Divine Eternity and the Reduplicative Qua

Introduction

One of the great polemics of Christian theism is how we ought to understand God’s relationship to time. Is God timeless or temporal? Does God transcend time such that all times are present to God or does God experience a succession of moments? Most philosophers agree that God cannot be both timeless and temporal and simple reflection reveals this tension: If God is timeless, then he is not “in time.” If God is temporal, then he is subject to successive duration and is “in time.” Thus, there appears to be an obvious sense in which the two theses are contradictory. But is this truly the case? This dilemma resembles another problem in Christian theology, namely the Doctrine of Christ’s Incarnation. In the Incarnation, God took on a contingent human nature and, with it, properties that appear to be incompatible with the divine essence. In a recent defense of the doctrine, Michael Gorman employs reduplicative qua locutions with the purpose of showing consistency in the doctrine. In this paper, I will first detail the essential aspects of Gorman’s argument. I will then apply Gorman's model to the Doctrine of Divine Eternity. I will argue that proper reduplication allows for consistency between timelessness and temporality and that we may indeed predicate both properties to God.

The Gorman Model

In an attempt to answer the charge of inconsistency in the Incarnation, philosophers and theologians have traditionally utilized a reduplicative strategy. Traditional reduplication proceeds as follows:

\[ \text{[AFFIRM]} \ X \text{ is } N \text{ qua } A \text{ is taken to mean:} \]

\[ X \text{ is } A, \text{ and } X \text{ is } N, \text{ and } X's \text{ being } A \text{ makes it the case that } X \text{ is } N. \]
This is labeled [AFFIRM] because it is an affirmation. Coupled with the affirmation is the related denial:

[DNARROW] X is not \( N \) qua \( A \) is taken to mean:

\[
X \text{ is } A, \text{ and } X \text{ is not } N, \text{ and } X's \text{ being } A \text{ makes it the case that } X \text{ is not } N.
\]

This is labeled [DNARROW] because it is a denial with narrow-scope negation.

But, when formulated as such, the reduplicative strategy doesn't appear to do much good since we're still predicating incompatible properties to \( X \). Michael Gorman suggests we replace [DNARROW] with a denial with wide-scope negation.\(^1\)

[DWIDE] X is not \( N \) qua \( A \) is taken to mean:

\[
X \text{ is } A, \text{ and it is not the case that } X's \text{ being } A \text{ makes it be the case that } X \text{ is } N.\text{\(^2\)}
\]

But does the conjunction of [AFFIRM] and [DWIDE] also lead to contradiction? According to Gorman, it does not. What we need to consider is that classical Christology posits a God with two natures. Since God has two natures, it's possible that, for some property he has, he has it in virtue of either both natures or only one nature. Therefore, we should distinguish “every” statements from “some” statements. An “every” statement is a statement to the effect that God has a certain property in virtue of every nature that he has, whereas a “some” statement is a statement to the effect that God has a certain property in virtue of some nature that he has. This distinction only helps when we consider entities with multiple natures. When we say that a single-natured entity, like a non-divine person, has some property \( P \) in virtue of some nature that it has, we can also validly infer that the entity has \( P \) in virtue of every nature that it has.


\(^2\) Ibid.
cannot validly infer an “every” statement from a “some” statement when we're speaking of multi-natured entities. This formulation also works for the related denials.  

Reduplicative statements are “some” statements, since we're attempting to say that God has a particular property in virtue of some nature that he has. It's important to notice that a single reduplicative affirmation is sufficient to establish the unqualified statement of the form “X is N.” For example, if we say that God can walk the earth in virtue of his incarnation, we need not say that he must also do this in virtue of his spirit. On the other hand, reduplicative denials do not imply the unqualified statement of the form “X is not N.” Consider again the previous example. If we say that God cannot walk the earth in virtue of his spirit, it does not follow that God cannot walk the earth. Again, he may walk the earth in virtue of his incarnated body. In order to infer that God cannot walk the earth, it must be true in virtue of every one of his natures.

**Eternity and the Reduplicative Strategy**

Now we may address the Doctrine of Divine Eternity. Like the Incarnation, we may propose that God has two natures. He may be timelessly eternal, and have this property necessarily, and he may acquire contingent created properties (which collect to form a created nature). So, from “God is temporal qua his contingent and created properties” we may infer “God is temporal.” But, from “God is not temporal qua his necessary nature” we may not infer “God is not temporal.” More formally, we may write our reduplicative statements as such:

Following [AFFIRM] schema:

God qua his contingent and created properties (his created nature) is temporal entails:

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3 Ibid., p. 92.  
4 Ibid., p. 93  
5 Ibid., p. 92  
6 Here I borrow Gorman's formulation of the argument with a substitution of the relevant terms. Ibid., p. 97-98.
God has contingent and created properties &

God is temporal &

God's having contingent and created properties makes it be the case that God is temporal, or with appropriate universalization we have:

\[ \forall x (x \text{ has contingent and created properties } \supset [x's \text{ having contingent and created properties makes it be the case that } x \text{ is temporal}]). \]

Following [DWIDE] schema:

God qua his necessary nature is not temporal entails:

God has a necessary nature &

It is not the case that God's having a necessary nature makes it be the case that God is temporal, or

\[ \sim \forall x (x \text{ has a necessary nature } \supset [x's \text{ having a necessary nature makes it be the case that } x \text{ is temporal}]). \]

Conclusion

Reduplication is a helpful tool for relieving tension between apparent contradictions and has proven to be fruitful when applied to the Christian Doctrine of the Incarnation. By applying Michael Gorman’s modified reduplicative strategy, in which wide-scope negations are employed, I believe reduplication can also elucidate the Doctrine of Divine Eternity such that the two seemingly incompatible properties of timelessness and temporality may be coherently applied to the one and the same God of Christianity.
Bibliography