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**The Coexistence of Time and Eternity:
Cajetan's Solution to God's Knowledge of Contingent Futures**

Abstract: This paper examines Tommaso de Vio Cajetan's commentary on Article 13 of Question 14 in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, focusing on the core challenge of God's knowledge of contingent futures. This gnoseological issue is inextricably linked to the metaphysical concepts of temporality, eternity, necessity, and contingency. Cajetan structures his argument by establishing a precise order of relations between the absolute, eternal nature of God and the relative, contingent nature of generated existences. The central claim investigated is that the doctrine of divine knowledge, particularly regarding contingent futures, must be sustained by the relation between divine eternity and temporality. Cajetan's view of eternity, which draws on the Boethian analogy, posits a coexistence between every temporal instant and the divine *unum nunc* (one

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now) of eternity. It establishes a form of presentism and lays a theoretical foundation for further investigation into the ontological status of potentiality, free will, and the logical structure of a conditioned continuum of eternities. Moreover, the paper notes that Cajetan's conceptualization requires a mathematical framework to articulate the relation between infinity and finitude and proposes new avenues for contemporary metaphysical inquiry into the eternity-temporality relation.

Keywords: Cajetan, Contingent Futures, Divine Eternity, Temporality, Presentism

Resumo: Este artigo examina o comentário de Caetano (Tommaso de Vio) ao Artigo 13 da Questão 14 na *Summa Theologiae* de Tomás de Aquino, focando no desafio central do conhecimento de futuros contingentes por Deus. Esta questão gnoseológica está intrinsecamente ligada aos conceitos metafísicos de temporalidade, eternidade, necessidade e contingência. Caetano estrutura o seu argumento estabelecendo uma ordem precisa de relações entre a natureza absoluta e eterna de Deus e a natureza relativa e contingente das existências geradas. A tese central investigada é que a doutrina do conhecimento divino, particularmente dos futuros contingentes, deve ser sustentada pela relação da eternidade divina com a temporalidade. A visão de Caetano sobre a eternidade, que se baseia na analogia boéciana, postula uma coexistência entre cada instante temporal e o *unum nunc* (um agora) divino da eternidade. Esta interpretação estabelece uma forma de presentismo e lança uma base teórica para futuras investigações sobre o estatuto ontológico da potencialidade, do livre-arbítrio e da estrutura lógica de um contínuo condicionado de eternidades.

Além disso, o artigo observa que a conceptualização de Caetano requer uma conceptualização matemática para articular a relação entre infinito e finito e propõe novas vias para a investigação metafísica contemporânea da relação eternidade-temporalidade.

Palavra-chave: Caetano, Futuros Contingentes, Eternidade Divina, Temporalidade, Presentismo

Introdução

The problem of how God knows contingent futures presents challenges in two main conceptual dimensions. Gnosologically, it poses intrinsic problems for a doctrine of knowledge, regardless of its scale, specifically concerning the certainty, infallibility, and simultaneous scope of the divine intellect. Metaphysically, it demands the rigorous articulation of abstract concepts that define the very structure of reality: specifically, the relation between temporality and eternity, the boundary between infinity and finitude, and the connection between actuality and possibility, as well as between necessity and contingency. At the scale of a self-subsistent and unchanging existence, the gnosological question of infallible knowledge is fundamentally conditioned by a metaphysical structuring. This structuring requires the precise articulation of abstract concepts that define the essential relations between a pure,

absolute, and necessary existence (which, by nature, is eternal) and the derived existences (determined, relative, and contingent) that are generated from it. These concepts – such as the nature of eternity, the present, and actuality – must be ordered to preserve the divine nature while simultaneously accounting for the possibility of contingent truth within the temporal world. Cajetan, in his commentary on Article 13 of Question 14 of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, has attempted to establish an order of relations that respects this same structure.

This paper focuses on the relation between divine eternity and temporality in Cajetan's commentary on this article of the *Summa*. According to him, it is on this relation that the divine gnoseological doctrine must be sustained, especially that of contingent futures. I will first provide a brief description of the order of subjects in the commentary, followed by a survey of the definitions of potentiality and actuality in relation to the succession of time. Then I will set out Cajetan's view of eternity and the present. I will conclude with brief remarks on the problem and the steps that should be taken next. This study will proceed in four parts: first, the presentation of Cajetan's exegetical and structural approach to

Summa Theologiae P. I, Q. 14, Art. 13¹ will give a brief description of the order of subjects in Cajetan's commentary and his framework for addressing the problem of contingent futures. This is followed by the second part, which surveys the distinctions Cajetan makes regarding the states of contingent existence and their relation to infallible knowledge. The central argument is articulated in the third part, which sets out Cajetan's view of eternity and the present by focusing on his defence against key scholastic critiques. Finally, the last two parts will conclude with remarks on the implications of his theory for concepts of temporality and potentiality, suggesting avenues for further inquiry.

This article focuses specifically on the textual analysis of Cajetan's commentary. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the eternity of God as a metaphysical concept is a rich field of discussion. This is particularly evident in the developments of Boethius' argument – as explored in the work of scholars like Stump and Kretzmann – and how the relation between timelessness and temporality informs the debate on divine knowledge, especially concerning contingent futures.

¹ For this paper, it was used: *Thomas Aquinatis. Opera omnia. Cum commentariis Thomae de Vio Caietani Ordinis Praedicatorum. Iussu Leonis XIII P.M. Tomus Quartus (Leonina 06) Pars Primae Summae theologiae a quaestione I ad questionem XLIX. 1891. All translations from Latin to English are the author's own, for the purpose of writing this paper.*

The fact that this article is part of a small-scale investigation and corresponds to initial work that lays the foundations for future investigations does not allow one to dwell in detail on this contemporary issue, although at the end of the textual and conceptual analysis presented here, some aspects are identified which, if developed further, could contribute positively to the development of new conceptual mechanisms that support the relation between eternity and temporality. Once these mechanics are solid and robust, philosophical explanations about the possibility of divine omniscience could eventually be improved, but not only that. Demonstrations that articulate panentheistic views (which reject a total identity between the divine mind and the world and a radical separation between the originating instance and the originated) may also be strengthened.

Cajetan's Exegetical and Structural Approach to *Summa Theologiae* I, Q. 14, Art. 13

The challenge of God's knowledge of contingent futures unfolds across two distinct, yet interconnected, philosophical domains. The gnosiological dimension is concerned with the theory of knowledge: the core dilemma here is understanding how divine knowledge can be absolute and necessary when its object – a contingent future event

– is defined by its inherent possibility not to occur. Complementarily, the metaphysical dimension addresses the nature of existence: this involves defining the precise relational structure between two fundamentally distinct orders of being – the eternal, necessary God and the temporal, contingent world – such that God's perfect grasp of the latter does not annul the world's essential contingency.

Succinctly, Cajetan divides the commentary into 38 points. He begins by presenting the views and arguments of Thomas Aquinas, outlining the objections from the literature, particularly those of Duns Scotus. After this presentation, he starts answering the objections. It is during his responses to the objections that his own view starts to emerge. This response is set into four parts.

First, he says that Thomas answers affirmatively that God knows contingent futures; second, that he sets forth how they are known relative to the object of knowledge; third, he explains how contingent futures are known relative to the one who knows; and fourth he presents a conclusion, from which he will manifest the evidence of the possibility of this knowledge in God. Cajetan sets out to explain each one succinctly, sometimes even completing the arguments of Thomas Aquinas. Cajetan then exposes the doubts.

VII. Regarding the things said in this article, it must be noted that there are doubtful points here. The first and principal is the argument adduced from the side of eternity: the second is the argument included from the

side of the reasons of things which God holds within Himself. For it is said in the text that all things are present to God from eternity, not only because of the reasons of things which God holds present within Himself, but because His gaze (or 'intuition') is carried from eternity, etc².

The first doubt concerns the question of eternity, and the second concerns the question about the reasons of things in God, that is, the application of the doctrine of divine knowledge to the relations between that which exists determined in time and eternity. In other words, the application of the logical and ontological relations between eternity and temporality to the possibility of an existence whose consciousness and wisdom are absolute. Cajetan, then, begins with the enunciation of the problem, which is that all things are present to God from eternity, not only because God holds the reasons for all things, but also because his perception of them in themselves is brought from eternity. Therefore, God, as an eternal and omniscient existence, knows things either by the reasons of things in themselves, as a matrix, or in themselves, by intuitive knowledge. He may be said to attribute the reason for this knowledge to an ontological relation between things in their proper temporal

² *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani, STh. PII, I, q. 14, art. 13, VII. Circa dicta in hoc articulo, advertem est quod hic sunt dubitabilia. Primum et praecipuum est ratio adducta ex parte aeternitatis: secundum est ratio inclusa ex parte rationum rerum quas Deus apud se habet. Dicitur enim in littera quod omnia sunt praesentia Deo ab aeterno, non solum propter rationes rerum quas apud se Deus praesentes habet, sed quia eius intuitus ab aeterno fertur etc.*

existence and the eternity of a self-subsistent existent. This relation by divine eternity is taken as a relation of coexistence.

Where manifestly two causes are assigned as to why things are present to God from eternity: namely, the reasons of things, and eternity. By the reasons, indeed, all things are present in the manner of the known, that is, as things known to the knower: but by eternity, they are present as coexisting things to the coexistent one. Therefore, the principal argument concerning eternity shall be examined first, and defended with the light of God and the support of Saint Thomas: secondly, the argument included concerning the reasons of things³.

The relation established by divine eternity resolves the initial dichotomy by clarifying the distinct roles of the two causes: the reasons of things (*rationes rerum*) secure the presence of all things to God as objects known to a knower (*in ratione cogniti*); whereas eternity itself secures the presence of all things to God as simultaneous entities coexisting with the Him (*ut coexistentia coexistenti*).

Actuality, Potentiality, and the Relative Necessity of the Present Contingent

³ Idem: Ubi manifeste duae causae assignantur quod res sint praesentes Deo ab aeterno: scilicet rationes rerum, et aeternitas. Per rationes quidem sunt praesentia omnia in ratione cogniti, idest ut cognita cognoscenti: per aeternitatem autem, ut coexistentia coexistenti. Primo ergo examinabitur, et cum Dei lumine ac divi Thomae suffragiis defendetur principalis ratio de aeternitate: secundo, ratio inclusa de rationibus rerum.

In relation to this, Cajetan explains the notions of contingency present in Thomas's arguments. He says that there are three differences in the states of actuality or potentiality. The first refers to temporal difference, the second to contingency, and the third to knowledge. What is in a state of actuality, in act, has an aspect of the present. The potential, in turn, has an aspect of the future. The difference between the contingent in act and the contingent in potency does not lie in a matter of nature, but in a distinction between different states of the same nature. From the state of actuality, and therefore of the present, the contingent draws a relative necessity. For Cajetan, this necessity will reside not only in the fact that the contingent is in an actual state of present, but also in the actual relation that the present holds to eternity. When speaking, later on, of the statement about the sealing of the present in eternity, this is what he refers to: a relative necessity. Even though it has a contingent nature, it assumes a relative necessity, as opposed to an absolute necessity, because, when it is actualised, it concretises and determines an existence or an event. Once it has been fulfilled, it cannot be otherwise.

The nature of eternity's relation to time and the specific context of Scotus's arguments, which Cajetan addresses

About the doubt of eternity argument, Cajetan begins his discussion in point 8 (of 38 discussion points). He begins by dividing the doubt of eternity into two parts. The first is about the proposition that everything that happens in time is present in eternity. The second is about its application to the conclusion he wants to defend, that God knows contingent futures. I will focus on the first part of the doubt presented by Cajetan.

Cajetan presents Scotus' objection and also divides it into four arguments. Next, four arguments will be outlined to provide context for the reader regarding Cajetan's discourse. The first asserts that what does not exist has no coexistence with anything; the contingent future has no existence while future, so it will have no contingency, and everything is known by presentness and actuality. The second asserts that if all things coexist for all eternity, they are all in simultaneous act, which annuls temporal succession. The third argument proceeds from the second and affirms that if this is so, events will have a double realisation produced by God, one with respect to the temporal level and the other to the level of eternity. The fourth argument confirms the first and, according to Cajetan, invalidates the argument given by Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa*

Contra Gentiles, in Book I, Chapter 66⁴, which states that the coexistence of permanent currents requires the existence of both temporal ends for the same measure of duration – past and future. Therefore, they cannot collide in only presentness. The objection argues that if each instant of time coexisted for all eternity, it would coexist, also on the temporal plane, with all instants of time, which would result in the collapse of the very succession, past and future, into a single present.

Thomas holds that whatever exists in any part of time, whether past, present, or future, coexists eternally as if it were the

⁴ SCG, L I, Cap 66: Amplius. Intelligere Dei successionem non habet, sicut nec eius esse. Est igitur totum simul semper manens: quod de ratione aeternitatis est. Temporis autem duratio successione prioris et posterioris extenditur. Proportio igitur aeternitatis ad totam temporis durationem est sicut proportio indivisibilis ad continuum: non quidem eius indivisibilis quod terminus continui est, quod non adest cuilibet parti continui, - huius enim similitudinem habet instans temporis – sed eius indivisibilis quod extra continuum est, cuilibet tamen parti continui, sive puncto in continuo signato, coexistit: nam, cum tempus motum non excedat, aeternitas, quae omnino extra motum est, nihil temporis est. Rursum, cum aeterni esse nunquam deficiat, cuilibet tempori vel instanti temporis praesentialiter adest aeternitas. Cuius exemplum utcumque in circulo est videre: punctum enim in circumferentia signatum, etsi indivisibile sit, non tamen cuilibet puncto alii secundum situm coexistit simul, ordo enim situs continuitatem circumferentiae facit; centrum vero, quod est extra circumferentiam, ad quodlibet punctum in circumferentia signatum directe oppositionem habet. Quicquid igitur in quacumque parte temporis est, coexistit aeterno quasi praesens eidem: etsi respectu alterius partis temporis sit praeteritum vel futurum. Aeterno autem non potest aliquid praesentialiter coexistere nisi toti: quia successionis durationem non habet. Quicquid igitur per totum decursum temporis agitur, divinus intellectus in tota sua aeternitate intuetur quasi praesens. Nec tamen quod quadam parte temporis agitur, semper fuit existens. Relinquitur igitur quod eorum quae secundum decursum temporis nondum sunt, Deus notitiam habet.

same present, in relation to any part of time. The divine intellect, in all its eternity, considers whatever exists in time as present. God's eternity is defined as being whole and simultaneously always abiding, which means his existence and intellect possess no succession and are entirely outside of time and motion. Time, in contrast, is characterized by the flow of succession. The relationship between the two is analogous to the indivisible centre of a circle and the continuous circumference.

Thomas Aquinas resorts to Boethius' well-known analogy⁵ to explain the coexistence of the two. In this analogy, the centre of the circumference maintains the same relation to all the points of the circumference; similarly, the eternity of divine existence maintains the same relation to all the events in temporal succession. Thomas Aquinas uses this analogy to explain that time, although it derives from eternal existence, is determined by the succession of events. Therefore, that temporal succession, equivalent to the succession of

⁵Boethius's circumference analogy, rooted in Christian Neoplatonism, portrays providence as the unchanging center of a circle and fate as its shifting circumference, an image adapted from Plotinus and Proclus. This framework explains how God's eternal, unified knowledge structures the temporal unfolding of events without negating human freedom. Medieval thinkers inherited the model: Aquinas used Boethius's definition of eternity and his distinction between divine timelessness and temporal causation, integrating it into Scholastic theology. Dante transformed the analogy into a cosmic vision in the *Divine Comedy*, depicting God as a radiant central point with the heavens revolving around it, mirroring Boethius's hierarchy of stability and change. Throughout the Middle Ages, this image profoundly influenced metaphysics, cosmology, and ethics, portraying spiritual ascent as a movement inward toward divine unity.

points that make up the circumference, coexists in the same way with eternity. This coexistence is equivalent to the relation that each point of the circumference has with the centre. Therefore, the proportion of eternity to the whole duration of time is as the proportion of the indivisible to the continuous, not indeed of the indivisible that is the term of the continuous, and is not present to each part of the continuous – for such is likened to an instant of time – but of the indivisible that is outside the continuous, and yet synchronizes with each part of the continuous, or with each point of a signate continuous. For, since time does not exceed movement, eternity is altogether outside time, being utterly outside movement⁶.

To return to Cajetan's commentary, after presenting Scotus' objection, he presents Scotus' views concerning the application of the conclusions about the possibility of knowledge. In point X Cajetan proposes to answer the objections, defending that to say that things are present to God means that all things, according to their

⁶ For further discussion and reading about the contemporary developments of this argument, consult: Eleonore Stump & Norman Kretzmann, «Eternity», *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981) 429-458. This paper analyzes the classical concept of eternity, defined by Boethius as the complete possession all at once of illimitable life. It distinguishes eternity from mere sempiternality (limitless duration) and static atemporality, arguing the concept must combine infinite duration with non-succession. The authors develop the notion of ET-simultaneity to establish a coherent, non-temporal relation between an eternal entity and all temporal events. This framework is used to address traditional philosophical problems concerning God's relation to time, including its apparent logical incoherence. The analysis samples solutions to issues like the compatibility of divine omniscience, immutability, and action (e.g., answering prayer) with human freedom.

actual existence in the nature of the world, are present or coexist with eternity.

X. In replying to these objections, I first note that this passage is judged by opponents to be full of contradictions and errors; while even followers of St. Thomas consider it so obscure that I have never yet seen anyone, whether in writing or in speech, defend this statement assertively. And I confess that for perhaps fifteen years it remained hidden from me as well. But the day before yesterday, while I was reflecting on the commentary for this article, the truth, clear and set out plainly, as I believe through the help of St. Thomas, shone forth, and for that reason it was passed over by him in very few words.

We must therefore first note, for the clarity of the terms, that to be present or to coexist with eternity, formally speaking, does not include the idea of the known being present to a knower. For if eternity were a non-cognitive reality, and a stone existed at some moment, there would still be a true presence or coexistence there, without any act of knowing whatsoever. It is also clear from this and from the text that the discussion concerns the actual existence of things that come to be in time, not their objective existence, nor their potential existence, and so on, but their actual being in the nature of things in themselves, outside their causes. Thus, the present discussion concerns the real coexistence of contingent things, which are actually existing, with eternity. And so, when it is said that "all things are present to eternity," the meaning is: all things, according to their actual being in the nature of things, are present, that is, coexist with eternity⁷.

⁷ *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani, STh. PII, I, q. 14, art. 13: X. Ad has obiectiones respondendo, praemitto quod iste locus ab adversantibus iudicatur plenus contradictionis et erroris: a sequentibus autem doctrinam 3. Thomae reputatur adeo obscurus, ut neminem hactenus viderim, sive scripto sive verbo, assertive tueri hoc dictum. Et me iam annis forte quindecim fateor latuisse. Sed nudiustertius, dum super commentatione huius articuli meditarer, illuxit (ut arbitror, divi Thomae ope) veritas plana et in manifesto posita, et ideo paucissimis verbis pertransita. Sciendum est igitur primo, ad evidentiam terminorum, quod esse praesens, seu coexistere, aeternitati, formaliter loquendo, abstrahit a praesentia cogniti ad cognoscentem. Quoniam, si aeternitas esset res non cognoscitiva, et lapis quandoque esset, esset ibi vera praesentia sive coexistentia,*

And he goes on to explain this idea in point 12.

XII. In another way, one can understand that in every now of eternity all things are present to eternity; such that the coexistence of everything with eternity is preserved in every now of eternity. And this meaning is true and is the one intended by St. Thomas.

It is true because eternity has only one now, which is identical with eternity itself and exceeds all time. Therefore, every instant of our time, and whatever is or comes to be in that instant, is contained within the eternal now and measured by it, not as by an equal measure but by one that surpasses it. Hence, to avoid confusion more clearly, one must move from things to propositions and from propositions back to things. Propositions such as all things that occur in time are present to eternity, or are present to God from eternity, or are always present to God, and similar ones, must be distinguished. The word are may either signify the temporal now or the eternal now. Likewise, the expressions from eternity' and 'always' may be taken syncategorematically, meaning that they distribute across every temporal difference, or categorically, meaning that they import perfect sempiternity, which is signified in eternity and its 'now'. In the first sense, these propositions are false; in the second, they are true.

For it is certainly true and beyond doubt that the first instant of this hour exists in the eternal now; and likewise it is true that the last instant of this hour exists in that same eternal now, not in the temporal now that is the beginning of this hour, but in the eternal now corresponding to another temporal instant, as is evident. And therefore, it is not inappropriate that two contradictories, with respect to the temporal now, exist in the same

absque cognitione aliqua. Patet quoque ex hoc et ex littera, quod sermo est de esse rerum quae fiunt in tempore, non obiectivo, nec potenciali, etc., sed de esse in actu in rerum natura secundum seipsas, extra causas suas: ita quod sermo praesens est de coexistentia reali contingentium in actu, ad aeternitatem. Et sic, cum dicitur omnia esse praesentia aeternitati, sensus est: Omnia, secundum suum esse in actu in rerum natura, sunt praesentia, idest coexistunt, aeternitati.

eternal now, and so on⁸.

Cajetan claims that in any now of eternity, things are present to eternity, so that the coexistence of anything to eternity is safeguarded in any eternity now.

That this meaning is the one intended in the text is clear from two points. First, because in this way all the statements become true and consistent. For the now, whether of time or of eternity, cannot be divided into present, past, and future, but is only present. Therefore, when pointing to the now of eternity in an actually designated act, it is true to say that all things are present to eternity; as is clear by saying, all things in the now of eternity are present to eternity. And likewise, signifying the now of eternity in its actually exercised act, it is most true to say that all things are present to

⁸ Idem: XII. Allo modo potest intelligi, *quod in quolibet nunc aeternitatis* sint praesentes aeternitati; ita quod coexistentia cuiuslibet rei ad aeternitatem salvetur in quolibet nunc aeternitatis. Et hic sensus est verus, et intentus a divo Thoma. Verus quidem: quia, cum aeternitas non habeat nisi unum nunc, quod aequatur ipsi aeternitati et excedit omne tempus; necesse est quod omne instans nostri temporis, et quidquid in illo est aut fit, salvetur in nunc aeternitatis, et mensuretur ab illo, non ut a mensura adaequata, sed excessiva. – Unde, ut clarius evadas laqueos, a rebus ad propositiones, et a propositionibus ad res procedendo, istae propositiones, *omnia quae fiunt in tempore, sunt praesentia aeternitati, vel sunt praesentia Deo ab aeterno*, vel sunt semper praesentia Deo, et similes, distinguendae sunt. Quia ly sunt aut consignificat nunc temporis, aut nunc aeternitatis. Et similiter ly *ab aeterno*, aut ly *semper*, aut tenetur syncategorematicae, idest quod distribuat pro omni temporis differentia: aut categorematicae, idest quod importet sempiternitatem perfectam, quae importatur in aeternitate et ipsius nunc. Et primo modo sunt falsae, secundo autem verae. Verum quippe est et indubitatum, primum instans huius horae esse in nunc aeternitatis; et similiter verum est ultimum instans istius horae, non in hoc nunc temporis quod est principium huius horae, sed in nunc aeternitatis eodem esse; pro alio tamen instanti temporis, ut de se patet. Et propterea non inconvenit duo contradictoria secundum nunc temporis, esse in eodem nunc aeternitatis, etc.

eternity⁹.

In other words, temporal things in themselves have no ontological value; their nature does not allow them to be present to eternity. However, that eternity presents itself in temporal things, either in itself or in the instantaneity of the present on the temporal plane, and presents them in itself, for itself. Here, underlying notions are evident, and one must understand and investigate further in the future whether and how they are treated in other parts of the commentary on the *Summa Theologiae*, such as the relations of immanence and transcendence, or of finite and infinite, for example.

The question that remains a central and enduring problem in philosophy is how an infinite and transcendent existence can be present in and relate to finite reality. The answer to this must fulfil certain conditions: specifically, it must maintain the distinct natures of both pure existence and determined existences without incurring radical monism or unqualified deism.

The present instant, viewed as the smallest possible interval of time, possesses a coexistence with eternity and a coincidence of

⁹ Idem: Quod autem hic sensus sit intentus in littera, ex duobus patet. Primo ex eo quod sic omnia dicta verificantur et consonant. Cum enim nunc, sive temporis sive aeternitatis, non possit distingui in praesens, praeteritum et futurum, sed praesens tantum est; demonstrando in actu signato nunc aeternitatis, verum est dicere omnia aeternitati esse praesentia; ut patet dicendus, omnia in nunc aeternitatis sunt praesentia aeternitati. Et similiter, consignificando in actu exercito nunc aeternitatis, verissimum est dicere, omnia sunt praesentia aeternitati.

actualities within that span. This is the rationale behind Cajetan's assertion that there is a present eternity in the temporal instant, meaning that eternity's transcendence refers not merely to its exceedingness of all time, but to its immediate presence within the actualized moment.

It is indeed true: because, since eternity has but one now, which is equal to eternity itself and exceeds all time; it is necessary that every instant of our time, and whatever exists or occurs in it, must be preserved in the now of eternity, and be measured by it, not as by an adequate measure, but as by an excessive one¹⁰.

This eternity has nothing but a present unity – *unum nunc* – that is therefore equivalent to eternity itself. The temporal instant, present and actual, exceeds time itself because a form of eternity is present in it, equivalent to eternity as the state of the divine substance, which is one.

Cajetan also states that it follows from this that every instant of time and everything that exists in it must be *salvetur*, that is, kept in eternity. Thomas Aquinas also holds that eternity involves – *ambit* – or contains the instant. Cajetan describes this containment not as real containment, but as a measure. An excessive measure because it

¹⁰ Idem.: Verus quidem: quia, cum aeternitas non habeat nisi unum nunc, quod aequatur ipsi aeternitati et excedit omne tempus; necesse est quod omne instans nostri temporis, et quidquid in illo est aut fit, salvetur in nunc aeternitatis, et mensuretur ab illo, non ut a mensura adaequata, sed excessiva.

is to the measure of the nature of eternity itself; therefore, measure in itself for its own sake. For if it were a measure suitable to temporal things, it would be according to the nature of time as extension, succession, and determination. Therefore, things are measured by themselves and in themselves. Things, even if they have an ontological autonomy of their own, being generated and sustained by eternity, the measure of their temporality is given by eternity. This would mean absolute autonomy of things over their own existence, rather than relative autonomy, which would contradict Christian theology. Hence, the ontological status of all aspects of reality is explained in reference to an absolute, yet also through itself and its own characteristics. In this way, Cajetan explains, in point 12, the presence of eternity in the temporal interval relative to the present instant and the immediate and simultaneous presence of things in eternity, making eternity equivalent to an absolute, necessary, transcendent and present metaphysical reality.

Indeed, commentators on Thomas Aquinas, primarily from the Scotus tradition, have interpreted his theory as a form of temporal collapse, where past and future merge into the instantaneity of the present. This is accepted by Cajetan as the correct way of explaining

how God relates to and knows creation and contingent futures¹¹. Cajetan accepts this interpretation as the correct way of explaining how God relates to and knows creation, particularly to safeguard the contingency of future events. The problem of contingent futures, a pivotal concern in scholastic theology, raises the question of whether God's eternal and infallible knowledge render all future events necessary. By endorsing the temporal collapse into the present instant, Cajetan affirms that God does not *foresee* a future action but rather beholds it as present in His eternity. Thus, the future act retains its contingent character in its own temporal existence, even while being known necessarily by God, because the divine knowledge is simultaneous with the action, not temporally prior to it.

The nature of the present eternity and the implications for time and potentiality

In short, Cajetan argues that to consign eternity to the present time is a natural error of human reason; it is truer to say that it is

¹¹ Idem.: Cum enim nunc, sive temporis sive aeternitatis, non possit distingui in praesens, praeteritum et futurum, sed praesens tantum est; demonstrando in actu signato nunc aeternitatis, verum est dicere omnia aeternitati esse praesentia; ut patet dicendus, omnia in nunc aeternitatis sunt praesentia aeternitati. Et similiter, consignificando in actu exercito nunc aeternitatis, verissimum est dicere, omnia sunt praesentia aeternitati.

things that are present to eternity¹². What this means is that by the determinate and finite nature of things, they are not present to eternity by themselves, but also eternity is of an uncontainable nature, so things present themselves by the uncontainable presence of eternity in the temporal instant. It is the divine substance itself that makes things present by itself in itself. The nature of temporal things, determined and conditioned, does not allow them to present themselves to eternity.

It is on these theoretical lines that Cajetan will construct his theory of time and eternity. In his doctrine, he distinguishes between simple eternity, which is God, and *aeviterna* – existences which have a duration equivalent to absolute eternity, God. For Cajetan, these existences, despite having an eternal nature, are subject to temporal succession. Temporal creatures, such as human beings, exist within the progression of time. For Cajetan, the present is a constant fluidity of actuality passing into the past. The present is the intersection of past and future; the temporal instant is the constant actualisation of reality. Time is, therefore, a continuity.

¹² Idem.: Et similiter, consignificando in actu exercito nunc aeternitatis, verissimum est dicere, omnia sunt praesentia aeternitati. Sed fallitur imaginatio, dum respicit ly sunt, et ex consuetudine nostra putat consignificere oportere nunc temporis.

The relevance of Cajetan's conceptual model for today's metaphysics of time

Even if Cajetan's explanation is hardly analytical, sometimes even confusing, its conceptual elements leave room for further formulations. It proposes paths that, if properly developed, could make innovative contributions to the contemporary debate.

Regarding the debate on divine knowledge of future contingencies, the problem is currently formulated as follows. Complete knowledge of future contingencies is often argued to require that an omniscient God is timeless, since temporal beings cannot fully know future events. This view, inspired by Boethius, is proposed as a solution to theological fatalism: the argument that divine foreknowledge and human freedom are incompatible. The fatalist argument is based on God's past belief of a future event, which is now unchangeable, thus removing freedom. The timelessness solution denies that God's knowledge is a past belief, holding that all temporal events are before God's mind in an atemporal present, though this solution faces further objections¹³.

¹³ Natalja Deng, «Eternity in Christian Thought», in Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2025 Edition), section 6.2 *Arguments from Divine Foreknowledge*, URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2025/entries/eternity/>.

According to a paper written by Gregory Ganssle¹⁴, some positions either defend: the view that divine knowledge is intuitive but neutral on God's temporality, as in William Alston's; or the view that intuitive knowledge necessitates a temporal God, as in William Hasker's objection to Alston's thesis. Ganssle contends that a temporal God must experience a sequential now, where present facts are known differently from past or future facts:

This is the question at hand: whether or not direct awareness itself can span time. There are good reasons to suppose that it cannot. This is because of what it means to claim that God is in time. It means, among other things, that He experiences temporal events sequentially and that He experiences a temporal now somewhat as we do¹⁵.

Since the intuitive view demands all facts (past, present, and future) be known directly in the same way, this mode of awareness conflicts with the nature of a temporal being. Therefore, for God to have intuitive knowledge of all facts, the distinction between past, present, and future must collapse, which only happens if God is timeless.

These authors are disputing precisely Cajetan's position – that in order for God to know future contingencies, He must be timeless.

¹⁴ Gregory Ganssle, «Atemporality and the Mode of Divine Knowledge», *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 34, no. 3 (1993) 171–80.

¹⁵ Gregory Ganssle, «Atemporality and the Mode of Divine Knowledge», *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 34, no. 3 (1993) 177.

Where Ganssle diverges from Cajetan is in the specific conceptual mechanics. Despite the limited analytical nature of Cajetan's exposition, his resources and conceptual ideas require different and new ways of conceiving the relation between eternity and temporality, and even a reformulation of what is understood about the nature of time. For this reason, authors who study these relations have, justifiably, drawn on physical notions of time, such as those developed in quantum physics and the theory of relativity¹⁶. However, they attempt to understand the relation between eternity and temporality by applying physical notions to metaphysical concepts and relations, as if they were subject to such notions. When conducting metaphysical inquiry within a framework that avoids physical reductionism, physical concepts cannot be simply superimposed or imposed upon metaphysical relations, despite their fundamental nature and their undeniable role in grounding metaphysical knowledge. It is important to maintain dialogue with contemporary physics, but the extent to which its concepts are applied, even in the form of analogies, must be carefully considered.

Working on the relation between eternity and temporality demands a conceptual framework that first establishes the foundational relation from which physical temporal concepts *arise*,

¹⁶ Ex: Stump & Kretzmann, «Eternity», cit., p. 436-440.

rather than allowing those physical concepts to serve as its ultimate basis and principle.

Thus, the model that Cajetan proposes in his commentary introduces the need to integrate new studies into the present discussion. A next step in the research should begin by studying Cajetan's application of this temporal conception to the possibility of divine knowledge regarding both the temporal instant (what is actual) and what is still potential. Within the scope of this project, it is also necessary to understand how Cajetan determines the divine *potential* – specifically, whether God possesses possibility or only actuality. Since he affirms reality as truly concretised in the temporal present, one must investigate the ontological status of possibility and potential contingency to contextualize his notion of free will and determine how free causes can coexist with the absolute knowledge of God.

Additionally, Cajetan's view presents alternative and innovative ways of describing the relation between eternity and temporality, as discussed above. His innovation lies in a way of describing participation through time conceptualization.

Some contemporary approaches to timelessness, such as atemporal duration (Stump and Kretzmann), introduce concepts like eternal-temporal simultaneity (ET-simultaneity) to relate eternal and temporal events. The contemporary philosophical views on divine

timelessness are often based on Boethius's classic articulation of eternity as the complete, simultaneous, and perfect possession of everlasting life¹⁷. While other contemporary approaches, like Leftow's, argue that all temporal things exist with God by sharing an unchanging reference frame¹⁸. The temporal view, conversely, must address arguments that timelessness is required for omniscient knowledge and the classical foreknowledge problem¹⁹. Eternal-Temporal Simultaneity (ET-simultaneity) is a special, non-standard relation proposed by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann to explain how God's timeless life can be connected to the events of the

¹⁷ Ed. E. K. Rand, in H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester, *Boethius. The Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy* (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1973): For whatever lives in time proceeds as something present from the past into the future, and there is nothing placed in time that can embrace the whole extent of its life equally. Indeed, on the contrary, it does not yet grasp tomorrow, but yesterday it has already lost; and even in the life of today, you live no more fully than in a mobile, transitory moment. Therefore, whatever includes and possesses the whole fullness of illimitable life at once and is such that nothing future is absent from it and nothing past has flowed away, this is rightly judged to be eternal, and of this it is necessary both that being in full possession of itself it be always present to itself and that it have the infinity of mobile time present [to it].

¹⁸ Cf. Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 1991. Shortly, Leftow distinguishes himself from Stump and Kretzmann by claiming that the simultaneity between a timeless God and the temporal world is univocal, meaning it is the *same* relation as temporal simultaneity, a view he establishes through stipulation rather than philosophical derivation. He further introduces Quasi-Temporal Eternality (QTE) to describe God's duration as involving ordered points (earlier/later) but no succession, a concept he controversially attempts to reconcile with the B-theory of time.

¹⁹ Natalja Deng, «Eternity in Christian Thought», cit., URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2025/entries/eternity/>.

temporal world. It is the crucial conceptual bridge in their model of atemporal duration.

What we want now is a species of simultaneity – call it ET-simultaneity (for eternal-temporal simultaneity – that can obtain between what is eternal and what is temporal. (...) What really interests us among species of simultaneity, however, and what we need for our present purposes, is not E-simultaneity so much as a simultaneity relationship between two relata of which one is eternal and the other temporal²⁰.

ET-simultaneity is explicitly defined as a non-reflexive (nothing is simultaneous with itself in this way) and non-transitive (if A is simultaneous with B, and B with C, it doesn't mean A is simultaneous with C) relation.

ET-simultaneity is symmetric, of course; but, since no temporal entity or event is ET-simultaneous with itself, the relationship is not reflexive; and the fact that there are different domains for its relata means that it is not transitive²¹.

Its entire purpose is to maintain that God's single, indivisible, eternal state is genuinely simultaneous with every distinct moment or event occurring in time (past, present, and future) without

²⁰ Eleonore Stump & Norman Kretzmann, «Eternity», *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981) 429-458, p. 436.

²¹ Stump & Kretzmann, «Eternity», cit., p. 441.

implying that those temporal moments are simultaneous with each other²².

In this case, they are effectively defending the same general principle as Cajetan – that eternity is present in temporal succession. The problem they attempt to solve by explaining simultaneity is how a timeless or eternal being relates to temporal things without being subject to time itself, and without finding itself simultaneous with things that are subject to temporal succession. However, the formulation of the non-transitivity of the relation, despite guaranteeing the simultaneity between eternity and temporality, without things being simultaneous with each other, does not allow for the presence of eternity in temporality. This causes some theoretical tension, since divine omniscience must be compatible with divine omnipresence. Eternity must be present in temporality because it is its supreme principle.

²² The framework for ET-simultaneity is indirectly aided by concepts drawn from General Relativity by drawing an analogy to how simultaneity is understood in modern physics. In classical, unreflective definitions of time, simultaneity is absolute. However, General Relativity established that temporal simultaneity is relative to the reference frame of a given observer. Stump and Kretzmann invoke this relativistic idea – that two events can occur and not occur at the same time depending on the observer's frame – to make their non-standard temporal relation (ET-simultaneity) seem coherent. The lesson taken is that if temporal simultaneity is frame-dependent and non-absolute, it is philosophically permissible to propose a wholly different form of simultaneity (Eternal-Temporal) that is also non-absolute (non-transitive and non-reflexive) to bridge the gap between time and eternity.

Cajetan argues that all things, according to their actual existence in the temporal world, are present to eternity, not by themselves, but by the nature of eternity itself. This relation is explained by the theory of instantaneity, where the present temporal instant is constituted by a form of eternity. Everything that exists is saved in and by eternity. Eternity contains temporal events, not as part of itself, but as a measure of those same moments or instants²³.

Another remark has to be made about the potential for further research offered by Cajetan's conceptualization. If every present temporal instant has a kind of eternity, and if reality is defined by actualization (a constant presentness), the past is then constituted by a succession of concretized instants, each infused with an eternity. This suggests that temporal succession is a conditioned continuum of eternities. Given that time has a beginning (making it finite) but an unknown end, it might be described as an unlimited finite – or even a conditioned infinity – composed of instants where an infinite, unchanging, and infinitely enduring eternity presents itself. This

²³ Similarly, in set theory, the principle/assertion that shapes the set is not identified with its elements but contains them as principles of these. In this case, we can then, in future works, seek to reformulate the conceptions of the relation between eternity and temporality by applying the relation of extensionality in a more exquisite way. As I elaborate in *Superveniência de Tomás de Aquino: Fundamentos da ordem e da unidade metafísica*, documento eletrônico, s.n., 2025, p. 83. From the perspective of this research, this may ensure the necessary distinction between the divine instance and the generated reality (without reducing eternity to temporal succession and without reducing temporal succession to eternity, thereby collapsing the succession itself and its moments into one).

theoretical scenario presents a problem that requires, first, a mathematical theoretical framework, and second, an in-depth examination of the ontological relationship between these two instances. This inquiry must adhere to a structural order, progressing from the most basic and conceptual to the most abstract. This notion of the presentness of eternity necessitates not only new ways of conceiving the ontological dependence implicit in the presence of eternity on temporal succession (as previously mentioned), but also a mathematical conceptualization that relates the infinite to the finite and explains the presence of infinity in finitude based on different existences is pertinent.

There is a single, absolute, and simple eternity, but there also exist modes of duration that share certain features with it – namely, the *aeviternal* durations of created intellectual beings²⁴. Although these beings possess an immutable nature, they nevertheless experience succession in some respect. Since the notion of eternity is inseparable from that of infinity, any deeper investigation into Cajetan's account requires a rigorous engagement with the mathematical treatment of the infinite. It might be valuable to consult Cantor's work on transfinite numbers for this, for example, in his work *Beiträge zur Begründung der Mengenlehre*, which offers

²⁴ Cf. Cajetan's commentary on the *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 10 (*De aeternitate*), especially in articles 2, 3, 4, and 5. Here he distinguishes eternity, time, and aeviternity, discussing the duration proper to angels and separated souls.

the most developed theory of infinite and transfinite magnitudes, grounded in his conception of an absolute infinity²⁵.

There is no doubt that the work of Cajetan and many authors of late scholasticism remains of great importance and innovation, and that it is necessary to continue reconstructing their role in the history of philosophy.

²⁵ Cantor developed his theory of the infinite and transfinite across several key works. In *Beiträge zur Begründung der Mengenlehre* (1895–1897), he introduced transfinite numbers, the alephs ($\aleph_0, \aleph_1, \dots$), and distinguished between potential and actual infinities, establishing the transfinite as a new domain of mathematical objects. Earlier, in *Über eine Eigenschaft des Inbegriffes aller reellen algebraischen Zahlen* (1874), he proved the uncountability of the real numbers, effectively founding set theory and the diagonal argument. In *Grundlagen einer allgemeinen Mannigfaltigkeitslehre*, he further developed the hierarchy of transfinite cardinalities. Cantor also explored the philosophical and theological notion of the Absolute Infinite, connecting his mathematical infinities to a metaphysical concept of God. Together, these works constitute the core of Cantor's mature theory of the infinite.