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Can an unlocatable, timeless God be perceived?

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1. Introduction: Alston and the Perceptual Model of Mystical Experience

Alston (1988, 1991, 2005) argues that one can have perceptual justification for beliefs about God. This claim turns on a parallelism with sensory experience; just as my visual experience that a sparrow is feeding its baby *prima facie* justifies my corresponding belief, my experience of God offers *prima facie* justification for the relevant beliefs about the existence and properties of God. Alston argues for the perceptual status of mystical experience by drawing on an array of reports in the Christian mystical tradition and the relevant similarities between these experiences and ordinary sensory perception. Then he defends the justificatory weight of mystical experience with a parity argument: “according initial credibility to sense perceptual beliefs and not to mystical perceptual beliefs ... it would be an arbitrary double standard to accord *prima facie* justification to experientially grounded beliefs in one area and not in the other” (2005, p. 207).

Call the above view the Perceptual Model for Mystical Experience. One crucial assumption of this model is that *perception of God is possible*. But is God really perceivable if God is entirely outside of spacetime as many Christian traditions suggest? We see cherry blossoms *over there* and hear an uplifting birdsong *in the afternoon*. All our workaday examples of perceptual experience are seemingly directed at objects that occupy a specific, restricted place and time. Isn't it part of the nature of perception that it involves a distinct spatiotemporal locus?

Objections along these lines have been made by So (2021) and Zangwill (2004, 2017). On the phenomenological account of perception, the possibility of perspectival dynamics, i.e., the subject's exploration of different aspects of the object through the movement of her phenomenal "body" through "lived space", constitutes the essence of perception. However, in reports of divine encounters, So argues, the mystics are simply aware of God's presence at once, and the necessary elements of body, space, and dynamically changing profiles of God are missing. Although this argument by itself does not support the impossibility of perceiving God, it could be strengthened to do so with the help of the doctrine of divine omnipresence. For if God is everywhere at every moment as a whole, it is seemingly impossible for any change of perspectives to occur with respect to God. On the other hand, Zangwill argues that if God is outside of spacetime as traditional Christian theology suggests, then our experience of God would be indistinguishable from *a priori* intuition and fail to count as perception.

My purpose in this paper is to defend Alston's Perceptual Model by contending that God can still be regarded as a potential object of perception without surrendering divine omnipresence or non-spatiotemporality. In section 2, I explain in more depth So and Zangwill's criticisms. Both critics agree that something regarding spacetime is a necessary condition of perception, which they think mystical experiences lack. Yet they differ on what the exact condition amounts to: while So regards the spatiotemporal dynamics of the *experienced profiles* of the object as the necessary condition for perception, Zangwill thinks the spatiotemporal existence of *the object itself* is essential to perception.

In response to these objections, I offer multiple lines of defense in section 3. First, I argue that contrary to So's diagnosis, some mystical accounts do include the required kind of spatial dynamics between God and the perceiver. Moreover, I argue that even if God is

omnipresent, this does not rule out the possibility of God revealing different aspects of Himself in different locations and times, thus allowing for the mystic to explore differing profiles of God through movement. Second, I show that there are other commonalities between mystical and sensory experience that mark off mystical experience from *a priori* intuition: causal connection and the contribution of *qualia* to the content of experience. Lastly, I argue that even if we grant the plausibility of Zangwill's insight that something like spatiotemporality is required for perception, this intuition can be accommodated by reference to divine action or causation toward datable, locatable objects in the world.

2. The Objections: Perception and Spatiotemporality

So (2021) and Zangwill's (2004) criticisms of the Perceptual Model have a common thread—the idea that spatiotemporality is essential to perception. However, on *how* exactly this requirement is to be understood they differ. Drawing on the phenomenological analysis of perception, So characterizes it as the in-principle possibility of the dynamic development of the perceptual “profiles” of the object through the movement of the body through space. On the other hand, Zangwill points out being either in time or in space as the necessary condition for something to be a possible object of perception. Put simply, then, while So demands spatiotemporal dynamicity of the experienced profiles of the object, Zangwill identifies the spatiotemporality of the object itself as necessary for perception.

2-1. The Spatiotemporal Dynamicity of the Object Profiles

With this brief characterization of their complaints in mind, let us dive deeper into the

individual arguments against Alston. As noted above, So's (2021) criticism of the Perceptual Model relies on the phenomenological analysis of perception propounded by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. On this approach, part of the nature of perception is that the subject can change her perspectives through space and thereby experience different aspects—*profiles*—of the object over time. Consider a ground hog for example. This little fluffy creature never reveals itself to my visual consciousness in its entirety at once; the animal shows at one moment its face but not its back, and at another moment its back but not its face. Generalizing, in visual experience, the seen object exhibits its multifaceted profiles that unfold and hide depending on the subject's relative location to it. This, on the current analysis, holds for other sense modalities too: "Smelling involves the bodily movements of breathing. Tasting involves the chewing and swallowing of food. Hearing involves the perception of sounding objects located with a "lived space" ... Proprioception always belongs to a *body image* or *schema* that is intimately related to our bodily movements" (p. 1018, fn. 23). The possibility of such *perspectival dynamics*, i.e., the subject's exploration of the object through movement of her phenomenal "body" through "lived space", constitutes the essence of perception. As So nicely summarizes, for phenomenologists, "*Perception is the peculiar mode of appearance by which objects of the senses are given to consciousness through the body in a spatio-temporal manner.*" (p. 1021)

This, however, does not make the excessive demand on the subject that she be able to alter her vantage point in every single instance of perception; our limited ability to see only the same side of the moon does not disqualify our visual experience of it from counting as perceptual. What the current account requires is rather that the exploration of the other side of the moon should be *in principle* possible by relocating ourselves. Furthermore, the required senses of "body" and "space" need not even be physical: "the requirement here will be a *formal* one: to be

perceptual in a meaningful sense, “mystical perception” must involve at least some parallel notion of a *body* that gives mystics a *vantage point* for perception, and it must also involve a *parallel* notion of *space* in which *motility* is realized and in which God, as the object of “perception,” is being explored from different perspectives” (So, 2021, p. 1020).

The gist of So’s (2021) complaint about Alston’s Perceptual Model is that we cannot find evidence for this spatiotemporal dynamicity of profiles in any reports of mystical experiences. God is always presented as a whole without any development of profiles: “there are no traces of such parallel notions of body, space, or motion parallel to our ordinary life ... the mystics do not experience different aspects of God through any changes of perspective, *and all that can be experienced by the mystic in that experience is given all at once*” (p. 1020).¹ Therefore, So concludes, the experiences of the mystics are at best “perceptual” by analogy, and accordingly Alston’s argument that mystical experience can provide genuine perceptual justification for theological beliefs founders.

I will address So’s objection in more detail in the next section. However, let me consider and reject two natural responses that immediately suggest themselves. First, one might be tempted to defend Alston by simply *denying* the necessity of possible developments of spatiotemporal object profiles for perception. This is surely a move Alston can make in defense his model; yet this would also make the Perceptual Model lose its appeal to those who incline toward the phenomenological analysis of perception, which seems like a cost worth avoiding. Second, it could be rightly pointed out that So has only shown that the required spatiotemporal dynamics is

¹ Clearly So (2021) does not extend this argument to sensory cases; if one literally sees God, then the relevant modality, vision, can be said to generally involve bodily movement and space at least with respect to other visual objects. I will not mind this restriction, for my paper follows Alston in focusing on non-sensory mystical experiences.

never *reported* and that this is far from sufficient to establish its *actual absence* in mystical experience. This line of thought has some plausibility; after all, with our everyday sense perception, we often leave out information about space, body, or change in profiles in our reports, as in, say, “I saw a ground hog,” or “I heard a loud noise. That said, if So is right that there is a consistent absence of any reference to such elements in mystical accounts, then, this does seem like good evidence of their real absence. For in other reports of our sensory experience, we do talk of movement of body through spacetime; for instance, I might say “I saw him walking toward me in the dark hall,” or “That loud racket was coming from the stadium.”

2-2. The Spatiotemporality of the Object

Traditional Christian theology has it that God is a non-spatiotemporal being; unlike us human beings and other objects of perception, He is wholly outside of spacetime. Alston (1989) himself also explicitly endorsed the view that God is essentially timeless (p. 160-161). As briefly noted above, Zangwill (2004) finds another source of objection here. After arguing that our ordinary five senses can only operate toward an object in spacetime and thus God cannot be perceived through any of these modes of perception, he goes on to contend that God, being a non-spatiotemporal being, cannot even be an object of *any* perceptual experience:

What if God is neither in space nor time? The main difficulty for the idea of a sixth sense that tells us about a non-spatial and non-temporal God is that we are bound to wonder how such a sixth-sense experience differs from non-empirical a priori intuition in anything but name. ... What is implausible and bizarre is not simply the idea that we might *know* about such a being. For there might be a priori knowledge of abstract objects, even though we stand in no spatio-temporal

relation to them. What is implausible and bizarre is the idea that we *perceive* such objects. Even if we are armed with a special sixth religious sense, it is difficult to see how we can perceive a God who is outside both space and time. Without the spatial and temporal requirements, there is no sense at all in which we are talking about *perception*. Our ordinary notion of perception has evaporated. There is then nothing separating such ‘perception’ from a priori intuition. (p. 13)

Zangwill’s reasoning seems to be the following. According to the Christian doctrines, God is non-spatiotemporal just like abstract objects such as numbers, universals, and logical truths, which we might arguably directly encounter through *a priori* intuition. Now, what marks off perception from *a priori* intuition is the spatiotemporality of the experienced objects; the reason that our vision of a ground hog is perceptual in nature while our “vision” of the truth of $2+2=4$ is not, is that while ground hogs inhabit the spatiotemporal realm, numbers do not. Therefore, the experience of God should be rather categorized as *a priori* intuition rather than perception, for nothing seems to justify Alston’s differential treatment of mystical experience as a type of perception and *a priori* intuition as non-perceptual.

Interestingly, Zangwill’s argument is echoed and supplemented by So (2021). Another charge So makes against Alston is that Alston fails at justifying the perceptual status of mystical experience: “for Alston, to perceive X means to have X itself directly *presented* to consciousness in a passive manner and as being so-and-so or doing so-and-so. *However, from the perspective of Husserlian phenomenology, such presentation of an object to consciousness is a generic feature of a whole class of acts called intuitions, and perception is only one member of this class.* Failing to differentiate perception from other forms of object presentation, Alston can, at most, only prove that God is being *intuited*—not *perceived*—by the mystics, which falls far short of his

goal.” (p. 1016). The list of non-perceptual intuitions in phenomenology includes intuitions regarding universals and self-evident propositions, i.e., *a priori* intuition.

In the face of Zangwill’s criticism, there seem to be two lines of response available for defenders of the Perceptual Model without surrendering the traditional notion of the non-spatiotemporal God. First, one might argue that mystical experience can still be justifiably called perception by pointing to other important features it shares with sensory perception but not with *a priori* intuition. I will provide two such differentiating features in the next session. The second line of response to Zangwill’s objection is available even for those sharing Zangwill’s insight that something like datability or locatability is essential to perception: one can say that perception of God is possible because God is in some special relation to things or events in spacetime.

I will offer counterarguments in these veins in the next session. Yet before moving onto my defense of the Perceptual Model, here I would like to briefly point out that the mere presence of *qualia* in mystical experience would not do as a further differentiating factor in an attempt to pursue the first line of response. Alston (1988) remarks that “if the direct experience of God is to be regarded as exhibiting the same basic structure as direct sense perception of external objects, then it will have to involve (phenomenologically) God’s being directly presented to the subject’s experience *as bearing certain phenomenal qualities* [emphasis added]” (pp. 31-32). Those of us who have never had mystical experiences are left wondering what these qualia might be, yet as Alston (1991) rightly points out, this is no bar to there being such qualities (p. 51). Moreover, he cites various accounts in the Catholic tradition referring to a diversity of spiritual qualia paralleling different sensory qualities (pp. 51-54). I should add that even in Protestantism, the existence of mystical qualia is evidenced by Jonathan Edwards’s talk, informed by numerous examples of convergent experiences, of a new simple spiritual idea analogous to ideas of color or

taste.² Given such considerations, a defender of the Perceptual Model might feel the temptation to say that unlike our intuitions about abstract objects, mystical experiences, just like ordinary five-sense experiences, involve *qualia*. The rub with this move, however, is that *a priori* intuitions do exhibit certain phenomenal qualities as well.³ Plantinga (1993) argues that such intuitions are accompanied by the peculiar feeling of correctness, or the sense of “seeing” of the truth or necessity of a proposition (pp. 104-106). When we intuitively grasp the mathematical truth of $2+2=4$ or the logical truth of $p \rightarrow p$, the understanding comes with the characteristic feel of logical bindingness or infallibility, which can be plausibly identified as the *qualia* associated with non-empirical intuition. Then, the mere existence of phenomenal quality cannot be what distinguishes mystical experience from our intuitions about abstract objects.

3. Defending the Perceptual Model

So far I have explained two different, yet spatiotemporality-related objections to Alston’s Perceptual Model and rejected some unsuccessful responses. In this section, I offer my own solutions to the problems raised by So and Zangwill.

3-1. Evidence for Spatiotemporal Dynamicity and Differential Revelation

² Edwards (1746/1794) writes: “I observed, that there is given to those that are regenerated, a new supernatural sense, that is as it were a certain divine spiritual taste, which is in its whole nature diverse from any former kinds of sensation of the mind, as tasting is diverse from any of the other five senses, and that something is perceived by a true saint in the exercise of this new sense of mind, in spiritual and divine things, as entirely different from any thing that is perceived in them by natural men, as the sweet taste of honey is diverse from the ideas men get of honey by looking on it or feeling of it” (p. 185). See also Plantinga (2000, pp. 298-300) and Wainwright (2020).

³ I thank Michael Rea for drawing my attention to this objection.

Recall that So's complaint toward Alston was that all reported mystical experiences, without exception, lack the dynamicity of the profiles of God grounded in the movement of some type of body through space, which, on the phenomenological analysis, partially constitutes the essence of perception. In reply, I say that So's diagnosis about the nonexistence of a moving body, space, and changing profiles of God is simply false. Quite ironically, So (2021) himself admits that some mystical accounts use "spatial terms like God is "near" or "dwells within" the mystics" (p. 1020). Of course, he quickly dismisses the significance of such phrases, saying that "we use such spatial metaphors even when describing our ordinary life (like "she is close to me"), and these terms alone do not prove that there is a notion of *spatiality* involved" (p. 1020). Yet neither do I see any evidence that these spatial terms were used invariantly in metaphoric senses alone.

Even if we grant him the point that mystics were talking loosely when they said God was "near" or "within" them, there are other reports that more strongly suggest that God was literally experienced as bearing changing profiles through relative movement of the mystic's body through space. To take one example, an anonymous mystic remarks, "the Holy Spirit *descended* [emphasis added] upon me in a manner that seemed to *go through me* [emphasis added], body and soul. I could feel the impression, like *a wave of electricity, going through and through me* [emphasis added]. Indeed, it seems to come in waves and waves of liquid love" (James, 1902, p. 250, as cited in Alston, 1991, p. 14). Such phrases as 'descended' and 'go through me' do not plausibly read like metaphoric expressions; nor would they not make sense unless some movements involving the mystic's body were detected, which in turn implies change in the experienced aspects of the object. And it is clearly the Holy Spirit—God—that is picked out as the object moving in relation to the mystic. Considering all this, at least some mystical experiences, contrary to So's suggestion, do seem to qualify as perception by the

phenomenological standards.

However, I think there is a theological resource that can be used to strengthen So's objection so as to pose a more serious threat to the Perceptual Model: divine omnipresence. Although some scholars construe omnipresence as literal spatial location and others do not (See Inman, 2017, pp. 174-175), they agree that the omnipresent God is present *everywhere as a whole* or *at once*.⁴ This entails that God is equally and entirely present everywhere throughout the space in either literal or analogical sense. If that is the case, wouldn't it follow that God cannot be explored dynamically by varying our perspectives with respect to any kind of "space"? *Pace* mystics, the thought goes, what they reported as having seen or heard could not possibly have been God.

Fortunately, the above reasoning can be easily debunked. Omnipresence is a feature of *God*—not His *profiles*. While being wholly present everywhere, God could *reveal* different aspects of Himself at different locations in spacetime. Suppose that God shows one theological fact here and another there, whether in the literal or some parallel sense of space. Then it will be in principle possible for the human subject to examine different aspects of God by moving her vantage point, seeing one property of God here and another there. Likewise, God could vary the revealed aspects of Himself over time, in which case the subject would experience diachronic

⁴ For example, Augustine writes: "God cannot be said to fill the world as water or air or even light do, filling a smaller part of the world with a smaller part of Himself, and the same with a larger part. He knows how to be *wholly everywhere* [emphasis added] without being confined to any place" (1953, Letter 137, pp. 21); "He is not distributed through space by size so that half of Him should be in half of the world and half in the other half of it. He is *wholly present in all of it* [emphasis added]" (1955, Letter 187, p. 231). Anselm (2000) stretches this idea to time as well: "the Supreme Being must be *present as a whole in each and every place at once and present as a whole at each and every time at once* [emphasis added]" (Monologion 22, p. 38). Among contemporary philosophers, Hudson (2009) and Stump (2013) build their theories of omnipresence upon this traditional idea, although Hudson takes God to literally occupy space while Stump employs an analogical approach.

dynamicity. This might in fact be the mechanism of how God appears variously and dynamically to different people and at different spatiotemporal locations. Therefore, I submit that even the stronger version of the phenomenological objection fails to establish that Alston is mistaken in classifying certain experiential encounters with God as a genuinely perceptual kind of experience.

3-2. Further Commonalities with Sensory Perception

One might think the doctrine of omnipresence might give an easy answer to Zangwill's objection that perception requires the object to reside in the spatiotemporal realm. That said, most theologians and philosophers in the Christian tradition adopt a non-literal reading of divine omnipresence, thus rejecting God's literal inhabitation of spacetime. Besides, as noted earlier, Alston (1989) himself cannot endorse literal spatiotemporal omnipresence of God, given his claim that God is timeless. Therefore, here I will follow this trend and offer alternative solutions to Zangwill's objection. This means that I will have to reject Zangwill's assumption that perceivability requires spatiotemporality of the object itself. Instead, I will undermine his argument by questioning his point that without reference to the object's being in spacetime, we cannot distinguish mystical experiences from *a priori* intuition and thus justifiably classify them as perceptual states. This will be done by pointing to two further commonalities between mystical experience and sensory experience that are missing in non-empirical intuition in this subsection and by arguing that we can still capture Zangwill's insight by showing how God, unlike other non-spatiotemporal entities, i.e., *abstracta*, can take on something akin to spatiotemporality in the next.

In my view, there are two further differentiating features that justify Alston's characterization of mystical experiences as perceptual states that mark them off from *a priori* intuition and liken them to sensory experiences: causal connection and a particular role of *qualia* in the content of experience. Firstly, unlike other non-spatiotemporal entities, i.e., abstract objects, God is understood as a concrete being with casual powers to interact with us, just like things we see, hear, or touch through our ordinary senses. As Alston himself notes, perception requires the right causal connection between the object and the experience (1988, p.32; 1991, pp. 56-58). Then, *pace* Zangwill, perhaps our intuition that universals, mathematical or logical entities cannot be objects of perception might be grounded in their lack of causal influence, not in their non-spatiotemporality. When we consider that God, despite being outside of space and time, can cause such-and-such experience about Himself in the mystic's mind, then, Zangwill's (2004) claim that "there is no sense at all in which we are talking about *perception*" (p. 13) starts to lose its plausibility. Secondly and additionally, although both mystical experience and *a priori* intuition involve *qualia*, the *roles* played by these qualities seem to be different in an important respect. When we intuit facts about abstract objects, the characteristic phenomenological feel attests to the *truth or necessity* of the relevant propositions. These *qualia* associated with *a priori* intuitions do not differentiate the *contents* of such intuitions, however; both the intuition that $2+2=4$ and the intuition that an empty set is a subset of itself seem to have the identical type of feeling—that they are necessary truth—albeit potentially different in degree. On the other hand, in sensory experiences, it is the characteristic function of phenomenal qualities that distinguish the very *content* of the experiences—what the perceived object is (object identification) and how it is (property attribution). For instance, it is in virtue of the differences in color *qualia* that I can tell a visual experience of the sky from that of a tomato. Thus, it seems central to or even

definitive of sensory perception that the experienced phenomenal qualities contribute to or constitute the content of the experience rather than merely indicate the higher-order characters (e.g., truth, necessity) of that content.

Notably, this role of content contribution seems to be shared by *qualia* involved in mystical experience as well. The famous reference to the five “spiritual senses” lends credence to this idea. Fr. Surin, for example, writes that “She knows what He is, indeed she even tastes Him by the divine *contact*, of which the mystics speak, and which a *supernatural* knowledge *whereby the soul knows what God is* [emphasis added]; not from having seen Him, but from having *touched Him*” (Poulain, 1950, p. 106; as cited in Alston, 1999, p. 53). Here the quasi-gustatory or -tactile quality is said to convey information *about God*, i.e., what God is like, as opposed to information about the character of the proposition about God. Edwards also affirms that the new spiritual idea apprises us of an attribute of God—holiness.⁵

Summarizing, we can find further common threads between mystical experience and ordinary sensory experience that are not shared by *a priori* intuition, which sufficiently set apart the former two from the latter. Then, *pace* Zangwill, we need not attribute spatiotemporality to God to make plausible the claim that mystics *perceive* Him in their experience.

3-3. Spatiotemporal Divine Actions and Quasi-Spatiotemporality

One might still feel like something was right about Zangwill’s claim that any object of perception is necessarily either locatable or datable. Here I want to argue that even if one fully

⁵ “now this that I have been speaking, viz. the beauty of holiness, is that thing in spiritual and divine things, which is perceived by this spiritual sense ... this kind of beauty is the quality that is the immediate object of this spiritual sense; this is the sweetness that is the proper object of this spiritual taste” (Edwards, 1746/1794, p. 185).

endorses the traditional non-spatiotemporality of God, one can still ascribe some *quasi*-spatiotemporal features to God in virtue of His interaction with the world, thus satisfying some intuition about perception in the ballpark.

The first thing to note is that even a non-spatiotemporal God might be capable of performing actions in spacetime. Notably, Alston (1991) himself writes on this borrowed temporality of divine actions: “the temporal location of an action can be given by the temporal location of its worldly effect” (p. 64, fn. 57; see also Alston, 1989, p. 154). For instance, the divine agential event that “God is strengthening her or comforting her *then*, or telling her so-and-so *then*” (1991, p. 64) appears to happen at some particular time to some individual at a particular location. Accordingly, if we follow Alston in saying that divine actions inherit the spatiotemporal loci of their *effects*, then, under the plausible assumption that actions arguably have their agents as their parts or constituters, it follows that God can be perceived as a part of the perceived divine actions situated at specific locations and times. Put otherwise, even if God is non-spatiotemporal, divine actions can still be spatiotemporal and thus perceivable. Then, it could be argued that God is perceived indirectly in the perception of His actions.

There are several ways to resist this line of reasoning. First, one might deny that divine actions are spatiotemporal. Second, one could argue that even if divine actions are indeed in spacetime and perceivable, this does not imply that God Himself can be perceived alongside. I now address these objections in order.

First, one might want to deny that God’s actions inherit the temporal character from their effects. This can be done on several grounds. For one thing, one could point out that certain

salient or intended effects of an action are not simultaneous with that action.⁶ For instance, Fred's action of *shooting* precedes Mark's death in time, and, arguably, even Fred's *killing* Mark does not occur simultaneously with the death, for this action of Fred's spans a stretch of time including the timing of shooting and that of Mark's death (See Thomson, 1971). However, there are multiple countermoves available to Alston here. Instead of identifying the timing of divine actions with that of their *effects*, Alston might equate it with that of *the objects directly involved* in such actions. Note that our actions are often constituted by physical or external elements. My raising my arm includes my arm's rising, and your action of greeting your friend is partly constituted by there being your friend around you. Given the *constitutive*, as opposed to *causal*, relationship between the action and these external factors, they are bound to be simultaneous. Likewise, Alston might argue that often God's action is constituted in part by certain creaturely environments (e.g., God's speaking to me involves my existence at a certain time) and accordingly takes on the timing of these things. Or, alternatively, Alston could maintain that divine actions still inherit *temporality* from their effects without deriving *the exact timing of occurrence* from them. For instance, God's responding to my prayer occurs some time around, as opposed to at the very moment of, my hearing God's words. Lastly, Alston can even exploit the traditional idea that God's interaction with creation involves *immediate* or *direct* causation. That is, unlike our actions that operate by means of causal intermediaries and therefore take time to bring about effects, divine actions immediately cause the intended effects in the world and therefore can be taken as simultaneous with these.

That said, one might still have other reasons to think that God's actions are outside of time;

⁶ I thank Michael Rea for this point.

Stump and Kretzmann (1981), for example, consider it impossible for a timeless being to perform an action in time (p. 448). Besides, as already mentioned, one could even question whether the agent is perceived along with the perceived action, thus denying that the mystic perceives God in perceiving a divine action, even granting the latter occur within spacetime. At this point, Alston could certainly dig in heels and claim that God's actions *can* take on temporality in virtue of the relevantly involved worldly objects and that since we always perceive actions *qua* action together with their agents, it is more natural to think that in the perception of divine action, God is also perceived.

But even if we give up on the idea of the spatiotemporality of God's actions and the idea that God can be perceived as part of these actions, it should still be admitted that if God exists, He should be nonetheless taken as causing certain events and causally interact with things in time and space. And this alone is sufficient to attribute certain *causal-and-quasi-spatiotemporal* qualities to God, e.g., *being the cause of my continuing existence in 2025 and responding to me during my prayer time in my apartment.*⁷ Thanks to such attributes that are sufficiently close to spatiotemporal locations and that God, unlike numbers and other atemporal objects, possesses, Alston could maintain that God is perceivable, and our initial insight that something like spatiotemporality is required for perception is satisfied. Of course, Zangwill could insist that anything less than full-fledged existence in spacetime isn't enough, but he would have to offer a stronger, non-question-begging reason to press that point in the face of the further common

⁷ Universals, too, may have certain quasi-temporal properties. For instance, since *T. rex* are extinct, the kind *T. rex* possesses the property of having no instances in the twenty-first century; the property of being red, on the other hand, has the property of being instantiated in 2023. But unlike God, these abstract entities cannot exhibit quasi-*causal*-spatiotemporal features, e.g., causally interacting in such-and-such ways with certain things located at particular times and places.

factors between mystical and sensory experience I have described above.

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