne Bayer

Patrick Henry College, Purcellville, VA, USA
Email: rlbayer@phc.edu

(Received 2 June 2024; revised 22 September 2024; accepted 22 September 2024)

Abstract

The timeless and unchanging nature of God was defended by Dr. Eric Mascall throughout his books. He argued against process theology, and in particular the works of mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, who was one of its foremost exponents. In his books, Mascall defended the distinction between our temporal and created nature and God's divine and uncreated nature as found in historic theology. In a manner suited to his learning, he discussed the implications of modern physics for theology.

Keywords: Heidegger, Martin; Hooker, Richard; historicism; Newton; Sir Isaac; pantheism; process theology; Whitehead; Alfred North

Background

Eric Lionel Mascall, who was born in 1905 and died in 1993, is rightly regarded among the foremost Anglo-Catholic metaphysical philosophers in the Church of England. Mascall remarked in his memoir, *Saraband,* that he gravitated towards the Anglo-Catholic movement in his youth not only because of its revival of liturgical ceremony, but because chief figures associated with that movement took an interest in natural theology. Among his near contemporaries he admired the works of V.A. Demant, C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, Dorothy Sayers, G. K. Chesterton and Austin Farrer because each made use of the theological arguments of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas in a day and age when too few theologians outside the Roman Catholic church (Mascall was particularly indebted to Etienne Gilson), took seriously the importance of historical theology. Throughout his life he followed developments in both Thomism and *Nouvelle Theologie* in order to deepen his own thought. Yet it should be added Mascall's early attachment to Anglo-Catholicism can also be attributed to 'triumphs in the slums and the mission-field' and the lives of 'dedication, sacrifice and discipline'[1] of the members of this movement. He wrote that they showed him 'a view of reality and a way of life that form an integrated and

[1]E. L. Mascall, *Saraband: The Memoirs of E. L. Mascall* (Leominster Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1992), p. 76.

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Journal of Anglican Studies Trust.

Check for updates

coherent whole,'[2] and he chose to live that life when he joined the Oratory of the Good Shepherd.

Mascall's intellectual gifts were evident during his undergraduate years at Cambridge. He completed the course of studies required to pass the Mathematical Tripos, which included study in the developments in Relativity and Quantum Theory.[3] He later wrote that 'the intellectual formation that the Mathematical Tripos has given me and the knowledge of modern scientific developments that accompanied it' were a fine preparation for his future vocation, 'that part or aspect of philosophy, which borders on theology.'[4] After graduation, he vigorously applied the same intellectual rigour to philosophy and theology, and his subsequent theological works are marked by a seamless integration of metaphysical philosophy and theology, natural and revealed. Mascall's books offer the reader concise summations of scientific theory and historical metaphysics and show their relation. His elegant and clear explanations of what is entailed in the project of modern science as a whole, and how those researches impinge upon theological and dogmatic truth, make intelligible how a scientist can and does integrate faith and reason. There is a formidable account of his reasoning in both *Christian Theology and Natural Science* and *The Openness of Being*. To show the relationship between natural theology and natural science, in a day and age when that seems nearly impossible, requires the breadth of learning, the kind of education and the clarity of mind of an Eric Mascall.

Human beings, he argued, were created with the capacity to integrate their understanding of the natural world with the revealed faith because they are body and soul, existing, as it were, on a 'frontier where the two regions of matter and spirit impinge on each other.'[5] Sense-based knowledge is one side of knowing and informs the life of the mind. But there is another kind of knowing which is fitted to the created intellectual soul, and that is pure speculation; it seeks the first principles of speculation, as Aristotle argued, it has a kinship with eternal verities. The one neither opposes nor excludes the other because human beings by virtue of the unity of body and soul, fitted to know incorporeal and corporeal realities in the world in which they are placed.

In order to explain this capacity to know intelligible and non-sensible reality, he frequently turned to the example of mathematics. The first philosophers in the western world took the study of mathematics to be the highest end of thought because the mathematician has insight into truths that are immaterial and intelligible. The Pythagoreans of Greece were the first to obtain an 'exhaustive understanding of completely transparent realities' and to that end even advised

[2]E. L. Mascall, *Saraband: The Memoirs of E. L. Mascall* (Leominster Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1992), p. 78.

[3]In *Saraband*, Mascall remarks that although encouraged to pursue a doctorate, he chose rather to go into the ministry, having recognized that there is a difference 'between being capable of getting a good degree in mathematics and having a flair for making original contributions in the subject.' p. 73.

[4]E. L. Mascall, *Saraband: The Memoirs of E. L. Mascall* (Leominster Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1992), p. 73.

[5]E. L. Mascall, *The Importance of Being Human: Some Aspects of the Christian Doctrine of Man* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 53.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355324000512 Published online by Cambridge University Press

abandoning 'everyday life and physical science for contemplation.'[6] Plato and Aristotle named those intelligible truths by which we know and understand the essential nature of things, ideas or forms. Plato and Aristotle discerned, without the help of revelation, that Mind or Being or Goodness as they termed the divine, is the source of existence itself. As Mascall wrote, the fact that human beings have this 'capacity is both complex and mysterious'[7] but unchanging truth, the truths which are the foundation of *meta*-physics, are discoverable through the working of a mind exercising a power that is rightly its own.

The Problem of Process Theology

These comments are preparatory to the main topic of this paper, which is God's timelessness and how this can be known. Human beings experience time as endless change, as moments which come and go, as past, present and future, but God does not. For God everything is seen at once, as in a glance. Mascall turned to this topic numerous times to expose the central defects in 'process theology', particularly that of Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead, a brilliant scientist and philosopher in his own right, held God to exist in time. This, Mascall argued, called into question central tenets of Christian dogma as to God's divine nature.

In *Process and Reality,*[8] Whitehead proposed a new system of general ideas by which to interpret human experience of God, with the intention of drawing the new theory of relativity into conversation with a theology of God. Whitehead's books received Mascall's attention, from early in his career, in *He Who is,*[9] in *Existence and Analogy (1949), Christ, the Christian, and the Church (1946), Christian Theology and Natural Science (1956), The Openness of Being (1971)* and *Whatever Happened to the Human Mind (1980).* Whitehead, he argued, confuses our finite being with the nature of God.

The first and foremost principle of existence for Whitehead was not God but 'creativity'. The principle of creativity offered the best explanation of the divine personality because it best accounted for a God who is always active in the world. But, Mascall wrote, 'Whitehead's adoption of 'creativity' as the fundamental characteristic of finite beings ... diverted his attention away from the existence of things to their behavior, and so ... caused him to be satisfied with the notion of a purely immanent deity, while his neglect of the concept of *analogia entis* left him at last with only a finite God.'[10] This finite God, immanent in the world, was to be

[6]E. L. Mascall, *The Importance of Being Human: Some Aspects of the Christian Doctrine of Man* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 54.

[7]E. L. Mascall, *Whatever Happened to the Human Mind? Essays in Christian Orthodoxy* (London: SPCK, 1980). In the first chapter, Mascall accounts for how the mind knows reality. See also: *Words and Images: A Study in Theological Discourse* (London: Longman, Green and Co, 1957), Ch. 2 and 'Thomism, Thomist or Transcendental?' *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie, 36ste Jaarg., Nr.2 JUNI 1974,* pp. 323–341.

[8]Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Co, 5th edn, 1960).

[9]Eric Mascall first discussed process theology in *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism* (New Haven, CT: Archon, 1970 [1943]), pp. 150–160.

[10]E. L. Mascall, *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism* (New Haven, CT: Archon Books, 1970 [1943]), pp. 194–195.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355324000512 Published online by Cambridge University Press

explained by and through reference to finite reality, thus subjecting God's nature to time and change. Mascall objected: if God is like us – historical, creaturely, passable, malleable, changeable and imperfect in knowledge – then he is not the divine creator described in scripture who alone, out of nothing, created the everything.

The church has consistently taught that human beings are created to know themselves as having two ends, temporal and eternal. Augustine wrote in the *City of God,* that men and women are on pilgrimage in the 'city' of this world towards their final end in the city of God. The two dominant medieval institutions, the Empire and the Papacy, represented those ends. The first of those institutions was ordained to keep temporal peace, and the second to direct the faithful to eternal life. In secular modernity, the loss of those two so visible representations of our temporality and spiritual immortality meant that the vast majority of human beings live lives in which the pursuit of temporal goods dominates their entire consciousness, leaving them wholly concerned with social, economic and political matters. A medieval theologian would observe that this life of restless activity feeds the sin of sloth, which is a disregard for the highest things.

The historic teaching of the church is that eternal rest, which is eternal peace in God, is the beatific vision, contemplating God in his goodness forever. Commonly today, when the afterlife is discussed among people who might consider themselves 'spiritual', vague remarks about the afterlife are made; it is reduced to being a place where we will be re-united with our loved ones. To speak, therefore, of eternal life as the contemplation of God in his glory can strike modern Christians as dull if their entire horizon is dominated by material existence. Furthermore, speaking as a North American, the visual horizon is relentlessly secular and seldom does religious artwork (apart from that found in museums), depict the heavenly kingdom or death and judgement. Church teaching is dominated by moralism, so modern churches, unlike the great cathedrals of old Europe, have few pictures of the Last Judgement, such as those depicted over the doors from which a medieval worshipper might have exited after mass, or depictions of Christ Triumphant enthroned in Heavenly glory over the altar. The still beauty of an icon, to some so inactive and cold, is intended to impart dogmatic teaching, to encourage contemplation, rather than action. The artwork of past Christian civilizations was intended to remind the faithful that the hope of the pilgrim is to be in heaven, with God forever, to leave this realm of imperfection and change behind.

The emphasis on life in this world, this temporality of outlook, signifies the metaphysical assumptions of the age, which are primarily historicist. The majority of people in any culture, whether they are aware of it or not, hold metaphysical assumptions which determine the practical actions they undertake. If one knows that this world will give way to eternal life, then that will determine how one chooses to live. It follows that as most people regard progress in science and the attainment of worldly goods as the total of reality, they come to presume that all truth develops, it is influenced by human action; there is no other standard for truth than that given by human reasoning. Hence truths about divine nature, dogmas such as the timelessness of God, are called into question if they do not fit into the categories of truth to which people are attached. To speak philosophically, the underlying metaphysical assumption of the day is that becoming is final. Granted, as Mascall

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355324000512 Published online by Cambridge University Press

continually pointed out, human thought is always bound by history and culture to some degree, and hence we see real developments in our understanding of the natural world, of the realm of becoming, in the fields of natural sciences. But this is not all that we can know, being creatures who have the capacity to know unchanging truths, the infinite as well as the finite, as noted above, because we are body and soul. Furthermore, by nature and grace, we are capable of seeing God. Hence, the human mind can apprehend that timelessness is necessary to reality, and that God, and human nature, are intrinsically bound up in that fact. As Mascall wrote: it is through the timelessness of God and through the adoptive incorporation of human nature into Christ, who is 'hypostatically united with his divine Person' that God gives mankind that 'real participation in the eternity which is one aspect of the life of God.'[11]

Alfred North Whitehead, in his Gifford Lectures of 1929, later published as *Process and Reality,* ascribed change and process to God himself. His intention was to synthesize, in a helpful way, the insights of the chief philosophies and religions of mankind, so as to defend Christianity. But in so doing, he sacrificed what is unique to the Christian faith, and thus the received teaching about God, in order to construct a metaphysical account of God fitted to twentieth-century human experience. Mascall's judgement upon Whitehead's theology was that only among 'philosophers whose basic metaphysic is pantheistic or at least immanentist has it been held that God is himself the subject of vicissitude or developments.'[12] God is not a creature of history, nor, to be absolutely consistent, can it be said that his Word, the revealed faith, is a creature of history.

Whitehead argued that out of the 'perpetual self-relinquishment and self-creation of actual entities the history of the universe is built up. Each of these entities is an embodiment of "creativity", which is a "principle of novelty".'[13] This principle of 'creativity' becomes the ultimate metaphysical principle. Or to put that another way, becoming is final, there is no final cause. Contingency, development and evolution describe actual entities, and God and these entities are part of one process. God's 'interaction with the world of actual (and real) occasions in this process allows him to acquire a 'consequent nature,'[14] in other words, God changes, as ourselves, because he is part of the forces of the universe.

The complexity of Whitehead's system does bear some resemblance to the existentialism of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, particularly with reference to the idea of existence as prior to essence, and the relationship of becoming and novelty. Heidegger's works, as is known, had an influence on theology, Protestant and Roman Catholic, and Mascall takes note of this in various

[11]Mascall, *Christ the Christian and the Church* (London, UK: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd, 1946), p. 106.

[12]E. L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (Philadelphia, PA: the Westminster Press, 1971), p. 159.

[13]E. L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (Philadelphia, PA: the Westminster Press, 1971), p. 160. On reativity as novelty see: Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality; An Essay in Cosmology* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Co, 5th edn, 1960), pp. 31–33.

[14]E. L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 160.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355324000512 Published online by Cambridge University Press

places.[15] But, the similarity between the philosophies of Whitehead and Heidegger lies in their view of causation, in that neither system admits of a transcendent cause, and Whitehead, like Heidegger, holds the doctrine of a transcendent creator at whose fiat the world came into being to be a fallacy.[16] *Dasein*, in Heideggerian philosophy, is a presence that is never apparent, but lies behind the gods of history, and whose arrival brings a new revealing of truth through what he calls *poesis,* the 'bringing forth' or presencing of truth.[17] Whitehead's 'creativity' is likewise, a process of becoming which lies behind religions, is creative, bringing something new. Mascall's judgement on Whitehead's system was that it was inconsistent, contradictory. He wrote: 'A. E. Taylor was, I believe, right, when he accused Whitehead of "unconscious tampering with his own sound principle that all possibility is found on actuality" and asserted that the "attempt to get back somehow behind the concreteness of God to an *elan vital* of which the concreteness is to be a product really amounts to a surrender of the principle itself".'[18] It is contradictory both to posit eternal actuality as self-creating and then also to hold to some kind of principle behind it. In sum, Mascall wrote: 'Whitehead never seriously asks the basic metaphysical question, what is the explanation of the existence of contingent being? In this sense, he is not really concerned with an *explanation* at all but rather with logical arrangement.'[19]

Whitehead's 'eternal actuality' was necessarily pantheistic and immanentist. This is true in a rather obvious way, but one might remark in passing, that modern pantheism differs from ancient pantheism. Ancient pantheism was accompanied by fear of the overwhelming power of the natural divinities; modern pantheism insists upon the decisive action of mankind over nature and is accompanied not by fear of the gods, but of man, and a sense of anxiety about human power over the environment. Pure temporality marks modern pantheism because it sees no purpose but to act – the question always being what to do. It also issues in a perverse desire to transcend oneself. One sees this in the transhumanist movement which expressly aims at self-transcendence, in its attempt to find a way to overcome the limitations of natural death, while at the same time there exists this omnipresent undercurrent of social anxiety about the effect of human interference in the natural environment. All this is evidence of the temporality of contemporary thought, of a sense that everything is in time, and there is no eternal peace, and the world depends upon

[15]Dr. Rudolf Bultmann's attempted Christianization of Heidegger's ideas in his 'demythologizing' programme is discussed by Mascall in *Words and Images,* and his influence on Karl Rahner in *The Openness of Being.* Mascall does not address the existentialism of Heidegger directly but in *Existence and Analogy* he distinguishes between the secular existentialism of Sartre, who on this point is like Heidegger, from the existentialism of a Gilsonian Thomist. Mascall, following Thomas Aquinas, holds that in God essence and existence are identical.

[16]Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Co, 5th edn,1960), p. 519.

[17]Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology' in *Basic Writings,* tr. David Farrell Krell (New York, NY: Harper Row, 1977), pp. 283–317. Also: Martin Heidegger, *The Principle* of Reason, tr. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996).

[18]E. L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 161.

[19]E. L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 170.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355324000512 Published online by Cambridge University Press

human action because there is neither timeless God, nor Mind and creator behind reality, and no existence beyond the present.

Mascall did point out that although God is timeless, that does not mean that God is not involved in time. God's involvement in the temporal is possible because of his complete transcendence. He wrote, 'as the perpetual creator and sustainer of the finite temporal world' God is 'in the most intimate relation, as creator, with every one of his constituents and with every phase of their history.'[20] In his ontological depth, because he is the timeless, changeless, omnipotent creator of all things, his creative relationship to his creation is continual. Historic theism has discussed this problem at length. Each individual is held in being by God, 'in whom we live, and breathe, and have our being'; his or her mode of existence comes from God, and knowledge of his existence is natural to created reason, attested to within the western natural law tradition.

God's timelessness requires the Christian to affirm that God made the world 'not *in time*, but *with time*'.[21] The words 'before' and 'after' have meaning only in relation to creation, he exists in an eternal present, God 'is' in a manner that we are not. This draws attention to the use of our word 'is'. Mascall observed that to say 'that God is wise or good, the verb 'is' is taken as relating not to a temporal present, sandwiched between a past and a future, but to a 'timeless present' before which the time-processes of all finite existents and the successive moments of each are uniformly and indifferently displayed and which would belong to God even if he had not created the world and was himself the only being in existence.'[22]

In a lovely argument, Mascall adds that one might reasonably ask, how can time-conditioned creatures like ourselves even speak of God's 'being' or existence which is not anything like ours? Consider mathematics. Contrast the use of the word 'is' in the mathematical proposition 'The square of three is nine' with the use of 'is' in the empirical proposition 'There is a wart-hog in the garden'. The mathematical 'is' is omnitemporal rather than strictly timeless; the square of three always is, is now and ever shall be nine, yet that is not said of the wart-hog in the garden. The omnitemporal and empirical sense of God is there also in the statement that God 'is' good. When I say 'God is good' at a particular moment, I certainly mean that God is good at that moment and very probably mean that he always was, is now and ever will be good.'[23] Is can be used in both empirical and omnitemporal senses, and if also one thinks metaphysically of the timelessness of God, he wrote, 'I recognize that the implied reference to time in this sentence arises from the fact that I am speaking of God from within my own temporal order of existence and does not, or should not, suggest that God is himself in time.'[24] Likewise, the statement 'God spoke to

[20]E. L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 161.

[21]E. L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 164. Quoting Augustine, *City of God,* XI, vi.

[22]E. L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 165.

[23]E. L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1971), pp. 165–166.

[24]E. L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 166.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355324000512 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Abraham', ascribes an action to God within the temporal process. Nevertheless, the action at God's end is timeless. God exerts a creativity 'towards and upon the whole spatio-temporal fabric of the created universe.'[25] Thus, 'is' refers to both what is temporal and omnitemporal. These metaphysical presuppositions are presumed in the everyday use of language.

This point about everyday language is important. For our language does not simply refer to things that are available to sense knowledge. As noted earlier, physics and calculus describe motion, indeed infinite motion, but to do so make use of mathematical formulas, which are another kind of language which belongs to the realm of the non-sensory and intelligible. Yet physics has its limitations. To examine the world through theories about matter and motion is to find the meaning of the world as it lies within itself, in its activity and motion. But explanations of why things exist at all, requires metaphysics – the study of that which is beyond physics. Physics is the study of created nature. As created nature will some day pass away at the Second Coming, and Christ will inaugurate a different order of existence from what we know at present, physics, as we know it, will have nothing to say because it is confined to discovering the meaning of the world in the world as it is known in the here and now.[26]

Physics and Metaphysics

It was Sir Isaac Newton who first proposed as a matter of scientific theory that God was in time. In his *Principia* of 1687, he gave a doctrine of space and time that would dominate for the next three centuries. He posited an absolute space and described it as 'the sensorium of God'. 'Space was for Newton an infinitely extended uniform Euclidean receptacle in which material bodies were immersed without their presence making any difference to space itself. All sorts of things could happen *in* space, but nothing whatever could happen *to* space.'[27] The outcome of this was that people conceived, although Mascall is careful to point out this cannot be 'cogently' derived from Newton, that all spatial or quasi-spatial relations take place in the physical universe. In this sensorium were the laws of physics by which the universe operated.

In *Christian Theology and Natural Science,* Mascall addressed the nature of scientific theory as a whole. Scientific hypotheses or theories are attempts to represent complex mathematical abstractions as concrete realities, they are models, although, he remarks, this can be a fool's errand in modern physics, which is really too abstract to benefit from such attempts.[28] Yet the human mind seeks to represent abstractions in images, and quoting the scholastic adage *mens convertit se ad phantasmata,*[29] notes that the mind turns invariably to sensory

[25]E. L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 166.

[26]E. L. Mascall, *Christ, the Christian, and the Church: A Study of the Incarnation and its Consequences* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1946), pp. 105–106.

[27]E. L. Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1956), pp. 25–26.

[28]E. L. Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1956), pp. 49–50.

[29]E. L. Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1956), p. 51.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355324000512 Published online by Cambridge University Press

representation.[30] Such representations may grip the imagination of the non-scientist in such a way that science becomes part of popular culture, whether or not the intricacies of the discovery are entirely understood. It was this case with Newtonian theory; he became a celebrity in his day for discovering the universal laws of gravitation and motion which govern the planets and earth. Although Newton certainly thought all those laws depended upon the will of God, and divine intervention was necessary to maintain them, later scientists, Mascall mentions Laplace in particular, showed that Newton's laws 'were more adequate than he thought and that therefore celestial mechanics had no need of the hypothesis of God.'[31]

Newton's near contemporary, poet Alexander Pope summed up the contemporary estimation of Newton in this couplet:

> Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night:
> God said, *Let Newton be!* And all was light,

although, as Mascall remarks, 'as time went on there seemed to be less and less room for God in the universe whose secrets Newton had discovered.'[32] So the damage was done. People believed that in forming a hypothesis, the 'scientist is making a guess at the real nature of the invisible machinery that is responsible for the phenomena under investigation.'[33] Science replaced metaphysics and theology as the true account of reality, or to put it another way, faith and reason parted ways, reason now defined by scientific method.

Newton's laws were eternal. The effect was to replace the Ptolemaic model of a universe composed of crystalline spheres circling the earth in perfect motion, and governed by an unearthly order of celestial laws, with a uniform set of eternal laws, thus effectively secularizing the supralunar realm.[34] Mascall remarked wryly: 'Their aura of deity had not however been annihilated; it had merely transferred itself to Newton's laws. Deistic pietism might indeed see the spacious firmament on high and all the blue ethereal sky and spangled heavens, a shining frame, proclaiming the Great Original [God].'[35]

Time was, in Newton's system, an immutable and eternal law. 'It was left for Newton to impose upon English thought the doctrine of creation *in tempore,* and it is natural that just as his receptacle theory of space led him to view space as the sensorium of God, so what we might describe as his escalator theory of time led him to view time as the mode under which God himself experiences events.'[36] God had, as it were, stepped into a stream of time when creating the world, just as you or I would step onto an escalator.

[30]E. L. Mascall, 'Thomism, traditional or Transcendental?' *Tydschrift coor Filosofie, 36ste Jaarg., Nr. 2 JUNI 1974,* p. 328. Mascall discusses the meaning of this Thomistic phrase.
[31]E. L. Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1956), p. 8.
[32]E. L. Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (London: Longmans, Green and Co), p. 57.
[33]E. L. Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (London: Longmans, Green and Co), p. 57.
[34]E. L. Mascall *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1956), p. 56.
[35]E. L. Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1956), p. 56.
[36]E. L. *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1956), p. 31.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355324000512 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Finally, Newton changed the use and meaning of the word 'eternal' to mean exclusively the laws of physics. In the *Laws of the Ecclesiastical Polity,* written by the eminent Renaissance theologian Richard Hooker, a century before Newton, Hooker applied the term 'eternal' in one way, to the law by which God governs himself, but in a different way to his creation, by analogy. Hooker uses the word 'law' here as a metaphor to represent the providential order imposed upon creation by God.

The first Eternal Law, the law by which God governs himself, is a 'book [that] we are neither able nor worthy to open and look into.'[37] The second Eternal Law is created and available to the human intellect by reason. Newton's laws belong to the second Eternal Law, yet his theory, as Mascall put it, suggests that God is *in tempore,* the laws equal to God. This collapsed the first Eternal Law into the second. When Richard Hooker referred to Scripture, Reason and Tradition as the foundations of faith, he gave primacy to Scripture and would have included laws of science as one aspect of reason, one kind of human knowledge, but not even the whole of what could be known by natural reason, as under the aegis of reason also fall ethics and metaphysics, which involve different kinds of reasoning. But that is an aside.

At risk of simplifying the complexities of scientific theory and how they came to dominate cultural conceptions of God, it can be said that quantum theory and the theory of relativity have changed the picture of the temporal world in a manner which Mascall finds helpful. It has led to an entirely different view of space, so that 'it is no longer necessary to hold that all experiences which involve spatial characteristics must be linked together in one unified extensional spatial continuum.'[38] Moreover, the idea of an absolute space in which everything exists was discredited. Also discredited is the 'escalator theory' of time, namely that time flows without regard to anything external. Relativity theory put an end to that.

Scientific theories are temporally bound, yet Mascall was pleased the new theories at least correspond more neatly with the Augustinian doctrine that God made the world 'not *in time,* but *with time*'. This is in 'line with the outlook of modern physical science, which conceives the spatio-temporal continuum as a systematic structure of relations between concrete physical point-events; the Newtonian view of time as a river which "of itself, and from its own nature, flows equably without relation to anything external".'[39] As he put it, time is now seen as an aspect of finite beings, and not some medium into which they are launched. God's timelessness is his own, physics and traditional metaphysics can unite on that point.

What then is the status of metaphysics with its claim to knowledge of eternal verities? Metaphysics treats 'the ultimate terminus of perception, real intelligible being.'[40] The mystery of the human intelligence is that 'there is a non-sensory and intellectual element in human perception' which 'does not consist in inference, nor even confused or implicit inference, but in apprehension.'[41] The intellect grasps, in a

[37]Richard Hooker, *Laws of the Ecclesiastical Polity,* I, ch. 2, 3.

[38]E. L. Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1956), pp. 28–29.

[39]E. L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being*: *Natural TheologyToday* (Philadelphia, PA; The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 164.

[40]E. L. Mascall, *Whatever happened to the Human Mind* (London: SPCK, 1970), p. 14.

[41]E. L. Mascall, 'Thomism, Thomist or Transcendental?' *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie, 36ste Jaarg., Nr.2 JUNI 1974,* p. 327.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355324000512 Published online by Cambridge University Press

'direct, but mediated activity, the intelligible extra-mental reality, which is *being,* the real thing, the *objectum quo.*'[42] The senses know something is there, the *objectum quod,* but, its intelligibility, the *objectum quo* offers meaning. This returns one to the importance of mathematics:

> This is why the physical sciences are so dominated by mathematics, for it is the intelligible and not the sensible characteristics of an object with which mathematics is concerned. Hence, for example, the same body of mathematical theory can deal with gravitational theory, electrostatics and the hydrodynamics of a non-viscous fluid; for in spite of their differences from the point of view of sense-experience, these phenomena have, broadly speaking the same intelligible structure and form.[43]

Mathematics makes intelligible the underlying and invisible truth. Number, as Plato would remark, is a form, an idea, it is intelligible, and one uses the intelligible to explain the sensible. This is, generally speaking, the Thomist-Aristotelian tradition of epistemology which Mascall affirms. There are truths, such as number, which are simply known or received by the intellect, we do not theorize about them, we simply find and use them. The *locus classicus* for this argument is Plato's dialogue *Meno,* but it is also found in Aristotle's treatment of the first principles of speculative knowledge, the end of thought, in his *Metaphysics* and sixth book of the *Ethics.*

To conclude this discussion of God's timelessness, it is necessary to speak briefly about the power of the human mind. There is a distinction between the power of reason and the receptive or perceptive intellect, what has been traditionally called the distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus.* An account is found in the sixth century Christian work *The Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius, as well as Thomas Aquinas, both dependent upon Platonic and Aristotelian thought. In the twentieth century, it was succinctly summarized by the German philosopher and theologian Josef Pieper in his book, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture.* Mascall used Pieper to explain, and in *Words and Images,* quotes from *Leisure:*

> Is there such a thing [Pieper asks] as a purely receptive attitude of mind in which we become aware of immaterial reality and invisible relationships? Is there such a thing as pure 'intellectual contemplation' – to adopt the terminology of the schools? In antiquity the answer given was always yes; in modern philosophy, for the most part, the answer given is no.'
>
> The Greeks – Aristotle no less than Plato – as well as the great medieval thinkers, held that not only physical, sensuous perception, but equally man's spiritual and intellectual knowledge included an element of pure, receptive contemplation, or as Heraclitus says, of 'listening to the essence of things'.

[42]E. L. Mascall, 'Thomism, Thomist or Transcendental?' *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie, 36ste Jaarg., Nr.2 JUNI 1974,* p. 327.

[43]E. L. Mascall, *Words and Images* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1957), p. 35.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355324000512 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355324000512 Published online by Cambridge University Press

They:

> drew a distinction between the understanding as *ratio* and the understanding as *intellectus. Ratio* is the power of discursive, logical thought, of searching and of examination, of abstraction, of definition and drawing conclusions. *Intellectus,* on the other hand, is the name for the understanding in so far as it is the capacity of *simplex intuitus* of that simple vision to which truth offers itself like a landscape to the eye. The faculty of man's knowledge is both of these in one.[44]

The *intellectus* has the capacity to receive truth, simply, as a vision. It is not the same power in the soul which we now think of as reason, as important as reason is to our thinking. One might say that both *ratio* and *intellectus* are at work in speculation about eternal verities. Mascall remarked that it is the 'neglect of this twofold functioning of the human mind that has so drastically impoverished the mental life of the modern world and produced the glacial and spectral character of much modern philosophy.'[45] His comment prefaced a learned discussion of the limitations of modern epistemology found in the philosophies of Descartes and Kant.

The upshot is that a general neglect, out of ignorance or *naivite*, of historical philosophy and theology leaves theologians captive to an unthinking historicism. Whitehead's placement of God in time was just one notable example.

What, therefore, are the fundamental claims of reason, the real powers of the human mind? To recognize that the mind has both intellectual and rational powers, that belief in God is not irrational, that science is, although very helpful to our knowledge of the truths of the creation, not final as to the revelation of truth. He warned of the danger of deifying the world, blindness to the timelessness of both revealed dogmas and God's nature, both resulting from a lack of a certain kind of education, recognizing the 'fundamental rejection of the claims of reason.'[46] In the words of Roman Catholic philosopher and theologian, Jacques Maritain, whose works Mascall admired, theologians today are in 'servitude to the present'. Maritain was speaking of his own church after Vatican II; he accused it of 'kneeling before the world'.[47] Mascall and Maritain, both indebted to the *philosophia perennis*, agreed that the philosophy, which for two thousand years had explicated and defended the one true faith, was more than ever relevant to our situation. Christians are called to charity in temporal concerns. But more importantly, they must nourish the reason, the intellect in study and prayer, for the true meaning of charity is the love of God.

Mascall's book, *The Christian Universe,* is about the vision of God in his glory, gathered from examples in poetry, literature and theology. It touches on the full capacity of the intellect to know the glory of God in contemplation. He quotes the

[44]E. L. Mascall, *Words and Images* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1957), pp. 63–64. Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture,* tr. Alexander Dru (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1952), pp. 7–9.

[45]E. L. Mascall *Words and Images* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1957), p. 65.

[46]E. L. Mascall, *The Theology of the Future* (London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1968), p. 47.

[47]Jacques Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne,* tr. Michael Cuddihy and Elizabeth Hughes (New York, NY; Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), pp. 53–58.

final stanzas of Dante's *Paradiso.*[48] Dante had witnessed God's glory, he had been granted a vision of Christ. In the vision, he ascended through the lower heavens to the Celestial Rose, the heaven of heavens, the Empyrean, where all the saints are gathered before the Throne of Grace. This heaven is not like Jupiter or Mars visible in the starry sky; Dante has ascended 'beyond all worlds', where there is no where, there is no time, there is no before or after. This is a picture of life after death, a life fulfilled, the intellect sustained in its vision of God in grace. 'For everything the will has ever sought is gathered there, and there is every quest Made perfect, which apart from it falls short.' (xxxiii, 103–105). The human soul will rest in heaven, with God, in contemplation of his glory, for this is eternal life, to be with God a 'heaven which is pure light alone: Pure intellectual light, fulfilled with love, Love of the true Good, filled with all delight.' (xxx, 38–43)[49]

[48]E. L Mascall, *The Christian Universe.* The Boyle Lectures 1956 (New York, NY:Morehouse-Barlow Co.,1966), pp. 53–55.

[49]Dante, *Paradiso,* tr. D. L. Sayers and Barbara Reynolds (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962).

Cite this article: Bayer, R.L. (2024). God's Timelessness, Our Temporal Nature. *Journal of Anglican Studies* **22**, 529–541. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355324000512

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355324000512 Published online by Cambridge University Press